

AUGUST 2017

AMTA AUDITIONS

SHOULD YOU
PARTICIPATE?



WHAT ARE AMTA AUDITIONS AND HOW DO THEY WORK?

The Alabama Music Teacher's Association sponsors preparatory student auditions at both the District and State level. In these events, students compete against a nationally set standard, rather than against each other. The auditions offer students a structured performance opportunity designed to motivate and improve long-range planning, evaluation of both their performance and theory/musicianship skills while providing teachers with valuable feedback into the effectiveness of their curriculum. This program offers a progression of theory/musicianship skills that will prepare the average student for entry into a college music program should he/she desire, or for use with his/her music throughout life.

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To enter, students must be at least six years old on September 1st of the preceding competition year. The application fee is \$25 per student.

District auditions are held on a Saturday in April at Samford University, in the private studios of the music faculty. Initially, you will need to reserve the entire audition day in your schedule. Your specific performance time will be issued to you the week before the audition.

Only one judge will be present in the room during the audition. There will not be an audience. Parents must wait in a waiting room.

Students will prepare a memorized program of three contrasting pieces representing different eras

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of music history. Additionally, they will be quizzed on age-appropriate theory routines consisting of scales, chords, and arpeggios in a variety of keys. The theory requirements grow much more stringent as students progress through the different age brackets.

A few days after their audition, participants will receive a graded critique with carefully considered comments. Students who are at least ten years old, who earn an Outstanding rating in both Repertoire and Theory, will progress on to the State level of the competition.

Another \$25 entry fee will be required for State, which is hosted by one of our universities. The University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa has been the location in recent years. Only repertoire will be required at the State level, no theory. Again, the graded comment sheets will be mailed to me. A small number of performers will be selected to perform in the Winners Recital at the State Convention in late spring. Participants will be awarded a certificate and will receive special recognition during our studio's Spring Recital.

WHY SHOULD I CONSIDER PARTICIPATING?

The biggest advantage of competitive performing is that both teacher and student are challenged to do their very best work. For some students, the fact that they are receiving a grade, and may be selected to progress, is highly motivating.

The required audition program is fairly vast and can only be successfully prepared with long-range planning. This valuable life skill is highly relevant to future success in any field. The attention to detail required to elevate repertoire to this very high standard *can be* tedious and time-consuming, however. To put it in perspective, most students believe they are finished learning a piece when they are about 30-40% of the way there, not even factoring in memorization. Participants will need to trust my experienced ears as they learn to listen more critically to their own playing. Some students do struggle with the monotony of repetition and question why they must keep practicing but I would argue that the payoff of more keenly developed listening skills is worth the effort.

COPING WITH PERFORMANCE ANXIETY

The student's emotional response to the performance experience itself is highly individualized. Some students are extremely vulnerable to performance anxiety whereas others seem to breeze through it effortlessly. Great care is taken to create a positive and encouraging environment for the audition. Judges are thoroughly instructed to put students at ease. Regardless, students with an overly perfectionistic



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IT'S ALL ABOUT PERSONAL GROWTH AND CHALLENGE

nature may struggle with the fact that they are, in fact, being judged. I suppose there are two paths we can take in response to this struggle. We can choose avoidance, and establish a routine of bypassing avoidable stressors. Or, we can arm ourselves with some great coping skills, and practice facing down our fears with the hope of one day becoming liberated from them. When approached in a realistic and balanced way, performance environments can be enormous confidence boosters.

ONE FINAL WORD ABOUT BEING JUDGED

I coach students to remember that the judge's opinion is, ultimately, just the judge's opinion. Sometimes the judge will have different

ideas about stylistic elements than I do. It can be extremely beneficial to have our playing evaluated

from another perspective. That said, we will thoughtfully review all audition comments with an open mind.

It is imperative that participants remember that not everyone can be selected to be a winner. We each have a unique musical aptitude that is in the process of developing. Your motivation to participate has to be about personal growth and challenge rather than winning. Winning is fun! That's for certain. We will certainly celebrate high scores and achievement, but we will do so fully cognizant of the fact that there is at least a little bit of luck involved. For example, some performance days are better than others and different judges may be affected by the very same performance in different ways.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As we near our competition deadline, progress in regular lesson materials will inevitably be temporarily shelved. The entirety of our lesson time will be needed to practice performance skills, test memory, and build fluency, artistry, and confidence. Among all of the tremendous advantages of competition participation, this last point is my singular concern. I strive to create a balanced piano program based on the individual needs of each student. I want to look back over our year together and feel like it was centered around meeting student needs rather than preparing for a test. For that reason, I would only recommend piano competitions for students who meet most of the criteria in the following checklist.



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PIANO STUDENTS SHOULD CONSIDER PARTICIPATING IN A PIANO COMPETITION IF THEY:

- Work well independently.
- Are able to focus on challenging tasks without becoming distracted.
- Crave more in-depth instruction and enjoy working in a very detailed manner.
- Can tolerate repetition with a positive attitude.
- Do not have any learning challenges that would make memorization particularly grueling.
- Are able to accept constructive critique without frustration.
- Understand and accept that they may not win or earn the top grade.
- Want to push the boundaries of their technique and artistry and are willing to work much harder than usual to get there.
- Need a greater challenge than their current lesson assignments provide.
- Are willing to follow a long-range preparation plan, meeting micro goals along the way.
- Are interested in having a new perspective on their playing.
- Are interested in understanding the mechanics of music theory.
- Can cope well with performance anxiety or are interested in improving their ability to manage stage-fright.
- Are rewarded and motivated by the sense of accomplishment that comes from completing personal challenges.

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