

# AUDITION ACTION GUIDE

What You Need to Know  
to Check Your Nerves at  
the Door So You Can  
Book the Gig

CUT TAKE  
ROLL  
CAMERAMAN  
CO.  
TOR *Sing* without limits

KATTI  
POWER



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# INTRODUCTION

Rejection sucks. So does feeling scrutinized. And then there's all the insecurity that comes from comparing yourself to the competition. Or screwing up your lyrics because that inner critic won't shut the hell up and let you sing.

And yet, we continue to do it because there's a paycheck at the other end. Or a prize. Or even just the gratification of "mission accomplished".

But here's the thing: just continuing to audition over and over again DOESN'T get easier, no matter what those liars tell you, especially when you really care about the outcome... unless you have the tools to MAKE it easier.

That's where this class comes in. It's going to be intense and at times feel like information overload. And there aren't very many quick fixes in here, but if you practice the skills we're going to learn, auditioning will become something you don't dread or at least something you don't enter into feeling like you've already failed.

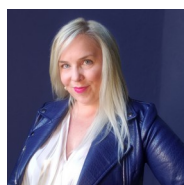
This isn't like a diet fad that requires sheer willpower to succeed. We are going to learn some solid skills that are repeatable for all your auditions which can improve your ability in the audition room with practice.

Also, there's a lot of information in here that specifically relates to musical theatre auditions. If you're not an actor, have no fear, this is still for you! There will be special instructions in each section when things are specifically different for you than for the actors, so keep an eye out for those notes marked with a microphone.

This is a workbook and I want you to complete as much of it as possible before our first class so that we can review your answers and take questions and learn some more stuff to be implemented in our second class. If you have a specific audition you're using this class to prep for, make sure to answer the questions with that audition in mind. If you don't, maybe pick a past audition and treat this like a do-over.

I want you to commit to this program and to doing this work. I know from experience that if you do the things we're going to talk about, you WILL experience better results.

— Katti Power



## YOU AS A BRAND

Being a performer really isn't a whole lot different than being any kind of an entrepreneur. Your product is yourself and the talents and abilities you bring into the room. Just like the latest coffee shop needs to have a recognizable brand identity to get anywhere in the business world, so do you.

This doesn't mean a logo or a catchy name, but it does mean a unified look and comparable packaging. What does that mean? Well, as much as I absolutely DESPISE stereotypes in real life, casting directors and competition judges rely on them in certain ways and it's important to know how to make yourself and what you bring into the room fit a certain brand or type.



For example, I have a friend who has played Seymour in Little Shop of Horrors more times than probably HE can even count. He also played Screech in a live version of Saved By the Bell. He's played Eugene in Grease. He's a typical (or stereotypical) nerd. He got headshots of himself with a short-sleeved button-down and his glasses and a really authentic and natural smile. He stuck a post-it note on his pic & resume that read "Looking for a nerd?" and submitted it to agencies in L. A. and got tons of phone calls in response to this. Why? Because his brand was clear.

### HOW THIS APPLIES TO YOU:

I'm not saying you need to go out and get new headshots. Although, if you discover that you DO need to, do it. But everything about what you sing, what you wear, how you behave in a room, needs to be a reflection of who you are and the brand you are trying to put forward so that when you are in front of casting directors or other decision-makers, they instantly see you in the role you intend when you walk in the room.

With that, let's do some work. Your brand should be a happy intersection of who you are and who you want to be. Actors, answer the questions below as honestly as possible.

Others, see the additional questionnaire after this one.

1. What types of roles do you normally get? For example: leading lady, character roles, villain, ditz, best friend, strong woman, mom, ingenue, vixen, etc.

2. What is your favorite role you've ever played and why?

3. Do you have any dream roles?

4. What about these roles makes them dream roles for you?

5. Is there anything about your look that people notice right away?

6. What roles have people said to you before that you would be perfect for?

7. What are your top strengths as a performer?

1. What types of genres & songs do you typically sing?

2. What is your favorite song to sing and why?

3. Do you have any dream gigs or dream achievements in your singing? If so, what makes them dream-worthy?

4. Is there anything about your look that people notice right away?

5. What songs, shows, or gigs do people tell you would be perfect for you?

6. What are your top strengths as a performer?

Now that you've answered these questions, look over your answers. Do you see any common ground? Where you see commonality is likely where your brand is. For example, if you typically get cast in quirky roles like Fruma Sarah in Fiddler or Mrs. Meers in Millie, if your favorite role you've ever played was Miss Andrew in Mary Poppins, and your dream role is Carlotta in the Maury Yeston Phantom, then you are probably a character actress with really strong legit singing tendencies.

If you have really incredible acting chops and a killer belt, if people look at you and instantly think you'd be the perfect Rizzo in Grease, if your favorite role you've ever played is Irene in Crazy for You, and if you dream of playing the Witch in Into the Woods, that's a really cohesive strong female brand.

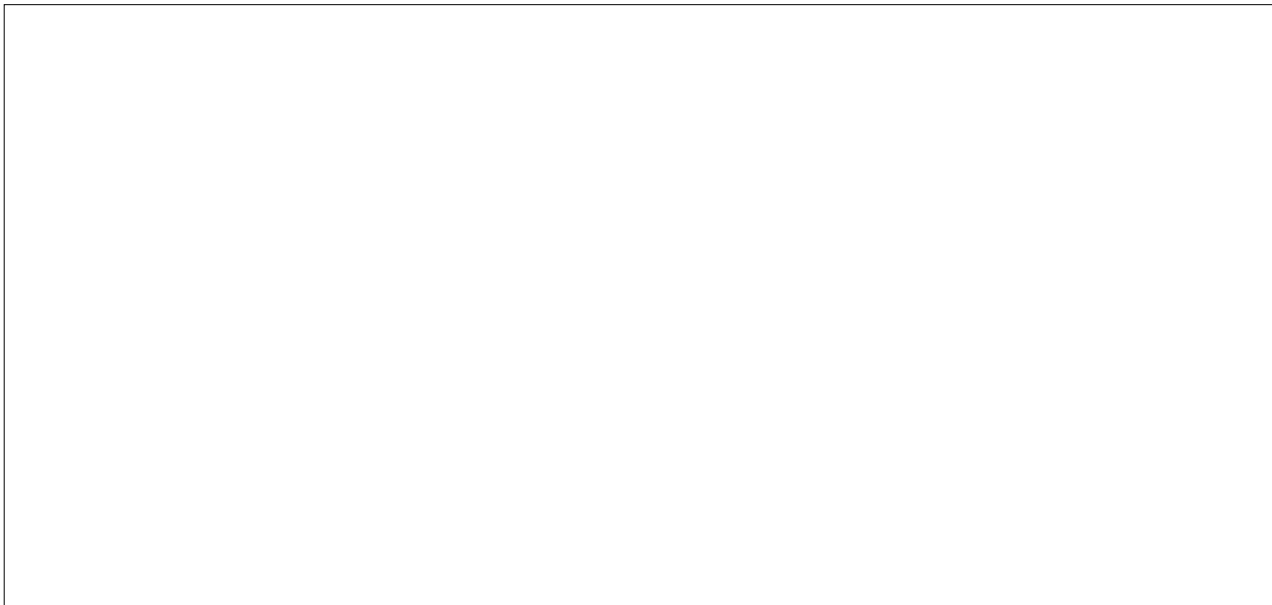
If you sing a lot of R&B, if your favorite song to cover is Ain't No Way by Aretha, if people tell you they wish they could riff like you, and if you're in a rock band that does retro covers

of Motown hits (or if you want to be), that's a very cool old school R&B brand that can come together very easily.

You get the picture. Once you've started to get the idea of who you are, it's time to look at everything you bring into the room and make sure it's sending the message of what you want them to see. It's super important to know that YOU are the one in charge of this, NOT the audition table. If you leave it up to them to decide how to see you, that's a first class ticket to the bottom of the pile. We were all told in school that the more versatile we are, the more opportunities we would have. Turns out that's not really how it works and the more versatility you have (or that you show you have), the more challenging it is for the audition panel to know where to put you in the show.

Think of the items on the grocery shelf. If you go into the pasta aisle looking for gluten free noodles, you're not going to waste your time looking at the ones that aren't gluten free. Nor are you going to waste your time sifting through the ingredients on a questionable box to see if they happen to be gluten free when there are several boxes that are clearly marked gluten free right there. Be the box that clearly defines what's inside and you're more likely to get picked up.

What do you need to adjust (and keep the same) about your look, your material, your behavior, etc., to be more convincing in the brand you've just identified? Be specific.

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Once you have created a clearly defined brand for yourself, it's much easier to stay within those parameters in preparing for your auditions. Also know that you aren't creating a caricature or a two-dimensional cartoon of yourself. You are a real person with loads of variety and there's room for that. Even strong women have vulnerable moments, quirky character women still sing ballads, and leading ladies still have goofy and ugly moments. You will still be able to have 2 contrasting pieces for any audition you go into, while still staying true to your brand. The goal is to make it really easy for the audition panel to see you in the role before you open your mouth so that whatever comes out of your mouth is icing on the cake rather than all that you have to offer.

You know what else that will help with? NERVES.

## SONG SELECTION

Now that you've identified a specific brand for yourself, it's time to get everything else to line up.

When it comes to song selection, I'm pretty sure we were all told in our liberal arts college bubbles to never sing from the show. And I followed that advice for YEARS. But things are different now (and have been for awhile), and most casting directors now prefer for you to make it easy for them and just sing the part you want. I'm sure this flies in the face of all you've been taught and seems terrifying. If you're like me, you were taught to sing something by the same composer with a similar feel and similar character. But think about how hard that usually is to find and how ridiculous it actually is: figure out everything you can about the character and the song, and then search the entire library of musical theatre to find a song that is similar enough that they will know what part you're going for in your audition, but under no circumstances should you sing the actual song which is completely perfect and shows exactly what they want to see???? That's insane. If it takes YOU that long to figure it out, it's not going to be easy for THEM to figure it out either.

The only time I recommend going through this ridiculousness is if you're targeting a role that doesn't have its own song. In this case, you need to show the character, but if the show doesn't provide a vehicle for that, you need to find something else that can, and then sing it AS the character you're targeting, regardless of the actual context of the song or the show it's from.

If this is rubbing you the wrong way, I totally get it. Another way to look at this is to think of every audition as if it's actually the callback. At a callback, it's more likely that they'll ask you to sing specifically from the show than it is they'll ask you to sing from your book. If you go in with the mentality that this is the callback and you sing something you might be asked to sing in a callback, not only are you taking out all the guesswork for the audition panel, but you're also approaching your audition from a much more confident position; it's another great way to tackle some nerves.

If you're auditioning for an entire season all at once, sing the roles from the 1-2 shows you're most interested in getting AS LONG AS BOTH roles fit within your brand. Avoid the temptation to show them an "if not this, then this". For example, "I really want this role, but if they already have someone in mind, I'm also preparing this role just in case", or "I'd also take this role, if it's what's available", or "I can just be in the chorus".

If you do a lot of competing, some think that showing versatility and variety is the way to go. While it can be impressive to sing an opera song followed by a riffy R&B piece, the same confusion still can apply. If you sing an opera song for a group of voters/judges/listeners and they love it, it's a bigger risk to completely shift gears your next time up, because you're starting from zero in their minds instead of building on what you have created. People put in charge of evaluating you and your abilities instinctively categorize you, whether they intend to or not. If you come in looking like an opera singer and you nail a difficult piece your first time out, they will expect that again. If you come in the next time looking like an R&B singer, you have started their expectations back at 0 rather than where you left off with them before, assuming they recognize you with a total brand shift. You're potentially hurting yourself rather than helping yourself. If it's the finals of a competition and it's between you and another singer or 2, and you each have to sing a few songs, THAT'S the time to risk something crazy like this because it's more NOTICEABLY impressive when comparing you to only one or two other people than it is to everyone else. If you are in the kind of contest where you have different judges in every round, this is another safe time to try different things each round IF YOU ARE EQUALLY STRONG AT EACH because no one will have seen any of your other performances anyway.

Generally speaking, whether you are an actor or a competitor, approaching an audition from this kind of perspective of lack and desperation does not show them how multi-talented you are, it shows them that you don't know who you are and it confuses them. If you don't know, how should they? Headshot or score sheet immediately goes in the "no" pile.

If you're auditioning for multiple theaters at once, like at a big conference audition, or you're auditioning for one of those singing TV competitions with millions of singers, it's good to have a few trademark songs that showcase your brand, your acting chops, and your vocal strengths. And you should pick songs in that pecking order.

Make a list of 5 songs that showcase your brand without you opening your mouth:

Of those 5, which 3 allow you the best opportunities to act?

Of those 3, which 1-2 feature your best vocal strengths

There you go. You've just picked your 2 best trademark songs for more generic, or as I like to call them, brand-specific, auditions.

# YOUR BOOK

If you're an actor, it's your book. If you're in a band, it's your list of repertoire. Either way, it's something else you need to make fit within your brand.

Here's how I like to look at your book: your resume shows what you've done, so your book should show what you could do. If you are primarily customizing each audition you go to (which I recommend), you're not really going to use your book very often. Instead of having a book that's just random songs you've worked on over the years, make it more of a place for your trademark songs in lots of categories. Ideally, if a musical director asks to see what else you have in your book, you want them to be able to thumb through it (or read a table of contents) and know exactly who you are just from what is inside.

For a book, I recommend having a few songs in each of the following categories:

Golden Age ballad, Golden Age uptempo, contemporary ballad, contemporary uptempo, Sondheim, Disney, standards, pop, rock, country, legit/classical/opera. And each of the songs in each of these categories should speak clearly of who you are and of the brand you are putting forward. If you are a 20-year-old ingenue and the only Sondheim piece you have is Everything's Coming Up Roses, don't put that in there; it's time to learn some new pieces that fit within your brand identity. If you are a character actor, it's a good idea to also put in a few patter songs as well.

For a rep list, especially if you're in a cover band or auditioning to front a cover band, make sure the songs on your list are songs you know inside and out; they may want to hear you do them. Also, it's okay to cross genres because a lot of bands do that, just make sure that when you do, the songs are still within the brand of who YOU are so that they can see an image of what you'd be like as their front person, instead of having to guess. It will make you look more put together if your list is cohesive rather than "versatile" (read: all over the place).

Imagine that the average song is about 4 minutes, which is approximately a 12-13 song hour-long set. It's a good idea to have about 3 hours of songs, if possible, and bands usually prefer more uptempos than ballads, but be sure to have both.

Use the sheet below to brainstorm song ideas that would be good for your book or rep list:

## CUTTING A SONG

Cutting a song can be an art form in itself. Ideally, you want a cut that is a nice balance of the strengths within the song that made you initially choose it. You want it to show brand, acting, and vocal abilities, in that order. If you pick the most vocally challenging cut of a song but it shows no acting skill whatsoever, you're just showing off, not showing them you can be the role. If you pick the best acting moment of the song and it doesn't highlight you vocally, what can you do to it so that it does? Take it up at the end? Extend the final note a bit?

If you don't read sheet music, make sure you have a friend who does because you want to make sure your cut is accompanist friendly and that it isn't changing keys in the middle of a phrase (i. e.: I want to do the first half of this verse, but the second half of that verse).

If you are using cuts from several parts of a song, it's better for you to take the time to make photocopies and play the cut and paste game so it all fits on 1-2 pages rather than creating a page-turning nightmare for your accompanist. The easier you make it for your accompanist, the better playing you will get from her.

Make sure to highlight or use flags to mark cuts from one location of a song to another. If it's your only copy, make a photocopy so you can mark on it without worry.

Also, if the audition notice gives you a time limit or a bar limit, DON'T EXCEED IT. If they want to see more, they'll ask. Ideally, if you're staying within your brand and singing for the role you're most right for, they may know they like you from the moment you walk in. If you extend your stay by giving them more than they ask for, you are saying two things: 1) you don't trust their abilities to see your brand, and 2) you don't respect their time. Let them ask you for more if they want.

With that in mind, if they don't ask for more, it doesn't mean you did poorly! You may have given them exactly what they want. The audition panel usually has loads of singers to get through each day, and the last thing they want is to ask for more from you when they already know they like you.

## GETTING IN CHARACTER

Before you skip over this section, it isn't just a random acting lesson in the middle of all this audition prep work. This part is another big step to battling your nerves. Here's why: your mind [can't multi-task](#). It can switch back and forth rapidly from one thought to another, but it can't think about 2 things simultaneously. What this means, is that if you are focused on the shaking in your knees or your voice, or on the funky note you just sang, or on whatever the hell the accompanist just played, then your mind can't focus on connecting to your song. To your advantage, what this also means is that if you are focused on the circumstances of the song/scene and on what you want and how you're going to get it, your mind can't focus on the scary stuff. You can go back and forth from one to the other, so the more focused you can remain on your acting, the less chance you have of being nervous.

So, let's develop some concrete things to focus on so that it isn't abstract and easier to lose focus. Let's pick one of your trademark songs. Answer the following questions about it. If the text of the song or what you are able to learn about the show or its history doesn't answer the question, you get to make up an answer. So pick something interesting and actable.

1. What do you know about the situation of your song? Describe the situation in thorough detail – the whos, hows, whys, whats, wheres, whens, and anything you can think of.



2. What do you want? Songs happen when just words aren't enough to match the level of emotion being experienced; it's a heightened sense of emotion. This means that you aren't singing just for the fun of it, there is something extra going on inside that you can't express with just words. In this heightened state, what do you want? Maybe what you want will come from another person. Maybe it'll come from a specific action or decision. Get really clear on what it is you want.

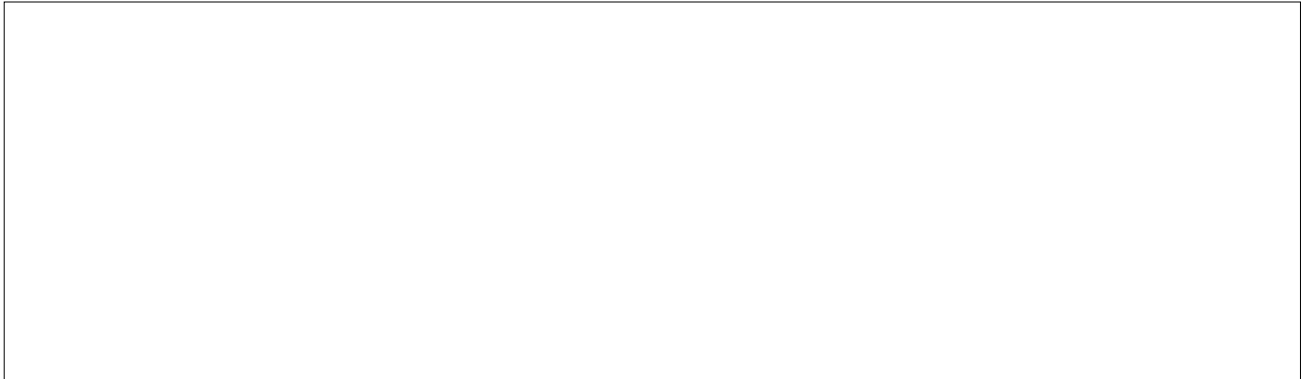
It's why you are saying the things you say and it will affect the way you sing them. Use this space to figure out what you want:

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3. How are you going to get what you want? Most of the time when we want something, we have to develop a plan for how to get it. Tactics are often involved because when our first plan doesn't work, we have to try something else. So think about how that plays out with your song. How are you going to get what you want and what will your backup plans be should the first idea(s) present challenges?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to write their response to the question about how they will get what they want.

4. Have you ever been in a situation like this or wanted something similar? What did it feel like? Figure out how you identify with this and how it feels in this situation with these desires.

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Now that you've answered these questions, it's time to try singing through your song with all of this in mind. Start by reading through the lyrics and seeing how it makes you feel now that you've identified all of this information. Next, try humming the melody while you read through the lyrics and see what that feels like. Lastly, try to incorporate everything you found in the exercise above into your singing and sing through the song, maintaining your focus on what you want and how you're planning to achieve it.

Make sure you know the song technically inside and out so that you don't have to think about technique. If you aren't as polished technically as you would like to be, spend some time just working on the technical aspects before attempting this step. Your mind needs to be able to focus completely on what you want. Continuing to practice this way will allow you to strengthen your ability to connect emotionally to your song so that whether you are alone practicing or you are in an audition room being watched, you'll be able to stay focused instead of giving in to nerves.

This isn't a quick fix. It is a skill that develops with practice and commitment. It helps you to give a stellar performance AND to eliminate the nervous energy and all the side effects that go along with that.

# NERVES

We've discussed a lot of different elements of audition preparation that all will help with battling nerves, and we'll get to even more of it in class. Anything that gives you confidence is going to kick the nerves to the curb, so we try to build in as many opportunities as possible for confidence-building along the way. A lot of that is reframing. We talked in the first chapter about reframing your mind to see the audition as the callback so that you go into it already feeling ahead.

I have always loved competition and when I was young and auditioning in NYC, I used to go into the waiting room of an audition and see people in serious survival mode – willing themselves to be ready for the audition. I decided then and there that I was going to go into the room with the mindset of showing that audition panel why they have already chosen me instead of going in there with the more common mindset of desperate anxiety asking them to please consider picking me. It was like a mantra that I said to myself before going into the waiting room. "I'm just here to show them why they already chose me." And it worked. I felt confident and the people around me were afraid of me.

The waiting room is actually a million times scarier than the audition room and here's why: everyone in there a) wants the same thing, and b) knows only one of you will get it. Because of that, people go into survival mode which is like watching those weird tropical birds do their mating dance in a desperate attempt to be chosen by the female. The nerves, if they didn't exist before, are created here in this waiting room. If they existed before you got there, they get worse in this room. Some singers find a corner of the room and "warm up" which is usually code for "show off in hopes of scaring away the competition". Some go around meeting each person in a social attempt to size up everyone else in the room. There's another group who are openly nervous or unprepared who go around finding others feeling the same way so they can bring each other down and remain in fear. Seemingly confident ones pull resumes out, name-dropping abundantly, people "bond" while others are left out and the whole mess of it all sends most everyone in there into a shame spiral of

WHY-THE-HELL-AM-I-HERE-I'M-NOT-GOOD-ENOUGH-I-HOPE-THEY- PICK-ME funk – all BEFORE even entering the dreaded audition room.

If you're someone who battles feeling nervous in auditions, my recommendation is to only talk to people who need your response – people managing the audition, the people in the room, an accompanist, etc. Anyone who is there for the same reason you are does not need your attention, especially if it has the potential to distract you or bring you down. If you know people there, just tell them you have an important call to make or something, and go be by yourself. You are there to accomplish a mission and you can hang out with friends when it's over.

Before you get to the audition, figure out what you need in order to stay focused and calm. If you need the social aspect to feel supported, make plans before you get there to FaceTime a friend (with headphones or outside the room). If you need solitude to get focused, bring your preparation notes with you or something personal that will help you keep connected to your song and find a space by yourself to get focused.

Give yourself plenty of time so you aren't stressing about being late, but not too much time so you have to occupy your mind longer. When possible, go already warmed up so you aren't worried about whether or not you have the ability to sing what you've worked so hard to prepare.

Speaking of preparation, let's talk briefly about practice and preparation. Even if you think you are someone who does better with the adrenaline of doing things on the fly, the truth is that the more prepared you are in advance, the better you will handle it if something unexpected occurs in the room.

If you are auditioning with an accompanist in the room, make sure you have practiced with an accompanist on your song before going in there so you know what it sounds like underneath you, so you know in advance what places might be challenging for the accompanist and can work them out before you go in there, and so you know how to lead instead of how to follow. This is a BIG one. If you are accustomed to practicing with a track, you are used to listening for the track to let you know when to start, how fast to go, etc.

When you are singing with an accompanist, they are listening to YOU for those cues. It is your job to make sure they follow you, not the other way around. If they play slower than you want, YOU speed up and they will follow. If they play wrong notes, you sing the right ones anyway. If they forget to pause where you want them to pause, you still pause and let them catch up when they figure it out. The best way I've found to practice this (besides practicing with several different accompanists) is to get a friend to bang around on a piano while you sing your song. This teaches you to keep going no matter what is happening underneath you. If the accompanist sucks, it's a lot more challenging to stay in character and to remember your words and everything else, but if you prepare for that possibility in advance, it's a whole lot less of an issue. If you stay composed and in charge of what's happening, the audition table will immediately know the accompanist messed up and not you. If the accompanist messes up and you follow her, that's on you. So, practice with an accompanist if you can, but also practice with a friend banging on a piano or with a totally different song – something that will allow you to concentrate on you and what you're in charge of instead of depending on something else to lead you.

If you're auditioning with a sound system, make sure you take the chance to have a sound check if that's offered. If it's not offered, ASK. When possible, you want to make sure you are familiar with what it will feel like and sound like in the room using the sound system for the audition before you have to actually audition. Remember to use that time wisely – it's not a chance to show off, or to practice your song in front of people, it's a chance to experience the way it will sound in the room, how hot the mic is, whether or not you have a monitor, what the balance is like of your voice to the instruments, etc. These are all really valuable things to know in advance whenever possible.

Remember that it's highly unlikely that the people behind the table want you to do poorly. They are there to find the right person and they want it to be you. Remember also that this is like a business transaction. They need something you have just as much as you need something they have. If you can think about this as you interviewing them, that will also help a bit with the stress. Think about all the times you've left the room thinking they didn't seem very organized or kind. Or the times you've left thinking they were the coolest people

and you'd love to spend more time with them. That was you interviewing them. So go into the room with the mindset of interviewing them for the position of your next employer. In addition to keeping you sharp in knowing what you will and will not tolerate from people, it instantly boosts your confidence, which helps with nerves and makes you more desirable.

Below, take a few minutes to jot down some of the ideas that resonated with you about managing nerves. Which ones will you try out in your next audition?

That's it! Bring your notes with you [to class](#). We will go over them and also go much deeper into all of this together. Feel free to share anything in our private Facebook group – it's just us – and we can support each other and share tips, etc. Thanks for trusting me with your auditions; I look forward to digging into this with you!

