



Studio of Andrew B. Spang

Orchestral Etiquette

*Based on a handout by Elaine Douvas,
Principal Oboe, Metropolitan Opera Orchestra (1977-present); Former Principal
Oboe, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra (1973-1977); Faculty, The Julliard School.*

Although this article is called “Orchestral Etiquette,” the points herein apply to any and all rehearsal situations: Band, Chamber Music, and/or Solo with Pianist. These little details can be summed up in three general guidelines:

- 1. Be prepared.**
- 2. Look interested.**
- 3. Be considerate of others.**

Rehearsal Behavior

1. Don't turn around and see who is playing, to watch them play, or for any reason.
2. Don't shuffle your feet if someone plays a passage well, muffs the passage, or for any reason, even at rehearsal.
3. Don't tap your foot: it can disturb other people's rhythm. *Use your ears and your inner metronome instead!*
4. Don't come to rehearsal without a pencil. Ever.
5. Prepare your part before the first rehearsal.
6. Get there early: entering at the last minute is disruptive and rude.
7. Try to warm up at the proper pitch.
8. Don't read magazines, books, newspapers, or anything (even the score can get you in trouble if the on-looker doesn't know what it is.)
9. Don't cross your legs.
10. Don't yawn.
11. If you wear perfume or cologne be certain that it is minimal, especially in the wind section.
12. There are **no** excuses: either you can play the part correctly, or you can't. The conductor doesn't want to know *why* you can't do what is asked of you, they just want you to play the part.

Performance Behavior

1. All rehearsal behavior applies *x2*.
2. No thematic practicing on stage: in many places it is considered bad form to play over and over passages from that evening's program. The same

applies to practicing concertos or someone else's part.

3. Do not make a face no matter who makes a mistake, *including yourself*.
4. Be attentive during the bows in case you are asked to stand alone or with your section. Stand promptly and remain standing until the entire orchestra stands. Delays, confusion, or displays of “modesty” are embarrassing to the conductor who is left gesticulating with his/her back to the audience.

Being a Good Neighbor

1. Sit quietly and don't cause any distraction; no excessive talking or laughing.
2. Don't clean instruments while a neighbor has something important or difficult to play: plan ahead or just wait.
3. Woodwinds: don't blow water out of keys *at all* - it's extremely noisy, ineffective as well, and may wreck somebody else's solo.
4. Brass: always release water silently - no noisy blowing or lip vibration is necessary to empty the spit valve. Be very careful of mutes: don't let them fall out while playing and don't kick them over when not in use.
5. Play with your section and the orchestra: don't attack sooner than the rest nor hang over on releases.
6. Use your best judgement on balance at all times: *don't drown out a more important voice*.
7. Try to know the count if asked: it's not your job, but it's awfully nice.
8. Don't finger solos along with another player.
9. When accompanying another voice, it is nice to incline a little in that direction as if to say "I'm right with you."