

Dear PMEA All-State Contemporary A Cappella Ensemble,

Congratulations on being selected to perform in the 2024 PMEA All-State Contemporary A Cappella Ensemble, April 17-20, 2024. This is a brand-new ensemble, and I'm so excited to work with you all to bring a fresh sound and style to the conference this year in Erie. I'm a big believer in the power of contemporary a cappella to build valuable musical skills in a supportive environment, while also crafting an unforgettable performance. That's exactly what I know we're going to do together in April!

A little bit about me: I'm an a cappella arranger, composer, teacher, and performer based in Los Angeles, CA (but originally from Ithaca, NY). I found a passion for singing and a cappella early in my musical career, which eventually led me to a job working for a TV show called The Sing-Off where I arranged for and coached groups like Pentatonix, Home Free, and Voiceplay. Around that same time, I got to work on the show Glee, recording the studio beatboxing/vocal percussion for the Warblers during the third season (that's not me on screen though – my dance moves aren't that good). Since then, I've continued to live and work in LA, arranging and composing for TV, and for groups all over the world. I also love teaching (check out my summer program, A Cappella Academy), and I'm so excited to offer my skills and experience to help you all develop your musicianship through this experience!

I'd like to outline a few goals and expectations that I have for you all coming into this experience:

- 1) Please come to our first rehearsal on April 17th with your music memorized. Please do bring copies of your music so that we can easily reference measure numbers for things, but by the end of our first rehearsal I want to be able to do the entire show from memory. We have very limited time together, and it's important that we spend it doing the work we can only do together (blend, phrasing, emotion, etc), rather than the work you all can do on your own (learning notes and rhythms).
- 2) Feel free to reach out to me at any time with questions about the music. I will be providing you all with learning tracks to work with ahead of time, but don't hesitate to let me know if there's anything else you need from me to succeed!
- 3) I want you to be ready to bring your own personal artistry to the performance. One of my favorite things that separates contemporary a cappella from a more traditional choral experience is that, because we are a smaller group, we have a lot more freedom to bring our own individual nuance to the sound of the group. I want you to feel empowered to be expressive with both your leads and your background parts. If something isn't blending, it's my job to fix that in rehearsal, but I want you to bring your own expression to the table so I have lots to work with.
- 4) Think about the emotional arc of the set, and what you want the audience to feel from your performance. In contrast to the other choral ensembles, I will not be on stage conducting any of your performance. The experience is going to be all about you connecting with the audience and being musical storytellers. Come to rehearsal having given some thought to the stories you want to tell.

Here is the set list in order for the performance:

I Want You Back
Valerie
Magic
Moon River
Nothing Breaks Like A Heart
What Was I Made For
Let It Be
Man In The Mirror

Solo opportunities are available in every song with the exception of Moon River and What Was I Made For. I highly encourage you all to audition for as many solos as you feel inspired by! Instructions for how to audition will be sent to you separately. I may choose to divide up solos amongst multiple singers.

Each song will also have a single **bass singer** and a single **vocal percussionist**. I would like all basses and vocal percussionists to audition for this role. I may choose different members for each song, or I may choose to have the same two people fill the role for the entire set. Bass singers who are not assigned to the bass line will sing the baritone part.

Bass singers – The big difference between contemporary a cappella bass and traditional choral bass is that in contemporary a cappella the goal is to sound more like a bass instrument, rather than a bass vocalist. I'm looking for the ensemble member (or members) who can best achieve this sound. If this style is unfamiliar to you, take a listen to Matt Sallee/Avi Kaplan (Pentatonix), Tim Faust (Home Free), and Geoff Castellucci (Voiceplay) – those guys are the best of the best.

Vocal percussionists – I'm mainly just looking for good groove from you all. A variety of VP sounds is a plus, but I want to make sure whoever our drummer is will be the rhythmic anchor for the group.

As you prepare these songs, please use the learning tracks I've provided for notes and rhythms, and the reference recordings I've provided for a sense of the sound, style, dynamics, etc that I'm going to be aiming for. We will have at least one Zoom meeting prior to getting together, which will be a great opportunity for us to cover any questions you might have about parts.

Again, I can't wait to work with you all in just a couple months. Feel free to reach out with questions at any point!

Thanks,

Rob