

Dear PMEA Elementary Singfest Participants:

Hello! My name is Mr. Schmidt and I will be your Singfest conductor this year. I hope you are as excited as I am for this event. Conducting festivals where I get to meet students from all over who love singing as much as I do is one of my absolute favorite things to do! This will be a very special day for us and one that we will never experience in the same way again after our day is complete. To make sure that our day can be as special as possible, I have made some notes below for you to think about before we come together so that you can be as prepared as possible. We get to have **more fun** and make the day even **more special** if we all come extremely prepared. Your music teacher will be a great help to you during this process so you should go to them for help if you do not understand any of my recordings or notes. I will be counting on you to know your music, be memorized, and be able to sing your part before you come to the festival. When you come well prepared, we are able to make the music “ours” that day and sing them like no one has ever heard them before. I am a strong believe in “making music” and adding in special details like dynamic contrast, a beautiful embouchure, and a special sound rather than just “singing songs” like they are written on the page. Best of luck to you and I cannot wait until our time together in May.

In your recordings you will find:

1. A track with your designated part. The singer on the recording has sung your part for you so you should listen to the song and track your part in your music. Replay that recording again and sing along with the track. Do this until you can close your music and sing successfully from memory!
2. Some of my favorite musical vocabulary that you will hear during the day of the festival include:
 - a. Posture: This is how we stand or sit when we sing. When you practice music at home, are you sitting up nice and tall in a chair or are you sitting criss-cross on the floor slouching? I'd prefer you to sit up nice in tall on your chair to sing. It allows all those muscles it takes for us to sing well work together properly!
 - b. Breathing: This is an important one that we never have to think about unless we are singing or playing an instrument. Does your breathing feel full like you are inflating your belly and filling it up with air or does it feel shallow? Try breathing like you are blowing hot air to fog up a mirror and then try breathing like you are taking a sip of your favorite soda from a straw. I like that straw breathing and we will talk more about that the day of the festival.
 - c. Embouchure: This is a fancy French word meaning the way your mouth is shaped. Us singers love a nice north/ south compass style singing where you feel like the inside of your mouth is like a mansion and not a tiny cardboard box. You hardly ever want to sing with a smile and we can talk more about that on festival day.
 - d. Dynamics: They are how loud and quiet the music is and helps to make our music special. You should take time to mark all of the dynamics in your music

with a little circle and become familiar with them. Do not sing every song as loud or quiet as you possibly can but rather, follow what the composer has written.

- e. Diction: This is how we say all of the vowels and consonants of our words in the music. I like clear and crisp pronunciations. Have you ever had a hard time listening to pop singers words and sung the wrong lyrics? They must be having trouble with their diction. Practice strong beginnings and ends to words so that our audience does not have trouble!

Grow Little Tree:

Focus: Beautiful tone, mature sound, smooth phrasing, dynamic contrast

1. This is one of my absolute FAVORITE songs and has such beautiful moments. The half notes are very important in this song to allow for longer phrasing and a smooth, connected style. Don't shorten those half notes but rather give them the full value.
2. Give a good attempt at the north/ south embouchure the entire way through the piece. We want a nice tall sound.
3. There are different dynamics in this piece that really add to the overall "feel" of the music. It is a slow build from the first measure to a big moment at measure 17.
4. Watch words like "shower" and "flow'r," we do not want them to sound like "shahr" and "flahr" and have our favorite Pittsburgh flair! Drop that jaw and only add the "r" sound to the very end of the vowel.
5. Alto's have a LOVELY part at measure 12. Picture you are a cello when you sing that line and be so smooth, connected, and give plenty of space in your mouth to let those notes out.

Dance of the Willow

Focus: Unison sound, dynamics, phrasing, and a beautiful smooth/ quiet tone

1. Read the notes of this song before you sing. Victoria Ebel-Sabo created this piece of music based on a childhood memory of dancing near a willow tree in the backyard of her family home. We will try to create this feeling through our voices with a gentle swaying type nature to our singing.
2. Do your best to make the breathing in this song be every four measures long. For example, connect your singing from the word "low" to the word "song" and only breathe after the word "breeze" in the opening melody. Continue this throughout the song.
3. We have the word "flowers" again so make sure to practice it the same way you did in Grow Little Tree.
4. Practice strong but quiet endings to words like "it" and "delighted" with a nice crisp "t" and "d" sound at the ends of these words.
5. I have conducted this song many times and for some reason measure 55 – end always gives us trouble when adding in the little "oh" part. I bet you'll practice this song and nail it!

Can You Hear Me?

Focus: Sign language, minor mode, dynamics, following the conductor

1. This song can be both BEAUTIFUL and POWERFUL if it is memorized, has a focused sound, and we work towards whole group togetherness. **Please do not learn the sign language prior to coming. I have a specific vision for how I like to teach it and perform it and I like to get to do that together the day of the festival.**
2. Phrasing is important in this song and we will try to do long phrases. The eighth rests should feel more like a lift in our singing voices than a stop and breathe kind of moment.
3. Change the dynamics from *mf* at measure 48 to *f*. This is a big moment for us in the piece of music.
4. You will really need to be watching the conductor in this song. We will play around with tempo, phrasing, and space.

How Can I Keep From Singing

Focus: Powerful singing, internal strength, unison sound

1. This song will start out our concert together. I like to pick this piece because I often wonder the question of “how can I keep from singing?” I love to sing and without it, my life would be less fun and joyful. Singing and music bring us internal strength even in our saddest or most frustrating days.
2. The dotted quarter note is our friend! We should pay respect to our friend and give it the entire length that it needs by connecting our breath from that word to the eighth note that follows it. Four bar phrasing is what we will strive for in this song.
3. The piano has a strong change in measure 20 when we sing about the tempest. Imagine you are on a ship with lots of waves crashing around you. How would your singing change during a moment like that?
4. We will use the word “song” and not “hymn” to perform this piece.

Hine Ma Tov

Focus: New language (hebrew), major and minor modes, beautiful tone, harmony in thirds, repeat signs, first and second endings

1. This song is in Hebrew and the rough translation of the song is “how good it is for us to dwell together in peace.” Much of the Israeli folk music is sung primarily in minor mode, which we in Western culture often associate as sad or scary, but this song is neither sad nor scary. It tells the story of us learning to live together in peace and although it is primarily minor, it should reflect that in the buoyancy of our sound!
2. Understanding 1st and 2nd endings will be really important in this song. There are several repeats in this song and we often have tiny changes between the first and second endings. Know the roadmap of the piece of music before you come to Singfest so that you know what to sing when!

3. "Lai" is a lot like "la" in American Folk Music. It does not really mean anything but it is fun for us to sing. We should have a nice tall embouchure but the word is pronounced like "lie." Be careful not to smile when you say that word or else the song will be too spread with our embouchures.
4. First time through at mm. 10 should be *mf* in dynamic, second time through will be *p*. We will follow that same style throughout whenever we have the "lai" sections of loud first, soft second.

Blue Skies

Focus: Balance between parts, change in diction, jazz singing, scat singing

1. Blue Skies is a lot of fun to sing! It is a jazz standard so we will snap on beats 2 and 4 in the beginning until mm. 21. We will start snapping again at mm. 29.
2. Part I at mm. 13 and mm. 29 should sound like a gentle bird, keeping it light for our ears and our throats! No need to over sing.
3. We will swing the rhythms throughout even at mm. 21 where it looks like the eighth notes are straight eighth notes. Follow the notes at mm. 1 about swinging.
4. Everyone should learn the scat section for their part at mm. 37 and mm. 45 but if all goes well, we MIGHT pick some solos to do the day of the concert. If not, we will all just sing those parts.
5. The diction is a lot less precise in this piece of music. There should be no plosives, no strong t's and k's at the ends of the phrases.
6. If there are 2 parts written for soprano line, take the top part.
7. Follow the accented notes at 53. If it looks like a small decrescendo, the composer wants you to accent the note and if it looks like an upright decrescendo, the composer wants you to swell your voice on those notes.