

NYSSMA Solo / Small Ensemble Festival Information

(and Frequently Asked Questions)

The Averill Park Music Department is pleased you are considering participation in the NYSSMA Solo and Small Ensemble Festival. Please take a moment to read a description of the event and answers to the most frequently asked questions.

WHAT IS THE NYSSMA ORGANIZATION?

NYSSMA (New York State School Music Association) is the state professional organization of music educators.

WHAT IS THE NYSSMA FESTIVAL?

Each spring, The New York State School Music Association (NYSSMA) sponsors festivals across the state in which students have the opportunity to perform solos and small ensembles (duets, trios, etc.) for an impartial adjudicator - usually a music educator or professional musician from outside the area. They listen to each student perform a graded selection from the NYSSMA manual, a short sight reading selection and for instrumentalists, prescribed scales.

WHAT KIND OF MUSIC MAY BE PERFORMED FOR NYSSMA?

All music must be selected from the current NYSSMA Manual - Edition XXX, effective July 2012 (until the 2015/2016 school year). Many of the schools within the school district have a copy, and your child's music teacher can help you and them select an appropriate musical selection.

The NYSSMA Manual emphasizes music that is written in a classical, folk or jazz style. Singers may also choose among a variety of traditional Broadway show tunes. Rock and popular music are not included in the manual.

HOW IS THE NYSSMA MANUAL ARRANGED AND USED?

The NYSSMA Manual is divided into sections by instrument and vocal part. Within each section, compositions are assigned a level between I and VI which gradually increase in difficulty. Music teachers should assist students in choosing an appropriate level and composition for performance.

In addition, the NYSSMA Manual contains important information regarding scale and sight reading regulations and specific requirements for piano and percussion.

HOW CHALLENGING ARE THE LEVELS?

- I – very easy – elementary
- II – easy – advanced elementary, middle school
- III – medium – advanced middle school, easier high school
- IV – medium difficult – high school
- V – difficult – advanced high school
- VI and All-State Level – very difficult – college level

HOW ARE STUDENTS EVALUATED AND SCORED?

Level I - IV solos are scheduled for ten minute time slots (percussion are fifteen). Students receive grades consisting of Outstanding, Excellent, Good, Satisfactory, Fair and Needs Improvement on a 28-point scale.

Level V and VI solos, including All-State auditions, last for fifteen minutes. Students receive grades ranging from A+ through D- and are based on a 100-point possible score.

In addition to a numerical grade, students receive written comments that highlight areas of strength and offer constructive suggestions for growth and improvement. Students are evaluated in categories such as tone quality, intonation, technique, pitch and rhythmic accuracy, interpretation, sight reading, and other skills particular to their instrument. In the case of a serious problem with the performance or an infraction of festival rules, a student may not receive a grade, only comments. Students may also choose this option.

WHEN & WHERE IS THE FESTIVAL HELD FOR AP STUDENTS?

This is determined each year when the dates are released. Please see Mr. Blostein for this year's dates.

DO I HAVE A CHOICE OF AUDITION TIMES?

Please check your availability for the festival your child will be attending. Let us know of any conflicts and if you have a preferred time slot. Although there no guarantees, we will do our best to accommodate you whenever possible.

SHOULD MY CHILD ATTEND NYSSMA?

Each student's decision to participate should be made jointly with the school and/or private music teacher. Trust their expertise to determine your child's readiness. However, the benefits are many. Students learn to prepare for a deadline, focus their skills, plan long-term for success, and receive feedback from a completely impartial adjudicator. The event also serves as excellent preparation for the skills needed for auditions, public presentations and performances, interview skills, etc...

IS PARTICIPATION IN NYSSMA REQUIRED?

Preparing a NYSSMA solo is an optional and extra task that goes above and beyond the regular expectations of band, orchestra or chorus. Participation requires a substantial commitment of time and effort for additional and consistent home practice.

IS A PRIVATE TEACHER NECESSARY?

Although a private teacher is not required for participation in NYSSMA, the most successful students usually study one-on-one with an instructor outside of school. In this setting, personal attention is emphasized and sufficient time is devoted to addressing the specific musical needs of individuals on a regular and routine basis.

Please note that a list of private teachers and high school tutors can be obtained from your school music teacher. It is the student's responsibility to schedule lessons with the music teacher.

WHAT SHOULD STUDENTS BRING TO NYSSMA?

Students must bring two original copies of music - one for the performer and the other for the adjudicator. Extra piano scores are acceptable for use as a second copy. Photocopied music is not permitted and may result in disqualification.

Vocal students and those auditioning for All-State ensembles must provide their own accompaniment. Since a live accompanist is always preferable, arrangements should be made early to secure pianists and guarantee ample time for preparation.

Music and/or accompaniment recordings purchased from a local music store can also be used. They should be ordered well in advance of the festival date to ensure availability. If the student is using any prerecorded material, he/she should bring the necessary playback equipment to the festival site.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF NYSSMA?

The NYSSMA solo experience can be a wonderful tool for motivating young music students. It gives them the opportunity to strive for excellence, requires a mature sense of responsibility, and encourages discipline and commitment. Moreover, the ability to perform for someone you don't know develops poise and confidence.

NYSSMA grades provide an objective standard that is used for acceptance to honors performing ensembles such as Area All-State and Suburban Council, the preparation helps students successfully audition for ESYO, many music camps, and should be included in college applications and recommendations.

The festivals also serve as audition sites for the Conference All-State bands, choruses and orchestras for students in grades 10 and 11 who elect, in advance, to perform their level VI solo for an All-State adjudicator.

WHAT SHOULD STUDENTS WEAR TO THE FESTIVAL?

Although there is no particular style or color of dress required for NYSSMA, most teachers would agree that NYSSMA is a special occasion and should be treated as a performance. Students should wear clothing that is neat, clean and reflects a serious attitude. As in any other aspect of life, presentation matters and completes the package of a strong showing.

WHO SHOULD I SPEAK TO IF I HAVE ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS?

If you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact Mr. Blostein.