



**ASMAC  
MAESTRA  
MUSE**

**MUSIC  
ASSISTANT  
STANDARDS  
OF PRACTICE**

This document was created by a collective of music professionals  
in the musical theatre industry.

If you have questions, please email [advice@asmacnyc.org](mailto:advice@asmacnyc.org)

Music Assistants have been an integral part of the Broadway musical development and production process for decades, but the responsibilities of this position have been the subject of confusion almost since its inception. The way we make musicals has changed over the past several years, and Music Assistants are now expected to do an increasingly broad range of highly skilled work, far beyond a reasonable workload for one person, while barely (if even) making minimum wage. The result is a position that is widely acknowledged as untenable.

In response, a collective of music professionals from across many disciplines in the musical theatre industry created this document to define the reasonable scope of work for Music Assistants. Our aim is to facilitate the natural creative fluidity of a musical's music department while ensuring that everyone's time and labor is acknowledged and compensated fairly.

This is a living document that will evolve over time.

This version was last edited on January 6, 2022.

## Table of Contents

<b>I. How Have Things Changed? .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>II. The Core Job.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>III. Typical Working Hours .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>IV. Compensation .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>V. Additional Tasks That Can Be Appropriate for Music Assistants.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>VI. Work That Must Be Credited and Compensated Separately .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>VII. How Other Company Members Can Support Music Assistants.....</b>	<b>10</b>

# I. How Have Things Changed?

## **The kind of music in musical theatre has changed**

Musical theatre composers used to write for the piano by default, and it was assumed that a composer would deliver music in the form of piano/vocal scores. Today, a wider range of composers are writing for musical theatre, and while many of them still do base their writing on the piano, many others write for other instruments or directly into digital audio workstations. To realize these composers' visions, additional musicians beyond the standard rehearsal pianist are often needed in the rehearsal room.

It has also become more common for composers to deliver their materials in recorded form instead of written score form. Because written scores are essential to the musical theatre creation process, someone must transcribe those recordings to create written scores.

## **Electronic music requires a different kind and amount of labor**

Most musicals today use keyboard programming, Ableton, click tracks, or other electronic music tools. While keyboard programming is now an established position on a musical's music team, not every musical uses the same amount or combination of electronic music tools, and every new innovation creates additional labor.

## **Rehearsal time has decreased**

Historically, the standard rehearsal period for new musicals was six weeks. Today, rehearsal periods are often condensed to four or five weeks, meaning every element of a normal rehearsal process, including music work, happens on a tighter timeline.

## **Changes in the development process have increased production value throughout the development process**

In the past, it was normal that a change to a musical's score would exist only as a rough piano sketch for a day or two, even in performance at Broadway preview. As the creation process has evolved and sounds beyond piano have become common in the rehearsal room, many creatives have become accustomed to a more fully realized musical product in readings, workshops, and rehearsals, even as complicated changes are made on the fly. A choreographer changing a short sequence during a workshop might expect a complete new arrangement, with written scores, click tracks, programmed instruments, and parts for rehearsal musicians, within a few hours.

Currently, when work extends beyond what other members of the music department can handle, Music Assistants are expected to fill any remaining gaps in the department's to-do list. However, these tasks are extremely varied and complex and often require advanced skills. They are also more time-intensive than any one person could reasonably handle.

Below, we will define the jobs one can reasonably expect a Music Assistant to do and how to compensate them. We will also define all of the other tasks that may or may not be done by a Music Assistant and how to compensate those tasks appropriately.

## II. The Core Job

The standard Music Assistant job currently encompasses two primary areas:

### Piano/Vocal (P/V) Maintenance

- Input script, lyric, and music changes into notation files as they are made.
- Collaborate with stage management or script supervisor to ensure script and score remain in sync.
- Print and distribute updated pages to cast, creatives, and production team.

### Music Department Support

#### ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT FOR OTHER MUSIC DEPARTMENT MEMBERS

- Replace script/score pages, transfer notes from old to new pages, and flag script/lyric changes that might affect music for other members of the music department.
- Create and maintain organizational tools to aid in the music department's work, such as spreadsheets to track which numbers have been released to the orchestrator.
- Aid Music Supervisor, Music Director, and Associate Music Director as needed to stay on top of all that's happening.

#### COMMUNICATING WITH OTHER DEPARTMENTS

- Facilitate communication with the Orchestrator, Copyist, and / or Keyboard Programmer to release completed songs/cues and changes as directed, with appropriate support materials (audio/video recordings, updated PV scores).
- Communicate with other departments (sound, stage management, production management) as directed re: music changes, script edits, and other administrative needs.

### III. Typical Working Hours

These are the times when a Music Assistant is currently expected to work:

#### Rehearsal hours

- Music Assistants are expected to attend full rehearsal hours, 10am-6pm six days per week. In addition, Music Assistants are often expected to arrive 30-60 minutes early and remain 30-60 minutes late to print and prepare documents or to attend post-rehearsal meetings. This adds up to a minimum of 48 hours/week and a maximum of 60 hours/week.

#### At-home work

- Music Assistants regularly work outside rehearsal hours, such as at night or on a day off, to prepare materials for the next day.

#### Tech and Preview hours (for productions)

- Music Assistants are expected to attend full tech hours, preview rehearsals, and some or all preview performances depending on the production. They are often expected to arrive early and stay late at these rehearsals. At-home work regularly continues through tech and previews.

The exact breakdown of hours varies depending on the needs of each individual project.

## IV. Compensation

In the past, Music Assistants have been paid an unrealistic flat weekly fee meant to cover all work from the first day of rehearsal through opening night of a production. This fee does not offer additional compensation for hours worked outside standard rehearsal hours, including pre-production and post-production needs.

This document recommends a new system of compensation.

### **A base weekly fee**

This fee will cover all work as described above occurring within a 9-hour workday (8 hours of rehearsal plus arriving 30 minutes early and staying 30 minutes late) six days per week, which adds up to a 54-hour work week. The 9-hour workday should include a lunch break and reasonable breaks throughout the day as needed. Note that these breaks may not line up with required AEA or Local 802 breaks because Music Assistants and other creatives often work through union performers' standard breaks. They should nevertheless be honored.

### **Overtime pay**

Overtime pay covers all work that occurs outside the established 9-hour work day and six-day work week. Overtime can be paid as per federal and state labor laws or by following Local 802 standard overtime rates, which are generally time and a half prorated for every half hour worked over the hours in the standard work week.

### **An hourly rate for pre-production, post-production, and part-time work**

If any pre-production or post-production work is called for, those work hours should be paid. The hourly rate for this work should correspond with the weekly rate such that, once a Music Assistant reaches 26 hours/week, it becomes economically advantageous to pay the Music Assistant a weekly rate instead of an hourly rate. This is analogous to similar standards in Local 802's hourly and weekly rates for rehearsal musicians.

- The hourly rate can also be used to hire additional Music Assistants part-time when a production with a heavy music workload may need extra support. Having two Music Assistants during normal working hours saves money on overtime and creates a more livable work situation for both Music Assistants.

This system allows for the normal variation of tasks and workload between projects. When a Music Assistant accomplishes all their work within normal work hours, the base weekly fee covers everything. When a Music Assistant is expected to go home and work extra hours on a regular basis, their pay increases.

These rates cover ONLY the work outlined in the Core Job section above. Other tasks will be discussed separately below.



## V. Additional Tasks That Can Be Appropriate for Music Assistants

Each of the tasks below, which Music Assistants are commonly asked to do, is a specialized job that goes beyond the core job expectations of a musical's rehearsal process. When Music Assistants do these tasks, they should be paid separately from their core payment, including the standard union rate where applicable for work covered by a union contract.

### Pre-Production Piano/Vocal Prep

A Music Assistant can be a great help to the Music Supervisor or Music Director in preparing the Piano/Vocal score for the first day of rehearsal. They often:

- Update the score to match the most recent script draft.
- Format each song file for clarity and consistency.
- Create a PDF of the Piano/Vocal score to send to stage management for printing.

This work is common for Music Assistants, though their compensation has often not reflected the additional hours worked outside the normal rehearsal period. When a Music Assistant does pre-production Piano/Vocal prep, they should be compensated accordingly, either hourly or with an additional paid week of prep work if needed.

### Rehearsal Piano

Anyone who plays rehearsal piano should be compensated as per Local 802 rehearsal piano rates. Music Directors and Associate Music Directors are paid union rates for work that includes rehearsal piano, so this is figured into their scope of work. Often a musical needs more pianists because there may be up to three rehearsal rooms going at once, so a separate Rehearsal Pianist is hired and paid hourly or weekly rates. The Music Assistant can function as a Rehearsal Pianist as well, but for the hours when they are playing Rehearsal Piano they should be paid 802 rates.

Paying the Music Assistant to play rehearsal piano **does not add to the cost of a project**. Someone needs to be at the piano, and whoever is there is paid appropriately, be that a Music Director, Associate Music Director, Music Assistant, or Rehearsal Pianist.

### Transcription

Transcription is writing down music that wasn't previously written down. Transcribing music, especially complicated music like a fully orchestrated demo recording, is a specialized task requiring extensive musical education and aural skills. Note that transcribing is not the same as creating a piano arrangement, a separate task covered in the next section (Contributing Original Arrangements or Orchestrations).

- **Pre-production transcription work**

Pre-production transcription work should be considered part of hiring the composer. The person who transcribes the composer's music before rehearsal should either be paid by the composer or by the producers as part of their agreement with the composer.

While a Music Assistant can be the person to complete this work, their compensation for pre-production transcription should be separate from their standard Music Assistant compensation. Appropriate transcription rates apply.

- **Transcription during rehearsals**

Music Assistants are often asked to transcribe music during rehearsals as changes are made or as new songs are written. This is normal and expected as long as the work happens during the Music Assistant's normal working hours. If transcription work occurs outside normal working hours, the Music Assistant must be compensated appropriately as described in the previous section (Compensation).

### **“Scratch Parts” in the P/V**

If a Music Assistant is asked, during regular rehearsal hours, to prepare “scratch parts” for additional rhythm section musicians and those parts are made by editing only the Piano/Vocal file (for example, showing only the left-hand part with chord symbols for bass and drums), that may be considered part of the Music Assistant job. If this work falls outside regular working hours, the Music Assistant must be paid overtime.

If a Music Assistant is presented with an orchestrated score (containing music for more than just the piano) and is asked to provide fully formatted parts, that work is considered music copying and must be paid as such.

### **Audio Editing for Rehearsal**

Some composers write in Logic or primarily use audio files to convey their work. In these circumstances, the best way to implement a music change in rehearsal is not by creating a new PV score but by editing the audio file.

If a Music Assistant is asked to cut and paste, move, or change the volume of an existing audio file supplied by the composer or another member of the music department, that may be considered part of the Music Assistant job.

If a Music Assistant is asked to do any more detailed work with the audio files, including any element of creative audio production, then that work is considered a separate job, either sound design, Ableton programming, music production, or something of the like, and must be paid as such.

## Intern Duties

General administrative support, like replenishing office supplies and making copies, can be appropriate work for a Music Assistant. Duties normally ascribed to an intern or personal assistant, like getting coffee or being asked to pick up lunches for other staff members, can leave Music Assistants feeling like their specialized skills are not being respected. Supervisors should be mindful when asking Music Assistants to run errands that anyone could run, and they should not prioritize these errands over other music department-specific tasks or take away from a Music Assistant's standard break time by asking them to run errands during those times. A company member who feels respected and valued will not mind running an intern-level errand from time to time.

Sometimes music teams want to hire Music Interns who are learning but do not have all the specialized skills a Music Assistant has. A Music Intern's duties comprise:

- Observing the activities of the music department for the purpose of learning.
- Supporting with general administrative tasks like making copies or distributing papers.
- A Music Intern may be given a Music Assistant-level task to perform, but it must always be under the supervision of another music team member with the purpose of teaching and supporting.

If any of the Music Intern's tasks begin to overlap with the Music Assistant job or any tasks described above, they should be promoted and paid appropriately.

Observerships and fellowships, which are usually funded by outside organizations, should be addressed in a separate document.

## **VI. Work That Must Be Credited and Compensated Separately**

The tasks below are encompassed by other jobs, most of them covered by Local 802 AFM contracts when shows go into production or advanced development, and are thus outside the scope of the Music Assistant position. If they are assigned to the Music Assistant, that person should be credited separately for this additional work and compensated appropriately, according to standard union rates where applicable.

### **Teaching Parts from the Piano; Leading Rehearsals with Actors**

This is contractually the responsibility of a Music Director or Associate Music Director and should be compensated according to Local 802 union rates when union contracts are being used.

### **Creating Rehearsal Tracks for Actors for Learning Purposes**

Many Music Directors or Associate Music Directors create rehearsal tracks for actors for learning purposes as part of their teaching process, either before or during the rehearsal period. This is a creative choice to supplement the MD or AMD's teaching process. It is not a contractual expectation according to Local 802, and if a production asks for it, it should fall under the MD or AMD's purview.

### **Contributing Original Arrangements or Orchestrations**

This is contractually the responsibility of an Arranger or Orchestrator and should be compensated according to Local 802 union rates when union contracts are being used.

### **Music Copying**

This is contractually the responsibility of a Copyist and should be compensated according to Local 802 union rates when union contracts are being used.

*See "Scratch Parts' in the P/V" on the previous page for clarification of what constitutes copy work.*

### **Keyboard/Ableton Programming, Including Click Tracks**

This is the work of a Keyboard Programmer or Ableton Programmer.

### **Audio Editing for the Production**

This is the work of a Sound Designer.

### **Personal Errands**

Personal errands, like picking up dry-cleaning, are not appropriate work for professional colleagues.

## VII. How Other Company Members Can Support Music Assistants

Music Assistants are generally young artists with limited power in relation to the rest of the members of the music department and a musical's company. It is the responsibility of the music department heads (the direct managers of Music Assistants) and management (their employers) to look out for these artists and ensure that everyone in the company, including the Music Assistant, understands and respects the policies in this document.

Music Directors and Music Supervisors manage Music Assistants' workloads and hours. Therefore, it is their responsibility to consider and respect the Music Assistant's time and labor and to advocate for Music Assistants when the expectations of the room go beyond what the Music Assistant can reasonably accomplish. Music Supervisors and MDs can distribute work amongst other team members when needed. They can also speak up when hiring another Music Assistant is necessary. This parallels how stage managers often have more than one Production Assistant per production depending on the needs of their department at any given time.

Some of the concepts in this document may have a financial impact on theaters and productions. Music department heads and management can collaborate in service of their shared goal to create fair working conditions for these essential members of a musical's creative team.