

MISSISSIPPI MUSIC TEACHER

The Official Publication of the Mississippi Music Teachers Association



Inside This Issue



**Officer
Reports**
P. 1



**Local Affiliate
News**
P. 8



**Upcoming
Events**
P. 12



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Carol Mahler

Growing pains! Who would think that someone my age or an organization as austere as MMTA would experience growing pains! Nevertheless, learning involves growing, and this past year's collegial dialogue and organizational discovery has proven that even a venerable institution requires a tune-up to remain resonant. The initiative to update the MMTA Constitution is fundamental to our growth, to ensure that our governing documents reflect our current practices, professional landscape, and identity as an organization of music teachers. While we have encountered the inevitable growing pains associated with these changes, these trends point toward future avenues for our members that line up with the goals and vision of the MMTA.

Admittedly, the Constitutional revision project has become near and dear to my heart, but steering the project toward completion has caused me to have to grow in many ways. And one of these ways has been the chance to get to know our membership-you!-in ways I never would have otherwise. Please be on the lookout for recommendations from MMTA's Executive Committee and Board for the passage of the needed revisions and respond to the call for a vote on the final document.

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I was very grateful to attend the MTNA 2026 National Conference during its 150th Birthday Celebration in Chicago, IL, March 22-25. In addition to the inspiring master classes, presentations, guest recitals, and competitions, the State Presidents Advisory Council and the Southern Division meetings were extremely beneficial to my having a broader understanding and appreciation of our own state affiliate's strengths and needs. Congratulations to our own Alice Ballard who represented us as MTNA 2026 Foundation Fellow at the Conference Gala. Other MMTA members who attended the Conference were MMTA Board Member Jenna Klein Johnson and University of Southern Mississippi Collegiate Chapter President Gregório Oliveira, who both represented MMTA as conference/poster presenters. Next year's MTNA National Conference will be held in St. Louis Missouri, April 2-6, 2027.

The MMTA Collegiate Competitions took place on February 28th, at the University of Mississippi in Oxford. Many thanks go to Jenna Klein Johnson, Vice President (VP) for Collegiate and National Competitions, for organizing the competitions. NOW is the time to consider entering your college students in next year's competitions.

Huge thanks again go to Rosângela Yazbec Sebba and Katie Johnson, VP's for Pre-College Evaluations, as well to as the seven District Chairs for overseeing another successful statewide event. Much appreciation goes to Janine Beasley, VP for Membership & Web Management, for continuing to add the numerous updates to our website and send out membership-wide correspondence. We are grateful for Treasurer Chris Ballard, who manages and processes all necessary payments and expenses.

Kudos to Rebekah Lipscombe and Rebekah Schultz who are somehow squeezing preparations for the Pre-College State Finals into the mix of the usual demands that are made on music teachers at this time of year! We are excited that the Finals will be held at Mississippi College in Clinton on May 16th this year, thanks to the efforts of Michael Rushing. And, thanks ahead of time to all the teachers and parents who will be working to make this the best State Finals ever!

Mississippi College will also host MMTA's 72nd State Conference this fall, on Friday-Saturday, November 6-7, 2026. This will be the "grand finale" for Michael Rushing in his role as President-Elect and Chair of the Conference Planning Committee. Thank you, Michael!

As we look toward the final months of this term, I want to share an important update regarding our upcoming transition in leadership this coming November. The Nominating Committee - led by Chair and Immediate Past-President Jung-Won Shin - will be working diligently throughout the summer to identify dedicated leaders for our elected positions. The continued success of our

possible through the commitment of our members. I encourage each of you to reflect on the unique talents you bring to our community and the evolving needs of the association. When the committee reaches out, I hope you will be ready to say "yes" to the rewarding opportunity of serving as an officer.

I encourage you all to consider ways that you and your local affiliate can invite new members to join MTNA and MMTA. Keep an eye out for ways in which younger teachers can feel that they are a vital part of their organization.

Hoping that each of you will have a nice summer, I look forward to seeing many of our members and students at the upcoming events.

PRESIDENT-ELECT'S REPORT

Michael Rushing

The 2026 Mississippi Music Teachers Association State Conference is scheduled to take place on November 6-7, 2026, at Mississippi College in Clinton, MS.

Leah Claiborne, the conference clinician, is an Associate Professor at the University of the District

of Columbia and the inaugural winner of the MTNA Stecher and Horowitz Power of Innovation Award. She was the recipient of the 2023 Emerging Artist in Music Award from the U-M School of Music, Theatre & Dance. In addition to her presentations, she will present a master class to area piano students. On Friday evening, guest artist Artina McCain will present a piano recital. Hailed by the New York Times as a "virtuoso pianist," Dr. McCain is Associate Professor of Piano at the University of Memphis and has performed at Wigmore Hall, Carnegie's Weill Hall, and with major orchestras including the Dallas and Memphis Symphony Orchestras. A master class with Dr. McCain is scheduled for Saturday. Pamela Pike, Professor of Piano Pedagogy at Louisiana State University and Editor-in-Chief of Piano Magazine, will present at the Independent Music Teachers Forum and adjudicate the concerto competition on Saturday. The conference commissioned composer will be Benjamin Williams of Mississippi College in Clinton. Professor of Music Theory and Composition at Mississippi College, chair of the department of music, and winner of multiple national composition competitions, Dr. Williams has received commissions from ensembles across the country. The premiere of his composition will take place prior to the conference banquet on Friday evening. The annual Gold Medal Winners pre-college recital is planned for Saturday morning.



The association's Mississippi Arts Commission Project Grant in support of the state conference and collegiate competitions was submitted in February. We await the decision of the panel. Another MTNA Foundation Fund Affiliate Enrichment Grant has been submitted. If awarded, this \$750 grant would be applied to an update of the MMTA website.

MMTA collegiate competitions are being scheduled. The date and location of this event will be announced when finalized.

Thanks to the members of the board and liaisons at this year's host institutions for their assistance in preparing for these upcoming events.



**MISSISSIPPI ARTS
COMMISSION**



VICE PRESIDENTS FOR PRE-COLLEGE EVALUATIONS

Katie Johnson and Rosangela Sebba

We hope everyone had a fantastic semester! We would like to extend our gratitude to Alejandro Cresmaschi for his outstanding work in assisting us before, during, and after the District Evaluations. Thanks to his dedication, the website has continued to evolve to meet our needs. Although some districts experienced minor glitches, Alejandro promptly identified and resolved each issue.



Gathering feedback from several District Chairs and teachers, it appears that we experienced fewer glitches and issues this year. Some have expressed interest in revising the theory, technical, and sight-reading exams, and we welcome your help and input. We appreciate any assistance you can offer. Our goal remains to align Mississippi with the many states that have adopted the online system, to significantly reduce manual work and paperwork, while continuing to refine the five-year evaluation materials.

Below is a report of all districts:

District	Audition Report		Finals Eligibility	Scores 270	Scores 360
	Registered	Participated			
Columbus/Starkville/Tupelo	34	34	33	10	20
Ellisville	38	38	24	9	15
Gulf Coast	24	23	22	2	16
Hattiesburg	22	22	18	2	16
Jackson	78	74	51	7	39
Oxford	6	6	6	0	2
Vicksburg	41	36	18	3	6

We would like to propose the following dates for the 26-27 District Evaluations:

April 10: Group B – Columbus/Starkville/Tupelo, Ellisville, Gulf Coast, Vicksburg

April 17: Group A – Cleveland, Goodman, Hattiesburg, Jackson, Oxford

This year we did not have any evaluations scheduled in Cleveland or Goodman. Should we remove their names from the calendar, or would you prefer to keep them listed in case they are able to return to our schedule?

Thank you for your commitment, perseverance, and patience throughout this process. Adjusting long-standing procedures is never a simple task, but we are confident that this change will bring lasting benefits to our association, our members, and our students. By working together, we can continue to elevate music education and performance across our state.

VICE PRESIDENT FOR MEMBERSHIP AND WEB MANAGEMENT

Janine Beasley

MTNA has updated their website and changed the way they have handled some things in the past. One of these things is our membership listing. Prior to the website update, the membership listing was reset to 0 as of April 1. This seems to have changed, as the membership listing as of May 6, 2026, is current with our 2025-2026 membership. I am assuming that this list will be reset at the end of the current membership year (June 30).



As of May 6, 2026, 141 members are listed for the 2025-2026 year. There are 86 active members, 14 collegiate members, 1 corporate member, 1 retired member, and 39 senior members (it is assumed that the “senior” members are also generally “active” members).

Website changes:

Updated Student Activities common documents to include an evaluation fees reference

Uploaded November 2025 meeting minutes per Alice

Uploaded corrected Evaluations Expense Report Form per Rose

Uploaded corrected Theory A Student Exam Grade 9 per Rose

5 Year Plan:

Continuing to review for C, D, E

Ongoing:

Miscellaneous updates as needed.

Continue to send mass emails to members as requested.

Continuing to add new members as I get information.



VICE PRESIDENT FOR COLLEGIATE AND NATIONAL COMPETITIONS

Jenna Klein

Recent Events:

- The MMTA Collegiate Competition was held on February 28th, 2026, at the University of Mississippi. A special thank you to Vicki Johnson for running the day off event.
 - Dr. Lora Gubanov, Assistant Professor of Music at LeMoyne-Owen College served as our piano judge and provided comments for our single string entrant.

- **Winners List:**

- **Graduate Solo Piano:**
 - 1st Place: Gregorio Oliveira (Teacher: Ellen Elder)
 - 2nd Place: Johanna Martha Tarcson (Teacher: Ellen Elder)
 - Honorable Mention: Haotong Fu (Teacher: Elizabeth Moak)
- **Junior/Senior Solo Piano:**
 - 1st Place: Kendle McCaskey (Teacher: Ellen Elder)
- **Freshman/Sophomore Solo Strings:**
 - 1st Place: Daisy Santana Maciel (Teacher: Armee Hong)

Upcoming Events:

- The MTNA State Round Competition, which will take place in tandem with our MMTA State conference this fall.
- The MTNA State Round Competition flyer will be circulated in early summer with several reminders sent throughout the summer and early collegiate fall semester. Please encourage your collegiate students to participate.





INDEPENDENT MUSIC TEACHERS FORUM

Hannah E. Adhikari

We were able to secure our IMFT luncheon speaker, Dr. Pamela Pike. She will be presenting her topic 'Cultivating Healthy Mindsets and Effective Practice Strategies to Improve Student Performance.' Dr. Pike is excited to share her knowledge on this subject and will even have printed handouts and visual aids for the presentation (she is

only in need of a projector and cables from us). I am sure it will be an informative and inspiring discussion, I have already heard such wonderful things about Dr. Pike and her research!

I have sent our president and president-elect the materials they need for the grant. Using the simplified IMTF speaker form that Michael Rushing created really streamlined the entire process for me this year, so thank you for that, Michael!

Thank you all.

GOLDEN TRIANGLE MUSIC TEACHERS FORUM

Katie Johnson

A Short Update from Golden Triangle Music Forum!

Current Officers:

President: Katie Johnson

District Auditions: Dr. Rosângela Sebba

Secretary: Dr. Rosângela Sebba

Treasurer: Dr. Rebekah Schultz

Historian/website: Dr. Rebekah Schultz

Vice President for Recitals: Dr. Bill Harned

GTMF Spring Events:

- MSU Community Music School Piano Retreat:
 - The Retreat for 7th-12th graders on January 31 had a great turn out! Students, parents, and teachers all said it was a fabulous experience. We even had some students of music class teachers from around Mississippi, not just students of private teachers!
- GTMF Pre-College Masterclass at MSU with Victor Rosenbaum:
 - On February 3, Dr. Victor Rosenbaum taught a masterclass to our pre-college students at MSU. The class was extremely inspiring!! His thoughtful help with the students and valuable words of wisdom were things that the teachers and students will remember for years to come.

- Masterclass held at MSU with John Price:
 - On March 28, GTMF and MSU Community Music School hosted another masterclass with Dr. Klein's friend from Northwestern State University in Louisiana, John Price. We were grateful!
- GTMF and Tupelo District Evaluations at MSU:
 - MMTA ran smoothly for the Columbus/Starkville/Tupelo group on April 18.
- GTMF and TF Annual Honors Recital:
 - On April 25, GTMF hosted Ilka Araújo as our performer and guest adjudicator for our annual Honors Recital. This recital honors GTMF and Tupelo Forum students who are eligible for State Finals and gives them the opportunity to practice performing one of their State Finals pieces and receive a rating. Students were given a ribbon and certificate for participating, as well as comments and rating out of 100 by Dr. Araújo.
- MSU MTNA Collegiate Chapter
 - The MSU MTNA CC has 8 active members. This spring members participated in several small-scale fundraising events to help support student travel for conference and performance opportunities. The CC hosted Dr. John Price (Northwestern State University) for a guest presentation that discussed the challenges of and strategies for teaching Gen Z and Gen Alpha. Additionally, the CC organized a Women's History Month concert and bake sale fundraiser. CC members as well as non-member MSU Department of Music students participated; the event was a success! (Thank you for this update from Jenna Klein)

MUSIC FORUM OF JACKSON

Jane Duran Fox

Music Forum of Jackson hosted our fifty-seventh Bach Festival at Hinds Community College, Raymond Campus, on February 14, 2026. From different parts of the state, 206 students, grades one through twelve, performed in celebration of Baroque music. Kathie Gunn Lott is chairperson of this festival.

Our MMTA Pre-College Evaluations were held on April 11, 2026, at Millsaps College with Donna Banks, chairperson. We had 78 students registered, and 74 participated. There were 51 students eligible to compete in the Pre-College

Evaluations were held on April 11, 2026, at Millsaps College with Donna Banks, chairperson. We had 78 students registered, and 74 participated. There were 51 students eligible to compete in the Pre-College Finals Competitions to be held on May 16 at Mississippi College, Clinton, Mississippi. On that day, we said goodbye and best wishes to Rachel Heard and her husband, Lynn Raley, who have moved to Maine. We wish them well in their new home.

First Friday luncheons continue to be popular among our members.

On May 1, 2026, MFJ members gathered for our annual spring business meeting and luncheon. We met at Anjou restaurant in Ridgeland, Mississippi. The 2026-2027 slate of officers were presented, voted on, and approved. The officers are these: President, Carolina Whitfield-Smith; President-Elect, TBA; Immediate Past President, Jane Duran Fox; Vice President Programs, Alice Ballard; Vice-President Treasurer/Membership, Portia Davis; Co-Chairpersons for Sonata/Sonatina Festival, Susie Cook and Patsy Simpson; Chairperson for Bach Festival, Kathie Gunn Lott; Chairperson for MMTA Local Pre-College Evaluations, Donna Banks; Chairperson for Communications, Susie Cook; Chairperson for Certification, Jacquelyn Thornell; Chairperson for Social Events, Brenda Sullivan; and Historian, Debbie Barnes.

This year with our very capable Program Chair, Alice Ballard, we are looking forward to a summer program to encourage membership participation and to inspire us all for the coming teaching year. Our own Rebekah Lipscomb will present a program entitled "Back to Bach" on June 19 at the home of Carol Durham in Ridgeland. We will lunch at Primos Restaurant afterwards. Hinds Community College, Raymond Campus, is fortunate to have Rebekah on their music faculty.

It has been my privilege to serve on MMTA board as President of Music Forum for these two years, and I confidently pass this responsibility to Carolina who is unfailingly capable and an asset to the MMTA board and to Music Forum of Jackson.

JONES COUNTY MUSIC TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

Janine Beasley

The JCMTA annual Ensemble Festival was held on Marh 7, 2026. Participation was significant and the quality of the students' performances was exceptional.

Jones County Music Teachers Association participated in the Ellisville area MMTA Evaluations on April 18, 2026, at Jones College.

A business meeting was held prior to the events.

A meeting will be held during the summer to choose new officers and committee members, and to determine dates for Showcase Recital, Solo-Sonata Competition, and Ensemble Festival. Music for Solo-Sonata Competition and Ensemble Festival will also be selected.

HATTIESBURG MUSIC TEACHERS LEAGUE

Elizabeth Moak

Since the last MMTA Board meeting on Sat. Jan. 31, 2026, the Hattiesburg Music Teachers League (HMTL) has continued with our tradition of holding recitals featuring the students of our members. On Saturday morning, February 14, 2026, at William Carey University, HMTL had four recitals of our students ranging from the early years of study up through college level. On Saturday, March 28, 2026, three student recitals were held at Main Street Baptist Church and again represented levels from the early years of study through collegiate level. We are grateful to our Recitals Chair, Erick Diaz, and to our Vice President for Membership/Website Manager Joanna Burnside for the smooth running of the recitals.

GULF COAST MUSIC TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

Jonathan Mitchell

We have had a busy, yet productive spring here on the Gulf Coast!

On January 24, at our GCMTA board meeting at St. John's Episcopal Church. We were delighted to have an enlightening (and entertaining) chat with Dr. Jennifer Bruton ([Dr. Jennifer Bruton Interview - Gulf Coast Music Teachers Association - 1/26](#)). I encourage all to listen. We also had a visit from Christy Meyers from the [Steinway Piano Gallery in Spanish Fort](#),

Southern Miss hosted our MMTA Local Pre-College Evaluations on Saturday, April 11, 2026. It was a triple-header day and took much coordination as the annual Spirit of Southern Invitational (an all-day event of performances featuring middle/high school and community college a cappella groups as well as small choral ensembles) plus the 2026 Magnolia State Percussion Festival were also running simultaneously at the School of Music.

We look forward to our upcoming May meeting to hear official reports on our MFMC Festival overseen by Anne Kathryn Deviney held on Saturday, February 28, 2026, as well as the Spring Concert on Sunday, April 26, 2026, coordinated by Laura Broughton. Both events were held at William Carey University.

who discussed [Steinway's Step Program](#). Thanks to VP, Dan McElrath for setting up these visits.

On March 7, we had two recitals at St. John's Episcopal Church (one at 2:00 and one at 3:30 for non-memorized students). Represented were piano, violin, and brass students from multiple studios. Thanks to Chelsea Riches and Kaitlyn Ross for their help with this event.

Our local MMTA Pre-College Evaluations took place on April 18 at MGCCC-Harrison County Campus in Gulfport the event was chaired by Carol Mahler. Drs. Elizabeth Moak and Chris Dixon served as piano judges and Dr. Alexander Russakovsky served as strings adjudicator.

Dr. Jonathan Mitchell administered the theory test. Thanks for Nelda Davis and Kaitlyn Ross, and many volunteers, for all their help in facilitating this wonderful event.

Our Summer Luncheon will be held in June at Coastal Harmony in Gautier, MS. Date and time are TBA.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Date	Event	Details
November 6-7, 2026	72 nd MMTA State Conference	Mississippi Christian University Clinton, MS
Date TBD 2027	MMTA Collegiate Competitions	Location TBD
April 2-6, 2027	MTNA National Conference 2027	St. Louis, MO
April 10, 2027	Pre-College Evaluations Group B: Columbus/Starkville/Tupelo, Ellisville, Gulf Coast, Vicksburg	
April 17, 2027	Pre-College Evaluations Group A: Cleveland, Goodman, Hattiesburg, Jackson, Oxford	
Date TBD 2027	Pre-College State Finals	Location TBD



For a list of current officers, visit
<https://msmusicteachers.org/officers.php>



Celebrating 40 years as an MMTA affiliate
<https://gcmusicteachers.com/>



FROM THE EDITOR

Stephanie McGee

I hope everyone is having a wonderful summer and is looking forward to another exciting school year!

Welcome to the redesigned Mississippi Music Teacher! My goal is to create a fresh, engaging publication that celebrates the outstanding work of music educators across our state.

This newsletter is only as strong as the stories we share, so I encourage you to submit articles, photos, chapter news, student and teacher achievements, and highlights from concerts, festivals, and other music events for future issues. I would love to showcase the great things happening in your studios and communities.

Thank you for all you do to support music education in Mississippi!



Mississippi Music Teachers Association

Est. 1954

The purpose and goals of the Mississippi Music Teachers Association are to further the art of music, and promote the growth and professional development of its members by providing programs that encourage and support teaching, performance, composition and research. MMTA is a not-for-profit organization whose funds are used solely to accomplish these objectives.