

PERFORMANCE CATEGORY

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I. THE ART OF PERFORMANCE

One significant goal of any art form is communication. A barbershop performance refers to how the artist communicates a message and vision via the transformation of a song into an entertaining experience for an audience. The performance of a song is the artist's gift to the audience, whose experiences, memories, and imagination transform that gift into an emotional experience. The performers' goal is to create a high level of entertainment through the performance. The means to that end are as varied as the personality, abilities, and creative skills of the performers.

The Performance judge evaluates entertainment within the barbershop style. Vocal and visual elements, in the context of the song choice and delivery, are evaluated for their contribution to the overall entertainment effect of the performance.

II. PERFORMANCE CATEGORY

DESCRIPTION A. Characteristics of the Barbershop Performance

1. Barbershop style

Barbershop is a musical art form, and therefore the type of entertainment with which we are concerned must be principally a form of music supported by artistic delivery and not simply a musical accompaniment of another form of art such as drama, dance, or comedy. That is, in a true barbershop performance the barbershop style of music remains a key feature of the performance. This does not preclude the innovative use of other art forms, in appropriate balance with the barbershop style.

2. Audience rapport

The degree to which the audience is entertained is dependent upon the degree to which they are receptive to the performer and the performance. It is the performers' responsibility to engender receptivity, engagement, or connection with the audience.

3. Creativity

Within the bounds of good taste, great freedom is permitted for the individual, the performing group, and the fundamental style of music that is being performed. There is no "one way" to sing in general, or to sing barbershop in particular, just as there is no "one way" to stage a song in the barbershop style. Performers are encouraged to develop their own style and identity. Performances can be two entirely stand-alone works or can be a "package" that builds one song upon the other.

4. Artistry and expressiveness

Visual and vocal expressiveness serve to communicate the emotional content of the song and to engage the audience in the performance. The success a performer achieves is measured by the Performance judge's sense of the degree to which the audience is entertained. However, for some forms of comedy and fantasy, believability must be suspended for maximum effectiveness. Events that could be considered offensive to an audience, if taken at face value in a serious performance, take on a different character when presented within the confines of well-presented comedy (i.e., farce, parody, slapstick, etc.). Audiences instinctively understand this, so this should be reflected in the Performance adjudication. For more sophisticated artistic performances, it is the performer's responsibility to connect and engage in a clear and effective manner.

5. From the heart and believable

The entertainment value is higher for performances that are perceived by the audience to be from the heart. These performances are characterized by effective mood creation through the performers' visual involvement and vocal expressiveness. The use of natural, realistic, and appropriate body language, staging, dynamic levels and tone color can create performances that the audience will believe in and relate to. Performances filled with technicalities, or formerly accepted "barbershop" traits or mannerisms may be technically impressive but will likely not create emotionally realistic performances to modern audiences. The Performance judge determines how successful the performer is at achieving a "from the heart" and believable performance.

6. Integration with other categories

The effectiveness of any performance will be predicated on the performers' skills and abilities in all aspects of the performance—skills that are also evaluated by the Music and Singing judges. The Performance judge must recognize when the overall impact is being affected positively or negatively by an element that is also judged in another category and must make note of that element's impact from the Performance category's perspective.

B. Performance

1. Vocal expressiveness is used to define and maintain the performer's chosen approach for the song and includes the use of musical tools, elements, and descriptors, such as forward motion, attention to meter, dynamics, and style descriptors such as legato, staccato, etc.

Often one of the musical elements will predominate, depending on the song. These tools should be appropriately used in order to create a realistic and believable mood or emotion. These devices are not meant to be mandatory or visible tools that become the main functions of performing music. In an ideal performance the presence of these tools is transparent and in service of the mood creation and communication.

2. Visual expressiveness is communicated by the physical presentation of the story or determined approach of the song and may use devices in a manner similar to that of the vocal elements. The use of any props or other mechanical devices should support, rather than detract, from the performance of the song. The Performance judge evaluates the quality of the performers' visual expressiveness in terms of appropriateness, timing, precision (where appropriate), unity, naturalness, and believability as it contributes to the overall effect and entertainment value of the performance. Believability is at its greatest when mannerisms, body language, gestures, and facial features enhance the true message of the song.

C. Visual/Vocal Balance

Both the audience and the Performance judge interpret the performance through their eyes and ears simultaneously. To optimize effectiveness, the performer must integrate the vocal and visual aspects in a purposeful manner. For a given song, either aspect—vocal or visual—may predominate per the performers' intent. As a result, the judge takes into account the balance between vocal and visual elements and the resulting effectiveness of the entertainment value.

D. Comedic Performances

1. The performer may plan to include comedic moments during the performance designed to elicit a range of reactions from the audience, from gentle smiles to uproarious belly laughs. A wide variety of lyrical, visual, and musical ideas may be used to generate comedic moments.
2. A detailed review of comedic styles, concepts, and techniques, and how they might be utilized in a barbershop performance would be too lengthy to incorporate into this document. (See Position Paper X.)
3. The Performance judge will evaluate the performer's use of comedic styles, concepts, and techniques and their resulting comedic effect as part of the overall entertainment value of the performance.

E. Scoring Methodology

1. The Performance judge simultaneously experiences the performance, like an audience, and analyses it. Judges position themselves mentally and emotionally so that the two thought processes occur in an integrated manner.
 - a. The Performance judge measures the overall effect of the performance with a focus on entertainment value, and a score is determined based on the degree of entertainment value achieved. Events that affect the entertainment value, whether positive or negative, are noted for discussion with the performer at the evaluation.
 - b. The Performance judge identifies visual and vocal interferences and distractions that prevent the group from realizing its maximum effect and audience impact. Minor errors may or may not be relevant. The Performance judge holistically determines those events which, if changed, would result in a measurable improvement in the overall effect. The judge should be sensitive when attention is focused on an obviously featured technique and the underlying emotions of the song may have been given secondary consideration.
 - c. Performances that are truly integrated, entertaining, and artistic should be encouraged and should provide a more rewarding experience for the audience than those with accumulated technique or mannered/patterned characteristics.
2. Representation of the barbershop style
 - a. It is important for the Performance judge to evaluate all performances within the context of contemporary standards of the barbershop style. It is recognized, however, that barbershop is an evolving style of music within an ever-changing cultural context. Therefore, the judge uses awareness of societal and musical influences on the barbershop style as a backdrop against which to evaluate performances.
 - b. Performances that are relevant to the audience and their cultural expectations will likely be more impactful and should serve to enhance the entertainment value.
3. The Performance judge determines the score for a song or medley on a scale of 1-100 points. The lowest quality score is a 1. Forfeiture and penalties for rules violations are addressed in section I. below.
 - a. Each performance is judged on its own merits. Therefore, the Performance judge will not consider expectations related to other performances (by the same performer or anyone else). This does not preclude the positive impact of reference to performances or other events known to and appreciated by the audience, thus achieving an entertaining carryover effect.
 - b. The score represents the evaluation of the overall entertainment value achieved. There may be a substantial difference in quality between the vocal and visual components. Therefore, the Performance judge derives the score only from the overall effect, while properly evaluating the contribution of each component.
 - c. The skilled performer attempts to take the audience on a dynamic journey toward an emotionally satisfying conclusion. The Performance judge must be sure to remain aware of the ebb and flow of entertainment value and emotional impact throughout a song and arrive at an appropriate score at the conclusion of the performance.

F. Scoring Levels

1. The A level

- a. Any A-level scores (81 to 100) reflect outstanding levels of entertainment. To achieve an A score the total effect must be judged as A. The vocal and visual components may or may not both be of A quality depending on their relative importance to the overall effect.
- b. The upper range of A scores (94 to 100) is assigned to truly exceptional performances. The applicable adjectives are all superlatives: superb, exquisite, breath taking, captivating, hilarious, overwhelming, deeply moving, etc.
- c. The mid-range A score (87 to 93) is assigned to performances that exhibit unyielding excellence. The listener may be unaware of the vocal and visual techniques employed; they are caught up in the artistic effect of the total performance.
- d. At the lower end of the A range (81 to 86), the feeling of excellence is definitely present, but some minor interruptions are felt.
- e. Traits that distinguish between A and B levels of performance relate to the presence of subtlety and artistry. The A score implies an extremely high level of consistency in the delivery of entertainment value. In summary, the A score denotes excellence as opposed to competence.

2. The B level

- a. B-level scores (61 to 80) are indicative of performances that deliver competent and increasingly believable emotional or entertainment content. They will exhibit basic to very good musicianship, rapport with the audience, and performance skills.
- b. The upper range of B scores (74 to 80) indicates a substantial presence of excellence. Such performances keep the audience almost totally involved, and moved emotionally. Some instances of A-quality performance are demonstrated.
- c. In the mid-B range (67 to 73), the judge may find that most effects are appropriate and properly presented. These performances are often quite enjoyable and may be memorable, in spite of the presence of technical flaws.
- d. At the lower range of B scoring (61 to 66), nominal consistency is demonstrated but distractions may occur. The result is usually a competent but undistinguished performance.
- e. In a B performance, there is a grasp and use of barbershop techniques. In summary, the B score may denote competence and consistency in the use of performance skills or an unbalanced mix of A-level and C-level skills (vocal vs. visual).

3. The C level

- a. C-level scores (41 to 60) are given to performances that have weak to adequate entertainment value. The interest of the listener is frequently lost due to lack of musical or vocal consistency, poor execution, stage intimidation, or poor understanding of effective performance approaches.
- b. At the upper end of the C range (54 to 60), some consistency is displayed. These are acceptable performances despite distractions and interruptions.

- c. Performances in the mid-C range (47 to 53) are marginally acceptable for public performance.
- d. At the lower end of the C range (41 to 46), the limited vocal and/or visual skills being exhibited produce performances that are weak in overall effect.

4. The D level

- a. D-level scores (1 to 40) are reserved for performances lacking entertainment value or conveyance of the song's emotional potential in either the musical or visual components.
- b. The upper half of the D level is represented by performances where performance skills are severely lacking or absent but many of the notes and words are being sung.
- c. The lower half of the D level is represented by performances in which not only are performance skills lacking, but also most notes and/or words are being missed.

G. Use of the Score Sheet

1. The judging form for the Performance category is laid out in a manner intended to allow great facility in judging the performance.
2. Main working areas and tools
 - a. There is an overall grade-level scale at the top of the form, and a horizontal bar calibrated from 1 to 100 to assist the judge in arriving at the final overall score.
 - b. The qualitative scoring guides serve as a reminder of the distinguishing characteristics of the A, B, C, and D levels as described above.
 - c. The main body of the sheet is left open and unformatted, allowing the judge to adopt the judge's own preferred note-taking style and to record data for evaluation counselling. The suggested approach is to proceed down the page chronologically as the song unfolds. A description of the various performance events, lyric-line references, emotions, moods, audience impacts, and net effects become useful aids in determining the score and relating the progress of these factors throughout the course of the song.
 - d. The list of key concepts and performance elements on the left margin helps the judge focus upon vocal and visual attributes of the performance that make positive or negative contributions to the overall effect achieved.
 - e. Other spaces are provided that relate to Entrance - Intro, Attire, and Break – Acceptance - Exit. Spaces are provided to make reference to strengths and suggestions, reason for any penalty or forfeiture of score and amount thereof (if applicable), and the judge's score for the performance.
3. The final score is first written in the box on the scoring form and then copied onto the judging form in the box in the lower right corner.

Differences Between Quartet and Chorus

An ensemble larger than a quartet typically has a director. The director should support and enhance the performance and not become a distraction to the audience, unless this is intended for comedic or other purposes. The role of the director in a performance may vary from featured to virtually unnoticed, but will be judged as part of the effectiveness of the integrated whole.

H. Penalties Up To and Including Forfeiture

1. Penalties (up to and including forfeiture) by the Performance judge may be appropriate only as a result of the following:
 - a. As specified in Article 11(a) of the contest rules, songs must “be neither primarily patriotic nor primarily religious in intent...” Most anthems and hymns are examples of clear violations. Songs that merely make reference to national pride or a deity are acceptable. Judgment calls are made for songs that fall in between these extremes. (See Position Paper V)
2. The Performance judge declares forfeiture by awarding a score of zero. If some action, but not drastic action, is appropriate for a violation of Article 11(i), the judge may apply a smaller penalty. When a penalty or forfeiture of score has been applied, the judge should note the reason for such on the judging form on the line: “Penalties: _____ Reason: _____” and on the appropriate line(s) of the penalty grid on the scoring form.
3. All penalties of five or more points will be notated on the scoring slip. Any Performance judge wishing to apply a penalty of five or more points in total must first conference with the other Performance judges and the judges must agree to the level of rule violation but not discuss the actual points or the performance score.
4. Article 11(b) of the contest rules specifies: “All songs performed in contest must be arranged in the barbershop style...” Although the Music category is the category primarily responsible for adjudicating barbershop style issues, Performance judges also have a responsibility to preserve the style through particular attention to the artistic aspects of the style. These aspects are adjudicated in terms of the quality of the performance but are not subject to penalty or forfeiture.
5. Performance judges are also responsible for adjudicating Article 11 of the contest rules. (For further information, see Position Papers.)
 - b. Article 11(f) states “Gestures or visual presentation by any contestant that are deemed suggestive, vulgar or otherwise not in good taste are not acceptable and will result in a lower score. Violations of Article 11f are adjudicated in terms of the quality of the performance but are not subject to penalty or forfeiture. (See Position Paper III.)
 - c. Article 16 states “Non singing dialogue is generally not part of a contest performance. However, relevant **brief comment** with supporting visual communications are permitted, to help establish the mood and/or theme, before, in between and at the end of the performance package. Spoken words deemed to be excessive or detrimental to the performance are adjudicated in terms of the quality of the performance, but are not subject to penalty of forfeiture.” Violations of Article 16 are adjudicated in terms of the quality of the performance but are not subject to penalty or forfeiture.

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II. FEMALE IMPERSONATION

In 1993 the Contest and Judging rules underwent significant revisions, including the elimination of a specific prohibition against female impersonation. It should be noted, however, that the elimination of this prohibition in no way was intended to imply that female impersonation is now generally acceptable as a performance option. Rather, it is a matter of taste. Under the current Contest and Judging System, the matter of taste is subjective and is adjudicated in the Performance Category. Female impersonation may be either offensive or entertaining, depending on many subjective factors.

The current contest rules recognize that it may be possible for a performance utilizing female impersonation to be staged in an inoffensive and tasteful manner. Performers should be aware, however, that our society in general, and therefore many Performance judges, has become sensitive to performances that may be offensive to some or many women. The use of female impersonation, therefore, represents a heightened level of risk in terms of the scoring of such a performance.

Risks are usually taken for the purpose of generating a reward. Some enhancement to the impact of a performance is possible through the clever, tasteful use of female impersonation. On the other hand, it is possible for a severe problem to occur, whereby a poor performance could result in a low quality score (as low as 1), audience scorn, and even damage to the overall mission of promoting barbershop singing to the general public.

III. TASTE

The test for poor taste is whether, by today's standards, the lyric and/or manner of performance is likely offensive to a significant number of reasonable adults.

The Performance judge uses societal norms, versus individual biases, in determining matters of taste. Specific circumstances surrounding the timing and location of a particular performance, and the demographics of the audience, may also have an impact on its perceived taste level.

Songs whose lyrics or manner of performance are in poor taste will be adjudicated in terms of the quality of the performance, with the lowest quality score being 1 (one).

The Contest and Judging System does not intend to enforce so-called political correctness. Taken to its logical conclusion, almost any performance could be offensive in some degree to some audience member. The role of the Performance judge is to be aware of the possible negative impact of contest performances on audiences, while continuing to encourage creativity in the preparation and delivery of those performances.

If the terms “likely offensive” and/or “significant number of reasonable adults” are overstatements, but a lesser degree of poor taste still exists, the Performance judge will adjudicate holistically in terms of the quality of the performance, with the lowest quality score being 1.

Part of judicial responsibility is to assess whether poor taste may have been inadvertent. The Performance judge should bring those instances to the attention of a competitor, in the evaluation session.

IV. OBSCURE LYRICS

The first responsibility of any art form is to communicate. The use of obscure lyrics can make it difficult to carry out that responsibility and therefore may interfere with the delivery of emotional impact to the audience. This can conceivably result in a lower Performance score.

The audience should not have to work hard to clearly understand the message being communicated by a barbershop performance. Consider the following lyric lines: "The sky isn't blue for a red rosy hue is there in the air today" or "I was jealous and hurt, when your lips kissed a rose, or your eyes from my own chanced to stray." In isolation, with one of this type of line at a time the audience could probably glean the message and could be convinced by the surrounding material that their guess was accurate. But too much of this type of lyric would leave most barbershop audiences frustrated. An example of a song whose lyrics get in the way of communication is "Send in the Clowns." This song's obscure lyrics require a highly skilled performer to effectively communicate the meaning of this song to the typical audience.

The heartfelt performance is not just an attitude or emotion of a song or theme, but rather the lyrics must contribute to generating human emotions in the listener. If either the emotions or the words are unclear, obscure, or ambiguous, heartfelt delivery is affected, which will generally result in a lower-scoring performance.

Notwithstanding the above, there is nothing inherently wrong with folksy, artsy, or poetic songs. They can be magnificent, thought-provoking and emotional works of art. Many of these songs are not, however, typical of the material we have come to understand as "barbershop." The Contest & Judging System has a stated responsibility to preserve the barbershop style; therefore, contestants should choose material with lyrics they can effectively communicate on its first performance.

V. PATRIOTIC AND RELIGIOUS

PERFORMANCES A. Patriotic Performances

References to national pride or the military are generally acceptable in contest. The rule violation would come into play in a performance where the theme is primarily extoling a particular national government. Examples include performances of national anthems or similar songs (for example, O Canada, God Bless America, or I'm Proud to Be an American). Such songs shall be considered primarily patriotic, and that song's scores would be subject to a penalty up to and including forfeiture by the Performance judge.

This rule does not prohibit the use of songs of an historical national nature, or general characterization of any nation. There is a wealth of contest-worthy material that falls into the acceptable range, such as Yankee Doodle Dandy, My Old Kentucky Home, Over There, If There'd Never Been an Ireland and many more.

The rule also does not prohibit the use of satire, or other comedic political material or manner of performance.

The Performance judge, in determining the application of this rule, will assess whether a typical audience would reasonably determine a song as performed to be primarily patriotic.

B. Religious Performances

References to God, religion or prayer are acceptable as long as the performance is not primarily focused on extoling a deity. Many songs refer to elements of religion or prayer without the focus being primarily religious. These can be work or struggle songs, many rhythm, dance, show vehicles or those alluding to a "revival". Examples include Get Happy, Blow Gabriel Blow, Wind Beneath My Wings, You Raise Me up, etc.

The test of whether or not a song or performance is primarily religious is not based on religious language or whether a song is published in a hymnal. Many secular songs are often utilized because of their message of uplift and spirituality offering hope and encouragement to all people, some of which allude to positive values and the impact of a power greater than ourselves, while not meeting the guideline of being primarily focused on extoling a deity.

The Performance judge will always be guided by the principle of primary focus and the likely impact of the performance of the song in its entirety on the audience. Where there is reasonable doubt that a performance would meet the criteria of being primarily religious, benefit must go to the performer and no penalty is justified. Otherwise the Performance judge shall apply a penalty, up to and including forfeiture.

X. COMEDIC CONCEPTS AND TECHNIQUES

Barbershop audiences love to laugh, and the rush of having a huge comedic hit has driven many Barbershop performers to include comedic elements in their performances. While different things are found amusing by different people, most successful comedic barbershop performances exhibit hallmarks of good comedic concepts and technique. The Performance Judge will evaluate these, and their resulting comedic effect, as part of the overall entertainment value of the performance.

Here is a brief description of some of the more common concepts and techniques.

The Comic Premise: Comic situations arise from the juxtaposition of a ridiculous character in a normal world, or vice versa. The Comic Premise is the gap between comic reality and real-world reality. In barbershop performances, we often see a quartet with three seemingly normal characters trying to soldier on despite the antics of the fourth one, usually the goofball standing on the end. Other examples of a strong comic premise include "fish out of water" situations such as hillbillies arriving in the big city, or aliens coming to Earth to sing in a quartet contest. Barbershop choruses have earned laughs by singing about real human feelings, but playing the roles of aquarium fish, or vegetables, or plastic green army men. A strong comic premise provides the structure and theme to a skit or performance; without one, a series of jokes can seem random and empty.

Characterization: The strength of a comic premise often depends on the audience being able to easily recognize the characters and personalities being portrayed by the performers. Barbershop performances, and other forms of low comedy, often use easily recognizable Stock Characters: the Nerd; the Jock; the Yokel; and so on. Once the audience has an expectation of how a character might behave, comedy can be derived by delivering the unexpected. In a two-song performance, there is very little time to convey character traits, but suitable costuming, brief spoken words, or stereotypical gestures can often do the trick.

The Rule of Three: When presented with information, humans intuitively search for patterns; it helps us learn, remember, and understand. Comedy is derived from delivering the unexpected, so comedy writers set up their gags in three parts; three is the smallest number required to establish a pattern. The first two phrases (or looks, or gestures) are consistent with each other, which sets up an expectation for the next one. The third one takes a left turn, and that surprise creates the laugh. It's as easy as 1, 2, C!

Timing: The secret of great comedy; pace and delivery affects the success of a joke. A fast pace can improve some gags but ruin others, and the skilful use of "beats" can be a source of comedy in itself. A beat is a pause used to allow the audience to absorb and process the action, or to create tension and expectation before a punch line. Jack Benny and Victor Borge are famous for using the "extended beat", and in the barbershop world, the quartet FRED also made good use of this technique.

Setups and punch lines: These could be sung, spoken, or acted out physically. In any case, for a comedic moment to be successful, there has to be clear and clean communication, and there are several ways to accomplish this. Excellent enunciation of song lyrics, especially if they are parody lyrics that the audience has not heard before, is essential. Successful sight gags usually

feature crisp gestures and movements, ie the visual equivalent of excellent enunciation. Punch lines, whether spoken or sung, are often best constructed with the funniest word of the punch line at or near the end. Also, a contrast between setup and punch line heightens the surprise; an intensely delivered setup followed by a deadpan punch line (or vice versa) is a common device. Once again, skilful comic performers use beats, and allow brief amounts of space in between loatures; all the better to allow the audience to absorb and understand the action.