

THE HARP AND THE ORCHESTRA: AN INTRODUCTORY GUIDE

BY

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Chapter 1: THE HARP AND THE ORCHESTRA

To many harpists, the study of orchestral repertoire is not introduced until much later in their private music study. It is not unusual for a harpist to play alone for years before playing in an ensemble or encountering orchestral excerpts. The reason for this delay is explained primarily by the instrument and circumstances surrounding it. It takes many years to develop the playing capability to tackle orchestral playing, and there is little harp music written for the introductory ensembles typically found in primary school settings. Consequently, the harp is often left out until the late high school or college level. When finally included in these advanced ensembles, the other instrumentalists have often played in ensembles for years. The harpist must learn quickly in order to keep up with the others who already have many years of ensemble experience.

This paper will examine several strategies on bridging the gap between solo harp playing and orchestral playing. Included is advice to the novice orchestral harpist on how to relate their solo playing to orchestral playing. Also included are a series of excerpts that provide the harpist with the opportunity to learn at their own pace, and allows them to slowly and incrementally achieve the skills necessary to become a good orchestral player.

While there are several books in existence devoted to this subject, most assume that the harpist is already extremely proficient in an orchestral setting and focus on only the most challenging excerpts. While extremely valuable tools for the advanced harpist, they assume that a certain level of proficiency has already been achieved. Rather than approach this subject from that same perspective, the focus of this text is to guide players

through a sequence focusing on individual concepts. By mastering each individual concept and practicing them on less challenging excerpts, the harpist will be better-prepared when it comes time to tackle more difficult excerpts.

In order to further grasp the challenges present when studying orchestral harp repertoire, it is important to have an understanding of the history of the harp in an orchestral setting.

Even though the harp is one of the oldest instruments in the world, its tenure in the modern orchestra has been relatively brief. While there are instances of the harp being used in early works (most notably, in works by Monteverdi and Handel), the harp did not gain its place as an integral part of an orchestra until much later.

The genesis of use of the harp in the orchestra closely mirrors the development of the harp as a solo instrument. When studying the development of the instrument in both fields, one shared event sparked dynamic change and explosive growth: the development of the double action harp mechanism.

The earliest harps did not have the capability of playing in different keys without having to stop and retune. Most of the earliest harp music was written in one key in order to avoid this arduous task. However, as music became more complex, so did the harp; first, by adding levers that allowed a change in pitch, then by adding pedals that allowed for the same function.

The addition of seven pedals, called the single-action pedal harp mechanism, was developed in the early 1700s. The pedals allowed the harpist to raise each string a half-step. By tuning the harp in E-flat major, the harpist was able to use the pedals to access 8 major keys and 5 minor keys. This single action pedal harp gained wide popularity as a

salon instrument, and closely matched the style of the time.¹ It was the instrument of choice for the upper class to not only display their talent as musicians, but also as an extension to the ornate decorations and embellishments of the aesthetic and cultural style at that time.²

While this expanded the ability for composers to write more complex music for the harp, the instrument lagged behind the development of music, which at this point was exploring and making use of increased chromaticism. The harp, even with its expanded capability, was not up to the task of switching between all the keys that composers were beginning to use, and consequently was not considered as an orchestral instrument.

This all changed in 1801, when inventor Sebastian Erard used the basic pedal idea, but devised a way to add two separate “actions” that the pedals would perform. Instead of just the ability to go up a half step, the harp strings were now able to be tightened one half step further, allowing access to virtually every key (the modern double-action harp is tuned in C-flat major, and by utilizing the pedals, discs tighten the strings one half-step at a time). The ability to change keys fluidly and without having to stop playing and tune allowed for the harp to explore avenues otherwise unavailable. The most revolutionary of these was the addition of the harp to the orchestra. The first composer to feature the harp prominently was Hector Berlioz, who used the harp extensively in his orchestral and ensemble music.

¹ Rensch, Roslyn. *Harps and Harpists* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 168.

² Ruth K. Inglefield and Lou Anne Neill. *Writing for the Pedal Harp: A Standardized Manual for Composers and Harpists* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 49-52.

As music shifted into the Romantic period, the harp truly took its place as a unique voice in the orchestra. However, the music by this point was very complex. Composers were excited to make use of the unique sound of the harp, but their musical sensibilities (chromaticism, meter changes, etc) required the harpist to be a strong musician. Unlike other instrumentalists, who had the luxury of developing their playing in tandem with musical style over a long period of a time, the harp and harpist made a huge jump with the advent of the modern pedal harp.

In order to become an effective musician, the harpist must not only have a deep understanding of both the technical aspects of playing, but also the historical and musical implications. By understanding the difference between musical eras and composers, the harpist will be much more effective at playing with the appropriate style.

In this text, there will be a focus on looking at each technical aspect of playing the harp and relating that to several excerpts. By bolstering each concept in turn the harpist will be better prepared to play in orchestra, and can develop their orchestral playing as they develop as a solo player. In addition to this, a focus on music history and how the particular piece being studied fits in the greater framework of orchestral repertoire will be examined.

It is also essential for the harpist to understand where the music they are studying falls in with the history of the harp. For example, the harp that was in existence when the Mozart *Concerto for Flute and Harp* was written is much different than today's modern double action pedal harp. Lower tension strings, single action pedals, and a smaller body all contributed to a different sound and capabilities of the harp. By understanding performance practice of a specific time period, as well as the limitations and performance

capability of the instrument the piece was written for, a better understanding of how to appropriately interpret the music can be achieved.

Chapter 2: ORCHESTRAL HARP STUDY IN PRIVATE LESSONS

The material and advice found in this text is primarily designed as a supplement to private harp study. Even in orchestral playing, the harp is treated as a solo instrument. Often the harp plays alone, and in today's modern orchestra, there is only one harp position in an orchestra.

While there are many works that require two harps, usually the parts are distinct and the harpist must be comfortable playing on their own, and not relying on someone else in their section to inform their playing. Instead, the orchestral harpist must be adept at listening to other sections and the orchestra as a whole and use that information to decide on how best to play.

With the treatment of the orchestral harp as primarily a solo instrument, it is important to develop the skills necessary to meet that challenge. The best way to do this is in intensive private music lessons with a teacher adept at both orchestral and solo repertoire. While there are several texts that allow for private self-study, nothing takes the place of weekly feedback from an experienced teacher.

This chapter will investigate ways in which both students and teachers can maximize their lesson time, and allow for focus on solo repertoire as well as orchestral excerpts and skill study. It is important that both student and teacher are committed to reaching common goals and that they identify worthwhile benchmarks that will allow for real progress and learning.

Private music teachers carry a great responsibility to shape tomorrow's professional players. It can be difficult time as a teacher to identify specific goals that

each unique harpist should endeavor to reach. The excerpts included in this text are short and intensive, which allows the teacher to assign one each week in addition to solo work being mastered.

The excerpts in this text are also divided by broad technical aspects of harp playing (for example, accompanying patterns or virtuoso solo excerpts), which gives the teacher the option of assigning a specific excerpt to bolster a particular technique being studied. This has the dual effect of improving the solos the student is mastering at the time, while at the same time giving students valuable exposure to orchestral repertoire.

In addition to the excerpts, advice about structuring lessons, and suggestions from existing material and other method books are included so that the teacher can better structure the student's lesson to include orchestral and music reading. Depending on the teacher's studio, there might be a wide range of student abilities, especially when it comes to orchestral and ensemble experience. Each student comes with different expectations and goals, and some may not have even considered the possibility of playing with an orchestra.

It is the teacher's responsibility to foster a culture of learning with their students, even with material that the student might not be enthused about learning. Whether it is a solo from a particular time period, assignments of exercises from etude books, or an orchestral excerpt, it is important for the student to understand the purpose behind learning the material. Even reluctant students who just want to focus on their solo playing instead of orchestral material might be swayed when they see the relationship between studying excerpts and improving overall musicianship. Below are several typical student

types, with ideas on how to utilize the resources in this book to help introduce or improve orchestral playing.

Often, opportunities for young harpists to be exposed to orchestral playing are few and far between. Orchestral music using harp is not often played in an intermediate junior high or high school orchestra, resulting in young harpists missing out on early lessons in playing as a group.³ The material in this document, including excerpts and sample lesson plans, will help fill the gaps in knowledge so that when the harpist is given an opportunity to play, they will be more prepared than they would have been without this intentional exposure. Information on tuning, following a conductor, and working with other musicians are skills often learned through trial and error. This book attempts to answer questions and address concerns the harpist new to orchestra might have that will help them avoid some common pitfalls.

The excerpts used in this book are a mixture of some very familiar standards and others not often found in other harp compilations. Depending on the harpist's ability, the excerpts included can be used as supplements to their current study or as a valuable sight reading tool.

Preparing for an audition can be overwhelming. This book offers advice on how to approach an unfamiliar harp part and learn it quickly. This information, along with advice on intonation, working with others, and following a conductor are invaluable lessons to review as the harpist prepares for an audition. In addition, orchestral auditions often advise candidates that they may have to sight read. The excerpts in this book will

³ Bowles, Chelcy. *A harp in the school: a guide for school ensemble directors and harpists* (Fairfax, Va.: American String Teachers Association, 2006) 25-32.

allow the harpist to test their sight-reading ability and feel more confident in their preparation.

The excerpts included in this book have been chosen to address particular concepts or techniques necessary for effective orchestral playing. If a harpist is struggling with a particular technique, the condensed and focused excerpts will allow for further study, all while improving music reading and familiarizing the student with orchestral excerpts.

Regardless of prior experience or future expectations, becoming familiar with the skills of orchestral harp playing can only help enrich a player's musical endeavors. If a harpist learns the fundamentals of strong orchestral technique, which include decisive playing, confidence, professionalism, and strong rhythmic ability, they will be in demand wherever their future endeavors take them.

Depending on a student's goals, it is important to have a structured plan that focuses on solo projects, but allows for enough time to cover other aspects of musicianship, including etudes, sight reading skills, and orchestral repertoire study.

The length of time spent on each subject depends on several factors. For younger, less experienced players, it is better to organize the lesson time into small bursts of focused study. Younger students operate best when given a short, focused task that they can achieve success in quickly. By switching between tasks, the teacher will be able to focus on only one or two concepts, but the student will be better able to achieve mastery by not being inundated with too much information, or focusing too heavily on only one aspect.

While this might seem slower at first, over time the student will develop the ability and focus to achieve more than just a few benchmarks. As the student's understanding grows, the breadth and depth of the teaching can grow as well.

For older students who have better concentration, it is still important for the teacher to not overload the student with too much information. For example, in some of the more advanced orchestral excerpts it would be very easy to spend the whole lesson time on just one. Rather than do this and overwhelm the student, it is better to make excerpts just one of several assignments each week. By going slowly and methodically through the material, a deep understanding and learning can be achieved by both student and teacher.

It is important to try to structure the lesson so that each aspect that makes up a good musician is equally developed. The definition of what makes a good musician might vary from person to person, but there are several overarching goals that should be addressed in private study. Specifically, the harp teacher should strive to develop the following in their students:

Fostering an individual musical voice in students is the most important skill a teacher will foster in their students. This is achieved by exposing the student to many different types of music, refining technique so that the student can be effective in their phrasing ability, and encouraging the student to be an individual.

Musicality and individual expression can sometimes be overlooked when it comes to orchestral repertoire, where, when preparing for auditions, the harpist faces doubts and questions about how an excerpt "should be played." By encouraging individuality while still staying within the strict confines of what is written on the page and what a particular

orchestral work demands, the teacher can introduce early to students the concept of being confident in their artistic decisions. By being able to make decisions themselves, students will be much more adept at preparing orchestral parts later without teacher assistance, and will have the confidence necessary to face a work situation where they are most likely alone (as principal harp) or helping to lead others (if there is a second harp playing).

An important but often overlooked skill is the ability to sight read well. When it comes to effective orchestral playing, this skill is vital. Being able to quickly learn a new unfamiliar part will be invaluable if a student decides to make orchestral playing a part of their career-often orchestras change programming or add pieces at the last minute unexpectedly. If the harpist is not able to quickly analyze and learn the new piece, playing it effectively will be impossible. Also, it is important for the student to be comfortable looking away from the music so that they can make sure they are following the conductor. Those students who have not developed their sight reading skills will focus solely on the notation rather than being cognizant of the conductor and those around them.

Even if students don't envision an orchestral career, being able to quickly look at a piece of music and identify patterns is an important skill for solo, chamber, new music, and orchestral work. By not being dependent on memory, the harpist has the ability to be flexible with changes and adapt as necessary. If a player only knows how to play it one way, and then is asked to change notes, bring out one of the voices more, or start at an unfamiliar section, it can be very disconcerting and might derail an otherwise strong player. By strengthening sight reading skills, the harpist will be more equipped to deal

with not only the fast-paced rehearsal style of many orchestras, but also improve their solo playing by utilizing the techniques discussed.

Going hand-in-hand with musicality is a strong technical foundation. It is the teacher's responsibility to correct any technique flaws or shortcomings. As with any instrument, the harp relies on the agility of the player. By fostering strong, correct technique, teachers ensure that their student will eventually develop the skill to learn any piece required of them.

Technique is vital in orchestral playing, especially with how competitive the music industry has become. Often at auditions, the player has less than 10 minutes to make a "good impression." It is apparent quite quickly when a player has less than solid technique, especially if they are competing in a field of others that have had teachers that focus on this and work to improve upon it.

Strong technique also helps once a player wins an orchestral job. While the workload of a harpist in an orchestra is much less arduous than a first violinist, they are still expected to prepare multiple works for performance, perform chamber music, and look ahead to upcoming projects, including concerto performances or next season's works. Even if a player decides on a career outside of an orchestral position, playing hours of background music, solo concerts, or wedding performances can be taxing as well. The successful juggling necessary as a full-time musician relies on a strong foundation of technique.

Many of the same tenets for good teaching apply to students seeking to get the most out of their lessons. With both teacher and student, there must be strong communication about goals and a discussion about how best to reach them.

In order to gain the most out of private music study, it is important to make a commitment to practicing. Even the best teacher will not be able to help with reaching ambitious goals if the lessons they teach each week are not reinforced each day. While in the lesson, it is best to have a notebook handy or a recording device that will help in remembering lesson goals and corrections.

During the week, it is important to approach each practice session with specific goals that need to be achieved. Instead of mindlessly playing through excerpts or solo pieces, the material assigned during a lesson should be divided and approached systematically. Even very small gains each day will be of greater benefit than a marathon “catch-up” session near the end of the week and before the next lesson.

A useful tool in preparing for a practice session is to reflect on what goals need to be met and arriving at specific benchmarks that will be met at each practice session. Some areas to consider when looking at areas to improve include note accuracy, phrasing, dynamic contrast, memory, and technical pedal work, including study of pedal diagrams and memorization of pedal repair points.

The most difficult thing to do, both in lessons and in practice during the week, is to organize time effectively. This is especially important when discussing harp practice, as the harpist must ensure that they don't over practice. Since the harpist uses the fingers directly on the string, practicing too much can lead to excessive calluses and a brittle sound. The best way to avoid this is to decide on what is to be done and divide time, focus, and effort equally between assigned tasks.

Included in appendix 1 is a sample worksheet that can be used by students during the week to set daily realistic goals.⁴ This worksheet has been divided into sections that include orchestral excerpts, solo work, and other exercises. By dividing practice into manageable sections, and by further dividing them into smaller daily exercises, real progress can be made in a very short time.

⁴ *Musician's practice planner: a weekly lesson planner for music students* (Oakland: Molto Music Pub. Co.) 1999. 2-4.

Chapter 3 : EFFECTIVE PREPARATION SKILLS

While a relative newcomer to the orchestral family, the harp plays a key musical role in many orchestral standards. From Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* to Stravinsky's *Symphony in Three Movements*, the harp has become a unique and integral voice in the orchestra. The overall musical success of the piece depends on the harpist being able to play these challenging parts with conviction and a deep musical understanding.

In order to achieve the fluidity and musicality necessary to become a strong orchestral harpist, it is helpful to think of the different aspects that, as a whole, make a strong musician. The hallmarks of a strong orchestral musician share many of the same qualities of that of a soloist. These include a full, rich tone, effective phrasing, and excellent rhythm. Unique skills to the harp include a strong pedal facility and the ability to achieve the many different colors the harp can create.

In addition to these shared traits, the orchestral harpist must develop particular strengths in areas outside of their playing. While these traits are also important in solo playing, they play a critical role in the harpist's success in an orchestral setting and will be the focus for this document. These traits include professionalism and preparation, the ability to interact and play as member of a greater ensemble, and the ability to sight read confidently and fluidly. This chapter will examine these skills and ways in which the harpist, especially the harpist new to an orchestra playing experience, can develop their innate ability.

Unlike other instruments where you are one of many, harpists stand alone. There is no one else to rely on to prepare the part and play it correctly. This requires the

orchestral harpist to be conscientious in learning their part in ample time before the first rehearsal.

Often, harpists unfamiliar with playing in an orchestra might view the first rehearsal as a chance to practice and learn their part. Unfortunately the harp is such a complex instrument that there is no opportunity to “learn as you go”. Even the simplest part can be deceptive. Tricky pedals, awkward fingering and exposed passages are all pitfalls that, ideally, the harpist will encounter privately, not with 80 colleagues looking on.

Below are some general guidelines on how to approach a part and prepare adequately for the first rehearsal and subsequent performances. While each experience will be different, the development of solid preparation habits will help the harpist develop a reputation of professionalism and preparedness.

Depending on what orchestra the harpist is performing with, the library should usually be able to provide the part well before the first rehearsal. Ideally, in addition to the harp part, it will be possible to check out the score as well. This is an important step, even if the harpist has played the piece before. Sometimes the orchestra will be using a different edition of the part, and it is important to verify that the part is the same. This is also important because different editions can include varying rehearsal markings, including rehearsal numbers or letters that might differ between parts. One important skill to develop as an orchestral player is the ability to jump from one section to another during rehearsal, and this is accomplished with much more ease when the music markings are accurate.

Before jumping in to the actual playing, it is important to research the composer and the piece. Doing this will allow for a deeper understanding of the music, and the additional insight into the piece will make for a more effective performance. There are so many layers to music that merely learning the notes is really just scratching the surface. Gaining deeper insight into these composers and their work will not only help make the performance more effective, it will leave the student more knowledgeable about the composer and the work.

Being able to jump from playing in the baroque style to twentieth century music quickly is often thought of when considering a solo harp repertoire. This importance is shared with orchestral music as well, where any given concert can include music from all different periods of time. The ability to draw from the study of history and the composer will ensure that the musician is playing accurately for that specific piece, and allow for greater ease in transitioning to others works.

Listening to recordings or live performances is one of the most critical steps in proper preparation. By listening to the entire piece, the musician gets a sense of the overall musical style and how the harp fits into the texture of the orchestra. While listening for the first time, it is important not to worry so much about the harp part specifically. Instead, it is best to listen to the other instruments and mark some auditory cues in the harp part. For example, if there is an obvious violin entrance during a long tacet section, mark it in the harp part. This will help during rehearsal to keep track of rests and stay connected to the music.

Looking at the score in conjunction to listening will help in understanding the overall rhythmic structure of the piece. Score study will also help identify areas in which

the harp plays with other sections that might need separate work. It will also help in marking any cues or musical components of other instruments into the harp part.

Listen to the piece several times, each time honing more and more onto the harp part. For example, on the second hearing listen to how the harp interacts with other instruments. Make note of any passages that the harp plays with others that might need rehearsal time. On each subsequent listening, try to hone in on a new aspect that will help during a rehearsal and performance, including exposed harp passages that are important to review and approach solidly. Mark the exposed passages with a little asterisk and spend extra preparation time on those particular places.

By this time the harpist will have listened to the piece several times before even playing it. Not only has this achieved familiarization with the work, it also has given insight into the music as a whole, and allowed the harpist to see what work is required to play their part most effectively.

Go through the part very slowly, taking it section by section. Write in pedals, being consistent with notation (for example, it is good practice to always write the right foot pedal above the left foot pedal). Write pedal diagrams at regular intervals, making sure to include them at rehearsal numbers or places where the conductor might ask the orchestra to begin during rehearsal. The ability to be ready to play any section of the part at a moment's notice rather than having to hunt out what the pedal settings may be gives a strong, secure feeling during rehearsals and performances.

It is important to allow ample time to for trying out different approaches, whether that involves trying different fingering, articulation, or phrasing. There is more than one

way to play a part, and the ultimate deciding factor on differing musical and technical ideas are ultimately decided by the individual harpist.

When working through tricky or unwieldy passages, it is important to take a step back and consider whether enharmonic spellings could help with mastering a passage. Several works, including *Salome's Tanz* by Richard Strauss, sound much better when rewritten using flat pedals instead of the original sharp notation. Splitting the notes differently between hands and considering alternate fingerings are other important aspects to try out and then mark into the harp part. It is important to allow enough latitude and time to try several tactics before committing to the one the final form. Once several different avenues are explored, write in any tricky fingerings and markings. It is important not to rely on memory when it comes to fingerings and other markings. Just as in solo playing, it is important to be able to come back to a well-thought out part years later that has clear, clean markings that make sense.

As this learning process takes place, it is important to continually circle back and revisit the earlier learning tools. By continuing to reference recordings, a refinement of musical ideas and different interpretation can be found. Seeking out other conductors and ensembles to get a feel of different interpretations is key to gain a greater understanding of the piece and settling on personal interpretation. If there are questions about speed or interpretation, try to talk to the conductor in advance of the first rehearsal.

By beginning the process of preparation and study well in advance of the first rehearsal, the focus can be taken off of preparation and instead move to making music. By investigating recordings, speaking with other musicians, and working intensively

alone on the part, a better understanding of the music can be reached and a better performance be given.

Chapter 4 : TUNING AND HARP MAINTENANCE

Arriving at the first rehearsal fully prepared with minimal worry about the ability to execute the part being played, allows the harpist to focus on other concerns. The most important consideration when preparing to play for an orchestra, besides learning the part well, is to allow for enough time to tune effectively. This often means planning on arriving well before many of the other musicians. Arriving early and placing the harp in the hall it will be played will allow for the instrument to acclimate to the surrounding temperature. It will also provide a quiet environment in which the harpist will be able to tune without being distracted by other instrumentalists.

All harpists, whether orchestral or solo, beginner or advanced, should be familiar with and be able to use an electronic tuner. It is not feasible, especially in an orchestral situation, to tune by ear. By familiarizing themselves with the different types of tuners available, the harpist can make the decision on what best fits for their needs and practice using it daily.

The most basic type of tuner uses lights, dials or sounds to help the harpist tune the string up to pitch. As the tuner becomes more advanced, greater accuracy in pitch can be achieved: chromatic tuners are a popular choice for harpists, as it gives the musician the ability to tune any note (including sharps and flats). The most accurate tuners are stroboscopic tuners (popularly known as strobe tuners). Rather than use sound waves to help determine pitch, strobe tuners use either a mechanical or simulated spinning disc to determine pitch frequency. This allows for a very precise tuning of each note.

Another very important tool for all harpists to own is a tuner pick-up. This is a small clip or suction cup that is plugged into the electronic tuner, then attached to a metal

part of the instrument. Regardless of whether the tuner being used is a simple chromatic tuner or more complex strobe tuner, pick-ups allow the tuner to ignore ambient noises and instead focus on the instrument being tuned. This is especially important as an orchestral harpist, when even an early arrival with plans to tune in silence can be thwarted by other instrumentalists or excessive ambient noise.

While electric tuners are readily available and should be utilized as the primary means of accomplishing tuning, it is important for the harpist to develop a good ear. This is especially true as an orchestral player, where it is important to be able to discern whether a note is sharp or flat in relation to the other players. Many times, a string may need to be adjusted during a concert. There is not enough time and it would not be appropriate to electronically tune the harp-the harpist must be able to quickly manage the problem note and move on. Some strategies on how to effectively do this will be discussed in the next section.

The easiest way to achieve a well-tuned harp is to tune every day. Daily tuning serves several purposes: First, having well-tuned strings will increase the longevity of the strings. Rather than being tuned only sporadically, a well-tuned harp will always be kept at the appropriate tension. A harp that is tuned infrequently will not hold its pitch and will need frequent readjustments.

Second, daily tuning will help develop the player's ear. Rather than getting accustomed to an out-of-tune harp, if the habit has been set and the harp is usually in relatively good tune, the harpist will more readily be able to hear and correct out of pitch notes. This is a very important skill to develop, as often a string might need to be tuned

during a piece. If the harpist has a well-developed ear, the string will be able to be tuned quickly, and will not necessitate much more than a little twist of the tuning key.

Third, keeping a harp up to its appropriate pitch will help in the overall development of the harp. When tuned up to its correct pitch, the strings of the harp exert equal pressure against the sounding board. By maintaining the equilibrium of the pitches, the sound board will be accustomed to this pressure and not stressed by sudden changes.

It is important for the harpist to recognize strings that need replacement, and be aware of good string replacement practice on strings that rarely break on their own (namely, the wires and the top octave nylon strings). Changing strings when necessary will help to make the harp sound as good as it should, and will make tuning easier as the harpist won't be battling false or dead strings.

Most concert grand harps are strung with the first octave (smallest strings) in nylon and the second through fifth octave in gut. The lowest strings use wire, and are available as standard wire, or wire with a tarnish resistant coating. This standard stringing can be changed as necessary by the circumstances the harpist finds themselves in. For example, there are gut strings available with a textured white coating, which allows for the strings to be seen with more ease in low-light or changing light situations. If the harpist finds themselves in a pit playing with a ballet orchestra, or on stage with many different colored lights that make the string colors hard to differentiate, there are options that will help.

Nylon strings are often used in the top octave because of the high tension. While gut strings are available, many harpists choose to use nylon to lower the cost of frequent replacement. While nylon strings are much less expensive than gut, there is a tradeoff in

sound quality. This is less noticeable in the higher octaves, but most professional harpists string their harps in gut from the second octave down. Again, however, this can change depending on circumstances. If the orchestral harpist finds themselves playing many outdoor concerts, they might find that nylon strings are a better option to help maintain the tuning and also decrease the cost of string breakage.

Regardless of what string type is used, eventually the string will wear out. Whether because of temperature fluctuations, frequent practicing, or simple wear and tear, all harp strings will need to be replaced. The frequency at which this is done can also be adapted to suit each individual musician's circumstance. Especially important to monitor is the timeline for the wire strings and the top nylon strings. Both materials will rarely suffer a catastrophic failure, where the string breaks. However, all of them will eventually wear out and sound "dead" on the harp. This is especially true of wire strings, which are very important for the overall resonance of the instrument. A good rule of thumb for professional harpists who frequently use their harps in performances is to change their wires every year. This is often done when a harp is regulated, as wire tension can also help with regulating the pitch of other notes. Nylon strings can also last well beyond their expiration date. The small nylon strings are inexpensive enough to change frequently, but every year is a good benchmark.

Whether nylon, gut, or wire, it is important for the harpist to recognize the signs of a string needing to be changed. The most obvious one is a string breaking. This can happen at any time and with no warning, so it is important that a spare set of well-organized strings be carried to rehearsals and performances. Other signs include strings

that begin to unravel (usually near the soundboard or at the top of the strings, near the discs), or nylon strings that develop indents or divots where the discs hit them.

Replacing strings is part of being a harpist. It is an especially important skill to develop as an orchestral harpist. The string will need time to stretch out and hold its pitch, which can be very problematic when the string is changed before a performance (or during a performance). The best way to prepare for this is to learn how to change strings quickly, quietly, and with as little fuss as possible.

When a string breaks or needs to be replaced during a regular practice session, try to practice as if it had happened during a concert, and think of scenarios that might be encountered during a performance. It is important that spare strings can be accessed quickly and quietly, and that they well-organized and maintained as a full set. In addition to the string supply, it is important that the harpist has in their bag a supply of string anchors handy and scissors or clippers available to trim the excess string after changing it. Practicing changing the string quietly, and bringing it up to pitch without aid of an electronic tuner to achieve the correct pitch are all important skills to develop.

The best way to prepare for a situation of a broken string during a performance is the same way that a harpist prepares their part: practice. Whenever a string breaks, it is very useful to practice changing it as swiftly, quietly, and accurately as possible. Doing this every time the situation arises will make it much easier to handle if it happens during an actual performance.

Even a harp that is rarely moved will eventually need to be regulated. Regulation is a process where a harp technician checks to ensure that all the pedals and discs are turning correctly. Even the slightest deviation will make the harp sound out of tune.

Technicians also check and replace pedal felts, which also help maintain the correct alignment of the harp and help to muffle the sound of changing pedals. They also will check for any structural problems the harp might be developing and replace any strings that are past their prime.

A regulation, just like strings, can vary depending on a harpist's circumstances. Most professional harpists choose to have their harp regulated each year, while others who might not move their harp or play it as much might opt for a less frequent schedule (usually every three years). Keeping a harp regulated will make it easier for the harp to sound in tune and will make the harpist aware of any problems on the horizon that might need to be corrected.

Chapter 5: THE ORCHESTRA REHEARSAL

Once the harpist has followed the steps to master a part well, including score study, listening, and marking their part effectively, they are ready for the first orchestral rehearsal. This again, is where most novice orchestral harpists go wrong. Rather than undergoing intensive study of a part before a rehearsal, some take the chance on sight reading a part or coming into a rehearsal with less preparation. By doing most of the work before rehearsals begin, the harpist will develop the habits necessary to survive in the fast-paced world of a professional orchestra, where often there are just a few rehearsals before a concert.

In addition to their solo preparation, it is important to identify specific passages where they play along with another instrument. For example, in Verdi's overture to *La Forza del Destino*, there is a very exposed duet between the clarinet and harp. The same is true in Ginastera's *Variaciones Concertantes*, which includes several extended solo passages between harp, cello and bass. Arranging a meeting with the musicians who share important passages with the harp is an excellent way to understand and listen to their specific interpretation. This small group work, in advance of the first rehearsal, is another essential preparation tool that will ideally take place before the first orchestra rehearsal.

If there is a second harp part, arrange a meeting with the other harpist so that both can work on the part together and understand how the two harp parts mesh with each other. This is especially true for parts where the two harps alternate with two very distinct parts.

Effective preparation prior to the first rehearsal is the hallmark to success as an orchestral harpist. Unlike other monophonic, single-lined instruments, the harp carries with it extra complications, including the need to mark pedals and fingering into the part.

Sometimes, however, obtaining the part well in advance is not an option. This is often the case with rented parts, where they may not be available until shortly before the concert. The ability to sight read, adapt, and be flexible with unfamiliar music will be discussed in a later chapter.

In most cases, however, the harpist arrives at the rehearsal with the marked part in hand, well prepared to play. Even in this ideal circumstance, there are unique challenges in playing the harp in orchestra that are important to be aware of and address.

It is important to arrive at least half an hour early in order to give ample time to unpack the harp and tune. The pitch at which an orchestra tunes (usually A440 or 442) will vary. If unsure, the principal oboe (who customarily gives the tuning A for the entire orchestra) will be able to help. Usually orchestral harpists tune to a bit higher, anticipating that the harp will start going flat during the rehearsal.

Not only is it important to tune the harp, it is important to allow for enough time to re-tune as necessary. Often the rehearsal space will start to get warmer as more people arrive, and the strings will change in pitch as the harpist plays. As more people arrive, it will become more difficult to tune accurately, even with the aid of an electric tuner and pickup. It is important to get the bulk of intonation and tuning out of the way as soon as possible.

During the rehearsal, it is important to keep listening attentively to the tuning of the instrument and adjust accordingly. This is another reason why arriving to a rehearsal

fully prepared and ready to play is so important. Rather than being distracted by playing the correct notes, the musician can instead listen and make sure they are blending well with the others, both in sound and in intonation.

When setting up the harp, it is important to ensure there is a clear line of sight between the harp and the conductor. Often overlooked is stand height. Rather than looking to the left and down, it is worth experimenting with different angles of the stand. Raising the stand up closer to eye level will help when it comes to maintaining eye contact.

Arriving early to tune will also afford time to test out the acoustics of the space. This is especially important with harp playing, as dynamics might need to be adjusted drastically to accommodate the space. It is usually appropriate to practice quietly, but an awareness and respect of other colleagues and what they are doing is important as well.

It is important to ensure that there are several sharpened pencils at your disposal. The rehearsal will be full of opportunities to make notes and changes in the music, and it is important to have the tools necessary to do so. Often, and especially useful in harp playing, it is helpful to write in cues of the other instruments that will help with entrances and with blending with others.

Even if there are many sections where the harp does not play during a piece, the musician can glean and assimilate a lot of information by being aware of what is occurring in the orchestra at large. If at all possible, follow along with a score or borrow an extra string part. This accomplishes several things; not only is a deeper understanding of the music being achieved, a greater understanding of how the ensemble

sounds is being learned. This learning while watching will allow the harpist to join in later with more awareness and accuracy than would have otherwise have happened.

Another important and practical reason to pay attention even during tacet sections is the opportunity to observe the conductor. Every conductor beats a little differently, and by following along with the score and observing the conductor, the harpist will be prepared to follow his beat more adeptly while playing their part.

If mistakes are made, make a note of it and realize that is what rehearsals are for. While preparation will help in mitigating mistakes, it is unreasonable to expect perfection. Don't let small inaccuracies derail the next notes to come. Always look forward and never dwell on something that didn't go quite as well as expected. Better one missed note than losing focus and missing twenty notes.

During the rehearsal, if there is confusion about how the conductor is beating a passage or if there might be an error in your part, speak up. Usually others will be having the same confusion. Don't wait until a later rehearsal or right before the concert to try to figure it out--it is better to clear up any confusion with as much alacrity as possible and be able to move on and focus on other things.

After the rehearsal, it is important to take a moment and practice any problem areas that were difficult during the rehearsal. The minutes after a rehearsal or during a break are ideal times to approach the conductor with questions, look at the score, or speak with colleagues about running through specific passages as a small group.

By taking an active role both before and during rehearsals, a better overall performance will be possible. Rather than waiting to learn the part until very late, effective preparation enables the harpist to be aware of other musical elements during

rehearsals, including identifying musical phrasing and other traits carried throughout the orchestra. By being attentive and present during rehearsals, the harpist will achieve a better performance and develop a reputation for solid preparation and focus.

Chapter 6 : AUDITION PREPARATION

With only one harp per orchestra and infrequent vacancies (sometimes only one a year, if that), harp auditions carry even more stress than the norm. With very few openings, there is stiff competition when a position opens.

The most important and useful way to prepare for auditions is experience. Not only does this help the musician prepare for and handle stress, it helps to prepare for the job after the audition. Rather than focus on playing an excerpt perfectly, it is better to devote energy to playing with many varied ensembles, venues, and circumstances. The best teacher is experience, and by playing in orchestras (whether in school, in the community, or for summer festivals) the harpist is slowly developing the skills necessary to not only succeed at the audition, but also to succeed in the orchestra after they win the job.

Auditions, however, require more than just simply knowing the part. With hundreds of applicants for just one position, it is important to prepare well, have a plan in place, and learn ways in which to manage stress.

The best preparation for an audition happens well before any opening is announced. While there can be unusual excerpts included on the audition list, most likely the majority of the list will include the mainstays of orchestral harp playing. A typical audition for a major orchestra is comprised of five main components, including solo repertoire, orchestral excerpts, ensemble playing, and sight reading.

Solo requirements vary depending on what ensemble is holding an audition. Occasionally only one solo will be required, but quite often, the audition committee will

ask to hear one or two of the most popular harp concertos. These include the Handel *Harp Concerto*, Mozart *Flute and Harp Concerto*, the Ravel *Introduction and Allegro*, or the Debussy *Dances Sacree et Profane*. Mastery of these important and standard harp concertos is one of the best ways to prepare for an audition well before it is ever announced. Even if the concerto is not asked for at that specific audition, the skills developed by studying these works will help in the technical preparation of an audition.

Often, the solo is played first at an audition. After that, the orchestra has usually supplied a list of excerpts that every musician will prepare and play on the audition day. Popular choices include the Waltz of the Flowers cadenza from Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker*. Other frequent requests include the cadenza from Ravel's *Tzigane*, Benjamin Britten's *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*, Smetana's *Ma Vlast*, Rimsky-Korsakov's *Cappricio Espagnol*, and Donizetti's opera *Lucia di Lamermoor*.

In addition to the standard harp cadenzas, excerpts can also include sections of greater works that contain important harp parts. Popular ones that will most assuredly be on the audition list include the entire harp part of the Berlioz *Symphonie Fantastique*, Bruch *Scottish Fantasia*, Debussy's *La Mer*, Mahler *Symphony # 5 Adagietto*, and Stravinsky's *Symphony in Three Movements*. These are all excerpts that are essential to know as a harpist, and should be learned well before an audition is ever announced.

Often in later rounds, the committee will test the harpist's ability to sight read music that is not found on the list. This can be problematic on the harp, but can often be useful in understanding a player's approach to unfamiliar music. While most music in an orchestra is provided well ahead of time, there are circumstances where it is important to know that the musician is able to quickly assimilate and play the part reasonably well.

The best way to get a head start on possible upcoming auditions is to become familiar with these broad sections of the audition. Learning the core orchestral excerpts thoroughly, long before the pressure of an audition looms, is the best way to prepare for future auditions. This is especially important with harp auditions, as there will not be copious opportunities to take an audition to ‘see what happens’, and learn by doing many. Rather than have to learn difficult lessons and lose a potential job, it is important to try to get most of the learning out of the way long before an opening is even announced. By the time the audition list comes out the harpist will be familiar with the majority of the required excerpts and not be overwhelmed by the amount of preparation needed to become ready to audition.

Rather than wait until a job is announced and there are only a few short weeks before an audition, it is important to set goals and seek motivation when there are no job openings in the immediate future. The more preparation that can be done when not stressed and with a looming deadline, the better.

Preparation and goal-setting can differ when there is no audition list to reference. Luckily the harp orchestral repertoire has some “usual suspects” when it comes to excerpts asked for at major auditions.

In deciding what to focus on preparing, it is important to have a mixture of new, unfamiliar pieces along with ones that have already been prepared and polished. This will simulate what a real list will feel like once an actual audition is announced.

The luxury of setting goals and preparing orchestral auditions when there is no deadline looming is the ability to spend ample time on honing each individual excerpt.

Rather than dealing with a massive list, it is better to focus on just a few and practice preparing and polishing them to performance level.

There are several books that have already identified some of the most important orchestral repertoire to learn and prepare. Primary among them are volumes one and two of Sarah Bullen's *Principal Harp*⁵ audition books. In these volumes, the most asked for excerpts have been edited, with fingering and annotation added, along with some performance tips. In addition to the *Principal Harp* volumes, it is possible to order the individual harp parts of popular orchestral works through music publishing companies. Additionally, the International Music Score Library Project⁶ makes it possible to find and download harp parts and scores that are in the public domain. There are also several ways to study scores and parts online and learn by listening and observing: The New York Philharmonic has recently launched a score archives project online⁷. This database allows for a searchable database of marked parts, scores, and programs throughout the history of the organization. This can be a very interesting tool, as many of the harp parts have been marked by harpists and might offer new ideas in fingerings and phrase interpretation.

While each audition will differ depending on the ensemble, there is an overarching structure to all of the major symphony orchestra auditions. Educating yourself about the process of looking for employment, applying, and knowing what to expect when attending an audition will help in preparing the harpist for the actual event.

⁵ Bullen, Sarah . *Principal Harp : a guidebook for the orchestral harpist* (Bloomington: Vanderbilt Music Co), 1995

⁶ *Petrucci Music Library*. <http://imslp.org> (Accessed November 2012)

⁷ *New York Philharmonic Digital Archives*. <http://archives.nyphil.org> (Accessed September 2013)

Announcements for major symphony orchestras are found in the back of the *International Musician*, a trade journal for members of the national American Federation of Musicians. These announcements are made anywhere from 2-3 months before the actual audition, and will have instructions on where to send application materials

Most major orchestras ask that the musician send a one-page resume. Depending on the orchestra, this might be the first or last step in an application process. Some orchestras allow anyone who wants to try for an audition a chance to perform. Most, however, get hundreds of applications for one position and must find some way to reduce the number. This is especially true for smaller orchestras who might not have access to a performance space for a long enough time to hear everyone who would like to audition. Major orchestras too often try to curtail the number of applicants by looking at the resume and deciding if the applicant has the necessary knowledge, skills and ability to win the audition.

Often an orchestra, after having a chance to review the applications, will send one of two notices to the applicant: The first, an invitation to audition and more information about the time and location of the event; The second, an email telling the player they do not feel they hold the necessary experience to succeed at the audition.

It is important that if the applicant gets the second discouraging email, that they not take it to heart and give up on their preparation for the audition. Often if an applicant contacts the orchestra, they can find alternate way to be invited to audition, whether by sending an audition tape or video or having a teacher send a letter of recommendation. Looking at a resume to determine someone's playing ability is not an exact science, and is especially true for harpists. Lack of experience might be indicative of the dearth of

openings in orchestras, as there is only one harp position. It might have no bearing on a player's ability. Many orchestras look for current employment as a full time musician in an orchestra, but fail to recognize the experience a recent college graduate might have playing in many varied ensembles, or experience a teacher might have after years of playing as a freelance musician. In short, if a player feels strongly that they will do well at the audition and are ready for employment in an orchestra, they should trust in their ability to play well and pursue alternate routes to the audition day.

Once the players have been invited, the orchestra sends out the list of excerpts they would like the musician to prepare. This can vary depending on the orchestra and might include specific measure numbers or sections, or simply list the name of the work and expect the player to learn and prepare the whole piece. The list of excerpts will vary depending on the orchestra, and is often selected with the help of the outgoing harpist or someone familiar with harp repertoire.

This audition list can be long and contain the most difficult of harp orchestral repertoire, and is usually disseminated only one to two months before the audition. Often you will hear the younger, unexperienced musician lament, "How can I learn and prepare all of these excerpts in only a few short weeks?" The answer is -- you don't. In an ideal situation, the list will mostly be review of standard excerpts the harpist has played many times before, both alone for audition preparation, and in ensembles as part of an orchestra. If the list is mostly unfamiliar excerpts that will require more preparation, it is worth reconsidering if the musician is ready for the audition.

An audition for a major symphony orchestra usually lasts 1-3 days, depending on how many applicants come to the audition. Many send in their applications, but

depending on how daunting the list is, might decide not to incur the expense of traveling to the audition.

Most auditions are divided into three rounds: Preliminary, Semi-Final, and Final. Depending on the situation and the orchestra, several musicians might be auto advanced to a later round. This can happen if an applicant has a very strong resume with a lot of professional performing experience, or if the applicant has played with the orchestra as a substitute. Some orchestras, however, require all applicants to start in the preliminaries.

The Preliminary and Semi-Final rounds are almost always held behind a screen, which allows the players to be anonymous to the committee (and vice versa). This is helpful in maintaining fairness, and for placing the importance on the sound and the music, instead of on the person. The candidates draw a number and are kept separated from the committee to ensure this anonymity and fairness.

Although it varies depending on the orchestra, usually when a musician draws their number they are also given a list of the music the committee would like to hear in that particular round. They are then given some practice time (anywhere from 20 minutes to an hour) before their turn. In the earlier rounds, once the committee hears a group of five or six people, they usually stop, discuss, and decide who will advance. In later rounds, the committee may instead decide to wait until they hear everyone before deciding who advances.

Once the final round of an audition is reached, the screen usually is removed. This allows the committee to see how the musician interacts with others (often with chamber music) while they are performing, allows them to hear the sound without anything getting in the way, and allows for more interaction with the committee.

After the finalists play, the committee deliberates and decides on a winner and any alternates. Sometimes, after all of this, no winner is chosen and the process will start all over.

The reality of any harp audition is that there will be one very happy person, along with a large group of very disappointed people who were not awarded the position. Being able to move on after an audition can be difficult. Complete preparation before the audition has required the harpist to focus on the music with such intensity that it is easy to linger over what happened at an audition once it is over.

The most important thing to do while taking auditions is not to make them more than they are; while the positions are few and far between and don't open often, there will always be another audition, performance, or competition around the corner, and the skills developed at each audition will help at the next one. Treating each audition as a learning experience will go far in preparing for the next one.

Immediately after playing at an audition, it's important to write down or somehow record personal perceptions of how the performance went. Since most auditions are closed, it is important to honestly assess how the performance went. This is easier to do as soon as getting off stage as possible, before time has passed and things that went well (or went poorly) have been forgotten.

In addition to personal perceptions, some orchestra committees also offer comments if the candidate asks for them. Ask the orchestra manager at the audition if it might be possible to get feedback from the audition committee mailed to you. This can be valuable insight into how your sound translates in different spaces and behind a screen.

It is helpful to have a project after the audition to focus energy on. With all the practice and preparation, it is the perfect time to start a new solo piece or project. This can be a great incentive during preparation; being able to look forward to something else after the audition helps in shifting gears and moving on to other endeavors.

At each audition, there will be some new experience to learn from and gain insight that will help at the next one. While it is important to recognize and learn from mistakes, just as important is the acknowledgement of those things that went well in the audition. It is important for the harpist to engage in honest review, learning from mistakes, and moving on quickly to new projects. These are the same tenets that will be necessary in an orchestral career, so it's a good idea to develop them early on and become comfortable in always improving one's playing and listening with a critical ear.

Most importantly, the harpist must change their definition of what defines a successful audition. Rather than define success as a job offer, instead the harpist should focus on their playing and performance on that day. By focusing on improving playing, managing stress, and looking forward optimistically to future chances to perform, the musician will develop the healthy mindset necessary for audition success.

Chapter 7 : STRATEGIES FOR PREPARING EXCERPTS

Just as with solo playing, it is important for the player to set realistic goals when tackling orchestral excerpts. If a student is unfamiliar with the majority of the above excerpts, it is important to set up a realistic, balanced plan that will help the harpist eventually learn all the excerpts well, but not at the expense of their solo work or other commitments.

While each student is different, most can handle learning several excerpts at once, especially if there is a combination of “hard” and “easy” excerpts that focus on different aspects of harp playing. Teachers can assign excerpts according to the student’s abilities and incorporate it into the lesson as an additional sight-reading exercise or etude.

If a student is in college and being exposed to orchestral playing for the first time, teachers can set a goal for a number of excerpts to be included on the final semester jury. This will allow the student to set a concrete goal and also give them the opportunity to play the excerpts while they’re nervous or under pressure.

Each week, the student will be assigned either a short excerpt or a portion of an orchestral piece, along with work on the core solo harp pieces that will most likely be asked at an audition. Each subsequent week, the student will perform the assigned pieces for their teacher in either a private lesson or group class. Once satisfactory progress has been made, the student can move on to the next week’s assignment or other exercise as the teacher assigns.

Mastering orchestral excerpts takes a particular type of focus and attention to detail. When in an audition setting, the harpist plays alone; there is no opportunity in having missed notes or flubbed parts covered by other musicians in the orchestra.

Another unique challenge in learning orchestral excerpts is the importance of accuracy. When learning solos, a high level of accuracy is important, but if a student makes one or two mistakes in the course of an 8 minute solo piece, it is not that noticeable. In orchestral excerpts, by contrast, several mistakes per excerpt would be quite noticeable, as most excerpts are quite short. Using the analogy of a racer running a race; if the marathon runner trips a few times, it won't affect their overall performance in the race. However, if a sprinter did the same, they would most likely not be successful. By applying this same analogy to the difference between solo and orchestral playing, the student will understand the importance of striving for accuracy when playing audition excerpts.

Second to learning orchestral excerpts thoroughly with particular attention to detail and accuracy, the next best preparation for auditions is to practice playing in front of others.

In addition to playing orchestral excerpts in front of others, it's also important to be confident as a performer in general. Many of the orchestral excerpts for harp that will be required at an audition are very soloistic. The best preparation for these is a solid technique developed through study of the solo harp repertoire. Solo music competitions are wonderful ways to simulate the stress of preparing for an audition. Many competitions are set up in similar ways to an orchestral audition (behind a screen, playing for judges, competing against others), and there are many different competitions that are available even to young musicians.

Preparing and playing at solo competitions also is an important tool for the harpist to decide if the stress associated with playing is truly something they are interested in as a

career. Even in an orchestra, the stress of being a section of one will often feel like playing a solo. By entering competitions and experience the stress associated with them, the musician will not only be more prepared for the eventuality of an audition, but also be confident in their decision to pursue this goal.

Practicing in the safety of a practice room or home studio does not prepare the musician for playing in a situation where there is a lot of pressure and nerves. By trying to simulate the audition experience as closely as possible, the harpist can gain a greater understanding of what happens to their playing while under duress.

Mock auditions are an important and valuable learning tool when preparing for an audition or public performance. In these situations, the conditions of an upcoming audition are simulated, to allow the musician to visualize and experience how the audition will go on the actual day.

Have the mock audition in a large room, or on a stage. This will allow the player to experience the resonance of a big room that private practice rarely affords. In addition to a larger, more resonant room, it is good to have a panel of musicians that are familiar with the music and are able to offer critiques sitting behind a screen. This can also simulate a real audition experience, and can further emulate a real experience by having the panel call out an unexpected order of excerpts, or ask for repetition of an excerpt or playing an excerpt a different way.

By preparing before the audition and having several opportunities to experience the nerves associated with this experience, the musician will be that much more prepared for the actual day.

It is much better to have the music assembled in one manageable folder for several reasons. Most importantly, it will be much easier to manage the music on the audition day. Instead of having to organize individual parts and keep them in order, the folder method will allow for quick access of any part. Rather than struggle to find what is needed, the folder will enable the musician to maintain focus, both during practice sessions and on the day of the actual audition. It is also much easier to keep track of just one folder while traveling to and at the actual audition. Especially with the harp, where you've marked your music with your own fingerings and pedal diagrams, the ability to just borrow someone else's music or look at a clean copy and have a successful performance will not be possible.

In a perfect world, the entire list will be familiar to the harpist, with all the excerpts able to be played at a high level from the announcement of the list. This will probably never happen, however. Even the most prepared and experienced harpist will need to review or learn new excerpts for the audition.

The focus on the outset of preparation should be on the unfamiliar excerpts. Even if this delays practice of the concerto or other more standard excerpts, the primary focus for the first week after the list is announced is to determine which new excerpts will need the most work.

Once the unfamiliar excerpts are in manageable shape (as in--the notes are learned, but they still need a lot of polishing in preparation for the audition), focus should go toward preparing the whole list. Usually the list is not manageable enough to practice all of it in one day, and it is much more effective to divide the list into smaller chunks that will allow for deeper practice and study. There is danger when preparing for an

audition of simply playing through the audition list and not really practicing the excerpts. By dividing the list into manageable chunks, the musician will avoid wearing themselves out and still allow for ample preparation.

When deciding how to divide the list, determine why the excerpts on the list were chosen. It is usually easy to hone in on one reason why the committee has asked for each excerpt. Whether it is testing soloistic playing, rhythm, pedal facility, legato playing, or endurance, there is usually one overarching characteristic of each excerpt. Examining the list and determining *why* that excerpt in particular was chosen will help immensely in preparing for the audition.

Once each individual excerpt is examined and its underlying reason for being there determined divide the list into several (three or four) broad categories.⁸ Below is mock list of excerpts from an orchestral harp audition, and one interpretation of how to divide the repertoire:

Composer	Excerpt Name	Challenges	Categorization
Berlioz	Symphonie Fantastique	Technique/Stamina	Endurance
Wagner	Magic Fire Music	Pedals	Technical
Britten	Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra :Cadenza	Solo playing	Solo
Tchaikovsky	Swan Lake: Cadenza	Solo playing	Solo
Weber	Invitation to the Dance	Technique/Stamina	Endurance
Stravinsky	Symphony in 3 movements	Counting	Technical
Mahler	Adagietto from 5th Symphony	Lyrical Playing	Lyrical

⁸ Rosenthal, Douglas. "a-tale-of-two-auditions." <http://www.tobyoft.com> (Accessed November 2012).

While the categories for the above example are broad, it is a good system to divide any list. Some ideas for categories include the following:

- Technique
- Endurance
- Solo Playing
- Pedal Facility
- Counting
- Interpretation/lyrical playing
- New/unfamiliar excerpts that need more work

Depending on the list and after looking at and evaluating each excerpt for why it was chosen, unique categories can be determined.

In the above example, four clear categories emerge (Endurance, Lyrical, Technical, Solo). Once the entire list is divided this way, write the name of the excerpt on a 3x5 notecard. Once all the excerpts have their own card, divide them into their predetermined categories. Do the same for the solo or chamber pieces asked for, but don't automatically put them in the "solo" category. For example, if the Mozart *Flute and Harp Concerto* is requested, a better category for that would be "technical" rather than solo playing. Another consideration is to divide the solos or concerti into smaller chunks (by movement or by part; for example, the exposition of the Mozart). The idea in this strategy is to divide the list into small, manageable parts.

Once the excerpts are divided into broad categories, decide how much can be practiced each day. The ability to accomplish small goals is more important than practicing too much of the list each day. On an actual audition list which might have 20 excerpts and solos on it, a good number would be to focus on six or seven excerpts a day, spreading the entire list over three to four days. Once the number of days is determined, make an envelope with the day on it (Day 1, Day 2, and Day 3). Using the piles of

individual excerpts, divide them equally between the envelopes. This strategy allows for each day to have a nice, manageable mix of different skills needed. Instead of being overloaded by playing all the endurance pieces in one day, the musician will be able to focus on just one or two. By dividing the list, it also forces the harpist to practice excerpts with equal attention. Sometimes familiar excerpts are taken for granted and can be just as dangerous as unfamiliar ones. The above division system allows for each excerpt to be practiced and prepared well, even the ones that are already fairly polished.

Once the excerpts are divided between the allotted days, real practicing can begin. At this point, the harpist knows some excerpts very well and consider them review, there are some excerpts on each day that are new, and there are some solos that either need review or significant work. Doing this will allow for good preparation while avoiding exhaustion or feelings of being overwhelmed.

Each day, the appropriate envelope is opened, the cards shuffled, and the top one chosen. It is very effective for this to happen as the first practice of the day, without any warm-up. This will allow for a similar feeling that will occur on the actual audition day, when there is less likelihood to feel “settled” or sufficiently warmed up. Shuffling the cards and playing whatever comes up first will also simulate having to play the list in any order, and will allow for practicing greater focus and preparing for anything.

The most effective way to practice and prepare audition repertoire is to have instant feedback on the performance. Rather than warm up, play through a few excerpts, then go back and work on what went poorly, it is much more effective to tackle each individual excerpt, set small goals for that day, and then move on to the next excerpt. To achieve this, each excerpt should go through the following process:

- Draw an excerpt card
- Record the excerpt once through (no second tries or warm up time)
- Stop and listen to the recording
- Evaluate and critique the performance
- Practice on improving one thing
- Record and evaluate: if there is improvement, move on to the next excerpt

This process achieves several goals: First, it requires the player to practice giving their best performance the first time through, which is what will be faced in an audition.

Second, it allows for immediate evaluation of each excerpt. There is no time to forget how the excerpt actually went, and with the recording there is no room for interpretation or convincing oneself that it went better than it actually did.

Doing the above will reveal many areas for improvement in each excerpt, even on the excerpts that are supposedly polished or ready. The process of focusing, playing well right at the start, and maintaining that focus through a varied list of excerpts that will be called for randomly are all skills that are necessary to develop before the audition day. In addition to maintaining that focus, other areas of improvement will reveal themselves, depending on the excerpt being practiced. Things to listen for include the following:

- Counting/Rhythm
- Steady beat throughout
- Smooth playing between hands (Left Hand/Right Hand balance)
- Technical concerns (missed harmonics, flubbed arpeggios)
- Correct style
- Proper dynamics

While some excerpts will have problems in all of these categories, the important thing to hone in on is one thing, each day that will be improved. For example, if the harpist plays through Swan Lake and, after listening to the recording, hears wrong notes, uneven arpeggios, incorrect dynamics, and an unclear left hand in the opening arpeggios, the important thing to do is focus on one big thing to improve upon (in this example: the

wrong notes are the most important to get corrected immediately). Once that one thing to improve upon is determined the practice goal for that day is to improve that one thing only.

Improving that one area in each excerpt can provide for a variety of practice techniques. For example: an excerpt that has uneven left hand arpeggios will need to be practiced much less than something where there are note inaccuracies. Rather than focusing on time practiced, instead the focus should be on goals being met. If it takes 5 minutes to practice and correct incorrect notes, the work is done and it is time to move on to the next excerpt (which might require 1 hour of practice to adequately meet its improvement goal). The key to proper practice, whether for an audition or for solo work, is to focus on small daily improvements rather than time put in behind the instrument.

Once the main goal of the practice session has been determined and improved upon during practice, it's important to make a note of what was done that day. On the back of each card, write the date and a short sentence on what was focused upon during the allotted practice session for that excerpt. Whether it took five minutes or two hours, it's important to keep track of what was accomplished and what still needs work. This will also help once the excerpt is revisited in a few days: After drawing the card, a quick flip over will reveal a short list of previous areas of focus.

When writing the short sentence about the focus of the practice session, it is important to remain positive. Rather than writing something negative, it is better to focus on what is trying to be improved. For example, if the student is practicing Wagner's Magic Fire Music, they are most likely focusing on the treacherous pedal work required throughout the excerpt. Instead of writing on the card, "Pedals are a mess--too much

sound and inaccurate,” it is much better to focus on what is needed for improvement. A revision of the above negative section would be “Work on improving pedal accuracy-change precisely on the beats.” This small change will help when reviewing notes in the future. Rather than focus on the mistakes, the focus instead is on the improvement being made. This will help during the audition, where the process of improving will be remembered over any negativity.

This process (assembling envelopes full of cards, recording and listening, practicing and writing down goals) should begin as soon as possible after receiving the list. With the above system, great improvement can be achieved with minimal practice time, but ideally at least five to six week’s time is available for preparation. Each week, a “mock audition,” even if it’s just with the recording device set across the room, should be conducted by mixing and matching the excerpts from the envelopes. This weekly check-in will illuminate whether adjustments need to be made to the schedule in order for adequate preparation. For example; if the list contains many new excerpts, more excerpts and less days (in order to facilitate greater repetition and revisiting of new material) might be in order.

As the actual audition draws near, the musician will have at least four weekly “mock auditions” that they can draw confidence from, as well as at least eight to ten repetitions of concentrated practice and recording sessions. As the weeks and practice progress, the goals will shift from broad ones (correcting wrong notes or rhythm) to more refined ones (shaping a phrase or making an accent or dynamic marking more expressive). It is another confidence booster to look back and see the progress made in just a few short weeks.

Once there has been real progress on the excerpts and the focus is on polishing them and readying them for an audition, it's important to look again at each excerpt and decide what needs to be said, musically, through the excerpt. Much like deciding on a designation of category when the list was first given, it is important to revisit and decide what overarching theme wants to be communicated in each little excerpt. At the audition, there will be a very short time to be convincing, and the decision of what to say needs to be decided well before the actual audition day.

The "idea" should be short and succinct--enough that before auditioning the musician can focus on that one word or phrase to settle themselves before playing. A good idea is to look at the notes accumulated on the back of the 3x5 card and decide where the emphasis and importance lies. For example, if the musician is asked to play the cadenza from Britten's *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*, some notes might include, "stronger rolled chords; strong, loud sound; take your time through the crescendo." A word that can encapsulate all those areas of focus would be "confidence." By choosing one overarching word several weeks before the audition, the musician can focus not only on the specific details of each excerpt, but also start to focus on one simple word or phrase they will be able to recall immediately during the stress of the audition.

Once the simple, unique to each excerpt, phrase is decided upon, it should be written on a post-it note and placed directly over the music of each excerpt. This serves several purposes. One, it forces the musician to read what is on the post-it, remove it, and have those few seconds to focus their mind on what they are about to play. In addition to the focus word, any tuning requirements (for example, tuning the lower two wires that do not change when the pedals are moved) should be placed on the post-it note. One of the

hardest things to do at an audition is maintain focus and not dwell on mistakes that might have happened in the last excerpt. Practicing refocusing on a new excerpt, making the necessary tuning adjustments, and playing as well as possible considering any circumstance, are all skills that need to be practiced well before the audition.

Just as important as musical preparation is taking time to prepare for the rigors and stress of an audition experience. As was discussed earlier, the best way to prepare for the experience of an audition is to practice playing for others and being critiqued. Summer music festivals, solo performance competitions, and master class performances are all ways in which to get accustomed to performing.

It is important to have many opportunities to experience performing. Each performance experience not only acclimatizes the musician to rigors that they will face at an audition, but also teaches them what happens to them individually when they get nervous. Being aware and cognizant of how nerves are manifested will help in managing them at an audition.

Besides performance experience, the ability to relax and enjoy the moment is critical in audition success. This can be very difficult, especially for harp auditions which are few and far between. The perception of “this is my one chance at this” is prevalent at harp auditions, and is somewhat true; in major orchestras, there is usually only one harp position available, and once filled, often will not become available in the same orchestra in several decades.

There are several strategies for taking the focus off of the fact of the terrible odds of the situation; at most harp auditions, there can be several hundred applicants for just

one position. Rather than focus on this rather daunting situation, it is better to focus on things with which the harpist can exert some control.

The most calming influence in a stressful audition situation is the realization that everything possible has been practiced, polished, and practiced again. This ability to look back at all the work to get to the moment is a huge confidence builder. Solid preparation, first and foremost, is the key to a calm mental presence on the day of an audition.

Along with preparation of music, it is important for the musician to arrive prepared for the day. If all goes well, the day will be very long as the harpist advances into the final round. Often, auditions can last well into the evening. In addition to a well-prepared and edited folder of music, it is important to have a supply of food and water as well as entertainment during waiting to take the mind off of the audition and allow for relaxation. The ability to have an outlet away from others is very important; whether a book, movie, or headphones, it is important to have an entertainment source independent of other people. They will be nervous as well, and it is important to stay focused on your own audition rather than let others worries or fears seep into your own.

As the audition nears, it is important to also prepare mentally by playing the music in different styles or in different ways than might be comfortable. In addition to simply playing through a prescribed list, start incorporating challenges into practice sessions. In addition to playing something faster or slower, try playing it in a different style (more legato, more left hand, more staccato). This ability to play in different styles on demand will be very important on the audition day, when the committee might ask for different playing of each excerpt.

In addition to playing in different styles or different speeds, the ability to repeat excerpts with the same high level is very important. Often during an audition, the candidate will be asked to play things again. This ability to maintain focus and be able to play it again, over and over, with the same consistent style (while still maintaining the ability to change if asked) is very difficult to do, especially when stressed. The ability to do so will help in standing out from the other well-prepared candidates.

Preparation, flexibility in musicality, and sustained focus are all important mental attributes that must be developed before an audition. By focusing on things that can be controlled, it will help in handling things that have to be left up to chance.

Chapter 8: FOCUSED EXCERPT STUDY

The skills necessary to become a skilled orchestral harpist share many similarities with becoming a strong soloist. Confident playing, a strong sound, and solid counting are just a few hallmarks of a strong player in both fields.

While much can be gained from solo study, it is also beneficial to intentionally study individual excerpts. Especially helpful are short excerpts that focus on one particular concept that needs improving. The following section will focus on several selections of orchestral repertoire. Drawn from standard symphonic repertoire as well as ballet and opera literature, the selections will allow for focused study on several key skills of harp playing.

Rather than include whole parts or vast sections, instead these excerpts will focus on only the most challenging parts of the harp part and allow for intense, focused study. Many of even the most challenging parts have sections where the harp is either not playing, or playing a very simple accompanying pattern. While it is important to adapt and change playing depending on the overall role and function of the harp, the subsequent selections will instead focus on the more difficult, soloistic or exposed sections.

The selections were chosen based on examination of recent repertoire lists for Principal Harp auditions in ballet, opera, and symphonic organizations, as well as drawing from popular works that are played often and are important to be familiar with playing. Small sections that simulate what might be found on an actual audition list are used. Each excerpt is introduced with a brief introduction, including an explanation of what musical skills and technical skills will be developed.

The excerpts have been divided into several broad categories. These include soloistic playing, pedal technique, legato playing, accompanying techniques, and articulation across registers. These are all skills that are important both for solo and orchestral playing. By focusing on a short excerpt that specifically addresses a particular skill, the student harpist will not only strengthen their technique for both solo and orchestral playing, but also prepare themselves for the focus necessary in preparing for an orchestral audition.

Chapter 9: PLAYING AS AN ACCOMPANYING FIGURE

While the harp excels at beautiful solos and unique colors, sometimes all that is asked is to keep a steady, resonant accompaniment. This is often the case in opera, where either a vocal line or another solo instrument is carrying the melody. Many ballet harp parts also contain extended sections of steady, rhythmic playing to accompany dancers. While not technically hard, accompanying passages have their own unique challenges. The focus of the harpist must always be on the other instrumentalist and be ready and able to adapt to changing circumstances very quickly.

An example of playing as an accompanying feature is the Verdi *Forza del Destino* overture. In this excerpt, it is important to recognize the clarinet as the important instrument and play under the soloist. Often harpists are conditioned to play everything very loud. This is a good thing, but just as important is the ability to temper that with playing softly while still maintaining a resonant sound.

By using proper technique, one can still have that rich, full sound without having to play too loudly and risk drowning out the soloist. Often the harp is used as an accompanying feature complementing another solo instrument. This is an important skill to practice, because the harpist has to be able to make their musical line interesting but not take away from the solo line of the other instrument. Successfully playing these passages relies on being mindful of good tone, phrasing and awareness of the other instruments involved.

The best approach when discovering a section with accompaniment and solo playing is to think of these little passages as chamber pieces. Knowing the other solo

lines carried by the other instruments as well as the harp part allows for adapting as playing changes during a performance.

The first excerpt in this series of exercises is from Bizet's *Carmen*. This excerpt is taken from the Intermezzo from the Entr'acte of Act 3 of the opera. In this excerpt, it is important to have a clear understanding of the flute line, which is the line that carries the lyrical melody. The harp serves as the rhythmic base of the solo passage. It is important for the arpeggios to be clean and even. It is also important to be mindful of the flute slowing down and speeding up and adjusting accordingly to their playing.

A helpful addition to any passage that includes a solo line is to write that line over the harp part. Much like looking at a score, this will allow the musician to follow along with the solo line and hone in on any changes that present themselves during a performance.

In the below passage, some edits have been made to the original part, including the removal of some rests that visually impede the flow of the arpeggios. This short excerpt, while fairly basic when it comes to harp technique, can reveal areas where the harpist can improve upon their even tone and playing of arpeggios.

The best way to approach learning this excerpt is to obtain the flute part and copy it above the harp music lines. Use the space above the harp staves to write in the flute line, and then try different fingering approaches for the arpeggios. The goal is for smooth, clean playing, devoid of buzzes or a halting rhythm.

Example 9.1. Georges Bizet, Carmen

The next excerpt, taken from the Berlioz work *Harold in Italy*, asks for a different kind of harp articulation. This work features solo viola, and there are several passages throughout that feature a viola and harp duet. Very similar to the writing in the Bizet, the Berlioz calls for smooth playing with an awareness of the viola solo line.

Also important in this excerpt are dynamics. Ranging from the extremes of pianissimo to forte, this short excerpt is ideal for practicing dynamic range. The pace is quick, with a tempo marking of 138, with brisk, rolled chords.

+++ 33 Allegro assai ♩ = 138

9

17

24

34

pp

cresc.

f

Example 9.2. Hector Berlioz, Harold in Italy

The next excerpt will combine both arpeggiated playing as well as chords. This excerpt, taken from *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* by Richard Strauss, features a beautiful lyrical passage by the horn. The harp plays underneath this, and is used again as the driving rhythmic force of the passage.

Many similar patterns are used between these excerpts, and this passage has intentionally been left blank of fingering and articulation to simulate a blank part one might get as an orchestral player. The first thing to do when getting a completely clean part is to decide on fingering, testing out several versions before settling on the final decision. Once fingering is decided, the focus can extend to creating an even sound and meshing well with the horn soloist.

The chords in the last 5 measures of the excerpt can be tricky: they are quick and jump around the harp, and must be done right in time. It is best to isolate this section and practice playing it when not warmed up. This will simulate what will be faced either in an orchestral performance or audition situation.

+++|+++ Andante

5

9

12

Example 9.3. Richard Strauss, *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*

In Ginastera’s *Variaciones Concertantes*, there is heavy and important use of the harp. The harp accompanies both the bass and cello in separate sections, with very similar musical material. The goal of the harp in this section is to play as an accompanying pattern, but as an equal with the cello and bass lines. Rather than think of this as simply an accompaniment, it is important to play this excerpt confidently, as if it were a solo.

In order to achieve this virtuosic playing while still being mindful of the cello and bass accompaniment, it is important to have a clear sense of rhythm in the following passage. Very slow, with a metronome marking of eighth note equals 50, it is important to have a good feel of the rhythm of both the eighth notes and the faster passages that follow it.

Alberto Ginastera was a prolific Argentine composer whose compositions range from opera compositions to orchestral and solo works.⁹ Included in his compositions is his *Concerto for Harp*, which shares many similarities with the *Variaciones Concertantes*. In both, the importance of long lines and clear enunciation of each note is important.

This excerpt has been edited to include pedals and some fingering, but several measures have intentionally been left blank. One important skill to develop is to become comfortable with adding individual fingering and markings. It is important to foster a sense of independence and ability to reach decisions without relying on others.

⁹ Choate, Robert, and Nick Rossi. *Music of our time: an anthology of works of selected contemporary composers of the 20th century* (Boston: Crescendo Pub. Co., 1970) 20.

Example 9.4. Alberto Ginastera, Variaciones Concertantes

The key to developing good ensemble skills is to, first and foremost, be a good listener. The ability to adapt to others is key in becoming a good group player, whether that is in a small chamber group or in a large orchestral setting. When practicing excerpts or sections that will be played with others, it is important to practice with variety in mind. Changing tempos, playing with different dynamics, and practicing different phrasing ideas are all ways to simulate what it will feel like to play with others and are good ways to prepare.

In recent years, the harp has also seen an explosion of interest with harp ensemble playing. This is another challenging way to practice group musicianship skills. Another positive attribute of recent harp ensemble compositions is the inclusion of pieces for mixed ensembles: instead of very difficult parts, some pieces have been edited and designed for beginning or intermediate harpists. This is another avenue to explore to develop ensemble playing skills, and can be utilized at an early age and ability thanks to the advent of mixed ensemble music.

Chapter 10: CLEAN ARTICULATION

One of the hallmarks of a strong harp technique is the ability to play clearly, with a focused sound, across the wide range of the harp. This can get more difficult when considering the many different colors the harp can create; harmonics, arpeggios, playing in very high or very low registers, all require special consideration when playing the harp.

The following excerpts provide focused study of this skill. In combination with solo harp repertoire, the addition of these focused, small excerpts will allow for more practice of a particular technique. As the following excerpts combine several different skills, including short, articulated notes, harmonics, and playing high on the register of the harp, the student and teacher can use them to pinpoint certain techniques that might need more work.

In Bela Bartok's *Violin Concerto No. 2*, The harp is very exposed and serves an important role to the soloist. At the first of the piece, the harp is the first instrument to set the rhythm and accompany the violin with simple chords. While they seem simple, the execution can be tricky on the harp. Each chord requires a totally balanced sound between hands, and the inner notes of the chords must be brought up. Finger independence and the ability to choose to play just one finger louder or softer is very important.

Additionally, the repetitious nature of the chords can be very difficult on the harp. As the harpist replaces, there is danger of buzzing the strings. Since this work begins so sparsely, any buzzes or lack of clarity in the sound will be very noticeable. In this

excerpt, it is important to practice replacing the notes as late as possible to prevent as much replacement noise as possible.

This excerpt (and the whole work) is very pedal-intensive. Just as with the focus on replacement noise discussed in the last paragraph, it is important that the harpist is very aware of their pedal technique. The best way to approach any pedal-heavy work is to work on the pedals separately from the music. The addition of pedal diagrams (often referred to as pedal repair points) can further help in getting back on track if something happens during a performance. Changing the pedals fluidly, on the beat, and together are all ways in which to reduce pedal noise and navigate this excerpt successfully.

♩ = 95

Example 10.1. Bela Bartok, Violin Concerto

In Igor Stravinsky's Suite from *The Firebird* ballet, the harp's unique colors are used throughout the work. With heavy usage of glissandos and harmonics, this piece is a popular orchestral work and worth learning in its entirety. Of particular interest to harpists is the opening to the Berceuse movement, which begins with a solo harp harmonic section.

The following excerpt has been rewritten enharmonically. Writing enharmonically is a very handy tool to have, especially when playing in an orchestra. The understanding of enharmonics can allow the harpist to edit tricky passages and avoid problematic pedaling. By rewriting the following excerpt utilizing the harp in flat, it also allows the harp to resonate as much as possible, which is important so that the harp can be heard in a big space like an orchestra hall.

This excerpt also is good practice for oscillating a pedal between two positions (C natural to C flat) Quiet execution of this is important, as the part is very exposed.

♩ = 50

(continue with harmonics throughout entire excerpt)

7

12

C♮ C♭ C♮ C♭ C♮ C♭ C♮ C♭ A♮

Example 10.2. Igor Stravinsky, The Firebird

The opening of Bela Bartok's *Miraculous Mandarin* requires completely different technique. Situated in the lower register of the harp, it requires clean, clear playing to cut through the orchestra.

In order to achieve this, especially on the lower strings of the harp, it is important to compensate for the larger, more resonant strings. By playing slightly lower on the strings, the harpist can achieve clarity in this passage. Playing lower on the strings is an

important consideration in other works for orchestra, specifically a passage in Benjamin Britten's *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*.¹⁰ In Variation I, after the harp cadenza, there is a passage that is written in the lower registers and difficult to hear. It is easier to play articulated, clean notes if the fingers are lower on the strings (almost next to the sounding board).

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system is in 4/4 time with a tempo marking of quarter note = 115. The bass line contains a sequence of chords and notes with dynamics *p*, *sf*, *sf*, *pp*, *sf*, *p*, and *sf*. The treble line is mostly silent. The second system starts at measure 5 and continues with similar bass line patterns and dynamics *sf*, *sf*, *sf*. It concludes with a 5/4 time signature change, the instruction *molto rit.*, and a double bar line.

Example 10.3. Bela Bartok, *The Miraculous Mandarin*

¹⁰ Bullen, Sarah. *Principal Harp : a guidebook for the orchestral harpist* (Bloomington: Vanderbilt Music Co)1995. 23.

Chapter 11: VIRTUOSIC SOLO PLAYING

Orchestral harp literature is full of beautiful harp cadenzas that take advantage of all the rich colors the harp is capable of. Unfortunately, these cadenzas or solo passages can often happen after long waits. This makes it even more challenging to play, because in addition to being nervous there is little or no chance to warm up. One example of this is Tchaikovsky's ballet *The Nutcracker*. The harpist rests for several pieces, but then is expected to come in with huge sonorous arpeggios in the Waltz of the Flowers cadenza. The same is true for the cadenza in Ravel's *Tzigane*. The solo violin has a 4 minute cadenza at the beginning of the work, after which the harp joins in with extremely fast and treacherous arpeggios up and down the harp.

The hardest part about these cadenzas is the ability to be confident and assured from the very beginning. Without being able to warm up at all, the first arpeggio often sounds weak. Then as the fingers get warmed up and accustomed to playing, it becomes more fluid.

The following excerpts will help in increasing confidence when approaching solo passages without warming up. It is a very important skill to develop before undertaking auditions, as often warm-up time is limited or fingers will need more time to respond with nerves affecting them. It is important to try to conduct these exercises and excerpts at the beginning of the day or at the beginning of a practice session. After a short while the harpist will have the tools necessary to play a loud, even, rich arpeggio. An important part of playing convincing solo passages is to be confident and relaxed. By mastering the following exercises fear will be replaced with excitement to show off the harp and all the incredible colors it can produce.

Virtuosic solo playing is also challenging as it usually combines every aspect of harp technique, including solid counting, variation of tone and color, effective pedal technique and clear articulation. Chief among these is pedal technique. Just as in solo music, orchestral harpists must be very aware of their pedals. In a rehearsal setting, the conductor may ask the harpist to start anywhere in the piece. For this reason, harpists must ensure that they have plenty of pedal diagrams marked in their music and that pedal changes are as clear and idiomatic as possible.

Pedal mistakes are much more difficult to identify and recover from than note mistakes. When preparing a particularly difficult part, it is important to practice the pedals separate from the notes. This will allow the focus to be completely on the movements the feet make without being distracted by the being played. When pedals are isolated in this manner, it becomes evident where there are problem spots, or where the feet and pedals might be a little unsure. Once problem spots are discovered, it is important to isolate the section even further to clear up any pedal confusion.

If a pedal mistake does happen it is important to become adept at skipping to the next pedal diagram, which hopefully is very close by. This is especially true in pieces with many pedals, like Wagner's *Overture to The Flying Dutchman* and *Magic Fire Music*. It is important to get in the mindset of looking ahead and not letting one mistake turn into many because of the focus on what's already passed.

In Stravinsky's *Petrouchka*, the harp has an important solo at measure 143. It not only asks for solid pedal technique, but also requires clear, clean playing in the higher register of the harp. Also important is rhythm: the quick tempo can be hard to accomplish, but it is important to have a effortless dance-like quality to the playing.

This part has been edited by taking out some problematic notes. The ability to decide what is truly important to the melody is a skill that will serve the orchestral harpist well. Harp writing can be difficult, and often composers ask for things in harp parts that are simply impossible to do. For example, in Richard Strauss' *Don Juan*, there are several sections of 5-note patterns. As the harpist only plays with four fingers, and these passages are very fast, it requires the harpist to understand what the composer was truly trying to say in the music. The following is one interpretation of this that sacrifices some notes, but allows for easier playing of this quick solo.

Example 11.1. Igor Stravinsky, Petrouchka

In Richard Wagner's *Tannhauser*, the harp has an exposed section accompanying the singer in Act I, the Venus aria. In this excerpt, the harp is asked to provide rich chords under the tenor solo. As with the other solo excerpts in this section, some editing has been done to allow for smooth playing at the brisk tempo. As with the Bartok *Violin Concerto* excerpt found in earlier chapters, the challenging part of this excerpt is the

replacement onto similar notes. There is a tendency to buzz, and accurate replacement requires slow, careful study.

$\text{♩} = 80$ 1+1+1+1+1

7

13

18

22

Example 11.2. Richard Wagner, Tannhauser

In *Salome*, by Richard Strauss, the harpist's ability to change pedals quickly while also playing rich, rolled chords is tested. In the *Tanz* orchestral portion of the opera, the harp has an important role: each rich, rolled chord gets increasingly louder, faster, and more frantic, and mirrors what is happening on the opera stage.

Just as with the *Firebird* excerpt, this part has been edited to utilize the pedals in flat. Originally written with seven sharps, the change to flat allows for greater resonance and easier pedals. In order to master this excerpt, it is important to work in sections, slowly, and master the pedals and large, sometimes awkward chords before attempting any *accelerando*.

System 1: Treble clef, bass clef, 3/4 time signature. Chords: A♭, A♭, A♭.

7

System 2: Treble clef, bass clef, 3/4 time signature. Chords: A♭, A♭, A♭, F♭, F♭, A♭, D♭, A♭.

13

System 3: Treble clef, bass clef, 3/4 time signature. Chords: A♭, C♭, F♯, D♭, C♭, A♭, A♭, G♭.

18

System 4: Treble clef, bass clef, 3/4 time signature. Chords: G♯, C♯, C♭, C♯. *8^{va}*

23

28

31

Chords: $C\sharp$, $F\sharp$, $C\flat$, $F\sharp$, $G\sharp$, $D\flat$, $D\sharp$, $F\sharp$, $B\sharp$, $G\sharp$, $D\sharp$, $B\sharp$, $C\sharp$, $E\flat$, $A\sharp$

Dynamic markings: sfz^{-1} , sfz

Example 11.3. Richard Strauss, Salome

Appendix One

SAMPLE WEEKLY LESSON AND PRACTICE PLANNER

Lesson Date:

ETUDES AND WARMUPS	SPECIFIC GOALS
SOLO REPERTOIRE (NEW)	SPECIFIC GOALS
SOLO REPERTOIRE (REVIEW)	SPECIFIC GOALS
ORCHESTRAL REPERTOIRE (NEW)	SPECIFIC GOALS
ORCHESTRAL REPERTOIRE (REVIEW)	SPECIFIC GOALS

	PRACTICE PRIORITIES	METRONOME MARKING/OTHER METRIC	TIME SPENT
Day 1			
Day 2			
Day 3			

Day 4			
Day 5			
Day 6			

Appendix Two

RECENT ORCHESTRAL AUDITION REPERTOIRE LISTS

San Francisco Ballet Principal Harp Audition, July 2013 Repertoire List

Solo (choose one from the following):

Ravel: Introduction and Allegro

Debussy: “Dances sacree et profane” for Harp and String Orchestra

- (Solos will either be unaccompanied or with piano only)

Excerpts

1. Tchaikovsky: The Nutcracker, Op. 71 - Act II, No. 13 (Waltz of the Flowers)
2. Tchaikovsky: Swan Lake- Act II, No. 13-V (Pas d’action)
3. Minkus: Don Quixote - Act III, No. 50d Variation II
4. Glazunov: Raymonda, Op. 57- Act I Scene VI
5. Stravinsky: Agon - First Pas-de-Trois
6. Stravinsky: Symphony in Three Movements- Mvt. II
7. Ravel: Piano Concerto in G - Mvt. I, Reh. 22-24
8. Britten: The Young Person’s Guide to the Orchestra - Variation I
9. Britten: The Young Person’s Guide to the Orchestra - Fugue
10. Minkus: Paquita- Harp Variation

Possible Ensemble Music

Tchaikovsky: Swan Lake, Op. 20 - Act II, No. 13-V

Repertoire List

Principal Harp – October 2013

Solo:

Mozart Concerto in C Major for Flute and Harp Movement I

Excerpts:

Bartók	Concerto for Orchestra	IV. mm. 42-58 IV. mm. 119-127 V. mm. 345-356
Berg	Violin Concerto	I. mm. 1-11 I. mm. 83-104 I. mm. 214-228
Berlioz	Symphonie fantastique	II. The Ball (complete)
Bernstein	Serenade	I. Reh. P through 1 after Reh. Q II. complete
Bernstein	Symphonic Dances	mm. 141-148 mm. 277-293 mm. 361-372 mm. 549-568 mm. 589-655 mm. 705-710
Britten	Young Person's Guide	Variation I to Variation K
Bruckner	Symphony No. 8	Fugue: Reh. I through Reh. L II. Scherzo: Reh. D to Reh. E II. Scherzo: Reh. I to end of the Mvt.
Debussy	La Mer	III. Adagio: m. 25 to Reh. B Reh. 2 to Reh. 6 Reh. 14 to 2 after Reh. 15 4 after Reh. 33 to 5 after Reh. 36
Mahler	Symphony No. 5	IV. Adagietto (complete)
Ravel	Alborada del gracioso	Reh. 5 to Reh. 9 1 before Reh. 16 to 3 before Reh. 17 1 before Reh. 21 to 1 before Reh. 22
Ravel	Tzigane	Complete
Smetana	Má Vlast: Vyšehrad "The High Castle"	Complete
Strauss	Salome	Dance of the Seven Veils: Reh. H to Reh. T

nso national
symphony
orchestra

christoph eschenbach, music director

Strauss	Death and Transfiguration	mm. 15-19 1 after Reh. B through 4 after Reh. C 11 after Reh. O through 6 after Reh. R
Stravinsky	Symphony in Three Movements	II. 2 before Reh. 118 through Reh. 120 II. Reh. 122 through Reh. 128 II. Reh. 132 to Reh. 134 III. 1 before Reh. 146 to Reh. 148 III. Reh. 191 to Reh. 194
Tchaikovsky	Swan Lake	Solo Cadenza
Wagner	Die Walküre	Magic Fire Music (Act III, Scene III): 4 after Reh. 97 through 6 after Reh. 100
Weber/Berlioz	Invitation to the Dance	Complete

Chamber music with Strings:

Debussy	Danses Sacred and Profane	Complete
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Sight reading and/or ensemble playing may be required in the final round only. NSO tunes to A-442. The audition committee reserves the right to immediately cut off any candidate not meeting the highest artistic standards.

The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts
2700 F St., NW
Washington, DC 20566

Mailing Address:
P.O. Box 101510
Arlington, VA 22210

**St. Louis Symphony
Principal Harp Audition April 2013**

Audition Repertoire (continued)

- RAVEL *Tzigane*
[4]-[5]
[12]-8 m. after [13]
- RAVEL Piano Concerto in G Major
I: [22] – downbeat of [24]
- RIMSKY-KORSAKOV *Capriccio espagnol*
IV: Cadenza V after [L], play for 7 mm.
- SMETANA *Vysehrad (The High Castle)*, from *Ma vlast*, complete
- STRAUSS *Death and Transfiguration*
m.15-19
1 m. after [B] – 5 m. after [C]
11 m. after [O] – 7 m. after [R]
- STRAUSS *Dance of the Seven Veils* from *Salomé*
[H]-[S]
- STRAVINSKY Symphony in Three Movements
II: 2 m. before [118]-downbeat of [120]
II: [122]-downbeat of [128]
II: [132]-[134]
III: 1 m. before [146]-[148]
III: 1 m. before [172]-downbeat of [177]
III: [191]-[194]
- TCHAIKOVSKY *Nutcracker* Suite No. 1
III. Waltz of the Flowers: m.3-33
- WAGNER *Magic Fire Music* (Act III, Scene III) from *Die Walküre*, 1st harp part from full opera
4 m. after [97] – 6 m. after [100]

CHAMBER MUSIC (for final round only, to be performed with members of the St. Louis Symphony)

- RAVEL Introduction and Allegro for Harp, Flute, Clarinet and String Quartet



PRINCIPAL HARP
Required Audition Repertoire

Auditions: Sunday & Monday, November 13 & 14, 2011

I. Required Concerti/Solo *Note: concerti to be performed without piano accompaniment*

Handel Concerto in B-flat (first movement)

AND

Solo work of candidate's choice

II. Orchestral Excerpts

Bartok *Concerto for Orchestra* – First and Fourth movements

Berlioz *Symphonie Fantastique* - Second movement

Britten *Young People's Guide to the Orchestra* - Cadenza and Fugue

Bruch *Scottish Fantasy* – Last movement

Debussy *La Mer*

Franck *Symphony in D minor* - Second movement

Mahler *Symphony No. 5* – Fourth movement (Adagietto)

Ravel *Tzigane*

Rimsky-Korsakov *Capriccio Espagnol* - Cadenza and Fifth movement

R. Strauss *Death and Transfiguration*

R. Strauss *Don Juan*

Stravinsky *Symphony in Three Movements* - Second and Third movements

Tchaikovsky *Nutcracker* – Waltz of the Flowers

Tchaikovsky *Swan Lake* – Act II Cadenza

Verdi Overture to *La Forza del Destino*

Wagner Prelude and Liebestod from *Tristan un Isolde*

III. Possible Sightreading at the discretion of the Audition Committee

Candidates are responsible for obtaining their own parts; only excerpts not in the public domain will be sent to invited candidates.

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