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OCSA AUDITION GUIDE

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CLASSICAL VOICE AUDITION GUIDE

The Classical Voice Conservatory is for those who are interested in learning the fundamentals of classical singing. Art songs, any kind of opera, and choral music fall into this conservatory. The department is modeled after college vocal departments, so expect to learn vocal pedagogy, musicianship, aural training, theory, diction, and musicology.

Overview of What to Expect

You'll audition at Symphony Hall, a theater on campus that was converted from a church. For this audition, you will wait in the lobby of the theater, most likely with fewer students than you would find waiting for Music & Theatre or Integrated Arts. The lobby has been chilly in the past, so make sure that you bring a sweater and thoroughly warm up your voice. The waiting period for this audition is hard to predict. If you show up before your scheduled time, sometimes they'll let you in right away, and other times you'll wait for as long as 45 minutes, depending on how many people ahead of you show up for their appointment on time.

I've seen the actual audition take place in two different rooms, depending on the year. The first room is the actual theatre. While it isn't a large theatre, it does have a stage and regular theatre seating. I find this room the most intimidating of all the audition spaces at OCSA, but some students like the feeling of being on the stage and are more comfortable in that context. There will be at least one, but possibly two people holding the audition, including Dr. Maria Lazarova, the director of the Classical Voice department. Because you'll be far away from your auditioners, you should be ready to project.

Last year, the audition was held in a different Symphony Hall room, one with a large classroom feel. My students who auditioned in this room found it easier to be heard over the piano in this room than in the theatre.

At the audition, Dr. Lazarova will begin by asking a few standard interview questions, like musical background. Then she will have you sing your two classical (or classical Broadway) pieces. You can either bring your own accompanist or have the school's accompanist play for you (in which case you need to bring your own sheet music).

Beginning last year, the audition also included a **sight-singing** component that was not announced (and still remains unannounced) on the website. Prospective students were given a short piece and asked to sight sing it as best as they could. I wouldn't weigh this part of the audition too heavily. Call it bonus points if you are a competent sight-singer.

What to Bring

- Your recommendation forms you gave teachers to fill out and separate recommendation letters if you've collected them (Optional, but recommended).
- An accompanist, if you're not opting to use the school's accompanist.
- Sheet music for your two songs (with notes indicating where cuts should be made) to give to your accompanist. The portion you sing should not repeat, so you can show versatility. More about song choice.
- A sweater
- Water
- A current photo of you

What to Wear

Dress nicely. Think business casual. If you express yourself through your wacky style of dress, tone it down for the audition to show you have the potential to be versatile.

What to Sing

Don't worry as much about the age appropriate lyrics for the Classical audition. For this, you should pick something that fits your fach (soprano, mezzo soprano, tenor, baritone, etc.) If you feel uncomfortable singing a classical piece or choral piece, they will also allow you to sing a Broadway piece. However, make sure you do not choose something you'll be tempted to belt. This should be classical Broadway only, where you spend most of your time using head tones. (For ideas, you might try something from Rogers and Hammerstein. Just stay away from the character numbers, like *"I Cain't Say No"* from Oklahoma).

If you feel comfortable enough choosing a classical piece, this is probably your best option. This will indicate to Dr. Lazarova that you have some interest in classical music and that you are not just auditioning for the department as a backup if you don't get into Music and Theatre (something the classical department sees fairly often). For ideas, OCSA suggests you consider these books:

"24 Italian Art Songs" - G. Schirmer/Hal Leonard

"15 Easy Folksong Arrangements" - G. Schirmer/Hal Leonard

"The First Book of (Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, Tenor, Baritone) Solos" - G. Schirmer/Hal Leonard

"Musical Theatre Anthologies" - Hal Leonard (the non-belter edition)

OCSA suggests you consider Songs by the following composers:

Henri Purcell, Robert and/or Clara Schumann, Franz Schubert, Johannes Brahms, Gabriel Faure, W.A. Mozart, G.F. Handel or Benjamin Britten

It's also not a bad idea, especially if you don't have a voice teacher, to purchase the CD's that come with some of these books so that it's easier to learn the piece. If you know you won't feel comfortable singing in another language, you might have better luck buying a book of English or American art songs to listen to.

If you've never sung a classical piece before and want to audition for this department, it's best that you find a voice teacher to work with who feels comfortable teaching classical music. You should have a firm grasp on breath control, vibrato, and head voice.

COMMERCIAL VOICE AUDITION GUIDE

Leave your show tunes and arias at the door because this conservatory is all about singing popular music. That isn't to say it's only about singing the "pop" genre. Commercial voice encompasses anyone who wants to sing pop, rock, alt, R&B, or any other genre that might show up in Rolling Stone.

What to Expect

I have had less experience with this audition, because the addition of vocals into the commercial instrumental program is a recent phenomenon. The 2012-2013 school year was the first in which this conservatory was in place. This conservatory is for 9th-12th grade only.

This audition takes place at a new building OCSA recently acquired. The prospective students are sent to wait in the basement, where you will see lots of different students playing lots of different instruments. Drums and guitars are all over the place, and students nervously warm up. You're asked to fill out a form with such questions on it as "who are your three favorite singers."

After what feels like you a very long wait period, you're sent to another room for your audition. Make sure you bring your own accompaniment in the form of a CD, iPod, smart phone, or USB drive, and a current photo of you.

At least with the auditions I attended, it was as simple as that. There was no interview and very little besides singing. However, the OCSA site advises that there will be a brief interview.

What to Sing

This audition is a little different from the other vocal auditions, because you must choose one of your two songs off a list they give you:

As with the other programs, make sure to choose a song that's suitable for your voice. If you know you can't reach the high note in the bridge of "Since U Been Gone," it's probably best that you don't choose that one, even if it's your favorite out of the choices.

Female Vocalists: Verse – Pre Chorus – Chorus:

- Rolling In The Deep – Adele
- Since You Been Gone – Kelly Clarkson
- Just Give Me a Reason – Pink

Male Vocalists: Verse – Pre Chorus – Chorus:

- All of Me – John Legend
- Just The Way You Are – Bruno Mars
- What Makes You Beautiful – One Direction

You also must pick a second song, different from the one you sent in as a video. As with Music and Theatre, it's a good general audition rule to stay away from songs that you suspect they've heard a zillion times. The overdone songs will most likely change much faster than overdone musical theatre songs. While Annie has likely been overrepresented at children's auditions since the 1970's, a pop song that was overplayed in the 1970's is definitely not going to be overdone at auditions today.

It's just the nature of popular music that trends change rapidly. I would give you a list of songs not to sing this year, but it's likely that in a year this list will be outdated. As a rule of thumb, if you listen to a pop station for 4 hours and hear

the same song played 8 times, it may be best to avoid it for this year's audition. For now, stay away from popular Adele songs (other than the requested one). "Someone Like you," "Set Fire to the Rain," and "Rumour Has It" are probably overdone. A possible exception is if you absolutely know that you will sing one of these songs better than anyone else they'll hear. If you love Kelly Clarkson's "Stronger," you might consider choosing another older Kelly Clarkson song, such as "Because of You." If you have a thick mezzo soprano belt and love the way you sound on "Set Fire to the Rain," you might consider something lesser known and slightly older in that range, like "Who Knew," by Pink.

Again, make sure that the song shows off your range but does not overextend it. If you have an amazing belting range that stops at C# and then fizzles out into an airy head voice, don't choose a song in which the climactic chorus note is a D. If you have a high voice and know you can't hit low notes very audibly, stay away from low songs, like Jar of Hearts, unless you plan to raise the key.

This may seem obvious, but make sure you pick something in a popular genre. I do not use "popular" to mean exclusively pop, nor do I use it to mean something trendy (Wicked is trendy, after all). I just use it as a catch-all for contemporary music, like pop, R&B, and rock. Do not choose a Broadway piece and especially not a classical piece. You should be able to sing with "pop" vibrato. That means a slower vibrato that doesn't come in until a little later in your note.

Pick the parts of your song that you do best rather than just going in order. If there are several verses and an impressive bridge 5 minutes into the song, by all means, cut out some of those verses. A verse, chorus, and bridge is pretty standard, but if this does not fit in what shows you off the best, be creative with it. You do not want them to cut you off before you get to the good part!

INTEGRATED ARTS AUDITION GUIDE

Integrated Arts is a unique conservatory, because it explores the various other conservatories. If you have a number of talents, or simply want to learn new ones, this is the conservatory for you. Don't think this is a cop-out department, either. The admissions are rigorous, and so is the curriculum. Use this guide if you are singing, playing an instrument, or performing a monologue as part of your integrated portfolio.

Video Submissions

For detailed directions on what to include for video submissions, visit the OCSA auditions page: <http://www.ocsarts.net/page.aspx?pid=425>.

If you are preparing a song, it should be the whole song, and no fewer than 32 bars. Monologues should be no less than one minute. More rigorous coverage of song and monologue choice can be found later in this guide.

What to Expect

As with the Music & Theater Audition, you'll go through the main lobby and be sent upstairs into a classroom to wait in. You'll know when it is your turn because there's a sheet with the order of students auditioning on it.

Unlike the Music and Theatre auditions, you will not wait outside the door with a group of students. There is always one person in the room auditioning and one on standby, and you should be keeping track of the list of students to stay on top of your turn. When one person comes back from the audition, the next one on the list should go and wait outside the door.

Inside the audition room, you will meet only the director of the Integrated Arts program, Heather Stafford. Several students I've had audition for her find her more intimidating than they do Jeff Paul, but others have said that she really put them at their ease during the interview process. I should also state that everything I know about this interview process is from what students report, since she will not allow the accompanist to remain in the room past the vocal audition part.

In fact, she'll have you sing first if you have an accompanist there in order to ensure that the accompanist leaves as soon as possible. This audition and interview process is contingent on what you decide to do at the audition. One of the critiques I've heard from Ms. Stafford is that when she's asking you questions at the beginning (just normal ones like your name and what grade you're going into) she really wants you to project, and not swallow your words. If you are too quiet, she will make you repeat yourself until you're understood—this is a performance school, after all.

Some people accompany themselves on an instrument while they sing, but please be advised that Heather Stafford recommends against it, since she'd prefer to see students stand up and perform. Some bring in a choreographed dance routine, and still others bring in portfolios of drawings, photos, and writing. In the past, she's seemed particularly impressed with students who, rather than just having a wide variety of artistic skills they're good at, seem to have an interest in combining the arts (hence the "integrated" part in the name). For example, one student a few years ago, not only acted, sang, and danced in a musical, but he also designed and sewed his own costume for the show, combining his visually artistic skills with his performance skills. After the performance part of the audition is finished, you will sit at a table with her while she looks through your portfolio and asks questions. Make sure you're ready to say something interesting about anything you included in the portfolio, because the time you have during this segment is short.

What to Bring

The Integrated Arts audition requires that you bring in at least “three aspects of the arts.” That means you can choose from a song, monologue, dance, art work (3D or 2D), set design, video of a film piece, or creative writing. Here are some additional tips on what to bring:

- A current photo of you
- Your **recommendation forms** you gave teachers to fill out and separate **recommendation letters** if you've collected them (optional)
- **If you are singing a song, bring a CD or electronic device with the accompaniment of your song**, cued to the place you'd like to begin singing. Make sure the music is purely instrumental and that you are not singing along with a separate voice.
- **If you are dancing**, wear comfortable clothing (but still look well-put-together), and **bring a CD or iPod** with your dance music, cued to the appropriate starting point.
- **If you are reciting a monologue**, it's a good idea to **bring along a copy of it**, even though you won't be allowed to use it at your audition. Make sure it comes from a play or musical, and not a show, movie, or cartoon.
- **If you are playing an instrument other than piano**, make sure you **bring your instrument**. Please be advised though that Heather Stafford has told students that she would prefer that you didn't accompany yourself while you sing.
- **If you have writing, drawings, or photographs, bring a portfolio** that highlights your work.
- If you have anything else to show—a painting that doesn't fit in the portfolio, a costume you've sewn, etc.—bring this along.

What to Wear

Make sure you dress nicely and clean yourself up. Let your clothing express your enthusiasm to be at the audition. The official OCSA site actually says absolutely no flip flops. And with that warning, infer also that you shouldn't wear ripped pants, loose t-shirts, beanies...you get the picture.

What Material to Choose

Vocal Pieces | Integrated Arts could include music from all departments: i.e. classical, contemporary, and Broadway. It would not be out of place to sing a song from any of these genres. But Heather Stafford herself has told students that she prefers hearing a Broadway song. It makes sense, since Integrated Arts puts on its own musical each year. With that knowledge, I would recommend choosing a Broadway song for the audition if at all possible (although I have had students get accepted singing pop songs). If your background is in pop and you decide to choose a Broadway song instead, choose a belty, more contemporary Broadway song. If your background is in classical, choose a legit, classic Broadway one.

If you pick a musical theatre piece, choose your best 32 bars; if you sing a pop song, try to pick a passage that shows off a verse, a chorus, and a bridge. The less repetitive, the better. If you choose a classical song, you may get away with singing the whole thing if it's short, but if it's on the longer side, pick a portion you feel best about (60 to 90 seconds in length). Whatever you choose, make sure you sing the parts you're most confident about. Cutting a song and picking out 32 bars can be stressful, but you can use cuts to your advantage, because chances are, you have sections of your song that make you sound great, and other sections that only make you sound good. Pick the great sections.

Monologues | Your monologue selection should not come from TV, cartoons, and should not be performed with an accent. You should always choose a monologue that is age appropriate so you can give a more convincing performance. Try to stay away from monologues that are considered trite.

MUSIC & THEATER AUDITION GUIDE

One of the original conservatories at OCSA, Music & Theater is for anyone interested in pursuing a future in acting or musical theatre. Graduates of this department have gone on to play roles on Broadway, in hit TV shows, and in movies.

Video Submissions

For detailed directions on what to include for video submissions, visit the OCSA auditions page: <http://www.ocsarts.net/page.aspx?pid=425>.

You should prepare one song (cut to 32 bars) and one monologue to include on your video submission.

What to Sing

You only get one 32-bar excerpt from a song, so make it count. Strive for a song that is **not too popular**, that is **age appropriate**, and that is **voice appropriate**.

CONCERNING POPULARITY

You don't want to sing something they've already heard a million times. Avoid (at least for the next decade or so) *Wicked*, *Annie*, *Les Miserables*, and pretty much anything featured in *Glee*.

CONCERNING AGE APPROPRIATENESS

By age appropriate, I mean something you could easily imagine someone your age singing (i.e. nothing about the pain of divorce or what it feels like to be a mother/grandmother, widow, etc.) This really goes for any audition except for children's theatre (where kids play adult roles). Choosing an age appropriate song indicates to your auditioners that you've paid attention to the lyrics and can connect to them in a meaningful way. I've often heard Mr. Paul ask a student how she came to select a song, and it was clear he was looking for something other than "because my voice teacher said I sound good on it." Answering a question like that is much easier if you can relate to the words.

CONCERNING VOICE APPROPRIATENESS

Helping you select something that sounds good on your voice is a harder thing for me to do, because if you're reading this, chances are I've never heard you sing before. This is something you'll have the easiest time with if you have a good voice teacher, because he or she will help you choose something that works well in your range. If you're hiring a voice teacher, make sure you find one who's comfortable with and knows a wide range of Broadway music. It's best if she or he is comfortable with both classical Broadway (think "If I Loved You" from *Carousel*) and the beltier side of Broadway (just make sure they're teaching healthy belting, and not just asking you to shout higher and higher).

If you know that you have a stunning, powerful soprano range and that you've never belted anything in your life, choose something in a soprano range, even if your very favorite song is "Defying Gravity" (please don't choose this one, regardless, since they've heard it way too many times already). If you've belted your whole life and know your range ends at C above middle C, choose a mid-range belting song, and don't try to whip out "I Could Have Danced All Night."

Lastly, I know this sounds painfully obvious to a lot of you, but I can't tell you how many times I've seen people ignore this rule. Come in with a song from a musical! Don't come in with the latest Taylor Swift or Kelly Clarkson hit, no matter how great your voice sounds on it. Nothing says that you aren't serious about musical theatre like auditioning for their program and not bringing in a musical theatre piece.

How to Choose a Monologue

Picking an effective audition monologue is similar to picking the right song.

- In the same way you picked an audition song, strive for a monologue that is age appropriate. Don't pick a monologue about your messy divorce or grandchildren—this is in your best interest because playing a character with whom you can relate is easier and more convincing than playing a role that is completely foreign to you.
- Don't write your own monologue. It has to be from some sort of published work.
- Don't recite overdone monologues. Some of these include "The Stepsister Speaks Out," "Alice in Wonderland," "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown," "The Diary of Anne Frank," and any excessively famous Shakespeare soliloquies.
- Monologues from plays are preferred. As opposed to monologues from a collection, monologues from plays give you a scene to contextualize, and show that you know your stuff about theatre. You may want to invest in a compilation of monologues that come from plays, but be sure you know the context of the monologue within the play.

On-Site Dance Audition

The on-site dance audition is fairly new to OCSA's musical theatre audition process. You used to have to sing your song and perform your monologue, but this is now covered in the YouTube video submission.

Needless to say, if you're planning to audition for OCSA's musical theatre program, you should now consider investing in some dance lessons well ahead of time. If you only have time to learn one style, I would recommend jazz dance or musical theatre dance if you have the second option in your area. If you have the option of doing more than one style, ballet and tap class would also be a great use of your time!



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For questions, or if you're ready to take your audition to the next level, go to:

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