

GETTING STARTED WITH PMEA MUSIC PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

By Tom Snyder, MPA Coordinator
Updated August 2024

Thinking about participating in *PMEA Music Performance Assessment*? Not sure where to begin? Do you need to know where to look for information? If you answered, “Yes”, to any of those questions, keep reading!

Known as *PMEA Adjudication* from its inception in 1986, the program was renamed *Music Performance Assessment* in 2019 to more clearly convey its fundamental purpose. The events themselves are referred to as *MPA’s*, short for ‘Music Performance Assessments’, that replaces the term, ‘festivals’. The term ‘MPA’ more directly refers to an educationally valid context easily understood and supported by administrators, school boards, other teachers, directors, parents, and the students themselves. Related terminology changes made for the same reason include ‘assessment forms’ replacing ‘score sheets’, and ‘adjudicators’ replacing ‘judges’.

A fundamental goal of the MPA program is to provide quality educational opportunities for a soloist or a small, medium or large ensemble to receive a rating reflecting the performance level of prepared pieces (and sight-reading, where applicable) as a ‘snapshot’ evaluation of how effectively the music curriculum has been implemented. While the rating derived from assessing criteria within broad Evaluation Areas is invaluable, the feedback from the adjudicators’ audio recordings in real time and written comments on the assessment forms provide powerful insights impacting learning and growth for students, the director, and the program as a whole. This ‘summative assessment’ for our academic content area includes supporting rationale recognizing strengths and making suggestions for improvement. Directors can benefit from this evaluation process as applied to music performance while also speaking the language of testing and curricular accountability when sharing results and strategies for growth with music faculty colleagues and administrators.

By focusing on comprehensive, meaningful input through an educational assessment process that combines both ratings and substantive feedback, PMEA Music Performance Assessment is a program striving for increased awareness, relevance, and participation by directors throughout Pennsylvania. The goal remains to establish PMEA MPA as an annual performance priority for directors within the many options available.

How do you ‘Get Started’? If you have not already done so, access the PMEA home page, click on *Conferences & Events* on the main menu, and click on *Music Performance Assessments* to access the MPA ‘homepage’.

On that page, the first link is to the *MPA Calendar* that includes a current listing of scheduled MPA dates, sites and types. A link to an online Registration Form is embedded for each MPA. Contact the host with initial questions. After registering, communicate further with the host concerning warm-up and performance times, especially if prevailing factors limit flexibility within available time slots.

The next part of the home page directs the reader to essential information for each role and type of MPA--- *Information for Participants*, *Information for Hosts*, and *Information for Adjudicators*. Guides to participating and hosting and all forms involved are posted. Reading the *Guide to Participating* provided for each type of MPA provides a valuable introduction for directors new to the program.

Within the 'From the Music Performance Assessment Coordinator' section, enjoy the resources curated to inform and address topics related to MPA participation.

Near the bottom of the page are lists of *Ensembles that Participated in an MPA* in recent years. The lists are sorted by PMEA District and includes each ensemble, school, district and director that participated along with indicating which ensembles earned a rating of I: Superior/Outstanding in the Traditional context. Don't hesitate to contact friends among the participating directors to ask about their MPA experiences.

The 'Festival' performance context, a distinctive component of PMEA MPA participation, was created in 2016 as an option for those new to performance assessment. While the Traditional context remains standard practice throughout the country for music performance assessment, the unique Festival context offers a menu of options to customize the assessment experience. Both the 'Traditional' and 'Festival' contexts are described at length in the participation guides.

While intended for directors new to MPA, directors are welcome to continue to choose the Festival option in subsequent years. These directors value performance assessment and are more comfortable utilizing the available options within the Festival context to align the assessment process to their educational goals.

If you are a choral director, note that standard medium-sized choral ensembles, such as madrigals, concert chorales, women's choirs, and men's choirs, may participate within the existing Choral MPA structure along with the typically larger SATB choirs. Choral directors often choose to bring two or even three of their ensembles to an MPA! Note MPA's are not yet available for jazz choirs or show choirs.

Solo & Small Ensemble MPA's were reinstated in 2023 to provide performance assessments for wind, percussion, string, and vocal soloists along with small ensembles of all sizes and types. Jazz Ensemble MPA's will be reinstated in 2025.

Guides to Hosting are also posted. New hosts are welcome throughout the state for every type of MPA!

How will your students' performances be assessed? Download and review the *Assessment Forms* for the type of MPA involved. These forms reflect current assessment processes and improve ease of use by adjudicators to maximize the educational value for directors and students alike.

Not sure what repertoire to perform? Directors with ensembles participating in the Traditional context can start by consulting the posted *PMEA Selective Music Lists*. Much flexibility exists concerning what repertoire can be approved as the Prepared Pieces. To perform a piece or pieces not on 'the list', simply complete and submit the *Selective Music List Requests* form no later than 60 days prior to the MPA. Directors with ensembles participating in the Festival context can simply choose any 2 pieces from what they already plan to perform at their next concert.

I hope this helps you 'Get Started'! Contact me at mpa@pmea.net or (724) 816-0420 with any questions. We continue to welcome feedback from all involved within our ongoing goals to continue to improve 'the system', to promote participation, and to best serve directors, their ensembles and, above all, students with quality educational opportunities through the PMEA Music Performance Assessment program!