

# Guide to the Solo/Ensemble Contests

(revised 10/14/09)

This information is for musicians and their families who would like to understand the solo/ensemble contests better.

## Purpose

The solo/ensemble contests are intended to provide student musicians an opportunity to perform a solo or an ensemble in front of an adjudicator and a limited audience, and to receive constructive comments, both spoken and written, from the adjudicator. The primary benefits to the students are the experience of performing alone or in a small group, and a critique from someone other than their regular music teacher(s). These contests also serve as regional qualifying events for the State Solo/Ensemble Contest every spring.

## Terminology

A **solo** is considered to be a piece performed either entirely alone or with a piano accompaniment.

An **ensemble** is a group of from 2 to 16 musicians performing together, with or without a piano accompaniment.

The **adjudicator** (often called a judge) is a professional musician not teaching school in the students' district.

The solo/ensemble contests should not be confused with the orchestra, band, or choir festivals, in which the entire large group performs for a panel of adjudicators.

## Entries

**Participation in these contests may be required. If in doubt, the student should verify their music director.** Participation is encouraged for all other students, but not required. Multiple entries are permitted: a student may enter, for example, both a solo and a duet, two or more solos on different instruments, and/or two or more ensembles.

## Fees

The entry fees for the 2010 contest are:

**Solos** - \$15 for a 10 minute time slot. Purchase two time slots if you go longer than 10 minutes, then you pay for two time slots - \$30. You cannot go over 15 minutes. **Note: There is a 7 ½ minute playing time limit at the State Contest.**

**Ensemble** - \$15 per group + \$2 per member. Purchase two time slots if you go longer than 10 minutes. **Note: There is a 7 ½ minute playing time limit at the State Contest.**

Besides one or more entry fees, a student's other potential expenses are accompanist's fees (see below) and purchase of personal copies of music.

## **Ratings**

Each adjudicator judges a series of entries, all on the same instrument or class of ensemble, and gives each performance a rating in the form of a Roman numeral with a possible modifier (such as II, I-, or III+). Many performances will receive the same rating during a contest. This rating reflects various technical and artistic aspects of the performance. A rating sheet showing these components and the adjudicator's comments is given to the music teacher at the end of the contest; the teacher normally gives this sheet to the performer(s) on a school day following the contest.

## **Locations**

The state of Washington is organized into 22 music regions. The Bellevue School District belongs to the Eastshore region (together with the Issaquah, Mercer Island, Riverview, and Snoqualmie districts and certain independent schools). The schools in every music region take turns hosting that region's annual contests. Interlake hosted three years ago, so we have 10 more years now! All the participating schools are typically less than an hour's drive from Interlake. This year Liberty High School is hosting, and due to a wrestling tournament, they are combining the Vocal and Instrumental Solo and Ensemble dates to Saturday, January 30<sup>th</sup>.

## **Dates**

Each contest takes place on a Saturday, lasting the entire day. The Eastshore high-school contests are usually held in late January for vocalists and early February for instrumentalists. However, this year is different since Liberty High School has a wrestling tournament conflict, they are combining the Vocal and Instrumental Solo and Ensemble dates to one day, Saturday, January 30<sup>th</sup>.

## **Music**

The selection of music to be performed is left to the performers and their teachers. The only stipulation is that it be "serious" (classical or genuine folk) music, rather than pop, rock, or show themes. The music teacher can suggest one or more selections appropriate for the student's ability; performers may propose their own choices to their teacher. **The solo part, or the score of an ensemble, must be supplied to the adjudicator and picked up after the performance. Students not performing by memory will need additional copies of their parts for themselves.**

## **Accompanists**

Most solos and some ensembles call for a piano accompaniment. If the student does not have a friend or family member that can play this accompaniment, several pianists in the Bellevue School District's area are available. The music teacher can supply their names and telephone numbers. Rehearsals and contests take up an accompanist's time and gasoline, and there is a fee for their services. This fee is not set by the district or the music region and must be negotiated between the student and the accompanist. A fee for one or two rehearsals and the performance typically ranges between \$30 and \$60.

## **Preparation**

Students should make arrangements for an accompanist **several weeks in advance** of the contest, in order to schedule rehearsals and performance time. This is particularly important because a contest often limits how many entries each accompanist can accept, usually 12, so the accompanist must take them on a first-come-first-served basis. This is also particularly true this year since the Vocal and Instrumental dates are combined. We may experience a shortage of accompanists. The accompanist's name must also be included on the registration form. Before the first rehearsal, the student should have his or her part practiced and learned; the accompanist's services do not include teaching it. To get used to the feeling of performing in front of other people, students will perform their pieces in class a day or so before the contest.

## **Schedule**

There are several adjudicators at each contest, each using a different room in the host school. Each entry is allocated a ten-minute time slot in one of these rooms. The schedule of times and rooms is made available to all teachers a few days before the contest. However, it is extremely difficult to maintain this schedule with precision. Unforeseen delays can cause a particular room to run behind, while "no-shows" can put another room ahead of schedule. Because of this uncertainty, and to allow time to warm up, students and accompanists are advised to appear at the contest at least an hour before their first scheduled performance. Travel planning should allow time for traffic and weather conditions, as well as for finding unfamiliar locations. We anticipate more confusion this year since they are combining the Vocal and Instrumental dates.

## **Conduct**

Although the atmosphere at the contests is informal, certain standards of conduct need to be upheld. Formal dress (such as ties or heels) is not required, but it is desirable to dress "nicely", as one might for church. Students and accompanists should not play or sing except in the warm-up room. Conversation should be kept to an absolute minimum in the halls, especially near the adjudication rooms. Food and drink should be consumed only in the area where they are served.

## **Procedure**

Performers are expected to appear with their music and accompanist at the proper place and time. The contest office (usually near the entrance and well marked) can help musicians locate the warm-up and adjudication rooms. The office can also help deal with logistic problems such as conflicting performance times or not being able to find an accompanist.

## **Performance**

Seats are provided in the adjudication room for a small audience. Teachers, family, and friends are welcome to attend. The audience is not allowed to enter or leave the room during a performance, or to engage in any distracting activity (moving or talking) while in the room. The adjudicator normally talks with the performer(s) before and after the performance as the time permits in the 10 minute time slot, but does not reveal the rating to them directly.

## Results

The rating sheets are collected periodically from each adjudication room and taken to the contest office for verification. They are retained and given to the appropriate music teacher at the end of the contest. In high-school contests, the ratings are also posted in a central area as soon as they are verified. Each adjudicator at a high-school contest is asked to choose one solo or ensemble entry (together with first and second alternates) to perform at the State Solo/Ensemble Contest in Ellensburg, usually held in late April.

## Categories

The Washington Music Educators Association, WMEA, defines the following categories for solo/ensemble contests:

**Woodwind Solo:** Piccolo/Flute/Alto Flute; Oboe/English Horn; Clarinet; Alto/Bass Clarinet; Bassoon; Soprano/Alto Saxophone; Tenor/Baritone Saxophone

**Brass Solo:** Trumpet/Cornet; Horn; Trombone; Euphonium/Baritone Horn; Tuba

**Percussion Solo:** Timpani; Mallets; Snare Drum; Multiple Percussion

**Auxiliary/Keyboard Solo:** Piano; Classical Guitar; Harp

**String Solo:** Violin; Viola; Violoncello; Contrabass

**Vocal Solo:** Soprano; Mezzo Soprano; Alto; Tenor; Baritone; Bass

**Small Ensemble:** 2-4 performers not counting accompanist (piano, harp, or guitar)

**Large Ensemble:** 5-16 performers not counting accompanist (piano, harp, or guitar)

Certain questions often arise (unlisted instruments, mixed wind/string ensemble, piano-four-hands accompaniment, double-winner categories). For complete rules and regulations, see the link: <http://www.wmea.org/StudentEvents/SoloEns/rules10.pdf>  
For further clarifications, see your director.

## Dates

The following are the dates and venues for the contests and festivals that might be of interest for this school year. Each contest and festival typically starts at 8:00 AM and runs at least into late afternoon.

- Eastshore High-School Vocal/Solo Ensemble Contest Registration Deadline – Tuesday, January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2010 – **just after Winter break! It may be best to turn this in before the break.**
- Eastshore High-School Instrumental Solo/Ensemble Contest Registration Deadline – Tuesday, January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2010 – **just after Winter break! It may be best to turn this in before the break.**
- Eastshore High-School Vocal Solo/Ensemble Contest – Saturday, January 30<sup>th</sup> 2009, **at Liberty High School**
- Eastshore High-School Instrumental Solo/Ensemble Contest – Saturday, January 30<sup>th</sup> 2010, **at Liberty High School**
- Washington Music Educators (WMEA) State Ensemble Contest – Friday, April 23<sup>rd</sup> 2010, CWU, Ellensburg – actual schedule will be posted the first week of April.
- Washington Music Educators (WMEA) State Solo Contest – Saturday, April 24<sup>th</sup> 2010, CWU, Ellensburg – actual schedule will be posted the first week of April.