

ORGANISTSRQ

SEVEN HOLIDAY SURVIVAL TIPS

BY AMY CERNIGLIA



7 Holiday Survival Tips by Amy Cerniglia

As we progress through the season of Advent, many of us are coordinating more rehearsals and extending our practice times. As family members begin asking why they're not seeing much of us until December 26, the stress of Christmas services closes around us. The beginning of the month wasn't bad for me, with visiting musicians and a children's program relieving some of the burden as our adult church ensembles worked away on Christmas Eve Lessons & Carols. But many of you had Christmas music programs landing a few weeks before Christmas and still aren't done, with Christmas Eve looming on the horizon.

How to survive this period in the midst of last-minute scrambling, hustling, and worrying about whether that one piece will turn out as planned?

1. Keep a literal survival kit

Most weekdays, we don't have time to cook a meal, especially on days with evening rehearsals. In addition to meal prep, keep filling snacks on hand. Fight the temptation to reach for snacks that will result in a sugar crash, and consider nuts, crackers, hummus and veggies, hard-boiled eggs, smoked salmon, and energy bars. A few bags of tea can offer a healthy

boost, and this relaxing essential oil blend can help you relax at the end of the day.

2. Listen to the experts

Even seasoned professionals can benefit from reminders of musicians' health and wellness. Janet Horvath's *Playing (less) Hurt* provides a plain-English, easy-to-read guide for avoiding injuries on the job. Similarly, Chapters 12-13 of *The Musician's Way* detail ways to prevent injury and protect one's occupational health.

3. Exercise

A growing body of scientific evidence correlates spending time outdoors with positive mental health. Even when it seems as though you don't have time to squeeze in that 20-30 minute walk, I often find that some of my best ideas arise during that day. Here in Florida, it's finally cool enough to really walk during the day, too. Take in those beautiful Sarasota sunsets while you burn off some of that nervous energy!

4. Batch

Every time you switch tasks, it can take 20 minutes or more to refocus. To make the most of your time, consider scheduling larger blocks than usual for everyday activities. Whether the task is music-related or as ordinary as sifting through your email inbox, batching can help you save time.

5. Meditate

Some people prefer to meditate throughout the day. You can simply sit at your desk and notice your breathing, or even complete a typical task while taking notice of your breath. Even while sitting behind heavy snowbird traffic, this can help clear your head. If meditation isn't a common practice for you and you don't want to spend any additional money during this season, there isn't any need to shell out extra money. Incense and other enhancements can help, but you really just need a pair of lungs to meditate.

6. Hit “delete” or “send”

Figure out the source of your stress and see if you can pare it down. For example, I asked a volunteer to help me re-configure the choir loft as snowbirds returned and our numbers expanded. It's not easy for me to delegate, because my instinct is to think that I can do it all myself. But it took a load off my shoulders to simply pull aside a kind person who happened to be around the office. She didn't mind at all. On a related note, sometimes hitting “send” can be the biggest blessing for musicians who overthink correspondence.

7. Don't be swept up in the negativity

Several church musician friends on Facebook have shared a recent meme about organists during Advent. Basically, it portrays us as misunderstood, and struggling much more than any other type of employee. But while we often work on days that seem like holidays for “everyone else,” there are a number of retail and other workers increasingly stressed on Christmas. This season is also rife with jokes about alcohol that become a hard reality for many organists. It's fun to let off steam by exaggerating the season's stress, but notice when the jokes become “too real.”

To focus on the most important aspects of this season, I follow some incredible Advent artists and poets on Facebook and Instagram. Waking up to beautiful reflections offers me wonderful reminders that Advent is one of the most meaningful times of the church year.