



## Iowa High School Music Association

PO Box 10

Boone, IA 50036

ALAN S. GREINER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

www.ihsma.org

Tel. (515) 432-2013

Fax (515) 433-4402

alan@ihsma.org

Dear Instructor/Student/Parent:

Many students are about to participate in one of the finer experiences they will have during their high school days - the State Solo/Small Ensemble Music Festival.

How well they do at the festival will be the result of several factors; natural ability, experience, instruction, practice, rehearsal time, technique, dedication, maturity, health, and, if they are an instrumentalist, the condition of their instrument.

With all of these possible influences on results, it is necessary to explore, and hopefully help you understand, the ratings system that is utilized for this festival. What do the ratings really mean, how important are they, and what will be your attitude towards these ratings?

The Iowa High School Music Association has established the following levels of musical performance achievement:

- Division I:** A superior performance. Outstanding in nearly every detail. Nearly every detail – they are not perfect, but they should be as good as students for this particular event can perform.
- Division II:** An excellent performance. An unusual performance in many respects but not worthy of the highest rating because of minor defects in performance and ineffective interpretation. Ineffective interpretation might be - dynamics are happening, they are just not musical.
- Division III:** An average performance. Shows accomplishment and promise, but is lacking in finesse, interpretation and the essential qualities necessary for the higher rating. Dynamics are no longer happening. The lack of finesse is obvious and many essential qualities simply are not present.
- Division IV:** A fair performance. Not worthy of a higher rating because of basic weaknesses in the fundamental factors of a good musical performance. A legitimate effort is being given; there simply is very little musical that is happening. Coordination is obviously lacking and, at times, the observer may wonder if they will finish together.
- Division V:** A poor performance. Obviously lacking practice, preparation, and observation of the necessities of a good festival performance. A legitimate effort is no longer being given.

Judges have been issued this exact information to use when evaluating student performances.

All judges are experienced music educators (five years minimum) who have proven they are capable of judging. They know from their own teaching experience what a student should be capable of doing. Many of them have had, or will have, their own students judged within a month's time.

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While we believe strongly in the worth of the music festivals, it must be realized they are only a part of the benefit a student receives from being in a high school music program. Therefore, it is very important for everyone to take time to assess the rating system and place the results in their proper perspective.

Sometimes, a student/parent/teacher can become so concerned over a rating that all the fine things about being in the music program become eroded and the joy of being a high school musician disappears. For example: take the instructor of a 9th grade student who shows promise. That instructor encourages the student to “take” a solo. That instructor intends to give the student experience in festival work, show them the benefits of really “digging into” a selection of merit, and allow them the privilege of being a participant. Through practice and instruction, the solo starts to sound “pretty good”. The student begins to hope, the parents begin to hope, and sometimes the instructor begins to think, “well....., maybe...?” A Division II or III rating results and everyone is disappointed.

The student/teacher/parent who is realistic - who has heard some of the very excellent performances that occur at every one of our festivals - realizes what it takes to earn the much desired “I” rating. They make up their minds that next year, using the experiences gained, they will put in the practice necessary to reach that goal.

The unrealistic will look for someone/something to blame - “the judge was partial.....my instructor didn’t work hard enough to prepare me.....I have too many other things to do.....the piano was out-of-tune, etc.”

We often forget that the solo which came out so easily at home or in the school practice room may waver a little under the tension of the festival center; the vocalist who sounded so fine in the relaxed atmosphere of the home or church choir suddenly finds the festival center is not a relaxed atmosphere; even experienced participants, who have received I’s in the past, fall victim to such things as colds, dry lips or throats, a bad reed, over-confidence, under-confidence, etc.

The whole point is - the festival is a part of the music education program in your school, not the ultimate goal. It is a snapshot in time of any given performance. If one remembers the first squawky notes out of the instrument, or the thin voice of the immature child, isn’t it wonderful that she/he has progressed far enough to become a participant?!

More than that, if a student is a participant, they have become a vital part of a musical organization within your school. That is something of which everyone can be proud.

Let’s allow the rating system to mean exactly what it says. Let’s allow ourselves the pride that should come with a “II” rating and not feel that a “III” (average) is really that bad. Let’s allow the festival to be a fun time and a learning time for everyone. Let’s not allow it to be spoiled by over-emphasis on a rating system. Keep in mind, like every other aspect of American life, the important thing is the journey, the festival result is just a benchmark along that journey!

Alan Greiner, Executive Director  
Iowa High School Music Association

(adapted from letters by O.W. Joiner, former Executive Committee member and Everett Johnson, former Executive Secretary of the Iowa High School Music Association)