

# EUYO Auditions: Where the Journey Begins

*An article by Alexa Nieschlag, National Partner coordinator for EUYO and organiser of EUYO auditions in Germany, on the EUYO audition process*

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If you're like me, one highlight of perusing the EUYO's annual yearbooks is studying the player pages, that big mosaic of nationalities, matching the faces we see on stage with names and provenance. Each of these faces has a story; each has a homeland. Who actually decides who makes it into the great talent pool that is EUYO, and how?

The answer, of course, is AUDITIONS. An essential part of orchestral life, yet one that takes place out of the public eye, in a process that sometimes seems shrouded in mystery. Let us lift the veil for you a bit.

The EUYO recruits its musicians in all 27 EU member states. Before Covid-19, this meant live auditions in every country. All candidates applied to the EUYO's national partner organization in their country, and were heard in their country.

CVs or advance recordings are not required; anyone in the right age bracket with an EU passport can apply.

On average, however, the EUYO gets between 2500 and 3000 applications a year – in some countries, like Spain and Italy, France and Germany, there are so many that there are two rounds. Those who pass the first round are then heard live by one of four senior EUYO tutors – in smaller countries, all candidates are heard live.

In larger countries, EUYO members during the past two years automatically pass to the second round. Yet all current members must re-audition every year!

The team of jurors is led by **Peter Stark**, the EUYO's beloved Rehearsal Director. Peter has been hearing EUYO auditions since 2009. Every country is visited by one of the four jurors over a



*A moment from an EUYO audition*

three-month period, and all the auditions they hear are filmed. They all use the same marking system, involving three separate categories, and those who meet certain marking criteria pass into a pool of eligible candidates.

This pool is the basis for a process Peter and his colleagues call “moderation”. Here, the candidates are judged again, within their instrument group, with guidance from specialists in their instrument, and ranked. So far, the process is entirely meritocratic.

Bear in mind, however, that EUYO’s mandate is to represent all 27 Member States. Therefore, every state must have at least one player in EUYO. How else could countries as small as Malta and Cyprus compete with their larger neighbours? Like so many things in the EU, the art lies in careful compromise.

In many conversations I have had with Peter and the jurors, I am always struck by the enormous care and effort they put into being fair to all the many candidates, and finding the best orchestra possible! After careful deliberation that goes on for weeks, they decide upon a list of members and a reserve list – a pool Alexia Higgs, the orchestra manager, relies on when filling all available slots for the main tours and smaller projects.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, many countries have been forced to switch to online-only audition systems, yet everyone working on the EUYO auditions – National Partners, tutors, staff, and the candidates! – agree that live auditions are the best way to really assess players, from the moment they walk into the room. It is also the best way to give them feedback, something that during recent years, we have increasingly been trying to offer, even during a 10-minute audition.

Sometimes the jurors offer master classes the day before auditions. Auditions are one of those things that you only learn by doing. In this as in

everything else, EUYO helps future orchestral professionals become their best selves.

As Peter Stark explains, “Auditioning for EUYO is a privilege. Every year we look at our process and tweak it a little in our quest to find the best possible method. We try to make the process something of a learning experience for all candidates, and often base our decisions on more than just ability; intangible qualities such as ‘potential’, ‘teachability’ and ‘spirit’ are all taken into account in making our judgements. It is an honour to lead this process.”

The EUYO is immensely grateful to its National Partners – some of whom are national youth orchestras, some music academies, broadcasters, or state agencies and organizations – for the great amount of work they put into finding the best candidates for EUYO. As always in the EU, it is a patchwork that has grown historically as the EU expanded. But each takes pride in finding the best candidates they can send to EUYO.

I organize the auditions in Germany and also act as the National Partner coordinator for EUYO, and the regular meetings of the National Partners are a congenial forum for exchange of information and helpful sharing of experience.

Auditions are sometimes criticized because, like all artistic decisions, they are ultimately based on subjective judgments, hard to objectify and easy to quibble with. Therefore, they rely on good faith from all involved. Like democracy, auditions may be a flawed system, but they’re the best we’ve been able to come up with so far.

Next time you look at the EUYO on stage, consider the long road the players have travelled to take their place, and the innumerable hours spent on choosing the orchestra you hear and see. And having done so, lean back and enjoy the music – that’s what we all work for.

**Alexa Nieschlag**

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