

Poise in performance

Plan as much as possible so there are fewer surprises on the day. Think about how you will stand during any long rests, which are usually at the beginning and end. They can be uncomfortable under pressure, so consider keeping your violin in rest position until a few bars before you start, taking the opportunity to breathe and engage with the piano part. Don't be tempted to fidget! Then put your left hand in fourth position over the strings so the violin is more manoeuvrable, and pop it on your shoulder in the mood and speed of the piece so it doesn't distract from the overall performance. Try to keep the same sense of composure before tricky passages and keep breathing throughout. Professionals often write messages in the music, such as drop shoulders, relax left thumb, look at accompanist, save bow, tilt bow, listen to pianist, breathe out and lead here!

On the day

Here are some tips that professionals use:

1. Get extra sleep the night before, eat lots of protein, limit sugars and conserve your energy.
2. Try to play all the tricky passages slowly earlier in the day but only practise until you're ready, then stop. You can still look at the music after that but be careful not to over play.
3. Get to the venue early and have a brief walk around, swinging your arms to release adrenalin. Take a non-sugary snack and some room temperature water.
4. Have a short warm-up with your accompanist and allow yourself to laugh as that helps to release stress.
5. Tune carefully to the piano but be aware that the piano in the exam room may be slightly different so be prepared to tune carefully again. This is also your time to get used to the acoustic, check the position of the music stand and make sure your accompanist can see you.
6. Check that you and the 'f holes' are pointing roughly at the examiner so you can really perform at maximum volume when needed.

Most important is to know that you have done as much preparation as possible, so you can be calm whilst actively communicating wonderful pieces to your audience. Enjoy the experience!

Allemanda

1st movt from Partita No. 2 in D minor, BWV 1004

Johann Sebastian Bach

There is no right or wrong way to perform Bach, but a working knowledge of current practices is useful. In the 1960s, Baroque repertoire was generally played with heavy bow weight and in the romantic style with full vibrato. In the 80s, when authentic period ensembles became more mainstream, the weight was lightened and vibrato used more judiciously as an ornament. Using a period bow and gut strings is not necessary, but awareness of releasing the long notes to create a more ringing and free tone alongside a little vibrato on important notes is a good middle ground. Listen to authentic performances and then make a personal decision on the style – noting that all musical and convincing performances are equally valuable.

Try singing the music or playing it on a piano first, adding breath marks where they fall naturally. Aim to create long *legato* lines and add several little breaths to divide up the phrases in a non-mathematical way, which helps to create a sense of poise and shape. Each breath can be preceded by a tiny *diminuendo* and slowing up. For example, in bar 1, release the bow on the first double stop on the D notes and sink in and out with the bow to make a 'scooped' sound; then keep the phrase moving until the high E on the fourth beat. On the dotted quavers, use a little narrow vibrato to warm the tone and at the ends of sections (e.g. bar 15) rotate the right arm so that the chord is played one note at a time rather than the traditional two and two, ending on just the top A note for lightness. Shifts should be clean and smooth and the shorter phrases as in bars 11 and 13 can dance with quick bow speed. Bach didn't write any dynamics, but it would be advisable to add lots of *crescendos* and *diminuendos* to give direction to the long lines and a sense of overarching shape and calm. Having a well-planned musical interpretation is a sensible idea, particularly when nerves are added to the equation. Practising unaccompanied works in different acoustics is also useful and helps focus on the ringing tone of long notes.

Allegro

First movement from Concerto in A minor, BWV 1041

Johann Sebastian Bach

This is a charming piece to perform that is familiar to most musicians, so accuracy, lightness, crisp tone and projection are important. Think in one beat in a bar as this will remove unwanted accents and help the flow. Upbeat quavers can be played with a little bow from the middle so retakes in the rests are required. Do include lots of shaping so there is clear direction in the phrases – you can always remove some later if you change your mind. Generally, if the range of notes is ascending, then mark in a *crescendo*, if patterns are going downwards, then put in a *diminuendo*. Do listen to the piano part so you've understood the bigger picture. In bars 17, 72 and 159, consider using one bow on each crotchet and adding a little grace note at the end, then starting the next bar cleanly on a down bow. Notes after the rest in bar 43 can be played in first position with a quick shift in the middle of bar 44 for the D sharp, but do keep the three notes of the tune on one string. In bars 112–113 and 115–116 the slur can be divided, especially if not using a full-size bow. In general, the semiquavers should be *legato* and quavers more separated. Add a small *rit.* at the end that feels natural and stylish.

Allegro moderato

First movement from Concerto in G, Hob. VIIa:4

Joseph Haydn

This is a bright and fun piece to play that is comfortable and not too demanding technically. Soloists don't usually play the opening tutti section, so discuss with your accompanist where they will edit these sections. A clear and projected sound is needed, so keep the scroll at a good angle so the bow stays closer to the bridge than fingerboard. You are aiming to create as much variety as possible and the long phrases can have lots of small articulation gaps for style. In repeated bars such as 34 and 35, create variety by lengthening the repeated D notes the second time. In bar 61, place left fingers on their tips and

Allemanda

First movement from Partita No. 2 in D minor, BWV 1004

Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685–1750)

0 2 3 4 3 3 1 3 3 1 3 3

4

7 1 1 1 1 1 1

10 1 4

12 3

(14) 0 1 3 3

(16) 0 2 3 0 1 0 1

(19) 3 3 (V)

22 3 3 3 3

24 4 3 3 3 3

27 4 0 3 2 3 2

30 0 3 2

Canzonetta: Andante

Second movement from Concerto in D, Op. 35

Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
(1840–1894)

Andante ♩ = 84

con sordino

p molto espr.

14

21

28

33

42

47

52

f

f con anima

p

f

più f

f

dim.

Résignation

Op. 59

Charles Dancla
(1817–1907)

Andante maestoso *molto espressivo*

dolce e flebile

15

20 *f* *con forza ritenuto*

24 *p sostenuto*

29 *f* *a tempo* *dimin.* *poco rall.*

32 *mf*

37 *cresc.* *passionato* *f* *vibrato* *IV^a*

42 *molto rit.* *a tempo* *f grandioso*

50 *forzoso* *dolce e cantando*