

ISMTA ACHIEVEMENT IN MUSIC (AIM) EXAMS

General Information for Parents and Students

Each year piano students from all over Illinois participate in the Achievement in Music (AIM) exams which are sponsored by the Illinois State Music Teachers Association (ISMTA). In the piano exams, there are fourteen levels of difficulty which begin with the five finger patterns and elementary pieces in Level 1A and culminate, for the dedicated student, with advanced technic and repertoire in Level 12.

At each level, requirements in theory and performance have been carefully planned. Students at the very beginning take an exam which includes technic, sight reading, aural skills, and the performance of two memorized pieces. Transposition, the harmonization of melodies and a written exam are soon added to the exam requirements. The performance exam concentrates on technic (scales, chord progressions and inversions, and arpeggios) and the performance of pieces from a flexible repertoire list. Two pieces must be memorized. If the particular level requires more than two pieces, bonus points are awarded for any additional memory work.

The non-competitive nature of this exam makes it a valuable performance experience. There is no first place rating and scores are not published. Friendly judges offer constructive criticism and encouragement in the rating sheets. Often students are more relaxed during the AIM exam than during a large recital because there are only two people in the room during the exam—the student and the judge.

Being involved in the AIM program of study is important because it gives the student attainable goals to work toward each year. The material gets progressively more difficult with each new level which gives the student a concrete tool with which to measure progress. These exams also equip the student who decides to make a career in music by providing a strong foundation for further study. Regardless of the career choice, performing and understanding music is a gift for a lifetime that benefits the individual and society.

Each year students who pass the exams receive a certificate, award pin and the written feedback from the judge. After successful participation the first time, the student also receives a **medal with a ribbon** on which to display the award pins from different exam levels as they are completed. As an incentive to continue participating in the exams, students passing Level 8 receive music dictionaries from NWSMTA. Levels 9 and above (with an average score of 80 or above between the theory and performance exams) are awarded a wooden plaque and award bars from ISMTA plus cash from NWSMTA!

The AIM exams in our area are held on Sundays at Harper College. Levels 1-2 exams (fee of \$20) are given in November. Also on that date, the Theory Exams for Levels 3-4 (fee of \$30) will be given. Levels 3-4 will finish their exams in March when they take their performance exams. For Levels 5-12 (fee of \$30), the theory exams take place in January. Level 5-9 participate in the performance exams in March while levels 10-12 take their performance exams in April. Those students in the highest level have an additional choice of offering a Level 12 recital instead of the performance exam. This allows family and friends to gather, enjoy the music and celebrate the student's achievement. In the case of recitals, the technic portion of the performance exam is tested on the April date.

As a long-range program of study, the ISMTA AIM program is an excellent guide. Participants come away each year with a feeling of accomplishment and with their sights set on the goal of returning next year!

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