SUCCESS AT SOLO AND ENSEMBLE CONTEST

MARY JANE PHILLIPS – WAYSIDE MS – mphillips@ems-isd.net
Cell # - 817-291-9177

In the past 26 years, I have taken hundreds (if not thousands) of students to Solo and Ensemble Contest. I have also judged dozens of Solo and Ensemble contests. I have observed many great teachers prepare their students well during those contests. Here are the 7 things successful teachers and students all do during Solo and Ensemble Contest preparations.

1) Students must have their song chosen at least 6 weeks before the contest. They need a copy of their song and a CD or mp3 recording WITH THE ACCOMPANIMENT at least one month before the contest. I have a large library of accompaniment recordings (since my piano skills are horrendous). 😊 I have made most of those with accompanists during summer breaks. My recordings have both a vocal part and accompaniment only for each song. You need your accompaniment recordings in place BEFORE contest lessons begin if you don’t play for your kids. Students need to bring sheet music to each lesson so you can mark it.

2) Students need to have a weekly lesson with you or their voice teacher to assess their preparations. I have one 15 minute lesson per week with my students. It adds up to 5-6 lessons to prepare for contest. If they skip 2 lessons with me for unexcused reasons, they are removed from contest. Before the first lesson, parents or guardians sign a contract with everything spelled out – practice expectations, when and where contest is held, weekly lesson expectations, etc. No contract = no lessons.

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. If you don’t do this prep ahead of time and just start searching through books when the student arrives, it will take FOREVER to find a song. I choose a lot of variety in the three songs. I am really careful that each song fits that student’s range.

4) DO NOT CHOOSE SONGS ABOVE THE CLASS TWO DIFFICULTY LEVEL ON THE UIL 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. IF YOUR CONTEST DOES NOT REQUIRE YOU TO USE ONLY THE UIL LIST, BE CAREFUL. ANY JUDGE WILL TELL YOU 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. SAVE CLASS ONE SOLOS FOR VERY STRONG SINGERS IN THE UPPER GRADES IN HIGH SCHOOL.

5) Teach students how to practice. I highlight each week’s info with a different color highlighter and then write that week’s expectations on the front page of music.

6) Walk through the process of what will happen at contest frequently with students – not just at the lesson before contest. My students begin memorizing their announcement (name, title and composer) 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 contest. We practice how they walk in, how they hand the judge their music and judging sheet and how they leave at every lesson.

7) Be sure to look closely at the accompaniment. A song may look “simple” to you. If the accompaniment is not supportive, then the “simple” song is not simple.
RECOMMENDED SOLOS

******* PLEASE NOTE THAT THESE ARE NOT ALL SOLOS FROM THE PRESCRIBED MUSIC LIST, SO THEY WON'T ALL WORK AT A UIL SOLO AND ENSEMBLE CONTEST. MY DISTRICT RUNS OUR OWN CONTEST AND WE USE SONGS BOTH ON AND OFF THE LIST.

Folk Songs for Solo Singers – Book 1 – Althouse – accompaniments are not particularly supportive in this book
  - Farewell, Lad – more difficult, good for 8th and 9th graders
  - To the Sky – modal, good for stronger singers
  - Homeward Bound – difficult, good for 8th and 9th graders

Get America Singing…Again – very supportive accompaniments
  - Over My Head – 3 note range, good for very weak singers, transposes easily
  - Simple Gifts - easy

Get America Singing…Again - Book 2 – very supportive accompaniments
  - All Through the Night – easy
  - The Erie Canal – easy

Ready to Sing…Spirituals – Althouse – accompaniments are very supportive
  - Gospel Train – easy
  - Ride the Chariot – medium
  - Wade in the Water – medium
  - Yes, My Lord – medium
  - Joshua – medium
  - Good News! – medium easy

Ready to Sing …..Folk Songs – Althouse – accompaniments are very supportive
  - All Through the Night – easy
  - Li’l Liza Jane – medium
  - Scarborough Fair – difficult for breathing in phrases
  - Skye Boat Song – medium
  - The Water is Wide – medium
  - M Bella Bimba – great first song in Italian, medium
  - Poor Wayfaring Stranger – medium

Reliquary of English Song – Potter – accompaniments are very supportive
  - Barbara Allen – great for boys’ changing voice – transposes easily
  - British Grenadiers – easy
  - Gather Ye Rosebuds While You May – medium
  - The Hunt is Up – great for boys’ changing voice, transposes easily
  - Love Will Find Out the Way – medium
  - Now is the Month of Maying – medium
  - Pastime with Good Company – 5 note range – great for weaker singers, transposes easily
  - Willow Song – difficult – great for 8th and 9th graders
  - You Gentlemen of England – medium

Pathways of Song – Book 1 – low or high voice – some accompaniments are very supportive while others are not
  - The Sandman – easy
  - Cradle Song (Mozart) – easy
  - In the Country – medium
  - Longing for Spring – medium
  - Dance Song – easy
  - Maiden Tell Me – easy
  - For Music – difficult – good for strong 8th graders
Pathways of Song – Book 2- low or high voice - some accompaniments are very supportive while others are not
   Below in the Valley – medium
   Eileen Aroon – medium
   Watchman’s Song – great for boys – medium
   Cradle Song(Brahms) – medium
15 Easy Spiritual Arrangements for the Progressing Singer – Walters – accompaniments are usually supportive
   Didn’t My Lord Deliver Daniel? – medium
   This Little Light of Mine – easy
Heroes and Vagabonds – Patterson – AWESOME boys’ book – GIVES RANGES OF EACH SONG IN THE TABLE OF CONTENTS!
   Red River Valley – medium
   Gloucester Moors – easy and great for young tenors
   British Grenadiers – medium
   Come Sail Away with Me – medium (and works great up the octave for girls)
Tales of Land and Sea – Patterson - AWESOME boys’ book – GIVES RANGES OF EACH SONG IN THE TABLE OF CONTENTS!
   O Captain – medium – great for tenor 2’s
   The Gallant Knight – medium – also great for tenor 2’s
   Down in the Valley – difficult phrasing, but really good for breathing
   Lonesome Road – easy
   My Lord, What a Morning – difficult because of the accompaniment
   Rock Island Line – medium
Let Nature Sing – Solo Songs for the Developing Treble Voice – some of these are harder because of the accompaniments
   I Know Where I’m Goin’ – medium
   The Song that Nature Sings – difficult
   Pure, White Owl – medium
And This Shall Be For Music – Lightfoot – some of these are harder because of the accompaniments
   And This Shall Be For Music – difficult
   The Swing – medium
   The Arrow and the Song – difficult