

Tips for performing in an amateur orchestra

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- 1 Turn up early. Music, and your part in it, needs time – to get your brain ready, as much as your reeds or strings.
- 2 Be prepared. Look at your part (many can be found on the public domain music site [IMSLP](#)) and listen to the pieces (try YouTube or Spotify) beforehand.
- 3 Never be without a pencil to take notes during rehearsals. There's too much going on to trust to memory.
- 4 Practise breathing together with others in your section to begin shared phrases. Strings included.
- 5 Develop peripheral awareness: you can hear and experience every note being played in the room if you put your mind to it. The orchestra then becomes one single wonderful instrument.
- 6 Develop peripheral vision: keep an eye not only on the conductor, but on section leaders and the leader. Avoid playing before them. [There are no prizes for who gets there first.](#)
- 7 Try memorising a little more of every phrase each time you repeat it in rehearsal. Music made without reading takes on an entirely new dimension: orchestral musicians need their printed parts far less than they might think. It's great for members of the audience, too, if they can see your face.
- 8 When the conductor stops, stop playing. Immediately.
- 9 Listen to what else is going on in the orchestra – it gives more relevance and dimension to your own line. Have a full score to hand, to check and refer to. The different instructions (particularly dynamics and phrasing marks) across the other parts will be revelatory.
- 10 Help your partner or neighbour count rests. Even in the strings, where life is far busier, you can always help your partner by pointing out where you're starting.
- 11 In the wind and brass sections, work out a routine between yourselves for tuning. Trust others to hear tuning difficulties that you may not hear while making your own (musical) noise!
- 12 In the strings, act like a top-drawer orchestra by learning how to transfer new bowings down the line from the front desk without speaking.
- 13 When in doubt, leave it out. Go through the motions, but avoid losing pace because you'll get behind the rest of the musicians.
- 14 Get page corners ready to turn in advance.
- 15 And finally ... Smile! You cannot overestimate the impact of a joyful performance on your audience.