

Before the first rehearsal

Twenty minutes with the part at home saves the whole section an evening. In this order.

WITH THE PART AND A PENCIL

- ☐ Number the bars if the part has none; the first bar of every line is enough.
- ☐ Listen to a recording twice with the part in front of you: once just following, once with the pencil.
- ☐ Bracket every rest longer than eight bars and write the count above it. Write a cue above every entry that follows a rest: the instrument you will hear just before you play.
- ☐ Circle every change of key, time, tempo and mute, and every divisi or a2 (the markings that split or share a line between players). These are where the wrong notes live.
- ☐ Find the page turns. If one falls mid-passage, write V.S. (volti subito: turn quickly) in the bottom corner and decide now whether to memorise the first bar overleaf.
- ☐ Mark the bars that are harder than they look: not the tune you already like, the awkward two in the middle.

IN THE ROOM

- ☐ Arrive early enough to warm up quietly, and keep the warm-up to yourself; the hall hears everything.
- ☐ Tune briefly and quietly, then listen more than you play for the first run-through.

WITH THE INSTRUMENT

- ☐ Practise the entries, not the piece: play the first note of every entry after a rest at its written dynamic, and give the exposed ones ten repetitions each.
- ☐ Take the hard bars alone, slowly, and write beside them the speed you reached.
- ☐ Play the exposed passages at their real dynamic: a pianissimo entry practised forte has not been practised.
- ☐ Know the tempo. If unsure, ask the section leader before the rehearsal rather than during it.

IN THE BAG

- ☐ Soft pencil (2B) and eraser. Never ink: the part is usually hired or borrowed and goes back.
- ☐ Mute, spare reeds or strings, valve oil or rosin, as your instrument needs. A tuner. A stand light if the venue is dim. Water.
- ☐ The part, which is forgotten more often than anything else on this list.

- ☐ Pencil in every instruction that touches your part the moment it is given. The ones you trust to memory are the ones that vanish.

Three habits from the professionals

- ☐ They learn the piece, not just the part: one listen to the whole work tells you what happens while you rest, and the cues write themselves.
- ☐ They pencil the tempo at the top of each movement within minutes of first rehearsing it. A tempo you wrote down beats a tempo you remember.
- ☐ Watch the pencils: the most experienced player in the room is usually the one writing the most.

