

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMERGING ARTIST AUDITIONS

In response to an ever-changing artistic climate, particularly within emerging artist auditions and training, this document has been created as a collaboration between the Soloist Collective for Emerging Artists (SCEA) and OPERA America's Performer Development and Artistic Administration Networks. The following recommendations for emerging artist audition planning are based on data collected by the two entities and offer best practices for emerging artist application and audition processes. This document is not intended as a definitive mandate, but it may serve as guidance for opera companies as they plan future audition seasons.

Through a multi-year examination of the audition landscape, the SCEA identified major financial and scheduling concerns posed by the audition structure as it currently stands. After much research and discussion, the SCEA sent a letter in spring 2024 to opera companies across the United States suggesting strategies for change, as an effort to mitigate the strain on emerging artists. OPERA America was also a recipient of this letter and referred to its Performer Development and Artistic Administration Networks. A conversation between OPERA America and the SCEA began in August 2024, culminating in a September 2024 webinar in which these suggestions were discussed in an open forum. As a follow-up to the webinar, OPERA America launched a collaborative committee comprising eight members — four from each constituency — and the recommendations that follow are the work of this committee.

NOTIFICATION TIMELINES FOR AUDITIONS

I. Notification Timeline Recommendations

- A. The ideal notice period is four weeks prior to a live audition.
- B. The recommended minimum notice period is three weeks before a live audition.
 - The aforementioned notice periods allow time for singers to research and purchase economical travel amid rising and fluctuating travel costs.

II. Airfare and Travel Cost Considerations

- A. General trends indicate airfare increases as the travel date approaches. Fluctuations in travel costs often depend on the day of the week and time of the year. Earlier notifications allow for more cost-effective and efficient travel.
- B. Timeline Example:
 - Audition Date: Friday, November 21, 2025
 - Ideal Notification Date: No later than Monday, Oct 27, 2025
 - Rationale: Enables flight booking on Tuesday, Oct 28. (It's often cheaper to book travel on Tuesdays.)

III. Application and Callback Considerations

- A. To create an effective audition season, companies should:
 - Evaluate their application timelines.
 - Review their callback processes.
 - Clearly define parameters/timing of callbacks in the initial application information
 - If communicating through application websites (e.g., YAP Tracker, Resonance), be aware that singers may not always receive timely notifications, so consider a backup communication method.

- B. Emerging Artists are typically coordinating around school, work, and life schedules. As such, more notice improves the likelihood of audition attendance and scheduling flexibility for the company and artist.

HIRING-RELATED FEES

I. Fee Responsibility

- A. Hiring-related fees should be the responsibility of the employer, not the applicant.
- The federal Fair Labor Standards Act generally prohibits employers from requiring job seekers to cover any costs associated with the hiring process, including application or audition fees. This practice is widely considered unethical, is often illegal under labor laws, and is explicitly prohibited in several states. We recommend reviewing local regulations to avoid potential violations.
- B. For organizations that still choose to charge fees, full transparency is essential. If a company believes it is exempt from the above federal guidelines — whether due to its classification as an educational program, a competition, or another designation — it should explicitly state:
- The exact amount of any fees required.
 - A clear justification for why fees are charged and how they align with the company's structure.
 - How the fees are used in relation to the audition or application process.
 - Financial equity issues arise when applicants are charged for applications and/or for applying for jobs.
- C. Please note: Our fellow arts industries of musical theater and dance do not charge these fees.

II. Application Fee Considerations

- A. Though some companies still require application fees, most U.S. emerging artist programs do not.
- Here is a [living document](#) of company audition information for over 150 companies (including this year and several previous seasons) showing the changing trends regarding application fees.
- B. While some companies claim that waiving application fees leads to more no-shows, there is no substantial data to support this. In contrast, eliminating fees has led to increased applicant numbers, which, despite adding to the administrative workload, broadens and diversifies the talent pool, ultimately strengthening the selection process.

III. Audition Fee Considerations

- A. Some companies have adopted a new cost-shifting approach by charging audition fees, requiring singers to pay to secure their audition slot once selected. As application fees have been eliminated, there has been a concurrent rise in audition fees.
- B. While audition fees are more standard in principal auditions, those types of auditions are more selective and highly tailored to the companies' seasons, and they are a known tax write-off for established singers (and often covered by their management, when applicable).
- Emerging artists are often still in school or have recently graduated, so the cost is relatively higher for those with that level of income and experience.

IV. Pianist Fees — Context and Considerations

A. Context

- When singers are responsible for hiring their own pianists, they are often asked to pay between \$35 and \$45 per audition. This higher fee typically reflects the pianist's time commitment, including round-trip travel and preparation of the audition repertoire.
- In some cases, companies hire a pianist and then ask each singer to reimburse the cost, usually between \$10 and \$45 per singer. These payments may be made directly to the company, which pays the pianist a lump sum, or paid directly to the pianist via check or electronic transfer at the audition.
- When companies hire pianists for their auditions (usually for an entire day or several days), they offer between \$70 and \$90 per hour.
 - If this is the current industry standard, companies could consider calculating a per-singer fee based on the number of singers scheduled per hour. This approach may result in a more equitable distribution of costs.
 - For example, a pianist working at a rate of \$80 per hour, with 8 scheduled singers during that hour, would be \$10 per singer.

B. Equity Considerations

- Local singers often benefit from bringing their own pianist, as they generally have worked with them previously or have prior knowledge of the pianist they are hiring.
- While there are several pianist list resources, such as [this list from the SCEA](#), they are not comprehensive, they do not account for the varying levels of the pianists' experience and skill, and they are often overwhelming for singers who do not know the pianists personally.
 - As a consideration, it may be more equitable to have all singers perform with the same pianist, creating a level playing field that allows panelists to focus solely on evaluating the singer.

C. Pianist Considerations

- When companies provide pianists for auditions, it is often pianists they have hired previously and have therefore been vetted by the company. These pianists are usually more experienced and specifically trained in performing audition repertoire.
 - Singers would appreciate and perform at a higher quality when a more experienced and versatile pianist is provided.
- If companies included their hired pianists' contact information in the audition details or application page, singers could email their non-standard repertoire in advance (with the accompanist's consent), helping to streamline the audition process.

LIVESTREAMED AND VIDEO AUDITIONS

I. Considerations

- A. It is universally agreed that in-person auditions are the most effective way to hold auditions.
 - Company perspective: An in-person, live audition provides a company with the most comprehensive perspective for each artist.
 - Artist perspective: An in-person, live audition provides a guaranteed window of attention for a company to assess the artist in the room.

II. Live and Virtual Auditions vs. Solely Virtual Audition Recommendations

- A. When live, “in-person” auditions are not feasible due to financial, geographical, or other limitations for the artist or company, it’s recommended that companies offer virtual auditions with equal preference for consideration. Examples of these considerations are listed below.
- If an artist’s resources (financial, geographical, or other) limit the ability to audition in person and/or travel to multiple audition opportunities throughout an audition season.
 - If company resources (financial, geographical, or other) limit travel to multiple cities for auditions.

III. Considerations for Three Audition Option Types

- A. When virtual auditions are offered either as a preferred choice for the artist or as a company’s alternative to in-person auditions, consider the following for reviewing submissions:
- If livestreamed
 - Utilize a uniform free streaming platform (e.g., Zoom, Teams, etc.) with clear guidelines.
 - If pre-recorded
 - Review submissions as a team, emulating the “in-room” panel with clear recording guidelines.
 - If in-person AND virtual auditions are offered
 - It is recommended that the company review virtual submissions in a parallel time frame to the in-person auditions.

UNIFIED AUDITIONS

The SCEA’s original letter discussed the concept of a unified or coordinated audition schedule, but the committee is not prepared to make recommendations at this time. We anticipate these conversations will be ongoing.

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