**SUCCESS AT SOLO AND ENSEMBLE MPA**

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In the past 8 years, I have taken students to Solo and Ensemble MPA with the majority of students receiving “superior” rankings (from superior, excellent, good, fair, needs improvement). In the near future, I will be judging at Florida Solo and Ensemble MPA’s in the near future. I have observed many great teachers within our district and at FMEA annual conference lecture on how they prepare their students well during these MPA contests. Here are 7 things that all successful directors and students do during Solo and Ensemble preparations.

1. Students must have their 1 song out of 3 chosen at least 6 weeks before the MPA date (typically chosen over Christmas break and announced to the director at the 1st week back to school). They need a copy of their song and a CD or mp3 recording **WITH THE ACCOMPANIMENT** at least one month before Solo and Ensemble. Surfside is beginning a library of accompaniment recordings (since my piano skills are slower) and will be using a youtue channel for gender specific voicing. :0) We will make our accompaniments during the summer breaks. Our recordings will have both a vocal part and accompaniment only for each song. You need your accompaniment recordings in place BEFORE contest lessons begin. Students need to bring sheet music to each lesson so that it can be marked.

2. Students need to have a weekly lesson with the director or their private voice teacher to assess their preparations. I have one 15 minute lesson per week with my students during 7th period. If they skip 2 lessons with me for unexcused reasons, they are removed from Solo and Ensemble and the 7th period class. Before the first lesson, parents or guardian sign a contract with everything spelled out - practice expectations, when and where the contest is held, weekly lesson expectations, etc. No contract = no lesson.

3. We choose a song at the first lesson. I narrow down the list to three songs for each student to choose from before the first lesson (they can use Christmas break to decide). There are thousands of songs out there, hundreds on the Florida Vocal Association approved list, and the task of finding “just the right song” can be overwhelming. I have chosen a lot of variety in the three songs I present to the student prior to the break. I am really careful that each song first that student’s range.

4. I CANNOT CHOOSE SONGS ABOVE THE CLASS TWO DIFFICULTY LEVEL ON THE FVA LIST FOR ANY REASON FOR A MIDDLE SCHOOL, JUNIOR HIGH OR HIGH SCHOOL FRESHMAN STUDENT. JUST BECAUSE A STUDENT ***CAN SING*** A DIFFICULT SONG DOES NOT MEAN THAT THEY ***SHOULD SING*** IT. JUDGES WILL TELL US THEY WOULD RATHER HEAR AN EASIER SONG DONE WELL, THAN A VERY DIFFICULT SONG IN WHICH A STUDENT GETS MOST OF THE PITCHES AND RHYTHMS CORRECT AND NOTHING ELSE. CONSIDER: THE CLASS ONE SOLOS ARE VOR VERY STRONG UPPER CLASSMEN IN THE HIGH SCHOOL LEVELS.

5. I will teach the student how to practice and I expect to see them follow my instruction and expand on it. I highlight each week’s information with a different color highlighter and then write that week’s expectations on the front page of music. They can tell how many weeks ago they have been working on a detail.

6. The student and I will walk through the process of what will happen at Solo and Ensemble frequently, not just at the lesson before Solo and Ensemble. My student begin memorizing their announcement (name, title and compose) at their first lesson. I have an X on the floor in front of a table in my room and students stand on the X, announce their song and sing it to the “invisible judge” beginning at least 3 weeks before Solo and Ensemble. We practice how they walk in, how they hand the judge their music and judging sheet and how they leave at every lesson.

7. The accompaniments are very important as we choose a piece. A song may “sound” simple to the student and parent; however, if the accompaniment is not supportive or distracting, then the “simple” song is not really simple. In addition, the accompanist may give a twitching eye or an overwhelmed sigh of disbelief.