

# PERFORMANCE FESTIVALS + VENUES GUIDE

7 WAYS FESTIVALS BENEFIT YOUR PROGRAM

6 TIPS TO ENHANCE FESTIVAL PERFORMANCE, ENJOYMENT, AND GROWTH

2026 FESTIVALS + VENUES LISTING

Music festivals, are they worth the effort? They can be some of the very best moments in shaping the musical development of students, as well as personal growth as an educator. Most festivals are sponsored by their state music education associations. These festivals allow groups the opportunity to progress through a tiered system, based on the outcome of their performance rating or score. Often, a group will perform at a district level, then move on to the state level or they perform at preliminaries (prelims) and ultimately can have a chance to perform at finals.

# Festivals are your program's BFF

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## 7 WAYS FESTIVALS BENEFIT YOUR PROGRAM

- **Sharpen your students' ability to sight read** both as an individual and as part of an ensemble.
- **Expose your program members to new literature and styles** that they will likely fall in love with as they work towards the festival performance experience.
- **Allow your students to see and hear their peers perform** from across their district, state, region and potentially the nation.
- **Visit new destinations** your students otherwise may not have the opportunity to see.
- **Challenge each individual performer** to enhance their technique, artistry, and musicality.
- **Enable you with a rare opportunity to observe your peers** in action and take inspiration for your program and teaching style.
- **Bring you, your students, and supporters closer together** as a performing fine arts community.

If you have a younger, less experienced group, we recommend approaching your first festival more as a 'discovery' opportunity. Some festivals will allow your group to attend and perform for 'comments only', allowing you and your students to receive constructive critique without the pressure of scores from the adjudicators (judges). This way, everyone can relax and focus on enjoying the overall learning experience without undue pressure.



## 6 TIPS TO ENHANCE FESTIVAL PERFORMANCE, ENJOYMENT, AND GROWTH

- **Consider starting with a local festival event to simplify fundraising and travel logistics.** You also might consider combining with another music program at your school to optimize costs as well as planning and chaperone resources.
- **Prepare students to focus more on the music performance aspect of the festival experience, rather than just the score.** Teach them ratings are an important part of the development journey, not a final judgment on their total abilities as a musician.
- **Select pieces that will challenge students to grow beyond their musical comfort zone.** Literature choices should be well rounded for the individual and the ensemble—not an attempt to impress the adjudicators with composer notoriety and difficulty.
- **Schedule reflection time with your students post festival.** Play back the performance if the recording is available plus ask them about the overall experience and discuss with you and each other what worked well and what could be even better the next time.
- **Communicate the success of your students' festival performance.** Brag on both the performance achievements AND learning journey successes to the school, district and community-at-large.
- **Educate your students, parents, and other community stakeholders on the true meaning of the festival rating/scoring system.** Help them understand that the score is just one assessment element in their student's learning journey. Emphasize the positive growth experiences along with the honors and skill achievements the individuals and ensemble received at the festival.

It's pure joy to witness individual and ensemble growth through a festival experience. What are you waiting for? Make festivals your best friend ever! A well-suited festival experience will help you accelerate your student's progress towards their goals. Your administrators/district leaders will see that success and excitement emanating from your program. It's a win-win!

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WRITTEN BY JEFF DODD.

*Jeff Dodd is a retired educator from St. Johns County, Florida, where he taught band, choir, color guard/winterguard, piano, and musical theatre for 30+ years. He is now a Customer Education Specialist with CutTime and Simple Raise.*



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