



Music Performance Assessments

GUIDE TO PARTICIPATING IN A JAZZ ENSEMBLE MPA

Developed by Tom Snyder, PMEA MPA Coordinator
West Allegheny SD - Retired
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INTRODUCTION

PMEA Adjudication piloted Jazz Ensemble Adjudication in 2007 at State College Area HS with Richard Victor hosting their annual jazz festival under the PMEA auspice. Jazz Ensemble Adjudication was formally approved in 2008 as aligned with the existing assessment contexts within PMEA Adjudication. Jazz Ensemble assessment was inactive since 2011 before being reinstated in 2025.

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 participate in an MPA
- To answer common questions about participating in an MPA
- To provide an ongoing reference for those who have participated in the past
- To include any changes and new aspects of participating

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 guides, forms and other resources needed to participate in and to host an MPA are posted within the Music Performance Assessment area of the [PMEA website](#).

The following forms are used when participating in a Jazz Ensemble MPA:

- *Jazz Ensemble Music Performance Assessment Form*
- *Medals Order Form (Optional)*

The online form for each Jazz Ensemble MPA linked within the MPA Calendar includes the followings:

- *Registration Form*

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

SECTION 1: JAZZ 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 *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 PMEA 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 is appointed by and reports to the PMEA President.
- The *PMEA MPA Committee* meets annually at the annual PMEA In-Service Conference to provide input concerning direction, policies and procedures. The PMEA MPA Committee is informally composed of the PMEA 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 any other interested PMEA 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
 - MARCHING BAND (Pilot program approved for Fall 2024, Fall 2025, and Fall 2026)
- PMEA Music Performance Assessment does not currently provide an MPA for Vocal Jazz Choirs or Show Choirs.

D. ELIGIBILITY

- Participating directors are urged to be members of PMEA. If the director is not a PMEA member, \$50 will be added to the Registration Fee. Ensembles from neighboring states are welcome to participate at the member rate if the director is a NAFME member in that state.

- A student who is an active member of an extracurricular Jazz Ensemble or enrolled in a Jazz Ensemble class during the school day is eligible to participate with that ensemble. Directors with ensemble members participating within extenuating scheduling circumstances are urged to contact the MPA Coordinator.

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](#). The initial calendar for the upcoming season will be posted on October 1.

F. SCHEDULING PERFORMANCE TIMES

- Each Jazz Ensemble will be scheduled in a 25-minute time slot if part of an evening performance or a 40-minute time slot as part of an MPA held during the school day or on a Saturday but not part of a public performance. Each slot would include the ensemble's entrance, set-up, performing, teardown and exit with the 40-minute slot also including a post-performance clinic by one of the adjudicators.
- The Host schedules performance times. Directors are urged to verify participation early while also confirming a viable performance time given travel distance and return time parameters.
- Scheduling early is even more important for schools planning to bring more than one jazz ensemble, especially those with the same director.
- Directors are also encouraged to include time to watch other jazz ensembles when possible, especially within a Saturday or an evening public performance.

G. PERFORMANCE CONTEXT: *TRADITIONAL OR FESTIVAL*

- Directors may choose to participate in either the *Traditional* or the *Festival* performance context. The *Traditional* context is the most common nationally. The *Festival* context differs primarily in that the adjudicators provide audio and written commentary without scoring and resulting ratings.
- **TRADITIONAL:**
 - **Three Prepared Pieces of choice. Contrasting styles are strongly recommended.**
Choosing pieces from a Selective Music List is not required. The grade levels of the pieces do not need to be declared. Sight-reading is not a component of jazz ensemble MPA's.
 - **Scores and Ratings**
Each of the three adjudicators will utilize the Assessment Form to generate scores in each of the five Evaluation Areas and a resulting individual Final Rating that will be combined for an overall Final Rating.
 - **Audio and Written Commentary**
Each of the three adjudicators will provide audio commentary in real time and written comments on the Assessment Form.
 - **Wording for Award Plaque**
 - Directors are asked to choose which rating terminology to include on the PMEA Award Plaque, either common adjudication-related terms also used by PMEA (Superior, Excellent, Good or Fair) or terms adapted from PSSA's (Outstanding, Advanced, Proficient or Basic).

- **Medals (Optional)**

Directors of ensembles that earn a rating of *I: Superior/Outstanding*, *II: Excellent/Advanced* or *III: Good/Proficient* have the option to use the PMEA MPA Medal Order Form to purchase medals for their students to proudly display evidence of their ensemble's achievement on their concert attire and graduation robes.

- **FESTIVAL:**

- **Three Prepared Pieces of choice. Contrasting styles are strongly recommended.**

Choosing pieces from a Selective Music List is not required. The grade levels of the pieces do not need to be declared. Sight-reading is not a component of jazz ensemble MPA's.

- **No Scores or Ratings**

Each of the three adjudicators will utilize the Assessment Form to provide feedback within the Specific Aspects of each Evaluation Area along with written comments but will not include scores or a final rating.

- **Audio and Written Commentary**

Each of the three adjudicators will provide audio commentary in real time and written comments on the Assessment Form.

- **Award Certificate**

The ensemble will receive an official PMEA Award Certificate recognizing participation.

- A side-by side comparison of both performance contexts follows:

MPA PARTICIPATION	TRADITIONAL	FESTIVAL
Choice of Repertoire	Three Prepared Pieces of choice. Contrasting styles are strongly recommended.	Three Prepared Pieces of choice. Contrasting styles are strongly recommended
Scoring and resulting Rating using the PMEA Assessment Forms	Included	No scores or final rating
Adjudicator Comments through digital audio commentary in real time and written on the PMEA Assessment Form	Included	Included
Award Recognition	PMEA Award Plaque that includes the Rating earned	PMEA Award Certificate
Rating Terminology on Award	A choice between Superior/Excellent/Good/Fair or Outstanding/Advanced/Proficient/Basic as adapted from PSSA terminology	Not included since no rating is issued
Individual Student Medals	Optional – purchased separately	Not available since no rating is issued

H. REGISTRATION

- The PMEA office generates an online *Registration Form* customized for each MPA linked within the MPA Calendar document posted within the PMEA website. Directors click on that link to complete and submit the Registration Form that provides both hosts and PMEA with information necessary for planning. Directors are recommended to register online as soon as permission to participate is confirmed and immediately contact the host to confirm a performance time.
- Payment information is included within the online Registration Form with the option for the Registration Fee to be paid by check mailed to the PMEA Office, not the Host, or by credit card (includes a \$7 fee). Confirm with your PMEA District if any funding support is available. Payment is to be processed and received by the PMEA Office no later than two weeks in advance of the MPA. The PMEA Office will provide a confirmation email that can be used as an Invoice or an invoice in a different format if needed.
- Registration Fees:
 - Ensemble participating in the *Traditional* performance context = \$235
 - Ensemble participating in the *Festival* performance context = \$200
 - The difference in the registration fees is the approximate cost of the Award Plaque and its mailing compared to that of the Award Certificate.
- Directors must complete the online *Registration* and *Declaring Prepared Pieces* forms for each of their participating ensembles and submit payment for the Registration Fee to confirm participation.
- Registration fee checks may be refunded if the ensemble withdraws two weeks or more before the MPA. The Registration fee will not be refunded for an ensemble that withdraws within two weeks of the MPA, a policy intended to discourage withdrawals for non-extenuating reasons, such as preparation concerns or ineffective planning. Extenuating circumstances will be considered. Being notified two weeks or more in advance enables the host to best adjust schedules to benefit all involved. .
- For large ensemble MPA's, information is compiled from the submitted online registration forms submitted about the ensembles and schools. Unique to Pennsylvania, this 'Ensemble Profile' document is provided to the adjudicators to enhance their awareness, perspective, and overall frame of reference within which each performance is perceived and assessed according to the performance level standards detailed on the assessment forms. Do not provide or ask the host to provide any additional information about the ensembles to the adjudicators to best ensure consistency in this area at all MPA's throughout the state.

I. DECLARING PREPARED PIECES FOR PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

- Directors are required to declare their three required Prepared Pieces within the online *Declaring Prepared Pieces* form customized for each MPA linked within the MPA Calendar document posted within the PMEA website. Within this form, directors provide the Title, Composer/Arranger, Publisher and Year Published for each piece to be performed.
- While the choice of repertoire is that of the director and not required to be selected from any 'list', the repertoire performed by all types of ensembles (band, orchestra, chorus, and jazz) is being compiled and made available as a resource for directors interested in seeing what other ensembles are performing at MPA's.

- Directors of ensembles participating in the *Traditional* context also declare on this form their preferred rating terminology for the PMEA Award Plaque as described above.

J. ASSESSMENT FORMS

- The PMEA *Assessment Forms* for all MPA contexts reflect current assessment practices. Forms are available within the MPA area of the PMEA website under ‘Information for Participants’/ ‘Jazz Ensemble MPA’s’. Directors are urged to also use these assessment forms as classroom and rehearsal tools.

K. ADJUDICATORS

- Hosts contract three adjudicators for a *Jazz Ensemble MPA*.

L. COMMUNICATING WITH THE HOST PRIOR TO THE MPA

- All directors, 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:
 - The final schedule of warm-up and performance times
 - Instructions concerning bus parking and where to enter the building
 - A list of what the host is providing for ensemble use, including percussion instruments such as drum set, vibes, congas, etc., and equipment such as a digital keyboard, amps, etc.. Contact the host in advance with any related questions.
 - A list of adjudicators
 - How and when adjudicator recordings can be accessed
 - Plans to watch other performances if possible

M. PREPARE TO SUBMIT AT THE ON-SITE CHECK-IN

- Submit three manila envelopes (10x13 recommended), one for each adjudicator, labeled with the school’s name, ensemble name and “Adjudicator #1”, “Adjudicator #2”, or “Adjudicator #3”.
- Each envelope must contain an original score for each of the three Prepared Pieces with the measures numbered if not already numbered by the publisher.
- Scores must be originals unless the piece is out of print. Copies may then be made, but only with written permission of the publisher. Include a copy of the permission document with the scores. If copies are made, pages should be two-sided and taped rather than stapled.
- Directors are recommended to order any additional scores needed well in advance to permit enough time to receive them from the publishers or for obtaining permission to make copies if the chosen piece is out of print.

SECTION 2: JAZZ ENSEMBLE MPA'S - THE EVENT

A. CHECK-IN

- The director must first check in at the designated group entrance to confirm that the ensemble has arrived, submit the three envelopes containing scores for the adjudicators, and confirm where the students are to first proceed, usually to a designated *Holding Area*.
- Confirm with the host if rhythm section equipment is to move with the ensemble or placed in a separate area before moving to the stage. The host will ensure that area is secure.

B. HOLDING AREA

- The *Holding Area* is a space to store instrument and equipment cases, coats, and personal belongings. No playing is permitted.
- Unless watching another performance, the ensemble normally stays in the holding area until proceeding to the *Warm-Up Area*. If time permits prior to the scheduled warm-up, directors may have their students watch another ensemble perform and are strongly encouraged to do so. Directors have relayed that watching another group is valuable in and of itself and often lowers the performance anxiety of their own students.

C. WARM-UP AREA

- The formal *Warm-Up Area* is usually a large ensemble room equipped with chairs and music stands.
- The length of the warm-up slot will match the length of the performance slot as described above, either 25 or 40 minutes.

D. AUDITORIUM STAGE

- The auditorium stage is where the formal assessment of the three Prepared Pieces takes place. Each ensemble will be scheduled in a time slot of either 25 or 40 minutes as described above. No on-stage warm-up is permitted other than a sound check for electronics.
- Hosts are to provide a traditional 'block' stage set-up that enables trumpets to stand on medium risers, trombones to stand or be seated on small risers, and saxophones to be seated on the floor, with ample stands and chairs available. A recently tuned acoustic piano, preferably a concert grand, will be positioned on stage right along with ample extension cords and power strips for rhythm section use. All ensembles will use the same basic set-up to permit efficient transitions between groups. Hosts will provide a stage crew of students and/or adults to assist with set-up as needed.
- Directors must confirm with the host in advance if they plan to bring and use their own drum set and electronics or would prefer to use what is provided by the host. Directors prefer either to use their own drum set and/or electronics that their students are accustomed to using and hearing or to use the host's equipment to avoid transporting challenges.
- Hosts will provide vibes and larger auxiliary percussion instruments, such as congas, if needed. Directors must provide their own mallets, sticks and small accessory percussion such as claves, shakers, cowbells, etc. Contact the host in advance to address any percussion needs.

- Hosts will provide appropriate jazz ensemble sound reinforcement if possible, including at least 5 microphones, 1 to amplify the acoustic piano when used and 4 for solos: 1 downstage off-center for standalone solos (and announcements) and at least 1 within each section---saxophones, trumpets and trombones. Hosts will contact directors if the number of available solo mics is different from this.

E. PERFORMING THE PREPARED PIECES

- After the announcer introduces the ensemble, director, the three pieces, and adjudicators, the director may conduct the first piece. Hosts have some flexibility with the announcing. For example, some choose to announce each piece.
- After each piece is finished, address any communications needed with your students. When you're ready to proceed, turn and make eye contact with each adjudicator. As they wrap up their audio and written comments to that point, they will see you and give you a 'thumbs-up' that they are ready for you to continue with the next piece.
- In addition to the adjudicators, the only audience for MPA's held during the school day would be the ensemble's chaperones and students from other ensembles. The audience is permitted to clap after each piece. An MPA held within an evening public performance would, of course, include a large, supportive audience.

F. HOW THE ADJUDICATORS USE THE ASSESSMENT FORMS FOR SCORING AND RATINGS FOR ENSEMBLES PERFORMING IN THE 'TRADITIONAL' PERFORMANCE CONTEXT

- The adjudicators assess the overall performance and assign a score from 1-15 for each of five Evaluation Areas: Tone/Intonation, Accuracy, Technique, Style/Expression, and Solos/Improvisation, 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

- The *Final MPA Rating* earned from the performance of the three Prepared Pieces is determined by combining the Final Ratings from the three adjudicators according to the following table:

DETERMINE THE FINAL MPA RATING BY COMBINING THE THREE RATINGS					
RATINGS FROM THE THREE ADJUDICATORS	I, I, I	I, II, II	I, III, III	I, IV, IV	I, V, V
	I, I, II	I, II, III	I, III, IV	I, IV, V	II, V, V
	I, I, III	I, II, IV	I, III, V	II, IV, IV	III, V, V
	I, I, IV	I, II, V	II, III, III	II, IV, V	IV, V, V
	I, I, V	II, II, II	II, III, IV	III, IV, IV	V, V, V
		II, II, III	II, III, V	III, IV, V	
		II, II, IV	III, III, III	IV, IV, IV	
		II, II, V	III, III, IV	IV, IV, V	
			III, III, V		
FINAL MPA RATING	I	II	III	IV	V

FINAL RATING	PMEA DESCRIPTOR	LETTER GRADE	APPROX. PSSA EQUIVALENT
I	Superior	A+	Outstanding
II	Excellent	A	Advanced
III	Good	B	Proficient
IV	Fair	C	Basic
V	Unprepared	U	Below Basic

- Final MPA ratings are not posted or published.
- For all ensembles, adjudicators may provide additional feedback using pluses '+', 'blanks', or minuses '-' to quickly indicate positive and negative aspects of the performance among the 'Specific Aspects' included 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 for those ensembles performing in the *Traditional* performance context. Some space is available to the right of this table for comments.

OTHER FACTORS (+, Blank or -) (Not scored; does not affect Final Rating)	
	Conduct, Approach & Appearance
	Choice of Repertoire

- 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. For large ensembles, that space is divided to permit specific comments for each of the Prepared Pieces. Adjudicators are urged to prioritize communicating information through their audio commentary. We recommend that written comments are concise and clear in highlighting the more important points concerning what went well or areas of concern and how to address those concerns if time permits. We do recommend that adjudicators do provide some written comments and not just write something like 'See recording.'

G. HOW THE ADJUDICATORS USE THE ASSESSMENT FORMS FOR ENSEMBLES PERFORMING IN THE 'FESTIVAL PERFORMANCE CONTEXT'

- 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. For large ensembles, that space is divided to permit specific comments for each of the Prepared Pieces. Adjudicators are urged to prioritize communicating information through their audio commentary. We recommend that written comments are concise and clear in highlighting the more important points concerning what went well or areas of concern and how to address those concerns if time permits. We do recommend that adjudicators do provide some written comments and not just write something like 'See recording.'
- For all ensembles, adjudicators may provide additional feedback using pluses '+', 'blanks', or minuses '-' to quickly indicate positive and negative aspects of the performance among the 'Specific Aspects' included within each Evaluation Area.

EVALUATION AREA	
SPECIFIC ASPECTS	
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Blank	Commensurate to rating
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- 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 for those ensembles performing in the *Traditional* performance context. Some space is available to the right of this table for comments.

OTHER FACTORS (+, Blank or -) (Not scored; does not affect Final Rating)	
	Conduct, Approach & Appearance
	Choice of Repertoire

H. MPA RESULTS AND MATERIALS RETURNED FROM THE HOST

- The following items will be returned to each director before the ensemble departs:
 - The ensemble’s *Jazz Ensemble MPA Rating Summary Form*
 - Three *Jazz Ensemble Music Performance Assessment Forms*, one from each adjudicator
 - Nine conductor scores, three for each of the three Prepared Pieces, that were provided for the adjudicators
- The host will provide information concerning how and when to access the audio recordings from the adjudicators.

I. AFTER THE MPA

- Directors are recommended to consider the following actions after the MPA:
 - Thank the administrator who granted permission for the ensemble to participate, any colleagues who assisted, and any parent volunteer chaperones for their support
 - Use the adjudicator recordings and assessment forms as educational tools to enhance the overall performance assessment experience for the students
 - Email the host expressing appreciation for hosting while also providing positive feedback and constructive suggestions
 - Email 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
 - For those ensembles participating in the *Traditional* performance context, consider the option to download the *Medal Order Form* and purchase medals for your students

J. DIRECTORS 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. Participating directors are automatically members and are encouraged to attend and contribute informed perspectives.
- While the meeting is informal, the agenda includes reflecting on the current season along with a forum for discussing possible ‘next steps’, an invaluable opportunity to consider options, to determine priorities, and to exchange ideas within dialogue not possible within individual communications.

To prospective and confirmed first-time participating Directors----I hope that this *Guide* provides the information needed to successfully participate in a *Jazz Ensemble MPA* sponsored by the PMEA Music Performance Assessment program.

Contact the MPA Coordinator with any questions.