



The ATAM Goes Virtual Again For Their 59th Annual New England Music Festival

As the Covid-19 pandemic continues across the world, the Accordion Teachers Association of Massachusetts (ATAM) is working hard once again to virtually host their 59th Annual New England Music Festival. For the first 57 years of this competition, the annual New England Music Festival has been held during a weekend in April where over 600 students and their families gather to compete and showcase their musical abilities. This event usually draws 2,000-3,000 people over the competition weekend. With categories for accordion, drums, guitar, piano, voice, and violin players, there is a wide variety of musicians represented. The competition includes many music studios throughout New England. Also, just two years ago, the ATAM added categories for adult musicians as well. The adult categories (for Accordion, Drums, Guitar, Piano, and Voice) are open to all musicians age 23 and older across the United States, with no affiliation to a specific music studio necessary. The ATAM also distributes over \$5,000 in cash awards and scholarships each year at this event.

Last year, for their 58th annual competition, the ATAM had to transition their competition to a fully virtual event. Over 800 video entries were submitted and judged during last year's virtual competition. After originally postponing the event, which was to be held during the last weekend of March 2020 at the Boston Marriott in Newton MA, the competition was originally moved to the last weekend in July 2020. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the association was unable to hold this event at the Boston Marriott Newton last year, and had to transition to a virtual competition. Mike Silvia, secretary of the ATAM, was the virtual competition coordinator and was instrumental in making this competition a reality. The decision did not come easily, but was determined to be the safest and most effective way to hold the competition during the uncertain times of Covid-19. With this transition to a virtual competition, the students who had worked so hard to prepare their competition pieces were still able to perform.

The ATAM worked hard last year to find a virtual format that was efficient and simple, so that all of the original contestants would have the opportunity to remain in the competition. With the inability to host a live, in-person competition at the Boston Marriott Newton in 2021, the ATAM is utilizing a similar virtual format this year in order to continue their annual music festival. The competition process is already in motion for this year and it appears as though there will be upwards of 500 video entries for this year's virtual festival. The students will be working with their teachers and studios to record their performance and post a video for each of their categories onto YouTube. The judges will then be sent a scoresheet and video for each contestant and will score and critique each performance. This alternative design is not the ideal way to host a music competition, but the ATAM thought it was important to continue with their 59th Annual New England Music Festival, even if it must be held virtually. During the difficult times of this pandemic, it is important for these contestants to keep doing what they love, playing music, while making sure they are staying safe.

Additionally, the ATAM is hopeful that they will be able to host a Battle of the Bands competition on October 24th, 2021 at the Hard Rock Café in Boston, MA. As long as Covid-19 regulations allow this event to take place, the date has already been reserved and planning for this event is well underway. With the inability to have groups perform and compete virtually the past two competitions, this event would be a great opportunity for the students to showcase their abilities in a group setting. The ATAM will be sharing additional information about this event as it becomes available. The ATAM is looking forward to hopefully hosting the 60th Annual New England Music Festival at the Boston Marriott Newton on April 8th, 9th & 10th 2022, but for now they are capitalizing on the advantages of technology to continue spreading joy through music during these tough times!

For any adult contestant interested in participating in this year's competition, please contact ATAM Chairperson, Peggy Falcetti at peggyf1944@gmail.com.