



## WSMA Music Theater Events Q&A

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### **Q: What should I consider when picking my piece to perform for WSMA Solo & Ensemble Festival?**

**A:** Picking the right song can make or break your performance. Don't pick a song because "you like it" or "it's the only one on the list that I've heard of." Spend considerable time thinking about which song will highlight your skills. Like any WSMA vocal category, start with the music. Scan the music and be sure you have the range and vocal skills to effectively sing the piece. Range is very important — don't pick a song if any of it is too high or low for you. Also consider style and genre — some modern songs require a "pop" style of singing, while others make use of traditional and bel canto training. You should also pick a character to which you can relate, or something that fits your personality. For example, some students are skilled at presenting dramatic pieces with passion and sincerity, others are skilled at performing musical comedy. Ask yourself what you have in common with the character. When we discover relationships between ourselves and the characters that we play, it gives our performances depth and humanity.

### **Q: What can I do to better prepare for my music theater performance?**

**A:** Research the play, the character, the scene where the song is from, and work with the drama teacher at the school, if one is available.

### **Q: When performing for WSMA festivals, how much of the overall rating is based on the character and blocking?**

**A:** Two of the five categories are evaluating the character and blocking of the performance. These categories include the physical connection, purpose, conflict, character and focus of the performance.

### **Q: Do I have to "move"?**

**A:** It depends on the song and the character. Certain songs clearly call for action and blocking. Others can be presented with sincerity while remaining stationary. The key is that all movement should be with intent and support the context of the piece. Avoid arbitrary walking or unnatural gestures. One of my acting teachers once told me that in musical theatre, "don't move without reason, but search for reasons to move."



**Q: What does “blocking” mean in regards to my individual music theatre piece?**

**A:** Blocking is any physical movement made during a performance motivated by the lyric, your intention, or in active pursuit of a goal.

Ideally, blocking should enhance the story on the stage by:

- Reflecting the authentic behavior of the characters — a character’s movements can reveal just as much and sometimes more than his or her words do.
- Reflecting the relationships between and among characters.
- Giving the focus to certain characters at appropriate moments (helping the audience know where to look.)
- Allowing the audience to see what they are supposed to see and not what is meant to be hidden — either as part of the play or an accidental peek backstage.
- Creating effective stage pictures — strong, pleasing, horrific — that convey the meanings and moods of the play.

**Q: Is it ok to sing/act my song directly to the judge?**

**A:** No. Please use a focal point just above the judges head or they may feel like your scene partner and they want to enjoy your performance.

**Q: Should I keep one basic “focus point” during my performance?**

**A:** You should have one basic “focus point” just over the head of the judge. That doesn’t mean you have to stare at this point the whole time you are singing but make that focus point your “home base.” In researching your character and the story you are telling, you may need to change that focal point to other people or spots in the room to engage the scene and the audience. You can look away to think, or address someone else but then come back to this focus point/home base. The perfect exercise for this is to talk to someone about something...notice that you don’t stare at them the whole time (so you don’t stare at your focal point, but you DO look away to think). So you treat the focal point like you would a real conversation with another person or persons.

**Q: Do I have to wear a costume or use a prop?**

**A:** The WSMA rules state that small props are allowed, but not required and costumes are optional. Both costumes and props can be very effective tools to support your performance, but you are being evaluated on your performance, not your ability to find the perfect costume/prop. Remember that if you choose to wear a costume, make sure it supports the quality of your performance. An inappropriate or poorly fitting costume may detract from the overall performance. You should also practice your piece while in costume to make sure it does not inhibit your movement. As far as props go, only have them if you are going to actively use them



as part of the performance.

**Q: What information should be included in the introduction?**

**A:** Like other WSMA categories, make sure you introduce yourself and the school you represent. Tell us the title of your song, the show it is from, and the character you are playing. Then, instead of telling us “something interesting about the piece,” set the scene. Give us the pertinent information we need to understand the context of the song. Some students present this information in character and/or as short original monologue. That is great, but not required. What is more important is that you provide accurate information to prove that you understand the character and the purpose of the song within the context of the show. **MAKE SURE YOU KNOW THE SHOW.** Inaccurate information is a bad first impression! Also, while the song itself must be memorized, the introduction can be written out.

**Q: What are some common pitfalls in this category?**

**A:** Not researching the character or show. Moving unnecessarily or without purpose. Going in and out of character. Not committing to focal points. Choosing a piece that does not fit you.

**Q: What are some common strengths in this category?**

**A:** Commitment to the character. Energy appropriate for the piece. Understanding the motivation of the character within the context of the whole show, not just in this chosen song. Well developed vocal technique. Consistency and commitment to focal points. Movement that is meaningful.