

OPERA AMERICA | AUDITION TASK FORCE

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REMOTE AUDITION GUIDELINES JUNE 2020

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GUIDANCE FOR COMPANIES

Below you will find suggestions and recommendations to consider should all or part of your audition season rely on remote auditions this year. We recognize that in no way does a recorded audition replace or replicate the live experience, but in the immediate term, this may be all that companies and hiring managers are able to use.

It is likely that almost all of your pre-screening submissions will have singers performing in non-professional environments (i.e. in quarantine) and without pianists. Whether or not the singer is able to record with a live pianist should not negatively affect the evaluation of the singer's performance.

It is also possible that some or all of your audition process will be virtual, with the same constrained situation for singers. This document is intended to facilitate building clear guidelines and submission policies so that you and your applicants will be prepared for this possibility.

As you look at both pre-screening and possibly modifying your in-person auditions, it is helpful to specify *exactly* what you need and expect from your applicants. Give them clear directions and set reasonable expectations for the current situation. Applicants are unsure of best practices and need strong, clear messaging from individual companies to navigate this moment.

The quality of singing and musicianship is not linked to access to technology. Many talented young artists will not have access to the kind of technology that will best display their gifts. This inequality will be a challenge for everyone in the industry. While it is up to each company to decide what is important in evaluating an audition, we strongly encourage you to focus on the artistry and not the technology.

Recommendations for Listening & Watching Online

- Be consistent with how you listen to/watch each of the video submissions so that you're listening fairly.
- If you have multiple panelists, consider setting listening guidelines within your company to ensure consistency in adjudication.
- Be mindful that your listening experience is directly impacted by the kind of equipment (speakers/headphones) you're using. Sound issues such as peaking or muffling may be a factor of the technology and not the skill of the artist.
- Please check the Opera America website for equipment recommendations for both your company and your applicants:

<https://www.operaamerica.org/content/about/artists.aspx>

General Recording Guidelines

Singers will do everything they can to provide a good audition recording, but many are working with severely limited resources.

With this in mind, give clear instruction and guidance about the following:

- Will you accept video, audio, or both?
- Define what a “recent” or “current” recording means, taking into consideration the current situation: 12 months? 6 months?
- Will you accept a recording of a performance, recital, or concert?
- Will you accept a cappella recordings?
- Will you allow the singer to accompany themselves?
- Specify what you do *not* want (recordings with orchestra backing, etc...)
- Must selections be sung from memory?
- Do you want your applicants to record a separate unedited video for each selection on their repertoire list, or do you want one single video combining multiple selections?
- Do you require a monologue? If so, please give clear guidelines for content and recording.
- Should the applicants identify themselves and the aria as part of the recording, or if they should just start singing?
- If a singer is using a piano track, they may need to wear headphones for the recording. Headphones with a cable offer better sound than airpods/earbuds. Specify your preference, but recognize that the singer may not have the option to choose.
- What is your policy on video/audio editing: what you will accept, and what you will not accept? Recognize that many video submissions will *require* some editing to sync the audio and visual tracks.
- Will you accept “split-screen” videos with both pianist and singer visible?
- How should the applicants submit their video(s) - YouTube, Vimeo, Google Drive, Dropbox, YAPTracker, email, etc.
- Realistic guidelines for dress and presentation - please remember some singers may not have audition attire with them.
- Consider including contact information of recommended pianists for making tracks, including per-track fee information.
- If possible, please keep your application open for at least six weeks in order to allow applicants to prepare for these circumstances.
- Make sure that someone on staff is available for questions. Set up clear, easily accessible lines of communication between your company and your applicants.

Audition Video Submissions (after pre-screening)

- Specify if there are differences in what is acceptable for pre-screening videos versus audition-round videos.
- Specify if you will accept “pre-recorded” videos, or if you will ask your finalists to record and send a video within a certain time-frame. Consider your response if a finalist is unable to meet your time constraints.
- In lieu of in-person auditions, consider short “Zoom interviews” and/or monologues with your finalists to gain a sense of presence and personality.

GUIDANCE FOR SINGERS

Below you will find suggestions and recommendations to consider should all or part of your audition season rely on remote auditions this year. We recognize that in no way does a recorded audition replace or replicate the live experience, but in the immediate term, that may be all that companies and hiring managers can use.

It is likely that all of your pre-screening audition recordings will be created while you are in some form of quarantine. It is also possible that auditions will be via video (instead of live and in-person). These guidelines are intended to help you navigate this process, with full understanding of the constraints of this unusual situation.

If you are unsure about *any* aspect of this audition process, please ask the company for clarification. Ask clear, direct questions, and ask for clarification if you are still unsure. These are unusual circumstances, and this will be new territory for many companies. Your questions will help *everyone* navigate this process.

Four things to remember for all audition submissions:

1. Work with what you have, and trust that what you have will be okay.
2. Follow the rules for submission for each individual company.
3. Listen and watch, and have someone else listen and watch all your recordings fully before submitting.
4. Submit your best work.

Audition Video Recording Recommendations

AUDIO

- Consider the acoustic of the room you are planning to record in. While experimenting with your recording location, realize that the best place to get a clear quality recording may not be in a typically resonant space where you enjoy performing. It's a bit counter-intuitive to our performing and listening habits for live opera.
- A single source recording (video and audio together) can be very successful, and is absolutely acceptable!
- That said, audio quality will be higher if your set-up has an audio recorder or microphone separate from the video recording device.
 - *Please note: this will require additional editing - you will need to edit the audio and the video together after the fact.*
- If possible, test the [EQ settings](#) on all recording equipment to eliminate extraneous noises. A quick summary of the three main parameters of an EQ:
 - **Gain:** How much you are boosting or cutting a certain frequency
 - **Frequency:** What part of the sound (highs, lows, or mids) you want to make changes to.
 - **Q:** Stands for Quality. How much of the surrounding frequencies you want to affect.
- Practice! Record "test" versions, listen, and adjust the audio settings to get the best mix for your voice in your space.
- Your audio recording device - microphone, laptop or phone - should be omni-directional. In general, a newer phone/laptop is going to be of a better quality, but there is a huge range of technology out there. Use the best of what is available to you. It's okay if that is just your phone.

VIDEO

- Carefully check the company guidelines as to what they want and how they want you to present your work.
- If filming from a phone or tablet, be sure to film horizontally, not vertically (landscape, not portrait).
- Your camera should record from a fixed position as if the adjudicators were seated in front of you. Do not use several cameras, but one well-placed camera.
- The camera should capture at least the upper $\frac{2}{3}$ of your body. Your facial expressions should be very clear.
- Consider lighting to ensure that you are well-lit. Light should be facing you; backlighting creates shadows (see below for more lighting tips).
- If possible, film in a neutral environment that gives you room to move, without lots of distractions in the frame. Unusual spaces are acceptable - if the best place to film is a laundry room or a bathroom, that's okay!

EDITING/POST-PRODUCTION

- Properly trim your video (beginning and end) so that is only you performing. Do not include extraneous footage of you setting up your camera or turning it off at the end.
- If you are submitting pre-existing material from a recital, a concert or performance (make sure and check that the company will accept this), edit to remove all extraneous footage.
- There are several free video editing software programs that offer some audio functions as well:
 - [Blender](#)
 - [Light Works](#)
 - [Shotcut](#)
 - [GarageBand](#)
- If possible, submit an [MP4](#) (the highest quality). Additionally, [MOV](#), [FLV](#), [AVI](#) are the most common formatting options.
- If you record in a room with a live or boomy acoustic, be sure to check that the audio is clear. If the text gets lost in the reverb of the space, please consider recording in a different space.
- Practice makes perfect - plan to do a few "rehearsal" recordings. Do short takes to check how everything looks. Consider spiking where you stand and where you put the device.
- Share the "rehearsal" recordings with a trusted colleague/mentor who can check the frame, lighting, and balance. Get feedback on your work!

SUBMITTING YOUR VIDEO

- Carefully check the company guidelines for video submissions.
- If using a platform such as YouTube or Vimeo, double check that your videos are easily accessible.
- If using YouTube, please note that you must select "public" or "unlisted" in the Privacy settings found under the broadcasting and Sharing Options section when uploading your video file to YouTube. If you select "private," adjudicators will not be able to access your submission(s).
- Be conscious of video file size and quality with all uploads - you are responsible for providing a video that represents you well.

- Be sure that the video remains available for a minimum of six (6) months after the initial upload to facilitate the potential of an extended application and audition process.
- Keep copies of all your videos on a secure server.

Video Audition with a Pianist

- If you are positioned with $\frac{2}{3}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ their body in the frame, you are likely an adequate distance from the recording device.
- If you can stand near the piano at the above proximity, that is ideal.
- Many modern devices may consider the piano to be an expendable background noise. If you can't turn off this option, then the pianist may need to experiment with lid up, lid half stick, lid down, etc.
- If the piano is out of the frame, try placing the device $\frac{3}{4}$ of the distance to the singer: if you (the singer) are 12 feet away in front of the recording device, the piano should be 8-9 feet away. This should help the automated mic issues and aid with balance.

Video Audition with a Pre-Recorded Track

- Many singers have anxiety about submitting an audition recording with a pre-recorded track. *It is okay!* Everyone understands these unusual circumstances.
- If possible when having a track created, work with a pianist who knows you, and your voice, and with whom you have good communication. Sometimes it's beneficial to first send your pianist a recording of yourself singing a cappella to help them understand what you need. You might also ask your pianist to provide you with a video of them playing and possibly conducting in places, so that you can connect visually for transitions and cadenzas.
- A single-source recording of yourself singing to the audio track is acceptable!
- However, in most cases, audio will be higher-quality if you are listening to your piano track via headphones while singing.
 - *Please note: this will require additional editing - you will need to edit the audio and the video together.*

Dramatic Non-Musical Content

- Companies are increasingly asking for real time or prepared dramatic readings. You may encounter requests for monologues or unprepared "sides."
- Research and prepare 1 or 2 options that fit your dramatic strengths.
- If you are asked to record a monologue, be aware that this may require different methods of framing and recording your work. As always, record and watch practice videos of your work before submitting a final version.

More Thoughts on Lighting

- It's best for the light to hit the performer from high and above (think of a spotlight on stage).
- If the light can come from eye or forehead level (around 40 degrees), this adds a natural spill that will accent the face.
- Natural light is generally preferred. When in doubt, face a window, rather than performing with your back to it.
- If you must perform with your back to a window, be sure to add extra lighting from the front. Not only will it balance backlighting, but it will help your camera's auto settings which sometimes shift and try to adjust mid performance.

Research for Singers

There is a *lot* of information on-line about how to best record, video, and edit yourself. Give yourself plenty of time to research and investigate what tools you will need before application deadlines start to roll around. Be judicious with your research: use recent articles/videos and make sure the audio discussions are geared for the classical voice.

- If you are still enrolled at a school (or have alumni privileges), we highly recommend using your institution's library and/or on-line access to sites such as [LinkedIn Learning](#) or [Coursera](#).
- Use your own social networks - find out who among your circle of friends and colleagues knows about recording and editing audio and video. Your best resource is almost always your own network. Remember that everyone is in the same situation - trade knowledge and best practices.
- Please check the Opera America website for video and recording equipment recommendations: <https://www.operaamerica.org/content/about/artists.aspx>

GUIDANCE FOR PIANISTS WHO ARE RECORDING TRACKS FOR SINGERS

Here are suggestions and recommendations to consider if you are making tracks for singers to perform with in their pre-screening and audition recordings.

- Refer to the AUDIO section on pg. 4 of this document.
- Place the microphone so that the full pitch range of the instrument and the dynamic range of the musical selections are clear.
- Include about 15 seconds of silence at the beginning of each track, so that the singer has time to click play and get into place before they begin recording.
- Some singers may ask you to provide video of your playing, and possibly conducting/nodding in places, so that they can connect visually for transitions and cadenzas.
- You may want to ask the singer to send you a recording of themselves singing a cappella to help you understand what they need.
- If filming from a phone or tablet, be sure to film horizontally, not vertically (landscape, not portrait).
- The camera should capture the upper half of your body. Filming from your left or right side will allow the singer to see your arms and the piano keys. Position the camera close enough so that they can see your facial expressions clearly.
- In most cases, companies will only want to see the singer in the submitted videos, instead of split-screen videos (showing both singer and pianist) that have frequently been made for quarantine performances. Therefore, visual aesthetic and video quality are not as important. Sound quality is top priority.
- Practice makes perfect - plan to do a few “rehearsal” recordings. Do short takes to check how everything sounds. Consider placing a spike mark where you place the recording equipment for consistency.
- Send high quality files to the singer. This may require uploading to and sharing from Google Drive, Dropbox, iCloud, etc.
- Please check the Opera America website for video and recording equipment recommendations: <https://www.operaamerica.org/content/about/artists.aspx>

TASK FORCE CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions about these guidelines, you may contact members of the Audition Task Force:

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