

Dear PMEA All-State Orchestra member,

Congratulations on your acceptance into the 2022 PMEA All-State Orchestra!! It is a great honor to be a member of this prestigious ensemble, and you should be very proud of your achievement. I know this to be true because I also was once a member of the PMEA All-State Orchestra and All-State Chorus during my high school years in Erie, PA. I have very fond memories of my musical and personal experiences at All-State, and I can't wait for you to hopefully have those same powerful experiences too! And of course, as Peter Parker says, "with great power comes great responsibility."

Your hard work and diligent preparation on your individual parts is going to determine 90-95% of our success as a team in April. It is crucial that *every one* of you puts a lot of time and effort into learning your music before you show up in the Poconos. One of my greatest joys and rewards of working with a professional orchestra every day is that every Kansas City Symphony member comes to the first rehearsal for any performance with every single note under their fingers, so that rehearsal is solely for putting it all together and for making music. You made All-State not only because of your talent, but because of your strong work ethic. I expect that you will treat this opportunity as a pre-professional experience and try to maximize what you can get out of it. Be professional and **be as prepared as possible**. That means not only practicing your individual part in great detail, but listening to the pieces we are playing often and learning as much as you can about the music, the background information of each piece, and the composers. Last year I conducted the Missouri All-State Orchestra, and I was immensely impressed with their preparation and work ethic! I fully expect that my home state of Pennsylvania is going to step up and be even more prepared than they were!

I can't wait to work on these three fantastic pieces with you! Christopher Theofanidis has long been one of my favorite American composers. "Rainbow Body" is a riveting piece, sometimes serene and spiritual, other times raucous and intense, and very triumphant at the end. And you get to shout in joy over the last minute of the piece – I know you're going to love it! Please listen to this great recording by Robert Spano and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UrgReGYKg3U>

Mason Bates is the composer-in-residence at the Kennedy Center in DC and at one point earlier in his career, was one of the hottest DJs on the West Coast. He often combines these two passions in his music, and "Warehouse Medicine" from the B-Sides is a perfect example of that. Paying homage to the abandoned Detroit warehouses that became techno clubs, Bates brilliantly pairs electronica beats with the intricate sounds of an orchestra. If for some reason we need to move to a virtual festival, the click tracks for this piece will be made available online and we will give a virtual performance. Here's a YouTube video of Bates himself playing the electronica part with Michael Tilson Thomas and the YouTube Symphony Orchestra in 2009:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wjZ1HhvZPlg>

Finally, Dmitri Shostakovich's 5th Symphony was an extremely important personal statement. Living under the Stalin regime, he found himself as all Soviet artists did at that time, under intense scrutiny and restrictions on what he could create. Arguably one of the most important and most performed works from the 20th century, the Fifth Symphony was a brilliant way for the composer to apologize for two pieces he wrote shortly beforehand, and at the same time, speak directly to the people in Russia, who could identify with many of the same feelings he was enduring. The 4th movement is violent, intense, passionate, and carries an empty feeling of "triumph" over the last minute. Simply put, it's some of the best music ever written. Here is one of my favorite recent recordings, with our home state's very own Pittsburgh Symphony:

Manfred Honeck and the Pittsburgh Symphony:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9PD90rhA5Xs>

There are a few short solos to point out in a few spots in the music you are preparing. Whomever ends up being principal cellist will play the cello solos in "Rainbow Body" at Rehearsal A and B. In the Shostakovich, there is a horn solo from Rehearsal 112 to 113. We might also reduce to one woodwind player on a part from Rehearsal 115 to 116 in the Shostakovich as well, depending on the acoustics of the hall in which we are performing.

I greatly look forward to making music with you soon! It is really an honor to return to my home state and lead this year's All-State Orchestra. We will have an amazing time together. Thank you in advance for all of your hard work and preparation you will put into your practicing, listening, and studying. See you in the Poconos!

Sincerely,

Jason Seber
2022 PMEA All-State Orchestra Conductor
Associate Conductor, Kansas City Symphony