

A Risk Worth Taking

“Are you auditioning for All City?”

I turned around to see it was my friend Lucas who had asked me the question.

“I’m not sure if I can make it, isn’t it for really talented people?”

“Greg, you definitely have the skills to make the band.”

I wasn’t too sure that I agreed with him. All City was an audition - only band/orchestra that was comprised of the best musicians in the Philadelphia School District. There was a reputation for the band to turn down a lot of musicians, and I felt like my two years of playing the saxophone weren’t sufficient. I told Lucas I would think about it as I headed towards my alto sax lesson which was down the hall. Inside, I was met with the same question, this time from my sax teacher of two years.

“Greg, are you auditioning for All City?”

Again, I was uncertain about my ability to make the band, but I didn’t want my teacher to know that. I quickly blurted out a sentence to avoid the awkward silence.

“Do you think I’m good enough to make the band?”

I was met with a similar answer of “You definitely can make the band with a lot of practice.”

For the rest of my lesson, I avoided any mention of All City and took a breath of relief once the lesson was over. The fact that I had only been playing the saxophone for two years wasn't the only reason to why I was scared to audition, it was also the fact that I hated auditions. Auditions, especially instrumental ones, carried a lot of unknown variables. My reeds could chip, the air could be hot and ruin my intonation, and my sax may decide to not even work the day of the audition.

I was also uncertain to audition because I knew the other sax players that were auditioning had way more experience. Most of them had been playing all their lives, and on top of that, they all went to music schools such as CAPA or Rush, and had lessons 5 days a week. At SLA, I was struggling to get just one practice a week.

My mind was almost made up and I was very close to deciding to not audition, however, that soon changed after talking to some of my friends at my music program. They made me realize that although I was at a disadvantage because of my experience and lack of a music program at my school, that should only convince me to audition. "You make it? Great. You don't make it? Who cares." They also made me realize that this audition was a great opportunity to get used to interviews/practice, and was a great way to see how I stood up against the "big dogs." After sleeping on it, I decided to take the risk of auditioning.

Upon finding out I was auditioning, my sax teacher was ecstatic. Since we had about a month until the auditions, we decided that we would spend every lesson working on the audition piece. I also agreed to dedicate multiple hours a week to practice in order to nail down the piece,

which was quite difficult. Day in and day out, I would go home and really try to fully understand and internalize the piece. I wanted the piece to become second nature

During these long practice hours at home, I would come to realize how much I really enjoyed playing the sax and how practice really contributed to your overall abilities. With every single day I practiced the piece, I would be getting better and better. I started to feel more confident in my abilities and when it was time to audition, I felt like I had a solid shot to make the band. My audition went really well and 2 weeks later, I found out I made the band! On top of that, I was the fourth best out of 6!

As I reflect, I realize how impactful that audition really was. It taught me a lot about confidence and hard work, and now as I prepare for my second audition for All - City, I now know there are risks worth taking.