

## **AN INSIDE VIEW OF THE COLLEGE POSITION AUDITION**

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This is a timely article for me as I have just witnessed the search and conclusion for my position of Professor of Percussion at the Eastman School of Music. This search started about five years ago when I proposed to the Dean of the Eastman School of Music that I should invite former students of mine, who have established successful percussion departments, to come back to Eastman, and over a four day period teach, perform a solo with the percussion ensemble, conduct the percussion ensemble, and give a clinic on their instrument of choice. This would give my students and the administration a chance to view others in the teaching profession. All together there were eleven former students who returned for the experiment. I know this is a bit of nepotism, but we had to start somewhere and there was never any indication that these former students would be the chosen ones by the search committee when the announcement was released about my retirement date. I knew when I was going to retire and I was planning my DIMINUENDO INTO RETIREMENT. Let's call this the preliminaries that set the stage for the big event.

Once the announcement is made that the position is open, serious candidates must start to get their qualifications in order. This means Curriculum Vitae, letters of recommendation from prominent leaders in their field, preparing a tape which represents their playing skills and perhaps a networking of phone calls to colleagues and friends asking for advice.

Preparing the Curriculum Vitae for a job interview can be a daunting and time consuming experience. You want to tell all about yourself, but must be careful not to have redundant information. This will surely turn off the search committee and cause them to move on to the next candidate. How do you determine what is important and what is not? One thing you can do is to put yourself in the position of the search committee and consider what you would want to know about the candidate.

Your teaching experience is crucial especially if you are applying for a teaching position. Where did you teach? What level was the teaching and where did some of your students go after they left your studio? A percussionist must list the specific areas of expertise such as snare drum, marimba, timpani, drum set and perhaps hand percussion. This would help the search committee to establish criteria on you. Most percussion jobs require the aforementioned instruments, as these are the staple of percussion instruction. For the wind player it is perhaps not as detailed, yet I think they would want to know if you doubled on wind and brass instruments. This is an area that must be detailed so mention all that you do in your teaching. Outline your professional experience, your orchestral experience, commercial experience, solos you have performed, and with whom and any CDs that you have made. If you have published, a list of your publications would be necessary. Your affiliation in musical organizations and any articles you have written are also important.

Letters of recommendation are very important but also can be detrimental to the candidate if they are too lengthy, filled with over zealous adjectives and contain information not pertinent to the situation. A search committee will surely pass over this kind of recommendation. Usually three to four letters of recommendation are required, so more is not better in this case. I have written many letters of recommendation for students, colleagues being considered for advancement in academic rank and various other jobs. I try to make the letter short and to the point covering the person's qualifications, their contributions to the field and a few well-chosen adjectives. Choose your recommenders well. They can help you or hinder you.

The search committee has chosen you to come to the institution to audition for the position. Now comes the big test. You must face the search committee, students, and administration. As the retiring professor, I had no position on the search committee. I did however, prior to the first candidate, give the committee an overview of what I thought would be a fair audition for the candidate. Following are my proposals:

1. The candidate must demonstrate skills in teaching snare drum, marimba, timpani, and an assortment of orchestra percussion before the search committee and selected students.
2. The candidate must demonstrate skills in conducting a percussion ensemble.
3. The candidate should perform a short recital.
4. The candidate should present a short clinic on the instrument of their choice.
5. The candidate should have a working knowledge of ethnic percussion.
6. The candidate should have an historical knowledge of rudimental drumming.
7. The candidate should have a knowledge of percussion history.
8. The candidate should be interviewed by the search committee and students.

I personally attended all the auditions of which there were four. In attendance were the members of the search committee, my students and a few curious faculty members. The successful candidates were those who connected with the students, both musically and personally. A great musician with no personality won't impress a group of students who will be taking lessons with them over many years. This type of person should stay on the stage and play solos where interaction is not necessary, except to make music for the audience. On the other hand a great personality with no talent will not impress students either. The perfect mix is necessary. What is the perfect mix? For me it's a person who has a good self image, acts in a professional manner, performs with musical taste, flawless technique, and quality sound on the instrument and is able to make the student feel important, relaxed and willing to listen to what they have to say.

The search committee has chosen you to fill the position. Now comes the negotiations for your contract. Don't be too eager to sign the first contract you are offered. Surely you have thought about the position you are being offered and have formulated some futuristic plans for its continuation of excellence. Present your ideas to the administration because they want to know about them. Also listen carefully to their expectations about the future of the department you are going to chair. Hopefully your ideas and theirs are on the same path. If you are a soloist who has established a concert schedule that takes you away from your teaching, discuss this with them. Missed lessons must be dealt with and it's best to understand what is expected of you before you sign a contract.

Are you going to be an Assistant Professor, Associate Professor or a full Professor with tenure? Be certain of the promotional tract they are offering you. Remember that in the academic world the "publish or perish" concept is used, so be certain you can fulfill this concept. Also discuss with them your obligation for committee assignments. This commitment will add hours to your schedule.

**AND NOW COMES THE MONEY DISCUSSION.** Everyone wants to make a lot of money, but perhaps the institution cannot afford your demands. Do your homework carefully about the city where the institution is located. Present to them a realistic money demand that reflects a comfortable living experience for you and your family, if you have one. Negotiations about money are not always comfortable but they must be done. As to what you think is reasonable, have in mind a bottom line you will not exceed.

Once all factors of the audition process are completed, the job is yours. This does not mean you can sit back and enjoy the success. You need to continually prove yourself

to your students and the administration. The trip to success is a long one that ends only when you retire.

### *About the Author*

John H. Beck was a member of the United States Marine Band, Washington D.C. for four years before joining the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra as Principal Percussionist in 1959 and becoming Principal Timpanist in 1962. A recipient of B.M. and M.M. degrees from the Eastman School of Music, he headed its Percussion Department and was conductor of the Eastman Percussion Ensemble. From 1965 to 1972 he was the percussion columnist for the *NACWPI Journal* and served for two years as State Chairman for Percussion for the New York State School Music Association. John H. Beck is a past president of the Percussive Arts Society. He became a member of the Percussive Arts Society Hall of Fame in 1999.

















