



# Music Performance Assessments

# 2025

# GUIDE TO PARTICIPATING IN A SOLO & SMALL ENSEMBLE MPA

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**West Allegheny SD – Retired**  
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# INTRODUCTION

The fundamental goals of this *Guide* have not changed since the first *Manual* was released in 1986:

- To provide directors with the information needed to successfully host an MPA
- To answer common questions about hosting an MPA
- To provide an ongoing reference for those who have hosted in the past
- To identify any changes and new aspects of hosting
- To provide practical suggestions for hosts, especially those new to hosting MPA's

In turn, feedback is welcomed from all involved for this Guide to best serve as a relevant resource.

The name of this program changed from "PMEA Adjudication" to "PMEA Music Performance Assessment" in 2019. The events themselves continue to be called "MPAs" or "Music Performance Assessments." This change simplifies and clarifies 'what we are' and focus upon 'what we do'-----*music performance assessment*.

All forms and items needed to participate in and to host an MPA are posted within the Music Performance Assessment area of the PMEA website at [www.pmea.net](http://www.pmea.net).

The following forms are used when participating in a Solo & Small Ensemble MPA:

- [Solo Assessment Form – Winds](#)
- [Solo Assessment Form – Percussion](#)
- [Solo Assessment Form – Strings](#)
- [Solo Assessment Form – Vocal](#)
- [Small Ensemble Assessment Form – Winds](#)
- [Small Ensemble Assessment Form – Percussion](#)
- [Small Ensemble Assessment Form - Strings](#)
- [Small Ensemble Assessment Form - Vocal](#)

Online forms issued from PMEA include the following:

- *Registration Form*
- *Declaring Participants Form*
- *MPA Online Medals Order Form (for Solo & Small Ensembles only)*

Contact Tom Snyder, MPA Coordinator, with questions at [mpa@pmea.net](mailto:mpa@pmea.net) or (724) 816-0420.

# SECTION 1: SOLO & SMALL ENSEMBLE MPA'S – THE SYSTEM

## A. GOALS

- The overall goals of the *PMEA Music Performance Assessment* program include:
  - To provide interscholastic, educationally valid assessment contexts in which any instrumental or vocal music student from Pennsylvania schools may participate
  - To foster musical achievement
  - To provide extrinsic recognition for the musical achievement of individuals and ensemble through plaques, certificates, and medals
  - To enable directors to select repertoire appropriate for their large ensembles from graded levels of music within the *PMEA Selective Music Lists*
  - To provide students and directors the opportunity to hear performances by ensembles and soloists from other schools when possible

## B. MUSIC PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT PROGRAM INFRASTRUCTURE

- The *Music Performance Assessment Coordinator* is initially responsible for administering the MPA system, to promote participation by PMEAs member directors and their students, to chair the *PMEA MPA Committee*, and to attend the annual meetings of the Student Performance Events Council (SPEC) as a voting member. The MPA Coordinator reports to the Chair of the Student Performance Events Council, the PMEAs President and the PMEAs Executive Director.
- The *PMEA MPA Committee* meets annually at the annual PMEAs In-Service Conference to provide input concerning direction, policies and procedures. The PMEAs MPA Committee is informally composed of the PMEAs District MPA Reps, all MPA hosts, and the chair of the MPA Music Review Committee, currently Dr. Tad Greig (Westminster College – Retired) for Band and Orchestra and Dr. Ryan Keeling for Chorus (Westminster College). All participating directors and other interested PMEAs members are welcome to attend and actively participate in the dialogue.

## C. TYPES OF MPA'S

- The following types of Music Performance Assessments (MPA's) are currently available:
  - BAND & ORCHESTRA      Band, Full Orchestra, and String Orchestra
  - CHORUS                      Mixed Chorus, Treble Chorus, and Tenor-Bass Chorus
  - SOLO & SMALL ENSEMBLE      Woodwind, Brass, Percussion, String and Vocal
  - JAZZ ENSEMBLE
- PMEAs Music Performance Assessment does not currently provide an MPA for Vocal Jazz Choirs or Show Choirs.

## D. STUDENT ELIGIBILITY AND SPONSORING STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

- Students in grades 3 -12 are eligible to participate in one or more *PMEA Solo & Small Ensemble MPA(s)* in any PMEAs District. This includes cyber students, home-schooled students, and students from neighboring states.

- Each participating student in a Solo & Small Ensemble MPA must be sponsored. Each sponsor must be a PMEA member OR a member of the PAMTA (the PA chapter of the National Music Teachers Association), PADESTA (The Pennsylvania-Delaware String Teachers Association), or ACDA-PA (the PA Chapter of the American Choral Directors Association).
- The sponsors listed below do not need a music degree, as active membership in PMEA and the organizations listed above is open to persons engaged in music teaching or other music-related educational work.
  - School music teachers from PA and neighboring states
  - Private teachers
  - Youth ensemble directors or section coaches
- If a sponsor is not a member of PMEA, PAMTA, PADESTA, or ACDA-PA, the sponsor would be required to submit a single Non-member Sponsor Fee of \$25 for one or more students to participate.
- Accompanists are not required to be members of PMEA, PAMTA, PADESTA, or ACDA.
- Parents cannot sponsor the student but may transport the student to and from the MPA.
- The sponsor or parent transporting students, preferably the sponsor, **must remain on site** throughout the MPA until the students have performed and are ready to depart.
- Small ensembles are defined as ranging from a duet of two students through a small ensemble of up to 12 students. While it is recommended to have one student on a part, more than one student on a part is permitted. Small Ensembles of any size that include students from grades 3-8 may be conducted. Small Ensembles of five (5) or fewer members that include students from grades 9-12 may not be conducted. Small Ensembles of six (6) or more from any grade level may be conducted.
- Students may participate in a maximum of three performances at a given MPA---a maximum of one solo and two small ensembles or up to three small ensembles. Hosts have the option to permit a student to participate in more than three performances if time slots are available within the overall schedule.

#### **E. CALENDAR**

- The most current *MPA Calendar*, listing dates, sites, hosts, contact information, and links to online Registration forms, is posted within the [Music Performance Assessment](#) area of the [PMEA website](#).

#### **F. SCHEDULING PERFORMANCE DATES AND TIMES**

- *Solo & Small Ensemble MPA's* are normally held on a Saturday due to the facility needs for this context involving multiple rooms and the large number of students and adults entering and exiting the building throughout the day. Hosts are permitted to hold an MPA on a weekday evening if the available time frame can accommodate the number of participating students.
- Scheduling performance times is at the discretion of the host. Hosts will prioritize scheduling students from a given school within the same time frame as much as they can to limit that school's total time on site.

## G. REGISTRATION

- The PMEA office generates online *Registration Form* customized for each MPA linked within the MPA Calendar document posted within the PMEA website. This form provides both hosts and PMEA with information necessary for planning. Sponsors are recommended to register online as soon as intent to participate is confirmed and immediately contact the host to confirm a performance time.
- Directors are asked to mail a check for the Registration Fee issued payable to PMEA to be received by the host no later than four weeks in advance of the MPA. PMEA will send a confirmation email with a copy of the completed online Registration Form for sponsors to print and use as an invoice if needed. Contact the MPA Coordinator if a different invoice format is needed.
  - Soloist \$20
  - Small Ensemble of 2-5 Students \$35
  - Small Ensemble of 6-12 Students \$50
- All registration fees include a medal for each student participant.
- Sponsors must complete the online *Registration* and *Declaring Participants* forms and submit payment for the Registration Fee to confirm participation. It is essential for hosts of Solo & Small Ensemble MPA's to know the extent of confirmed participation on each instrument/voice part to contract and schedule adjudicators. Hosts are not obligated to hold an assigned performance slot if payment has not been received given the priority to fill all performance slots without any holes. Schedule gaps result in not effectively using the adjudicator's time while other performers wait.
- Refunds will not be issued for students who withdraw within two weeks of the event or otherwise do not attend, a policy intended to discourage withdrawals due to preparation concerns or ineffective planning that did not account for schedule conflicts. Extenuating circumstances will be considered. Being notified two weeks or more in advance enables the host to best adjust schedules to benefit all involved.
- Sponsors may substitute a different student soloist or a different student participant(s) in a small ensemble *on the same instrument* for those who already registered and paid should a withdrawal occur, given the ease of simply replacing the participant(s) on that instrument in a performance slot that is already scheduled.
- While including as many participants as possible is a goal, the logistics of this context will permit additional soloists or small ensembles to register after the deadline only if time slots are available within the overall schedule and the registration fee payment is received in advance. Refunds will not be issued for late registrations if the students involved withdraw or otherwise do not attend after being registered.

## H. CHOOSING REPERTOIRE

- Each soloist or small ensemble performs one Prepared Piece of no longer than six minutes.
- The Prepared Piece, whether a solo or a small ensemble piece, must be a graded piece with grades provided by the publisher, listed within another state's selective music list, or posted on a music distributor's website. There is no PMEA selective music list for Solo & Small Ensemble.

- Recommended resources for repertoire options include:
  - A published graded individual piece or one from a published collection available online or from a brick-and-mortar music distributor
  - [Texas University Interscholastic League \(UIL\) Prescribed Music List](#) (Instrumental & Vocal)
  - [Florida Bandmasters Association \(FBA\) List](#) (Woodwinds, Brass & Percussion)
  - Other publicly available state music lists, including neighboring states such as MD, NY & OH
- Sponsors are permitted to substitute repertoire but must notify the host as far in advance of the event as possible.
- Instrumental solo and small ensemble music **does not** need to be memorized. Vocal solos **must be** memorized. Small vocal ensemble music is strongly recommended to be memorized but not required.
- Soloists are required to perform with a live accompanist or recorded accompaniment. Recorded accompaniments are often available from publishers or recorded in advance by a pianist.
- Solos composed as unaccompanied are permitted but not preferred given what is additionally demonstrated by performing with an accompaniment.
- Students not being accompanied by a pianist must provide their own playback source and speaker with hosts providing a table and extension cord. An adult may accompany the student to operate the technology involved. Using a sound file for the accompaniment is required given that a stable, consistent, accessible internet connection is likely not able to be guaranteed. *Operating the technology involved in a recorded accompaniment is the sole responsibility of the performer with the host and adjudicators not responsible for resolving issues.*
- Percussion solos, including those for snare drum, mallets, timpani and multi-percussion, normally do not include accompaniment and may be performed as written. If the given percussion solo does include an accompaniment, the parameters included above will apply.
- Soloists and small ensembles are permitted to perform music from Broadway, movies, jazz, and video games. Please avoid Pop or Rock styles. Contact the MPA Coordinator directly with questions about performing a particular piece. Also consider repertoire by living composers and composers from diverse backgrounds.
- All music performed by the students for assessment must be originals. Sponsors, particularly school music teachers, often amass a library of original solos and small ensembles over time, purchasing duplicates as needed for more than one student performing the same solo.
- Upon entering the assessment area, students will provide a copy of the music being performed to the adjudicator with the measures numbered in pencil. Music with multiple pages should be taped and not stapled, as stapled pages are difficult for an adjudicator to manipulate. Retrieve that copy of the music from the adjudicator before exiting.

#### I. DECLARING PARTICIPANTS & REPERTOIRE

- Sponsors are required to complete and submit the online *Declaring Participants Form* with information about the student performers and the repertoire that each soloist and small ensemble will perform.

- Within the *Declaring Participants & Repertoire Form*, use the link indicated on Page 2 of the form to access the separate, online *Declaring Participants & Repertoire Form - Soloists* and the link on Page 3 of the form to access the separate, online *Declaring Participants & Repertoire Form - Small Ensembles* to provide the remaining information about the student performers and the repertoire being performed.
- On the *Declaring Participants & Repertoire Form*, choose an Assessment context for each soloist and small ensemble, either *Traditional* or *Comments Only*. The *Comments Only* context includes the adjudicator's written and post-performance verbal comments but with no scores or ratings. The registration fee is the same for students participating in either Assessment context.
- Once completed, upload the *Declaring Participants & Repertoire Form – Soloist* and/or *Declaring Participants & Repertoire Form – Small Ensemble* where instructed. Up to ten (10) soloists can be listed on one Soloist form; up to five (5) small ensembles can be listed on one Small Ensemble form. Complete additional forms if there are more soloists and/or small ensembles participating.

#### **J. ASSESSMENT FORMS**

- The PMEA *Assessment Forms* for all MPA contexts updated for 2025 reflect current assessment practices. Forms are available within the MPA area of the PMEA website under 'Information for Participants'/'Solo & Small Ensemble MPA's'. Sponsors are urged to use these assessment forms as classroom tools.

#### **K. ADJUDICATORS**

- The number of adjudicators needed is dictated by the number of different instruments or voices and the number of soloists and small ensembles registered for each. Adjudicators must have a music degree. As the assessments are not blind, adjudicators are not permitted to assess students that they are currently affiliated with at schools, private studios or youth ensembles.
- Adjudicators are not permitted to aid or coach students during the performance. The performances of all soloists playing a given instrument and small ensembles of a given instrumentation/voicing (i.e. low brass ensemble, clarinet choir, string quartet, or soprano duet) must be assessed by the same adjudicator if possible.

#### **L. COMMUNICATING WITH THE HOST PRIOR TO THE MPA**

- All sponsors, especially those participating for the first time, are urged to be proactive in communicating with the Host in advance to confirm the final arrangements involved, including the following:
  - Confirming that the Registration Fee check has been received
  - The final schedule of performance times and room assignments
  - A list of the adjudicators
  - A map of the facilities to assist in locating the Assessment Areas
  - Bus parking, where to enter the building, and other facility information
  - Any known traffic or road construction advisories that could impact travel time
  - Where to pick up the compiled Assessment Forms after the performances



## SECTION 2: SOLO & SMALL ENSEMBLE MPA'S – THE EVENT

### A. CHECK-IN

- Upon arriving at the MPA site, sponsors must first check in at the designated group entrance to confirm that the registered students have arrived and where the students are to proceed first, usually to a *Holding/Warm-up Area*.
- Participating students should arrive at least 45 minutes before their assigned performance times. While parents are permitted to transport their child to and from the event, the sponsor must check in all his/her student(s) at the same time if possible.

### B. HOLDING/WARM-UP AREAS

- The *Holding Area* is a space for students to store instrument cases, coats and personal belongings and most often also serves as the *Warm-Up Area*. Hosts may also provide additional areas. Students may warm-up in this area prior to their performance(s). Music stands are not provided. Students are responsible for monitoring the clock to arrive at their assigned Assessment Area on time.
- Sponsors are welcome to assist their students in this area with warm-up and tuning.
- Sponsors, accompanists, chaperones and parents often wait along with the students in the auditorium as the *Holding Area*.

### C. ASSESSMENT AREAS

- The *Assessment Areas*, normally classrooms or ensemble rooms, are to be equipped with enough space, chairs and music stands for the scheduled participants, especially the larger small ensembles. Students may stand or sit when performing.
- Hosts will provide an upright piano or keyboard in each assessment area for a live accompanist. All electronic keyboards provided must have ample range, weighted keys and the appropriate speaker volume level and be set to produce acoustic piano sounds. If using a recorded accompaniment, students must provide their own playback source and speaker as described in Section 1.H above with hosts providing a table and extension cord.
- A 10-minute time slot is scheduled for each soloist and small ensemble to include entering the space, adjusting seating and stands as needed, setting up and testing the recorded accompaniment (if used), playing a few notes to check balance with an electronic keyboard or recorded accompaniment, additional warm-up notes (optional), performing the prepared piece, verbal feedback from the adjudicator, and exiting. A performance may only be performed and adjudicated once.
- After the performance, adjudicators will provide brief verbal feedback. This personal contact is an invaluable component of this MPA context analogous to adjudicators doing a clinic on stage after large ensembles perform their prepared piece and the verbal feedback after instrumental sight-reading. Comments should be concise, recognizing strengths and providing strategies to address concerns while being encouraging and nurturing.

- Sponsors, other adults, and other students are permitted to listen to performances as the capacity of the space reasonably permits and at the discretion of the performers. Adjudicators may limit capacity if necessary. **Video and audio recordings are prohibited.**
- For percussionists, hosts will provide an appropriately sized Assessment Area and are required to provide the following large percussion instruments: bass drum, four timpani, bells, xylophone, vibes, marimba, and chimes. Students are responsible to provide their own mallets and sticks along with any other instrument required, including snare drums, crash and suspended cymbals and any auxiliary/accessory percussion instruments for a multi-percussion piece. Sponsors should communicate with the host to inquire if any other instruments could be provided other than what are already required. (I.e., toms or temple blocks).

**D. HOW THE ADJUDICATORS USE THE ASSESSMENT FORM**

- The adjudicators assess the overall performance and assign a score from 1-15 for each of five Evaluation Area according to the following rubric and descriptors:

SCORE	RATING	PMEA DESCRIPTOR	LETTER GRADE	APPROX. PSSA EQUIVALENT
13-15	I	Superior	A+	Outstanding
10-12	II	Excellent	A	Advanced
7-9	III	Good	B	Proficient
4-6	IV	Fair	C	Basic
1-3	V	Unprepared	U	Below Basic

- The three-point range within the scoring for each evaluation area provides adjudicators with considerable flexibility in conveying their assessment within a given rating. Adjudicators decide which ‘third’-- lower, middle or upper --- within the three-point scoring range best reflects that determination within each Evaluation Area. For example, within the performance level of ‘II’, 10 is the lower number, 11 is the middle number, and 12 is the upper number.

UPPER NUMBER – an upper number reflects that many of the descriptors are displayed with a distinction that leads towards the descriptors of the next higher rating.

MIDDLE NUMBER – a middle number reflects when the performance typically displays most of the attributes of the given rating itself without enough distinction to lead in the direction of the next lower or higher rating.

LOW NUMBER– a low number provides a bridge between the next lower rating and the middle of the given rating. While the performance reflects most if not all of the descriptors involved, it has areas of concern in many of the components that reflect more of the descriptors of the next lower level.

- The scores for each of the five Evaluation Areas are then added together with the resulting Total Score generating the corresponding Final Rating as the cumulative assessment of the overall performance.
- The lowest Total Score within each Rating Level was calculated as the lowest possible summary of the five Evaluation areas as follows:

RATING LEVEL	E.A. #1	E.A. #2	E.A. #3	E.A. #4	E.A. #5	LOWEST TOTAL SCORE
Lowest I (13-15)	13	13	13	12	12	63
Lowest II (10-12)	10	10	10	9	9	48
Lowest III (7-9)	7	7	7	6	6	33
Lowest IV (4-6)	4	4	4	3	3	18
Lowest V (1-3)	1	1	1	1	1	5

- The scoring ranges indicated below within the Total Score can also be divided into 'thirds'—lower (-), middle or upper (+) ---to best reflect achievement within the summary performance assessment.

FINAL RATING	TOTAL SCORE to FINAL RATING with DESCRIPTORS
Convert the Total Score to the Final Rating according to the table on the right using the Roman numeral only. Do not include a '+' or a '-'	63-75 I A+ (63-66 I- 67-71 I 72-75 I+) Superior Outstanding
	48-62 II A (48-52 II- 53-57 II 58-62 II+) Excellent Advanced
	33-47 III B (33-37 III- 38-42 III 43-47 III+) Good Proficient
	18-32 IV C (18-22 IV- 23-27 IV 28-32 IV+) Fair Basic
	5-17 V U Unprepared Below Basic

- Adjudicators provide additional feedback is available using pluses '+', 'blanks', or minuses '-' to quickly indicate positive and negative aspects of the performance among 'Specific Aspects' within each Evaluation Area.

EVALUATION AREA	
SPECIFIC ASPECTS	
+	Area of strength; Noticeably strong within rating
Blank	Commensurate to rating
-	Area of concern; Noticeably needing attention within rating

- An area listing 'Other Factors' is included in the lower left corner of the assessment form. Feedback is also provided through pluses and minuses. This evaluation is not scored or part of the Final Rating. Some space is available to the right of the table for comments.
- A large space is available on the front of the form for written comments that provide additional input that is clear, focused and concise. Comments should briefly identify strengths and areas that need to be addressed along with recommended 'next steps'. Space is available on the back of each form as an option for additional comments.

## E. RETURNING ASSESSMENT RESULTS TO THE SPONSORS

- The host or designee will confirm the assessment results and compile the summary ratings forms and assessment forms from each school into a manila envelope.
- After all the students from a given school have performed, sponsors will be able to pick up this envelope at a designated location. Ratings for other soloists and small ensembles are not provided.

## F. MEDALS

- Each student soloist or member of a small ensemble will receive a PMEA MPA medal: a Blue/White ribbon for those earning a 'I'; a Gold/White ribbon for those earning a 'II'; or an all-White ribbon for those earning a rating lower than 'II' or participating in Comments Only. Providing a medal offers extrinsic recognition as funded by registration fees the same as for the plaques and certificates provided to large ensembles.
- To receive the medals, sponsors must complete and submit the online [Medal Request Form](#) for Solos & Small Ensembles available within the MPA area of the PMEA website under 'Information for Participants'/'Solo & Small Ensemble' after the MPA. Note that this form is different from the Medals Order Form for large ensemble (BOC). Be sure that the form accurately reflects the preferred shipping address along with the total number of each level of medal earned.
- The request will be cross-referenced against the assessment results provided by the host with the medals subsequently mailed to the address provided.

## **G. AFTER THE MPA**

- Sponsors are recommended to consider the following actions after the MPA:
  - For those teaching in schools, thank the administrator who granted permission for the students to participate, any colleagues who assisted, and any parent volunteer chaperones for their support
  - Use the assessment forms as educational tools to enhance the overall experience for the students
  - Email the host expressing appreciation for hosting while also providing positive feedback and constructive suggestions
  - Email to the MPA Coordinator with feedback from the overall experience along with constructive suggestions concerning any aspect so that the 'system' can continue to evolve to improve the educational experience for all involved

## **H. SPONSORS AS MEMBERS OF THE PMEA MPA COMMITTEE**

- The annual meeting of the *PMEA Music Performance Assessment Committee* is held at the PMEA In-Service Conference. Sponsors who are PMEA members are encouraged to attend, contribute to the dialogue, and ask questions. Sponsors who are not PMEA members remain most welcome to communicate by email or phone with suggestions, concerns and questions about any aspect of participation.
- While the meeting is informal, this forum includes reflecting on the current season along with discussing possible 'next steps'. This meeting has been an invaluable opportunity to consider options, determine priorities, and exchange ideas within dialogue not possible within individual communications.

To prospective sponsors - I hope that this *Guide* provides the information needed to successfully participate in a *Solo & Small Ensemble MPA* within the PMEA Music Performance Assessment program.

To experienced participating sponsors - I hope that this *Guide* serves as an ongoing reference to refresh memories and answer questions concerning any aspect of participating in a *PMEA MPA*.

Contact the MPA Coordinator with any questions.