

## DESCRIPTION OF STUDENT ACTIVITIES

Most of the activities that piano students can enter are sponsored by either the Arlington Music Teachers Association or by Student Affiliate. Student Affiliate is described as “a program of the Texas Music Teachers Association inaugurated to provide for the student a wider musical experience than is usually afforded in private music study, with recognition for achievement in various phases of musical education and activity.”

Some definitions:

- ❖ **Festival**—a student performs privately for a judge and is rated according to his or her performance (I+, I, I-, II+, II, II- or III). Written comments are given in order to help the student improve. Scores are not publicly posted, nor compared with those of other students.
- ❖ **Contest**—Students perform (often publicly on a stage) for a judge and compete for prizes, such as 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, or Honorable Mention, or for the chance to advance to the next level of competition, such as from city to district or city to state. Winners are often presented in a public recital.

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### A.M.T.A. FESTIVALS/CONTESTS

1. **Sonatina Festival**—The Sonatina Festival is for the study of sonatinas and sonatas, which are pieces written according to a special pattern known as Sonata Form. Any student with at least one year of piano study may enter. (my personal rule) This is one of the best events for beginning students.
2. **Counts/Tinker Cyclical Contest**—The Cyclical Contest provides for an in-depth study of one of the four major periods of music: Baroque, Classical, Romantic, and 20<sup>th</sup> Century. One year will focus on Baroque, the next year on Classical, the next on Romantic, then on to 20<sup>th</sup> Century, then back to Baroque, and so forth in a “cycle.” The festival is open to any age student who is capable of playing music from the standard repertoire of the musical periods. Those students who earn a I+ rating at the festival will be honored in a recital and earn trophies. For 2014, the category is Baroque Period Music.
3. **Solo/Duet Festival**—The Solo Festival is held twice a year, once in the fall and once in the spring. A student may play in one or both festivals. Any student, at any level of study may play any piece, except an easier transcription of a difficult piece is not allowed. This is the best festival for a beginning student to enter. A solo must be played from memory.

The Duet Festival is also held twice a year, once in the fall, and once in the spring. It is not to be confused with the SA Ensemble Team, which travels to the State TMTA Convention in June. The Duet Festival is a local festival, designed to encourage students to play duets with one another, or with a teacher. The duet must be music for piano only, not piano and violin, or flute and piano. It does not have to be memorized. A student can play with the teacher, or with another student. This is a fun activity and even younger students are encouraged to enter this festival. Both the Solo and Duet

Festivals are held on the same day. A student can play only a Solo, or only a Duet, or both a Solo and a Duet. Solos must be memorized.

4. **Jazz/Pop Contest**—This contest is for all ages of students to compete with each other for prizes in the category of jazz and pop music. Students first play privately before a judge. Then, from among all students on their grade level in school, the judges select finalists. The finalists then perform again that same day on the stage in front of an audience. Trophies are given to all students who are selected as finalists in grades K-6. In grades 7-12, the judges award the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> places a trophy while the other finalists receive honorable mention ribbons. A student should be very secure in playing a piece before entering this contest. He or she should also feel comfortable performing on a stage. This contest is not recommended for beginning students (those who have not entered contests before).

## STUDENT AFFILIATE FESTIVALS AND CONTESTS

Arlington Student Affiliate (SA) is a “subset” of Arlington Music Teachers Association. Membership is open to any student who pays \$10.00 in dues and participates in one or more of these activities. In order to be in any of these festivals, a student must first join and pay dues. Dues received after the September 15<sup>th</sup> deadline will be \$11.00.

1. **SA State Theory Test**—The test is given twice yearly, in the fall and in the spring. It rates the student’s ability in the elements of music theory. The tests are given according to grade level in school, with each level progressively more difficult. Any score of 90 or above receives a medal. If the test is taken both in the fall and spring, the highest score is the one that counts. The gold, silver, and bronze medals are perhaps the most coveted awards, since the students are reminded of the Olympic medals. Younger students are encouraged to participate, since the tests in grades 1-3 are fairly easy.
2. **SA Local and State Composition Contest**—Students compose their own piece, then write it down with very little or no help. It is then judged according to the skills of manuscript and musicality. The performance of the piece at the contest is by the student in a group situation, allowing students to hear each other’s work. Comments from the judge are given in the form of writing, and verbally in a small workshop at the end of the contest. Winning compositions may be sent to the state level of competition. In order to participate in the state contest, a student must have passed an appropriate grade level Theory Test.
3. **SA State Performance Contest**—Students are eligible to enter according to their school grade: 7-8, 9-10, 11-12, and post-12<sup>th</sup>. They should play two contrasting pieces from standard piano repertoire from memory. The student must have passed the theory test. The winner from Arlington goes on to the highly competitive district competition, and then possibly on to the state level. State final competitions are held each year during the TMTA state convention in June. A student who wishes to participate in this contest should have nerves of steel and the ability to handle criticism, along with much experience in on-stage performance.

4. **SA Ensemble Team**—Students are divided into teams based upon grade in school: grades 3-4, 5-6, 7-8, and 9-12. Students must have passed the theory test for their grade level. They learn either the primo or secondo part of a duet that is selected for their grade level. At the tryouts, the piece must be completely memorized. The judge selects up to 20 students in each category—10 primos and 10 segundos, who will perform at the state convention in June. Students who make the team are expected to attend rehearsals each Saturday morning in May, and some rehearsals during the first week of June. They will purchase and wear matching costumes, and receive a trophy and team picture. Team members and their parents provide their own expenses for the trip to the convention.
  
5. **SA World of Music Test**—Similar to the Theory Tests, here the students are tested on their knowledge of music history. The test is given according to the student’s school grade level. Study guides and practice tests are available for the student or the student and parent to review AT HOME. We do not have time to study this material at the piano lesson. A World of Music medal is awarded to all students who score 90 or above on the test.

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## OTHER CONTESTS AND FESTIVALS

1. **UTA Solo Contest**—This is a contest where one piece is played. It must be a piece from standard piano repertoire. The judging in the contest is more difficult than other contests. This is NOT a contest for beginners. Students who rate a “Recital” rating in the contest are selected to perform at an honors recital to be held at Irons Recital Hall in the UTA Music Building. A cash award is presented to the outstanding performer in each division.
  
2. **Federation Junior Festival**—This has been called the “mini-guild” contest. Students perform two memorized pieces for a judge. One of the pieces is from a list of required pieces for the contest. All of these pieces are contemporary and by American composers. The student also plays one piece of his choice by a non-American composer. Again, the judging for this festival is a little harder than others. No ribbons are given for this festival. Instead, points are accrued each year until the student has earned enough points to receive a Gold Cup Trophy.
  
3. **National Guild Auditions**—This contest is sponsored by the National Guild of Piano Teachers, and is held annually in the spring. Students play from 2 to 15 memorized pieces. They are judged on a Guild “report card,” especially known for its brilliant calligraphy when writing the student’s name. The students earn a pin to wear, along with the fancy report card. This is a good contest for beginners, especially those who memorize quickly.

### FESTIVALS, THEORY TESTS, and TROPHIES

Festivals are ways for students to earn ribbons and trophies for piano playing, but they are not required. Students must have completed one full year (9 months) of lessons before entering a festival. While some festivals have required lists of music; others let you play almost anything. Please check with me if you have questions about which festivals are suitable for your child to enter. Remember all festivals are OPTIONAL.

As your child's teacher, if I feel that he or she is ready to play in a festival, I will give them a piece to prepare that fits the requirements for that festival. Then, about 3 weeks before the festival, I will send home a permission slip for you to sign and return, along with the fee for the festival. Many students choose to play in only one or two festivals a year, and this is a great way to reward them for their hard work in preparing a piece and memorizing it.

Twice a year, in November and February, we also have a written Texas Music Teachers State Music Theory Test. Students must take the test at the same level as their grade in school. A 4<sup>th</sup> grader would take the 4<sup>th</sup> grade theory test, for example. Students earning a grade of 90 or above earn medals for the test (gold, silver, or bronze). The tests in grades 1-3 are fairly easy, then beginning in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, they get progressively harder each year until the 12<sup>th</sup> grade test is equal to a college freshman level theory exam. If you have never taken a theory test, then summer lessons are a great time to get "caught up" with theory by taking a "Theory Week." In October and January, students who are preparing for the theory test often may not play the piano at their lessons for 4 to 6 weeks before the test, and may be given written homework, so that we can adequately prepare for it.

Students who participate in several festivals and the theory test may qualify for a trophy at the end of the school year. Three festivals, all with ratings of I, plus a theory test grade of 70 or above earns a small size trophy from Arlington Music Teachers Association at the end of the school year. Three festivals, plus a contest (i.e. Jazz or Cyclical) all with ratings of I, plus a 90 or above on the theory test earns a larger size trophy. Because the Jazz/Pop event is a CONTEST, not a festival, elementary students who make a I+ at the contest earn a Jazz trophy just for that contest. In grades 7-12, trophies are for 1<sup>st</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> place only.

There is a Solo/Duet festival in October and in April. If you play a solo for one of them, you must play a duet at the other one. You may also play a Solo AND a Duet at the same festival. Duets do not have to be memorized and are usually played along with the teacher.

The other "rules" mostly have to do with the selection of the types of music and the difficulty levels the pieces must be, based on the student's level of study. As your child's teacher, I am careful to select appropriate pieces for each student, sometimes letting older students help with the selection of their own music.

Because they give students a goal, and motivate them to practice and do their very best, I hope that many of you will choose to participate in our AMTA Festivals, Contests, and Theory Tests at UTA this year.

## PIANO FESTIVALS

A piano festival is an event where a piano student plays a piece (usually from memory) for a “judge,” or another piano teacher. The student then receives comments about how he or she played and a ribbon for participating. For most students, earning a ribbon for their piano playing is a great motivator to practice well, do their best, and receive an award. All students who play in a festival receive ribbons.

Here in Arlington, most of the festivals are sponsored by the Arlington Music Teachers Association and are held on Saturdays at the University of Texas at Arlington music building. Parents would be required to provide their own transportation to and from UTA, and a festival usually takes only a total of 20 to 30 minutes of your time.

If I feel that a particular festival is appropriate for your child and their age and ability level, I will give them a particular piece to begin practicing. Some festivals have strict guidelines about which pieces may be played. Others allow students to play almost any piece. If I feel that the student will be adequately prepared by the festival date, I will send home a permission slip about three weeks prior to the festival. If you wish for your child to participate, then you should sign the permission slip and return it along with the payment for the festival. Most Arlington festivals are \$15.00. There is a place to select which time of day you prefer, such as morning, early afternoon, or late afternoon. You cannot request “10:00 A.M.” However, you may prefer to come in the morning, then a specific time will be assigned for you to come. Again, the whole event will take only 20 to 30 minutes of your time.

Since playing in festivals is not for everyone, it is not a requirement in order to take piano lessons. Some students do not enjoy playing for others, or may have a very busy schedule on the weekends. That is why festivals are optional. It is up to you, the parents, whether your child participates or not. However, many years of teaching piano have proven to me that children who are periodically rewarded for their efforts tend to “stick with it” longer. Think about it. How much longer would you continue to work at your job if you no longer received a paycheck? A ribbon may seem like a small thing, but in the eyes of a child, it is priceless.

Here’s to much piano playing and happy festivals!

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS—2014-2015

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>FEE</u>
Oct. 18	Fall Solo/Duet Festival	UTA	\$15.00 each event
Nov. 1	*SA Fall Theory Test	UTA	\$15.00+*SA dues
Dec. 13	Cyclical Contest (Classical) and I+ recitals	UTA	\$15.00, recitals are free
Jan. 10	*SA Composition Festival Deadline—December 21	UTA Room 106, 2:00 pm	\$15.00+*SA dues extra fee for state.
Feb. 14	*SA Spring Theory Test	UTA	\$15.00+*SA dues unless dues already paid
Mar 28	Sonatina Festival	UTA	\$15.00 per mvmt.
TBA	*SA Performance Competition	to be announced	\$15.00 try out at local level
Feb-TBA	*SA Ensemble Team Try-Outs	UTA 1:00 – 5:00 pm	\$15.00 try-out, plus \$\$ for team
Feb-TBA	Federation Junior Festival and Honors Recitals	Texas Wesleyan Univ. in Ft. Worth	\$20.00, recitals are free
Apr. 18	Spring Solo/Duet Festival	UTA	\$15.00 each event
April-TBA	Guild Auditions	Arlington Presbyterian Church	around \$25.00, depends on how many pieces Played
May 16	Jazz/Pop Contest and I+ Recitals	UTA	\$15.00, recitals are free
June 11-14	TMTA State Piano Convention Ensemble teams perform	Hyatt Regency, Houston	Convention cost and travel

\*SA stands for “Student Affiliate,” a subset of Arlington Music Teachers Association. Students pay \$10.00 once per school year to join. This enables them to participate in the events labeled “SA.”