GHS students audition for All State band, choir

Musical sing offs? Band play offs?

You betcha.

Auditions for All State choir, band, jazz band and orchestra are like a state athletic tourney, according to Gothenburg High School and elementary music teacher Ernie Blecha.

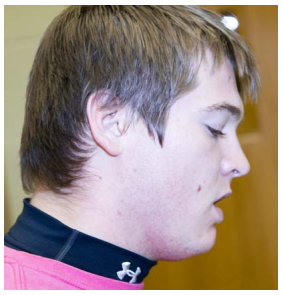
“It’s a tournament about individual voices (and instrumental talent), a select group of sophomores, juniors and seniors who have auditioned in front of a judge for either a mass choir, band, jazz band or orchestra,” Blecha said.

Figuratively speaking, the best prepared and talented win the trophy at the end—selection to an All State group. Musicians rehearse and perform during the Nebraska Music Educators Association conference in Lincoln Nov. 14-16.

More than a dozen GHS band and choral students traveled to Kearney High School Saturday for auditions in front of a judge. Tryouts were at different locations throughout the state. Selections will be announced next week.

Blecha described All State as the most prestigious choir, band and orchestra for Nebraska’s high school youth.

“It’s very difficult to get in, but the satisfaction of being selected is phenomenal,” he said.



Band teacher Tom Belanger agreed, noting that the music students must sing or play is extremely difficult.

Blecha said the GHS choir has learned and performed some of the pieces used at All State but most of the music is too difficult and challenging for a non-select choir like Gothenburg’s.

Cody Cooper, a GHS senior, has tried out for All State choir the past two years and auditioned again on Saturday.

During auditions, Cooper said it’s hard to stay calm to perform, stay on beat and keep count while in a room with a judge.

“For me, the biggest part is waiting to go in,” Cooper said. “A lot of it is your nerves.”

Blecha noted that many students who audition are private voice students who have rehearsed with a voice coach.

“Smaller communities that don’t have access to such personnel are certainly at a disadvantage but we have had numerous individuals selected throughout the years,” he said.

GHS choral students chosen for All State in recent years include Josh Clark, Elisa Meridith,

Kirsten Block, J.C. Meridith, Kaitlyn Clark, Micah Reeves and Emily Davenport.

The experience, Blecha said, gives students a chance to be exposed to a different level of music and forces them to expand their capabilities and potential by studying more difficult music in order to learn their part.

“If selected, it offers the student a chance to sing with a really great choir (or band or orchestra), an awesome director, and to be a part of making some fantastic music,” he said. “It’s an unbelievable experience.

Belanger said the experience leading up to and including the audition makes better students as they go through the process, whether or not they’re chosen for All State.

This year 12 choral and three band students made the trip to Kearney.

At the audition, Blecha said students sing (or play) to a recorded accompaniment.

Choral students begin with several vocalizations to show the dexterity of their voice and range.

They then sing with a recording of a specified measure in a piece they’ve practiced.

“The accompaniment doesn’t stop while the student does his or her best to sing their specified part at the appropriate time,” Blecha explained. “If a student misses an entrance or has difficulty finding the correct place in the music, they miss their chance at a good audition.

“One time and one time only before the judge.”

Before the audition, choral students spend several weeks practicing the music with a CD but aren't given specific measure numbers until late in the afternoon the day before for choral students and early morning on the day of the audition for band and orchestra students.

Belanger said band students play different scales and selections from difficult pieces of music in front of a judge.

Choral students who auditioned for soprano, second soprano, alto, tenor and bass parts include Jon Rehmert, Cody Cooper, Bailey Gibbens, Rhett Lindholm, Shaylee Scott, Carlin Daharsh, Kayla Trevino, Rachel Rice, Abbie Mazour, Betsy Potter, Jacob Franzen and Alayna Collins.

Band students who tried out include: Rehmert, bass clarinet; Rice, flute; and Trenton Long, trombone.

Belanger said he didn't know who the last person was from Gothenburg chosen for the All State Band.

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