



PTSO Young Artist Competition 2026

Information and Guidelines

The PTSO Young Artist Competition is held annually for young musicians in Jefferson County, WA. We encourage you to participate since being in a competition brings multiple benefits for young artists.

Participants

1. Gain motivation to achieve their musical goals through focused practice.
2. Get a chance to perform in a competitive setting, building their confidence.
3. Improve their performance skills and develop ways to cope with nerves.
4. Receive expert feedback from judges to improve.
5. Hear different performances and meet fellow musicians. *Support each other!*
6. Earn recognition and support through awards and public visibility.

Judges

- Provide expert, constructive feedback specific to individual performers.
- Identify musicians' strengths, as well as areas for improvement.
- Share tips for tailoring practice to help with improvements.

Treat feedback as an opportunity for growth. Use it to build on strengths and address weaknesses.

Adopting a Mindset of Confidence, Not Perfection

More than anything, judges want to see you perform with poise and musicality:

- Prepare well, but don't obsess over perfection. *Musical feeling is important.*
- Don't let nerves take over. Focus instead on sharing your love of music.
- Have confidence in your abilities and all the preparation done.
- Small mistakes are part of live performance, simply move on.
- Pour passion into each and every musical moment.

Here are tips for managing competition nerves:

- Arrive early to get comfortable in the environment and warm up on your instrument.
- Breathe slowly and deeply, let go of tension.
- Visualize yourself succeeding through challenges.
- Focus on sharing the music, not impressing judges.

Musical Details Judges Value

Three judges with expertise in strings, winds, percussion and piano will evaluate the performances, give comments and suggestions to performers and allocate the awards.

Beyond just playing the right notes, judges listen for:

- Attention to dynamics, phrasing, articulations, and other expressive markings.
- *Emotional, human musicality beyond technical accuracy.*
- Precise rhythms and tempos from start to finish. Metronome practice helps.
- Respect for the musical style and performance guidelines.

Bring the music to life. That makes a winning performance.

Musical Style

- Research the composer and time period to understand stylistic details.
- Listen to recordings to absorb stylistic elements.
- Honor instructions such as adagio, vivace, or giocoso.
- Bring out the composer's unique voice. Judges will notice.

Performance Skills Judges Assess

- Stage presence – walk on confidently, maintain posture, acknowledge your accompanist.
- *Audience engagement – draw listeners in through musical expression.*
- Tone quality – beautiful, clear sound in tune across registers.
- Technique – precise fingering, shifts, pitch, etc. that serves the music.
- Memorization – familiarity that allows focus on expression, not the score. (not required)
- Professional polish – from attire to presentation.

Practice these performance aspects until they feel automatic.

Stage Presence

Project confidence through:

- Posture – stand or sit tall, avoid slouching.
- *Eye contact – connect with listeners and judges.*
- Poise – walk on and off stage calmly, maintain composure.

Storytelling

Perform with dynamics and emotion to:

- Build tension and release.
- Shape phrases in “conversational” ways.
- Use variations to convey different moods.

Draw the audience into the meaning and messages behind the music. Communicate boldly.

Eligibility & Awards

SENIOR DIVISION is open to any musician 13 to 22 years old at the time of the competition, who plays strings, woodwinds, brass, percussion or piano, who resides in Jefferson County, WA and who did not win first prize in the Senior Division the previous year. We award:

Cash prizes: 1st Place \$500 2nd Place \$250 3rd Place \$200

First place winner (or any winner) may be invited to perform as a featured soloist with the orchestra during our 2026-27 season.

JUNIOR DIVISION is open to any musician 4-13 years old at the time of the competition, who plays strings, woodwinds, brass, percussion or piano, and who resides in Jefferson County, WA. We award:

Cash prizes: 1st Place \$250 2nd Place \$150 3rd Place \$75

OPTIONAL AWARDS: One contestant from either division above may be recognized by Maestro Arakelyan for a Conductor's Prize of \$100. Achievement Awards will also be given to participants.

Repertoire

- Contestants perform one piece of music **from the repertoire for their instrument** which demonstrates their level of ability and musicianship.
- All contestants perform in person at the event. Pre-recorded performances will not be considered.
- The performance piece should be **no longer than 10 minutes**.
- Players should prepare with the help of a **teacher or coach** to make their performance as musical and polished as possible.
- Participants other than pianists must **arrange for piano accompaniment** unless the piece was composed as an unaccompanied piece.
- **Please bring four copies of your music to the event for the 3 judges and 1 conductor.**
- The judges would like to hear you announce your name and your piece, but you may request that the emcee do so. The judges might want to speak with you after the performance so please remain on stage until you receive your flowers and have your photo taken.

Times

- The competition will start at approximately 9:00 am. Each soloist will be assigned a 15 minute performance time to present their music and have their photo taken.
- A schedule for the day will be emailed to everyone in advance. It will be subject to changes and refinements so please remain flexible.
- **Arrive 30 minutes in advance of your official time. A warm-up room will be available where multiple contestants may warm up at the same time.** We will also reserve an individual warm-up room for participants to use *just before they perform*.

- Competitors are encouraged to stay for the day and listen to other competitors provided they remain still and quiet so as not to distract the judges or the performers. **Results will be announced at the end of the day's event and a group photo will be taken of participants at that time.** Results will also be e-mailed to competitors by the evening of the competition.
- There will be bottled water and cookies provided.

Publicity: The publicity release section on the application form must be signed. Thank you.

Dress Code

Please wear something slightly formal that feels comfortable to you. "Concert black" is fine but colorful is good too. You are a soloist! It's okay to dress up a little. Please no blue jeans, tee-shirts, torn or dirty shoes and your tuxedo or prom dress would be too formal. Appearance is part of your stage presence and demonstrates respect for the music and the audience.

Judging

- Judges will evaluate each performance for fundamental musical skills such as intonation, tone, rhythm, dynamics, articulation and all aspects of performance skill, including stage presence.
- Judges will assemble a ranking. The competitors with the highest rankings shall be granted 1st, 2nd and 3rd Prize Cash Awards for each division. *If a tie should occur, the full amount of the tied award will be given to each chosen competitor. We award:*

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|------------------------|--|-------------------|-------------------|
| SENIOR DIVISION | 1st Prize – \$500 | 2nd Prize – \$250 | 3rd Prize – \$200 |
| JUNIOR DIVISION | 1st Prize – \$250 | 2nd Prize – \$150 | 3rd Prize – \$75 |
| OPTIONAL AWARDS | Conductor's Prizes – \$100 Achievement Awards | | |

Cash awards are sent by check to the mailing address on the application form.

Thank you for your interest. Don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Pamela Roberts, Chair
PTSO Young Artist Competition
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Event Date: April 11, 2026
Application Deadline: March 28, 2026

The PTSO Young Artist Competition is sponsored by the Port Townsend Symphony Orchestra.
Tigran Arakelyan, Music Director and Conductor

The mission of the Port Townsend Symphony Orchestra is to entertain, inspire and engage the community through musical excellence and affordable concerts.