

Auditioning for dance courses

FOR MANY DANCE students, auditioning for a full-time school is their first exposure to the audition process. While many of the same principles apply to auditioning for a school as a company, there are some extra points to consider when preparing to audition for a full-time training institution . . . and the key is in the word "institution". Even smaller schools will have a certain amount of paperwork that needs to be completed as part of your application and it is important that you read everything carefully to ensure the best chance of success. "One of the most important ways to prepare is to thoroughly read the paperwork and supply everything requested," says Queensland University of Technology's dance discipline leader, Avril Huddy.

If you are applying to a university, there may be extra requirements from that university, in addition to the school's own requirements. "Prospective QUT candidates need to apply to QTAC as well as submit the audition paperwork to QUT," says Huddy. "All too often candidates fail to supply a QTAC number when submitting the QUT audition paperwork. When the auditions are completed, QUT Dance will inform QTAC of the names of successful candidates. If you do not have a QTAC number they will not contact you and you risk not receiving an offer."

The written application may be about more than just administration. As part of the application for the WA Academy of Performing Arts, for example, applicants are required to write a 500 word essay. "That essay is relevant," says head of department Nanette Hassall

emphatically. "I would love [applicants] to spend some time on the application form, instead of seeing it as perfunctory. Generally applicants can send in more info. Often people send in certificates, school records, even music exam results – it's all relevant."

As with companies, the criteria for getting into a full-time school vary from school to school. Technique might not be the be-all and end-all. "I look for that certain "something"

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in one of the major fields, rather than just exceptional dancers," says Cameron Mitchell, artistic director of Brent Street in Sydney. "Even if it appears that an auditionee is behind in, say, technical ability, they may have that spark that tells you they will surpass those who are currently ahead of them."

Todd Patrick, the director of Patrick Studios Australia in Melbourne, agrees that a dancer's attitude and willingness to perform can be just as important as technique. "Some of my best dancers started with no technical training at all," he remarks. "They were hip-hop dancers or gymnasts or singers. They are now working all over the world purely because when they auditioned they went for it. They proved that they wanted to be there. They showed up and gave it their all."

As directors of schools that provide training for those in the commercial dance field, both

Mitchell and Patrick emphasise the importance of energy and expression. "Market yourself and perform," says Patrick. "I can teach anyone to dance but that 'x factor', that special energy that comes when the dancer doesn't just do the choreography but performs it, that's what I'm looking for. Expression, performance, style and character."

University courses tend to be based on contemporary and class technique, and so your skill level in these areas will be important. "We look for the capacity to move in a really integrated and persuasive way," says Hassall. "Technical skills and musicality are big ones for me." However, you're unlikely

to get in on your ability to perform alone as courses will always have a creative component and also an element of written work. "Because of the intensity of the training, candidates need to demonstrate an ability to get on with others," Huddy says. "We are interested in how they interact with their peers, how they respond to feedback, and how they approach their learning and the learning environment."

Hassall agrees whole-heartedly that there are many factors that influence the outcome of an audition. "We interview every student and that interview is important," she says. "We give each student a chance to show their own work and that often transforms the situation. Often someone who hasn't convinced you that they should have a place in the course comes out and does something really special". It is also important to convey a love for the artform. "I look for a sense of joy. Does dancing make you happy? Because I think that if you're going to spend three years, and potentially the rest of your life dancing it has to delight you."

Confidence is another must. "At our Melbourne call last year we had between 100-200 dancers auditioning," recalls Patrick. "A lot were intimidated and tried to hide, which was so strange to me. You're there to get one of 30 positions. Go for it, stand out get to the front!"

Be careful of over-confidence, however. "Don't be complacent or have a pompous attitude," warns Mitchell. Personality is also important across the board. "You should want the panel to like you immediately – make them want to get to know you," suggests Mitchell. "Be yourself, be relaxed," advises Hassall.

Lastly, make sure you are appropriately attired. "Dancers wearing clothes where I can't see their body is an instant dislike for me," says Patrick. "You're a dancer! Your body is your product, don't hide it. Don't wear black! Wear something that the panel will remember. Look good and take pride in your appearance."

