

DESCRIPTIONS OF CATEGORY OVERLAP

I. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MUSIC AND PRESENTATION	p. 1
II. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MUSIC AND SINGING	p. 6
III. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRESENTATION AND SINGING	p. 12

I. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MUSIC AND PRESENTATION

The theory of overlap among the scoring categories is that each scoring category views the same performance but from a unique perspective. Some of the performance events that are observed may be the same (or “overlapped”) but described using varying terminology because of the different perspectives at play, or at times, using similar terminology but relating it to the central role of that judge’s category. The overlap areas will not necessarily contribute equally to the score in each category.

The MUS and PRS categories are perhaps overlapped to a greater extent than any other pair of categories, due in large part to the similarities in their principal roles. The evidence for this similarity can be seen by examining the following excerpted official writings pertaining to each of these respective categories:

A. Music Category Statement

“The sensitive handling of musical elements, such as melody, harmony, and embellishments, demonstrates musicality in a performance. A strong musical performance is one in which everything provided by the composer and arranger is skillfully delivered and effectively integrated in support of the musical theme ... The Music judge evaluates how the musical elements of the song and arrangement support the theme” (from the Introduction to the MUS category description). The context is the thematically appropriate performance of the material.

B. Presentation Category Statement

“The Presentation judges evaluate how effectively a performer brings the song and arrangement to life – that is, to what degree is the audience entertained through the performer’s communication of the story/message/theme in its musical and visual setting” (from the Introduction to the PRS category description). The presentation of barbershop music uses appropriate musical and visual methods to convey the theme of the song and provide the audience with an emotionally satisfying and entertaining experience. The musical and visual delivery is from the heart, believable, and sensitive to the song and arrangement throughout (extracted from Paragraph 4 of the Definition of the Barbershop Style, assigned for adjudication to the Presentation category). The context is the entertainment value of the presentation.

Category Overlap

C. Similarities and Differences

The two paragraphs above illustrate the similar language that is used to describe these two categories: “Sensitive handling of musical elements” (MUS) vs. “delivery is sensitive to the song and arrangement” (PRS); “musical elements...support the theme” (MUS) vs. “musical...methods convey the theme” (PRS). Given that the MUS category adjudicates the musical elements AS PERFORMED, there is even greater similarity in the second comparison. Both categories are listening for a clearly defined theme and featured musical element, such as melody, harmony, rhythm, lyrics, or some combination of those elements. There is strong correlation in this area.

There are some areas where responsibilities are clearly separate. For example, MUS stands alone in its responsibility for chord and progression analysis that defines the barbershop style (Paragraph 2 of the Definition), while PRS is singularly responsible for analyzing a presentation’s visual interpretation. However, in the overlapping areas described in the previous paragraphs, the differences between the two roles of MUS and PRS judge are more subtle. Examples include the difference between the “musicality of the material as performed” (MUS), and the “effectiveness of the performance” (PRS). Judges from both categories may talk about “bringing a song to life” from their category perspective.

Great care must be taken by the judges in each category to experience the performance from their respective categories and then support that unique experience with appropriate language and terminology that clearly ties the judges’ observations to their respective category roles. If this is successfully accomplished, their observations to the contestant will appropriately reinforce one another.

If, however, care is not taken to describe common observations of performance events by tying them to the principal role of each respective category, the result may be confusion, and the contestant may infer that there is no unique perspective of each category. If that occurs, the integrity, objectives, and value of the three-category system may suffer.

D. Category Terminology

While a wide range of recommended corrections (“fixes”) may be well within the judge’s coaching ability, care should be taken during evaluations to relate the problem and possible solution to the principal role and perspective of his own category.

Some vocabulary is more commonly used in a particular category due to unique features of the category or to the judge’s central task in a specific category, for example, in MUS: “chord structure,” “progressions,” “melodic shape,” etc. and in PRS, “entertainment value,” “generation of mood,” “visual impact,” etc. (PRS). When used, these terms should always be framed in reference to the responsible category.

The larger body of musical vocabulary that relates to musical interpretation and musical effects, such as volume dynamics, tone color, word inflection, syncopation, accelerando, diminuendo, sforzando, etc., are terms used in common by every category and can be used to express multiple concepts. Their use is governed by context and by relating the relevance of those terms to the

Category Overlap

central task of each category. If these terms are used by a judge without describing the necessary tie to the unique perspective of that category, the contestant may not understand distinctions between categories. It is inadequate for a judge from either category to simply make a comment such as “You need more volume dynamics” without relating this “musical effect” or “interpretive tool” to the respective category’s central role.

For example, the MUS judge may find lack of volume dynamics to be a result of poor chord voicings that presented an obstacle at the lyrical climax. (This would be an example of the arrangement not supporting the theme.)

In the same instance as above the PRS judge may experience that the climax of the song had little emotional impact due to lack of volume change. (This would be an example of lack of emotional conveyance of a lyrical theme.)

The following are additional examples that illustrate how MUS and PRS might employ different vocabulary to question or express their respective category perspectives regarding various musical elements. These examples are not meant to represent the entire role of either category regarding the topic mentioned. They are only to demonstrate some of the differences in perception of the performance.

1. GENERAL

MUS - Effectiveness of the choices made by the contestant regarding the use of the musical elements of the song and arrangement.

PRS - Effectiveness of the choices made by the contestant to communicate the song’s story/message – that is, the extent to which the audience is entertained.

2. THEME

MUS - Were musical elements used appropriately to create an identifiable theme?

PRS - Did the execution of the chosen theme contribute to entertaining the audience?

3. RHYTHM

MUS - Is there agreement and good execution among the performers as to what the rhythm is?

PRS - Did I, as a member of the audience, experience the rhythm and feel like tapping my toes?

4. TEMPO

MUS - Does the tempo support the theme of the song by allowing the cleanest delivery of the theme – rhythm, lyric, harmony, etc.?

PRS - Does the tempo help to make the song more entertaining?

5. LYRICS

MUS - If the lyrics are the theme, are the lyrics supported by the melody, harmony, and performance of musical effects?

PRS - Am I, as a member of the audience, feeling the emotional message being delivered?

Category Overlap

6. METER

MUS - Is there a discernible underlying sense of meter? Is the meter consistent?

PRS - Is the story or entertainment value interrupted by meter errors?

7. RANGE and TESSITURA

MUS - Is this a good piece of music for these voices?

PRS - Was the entertainment value diminished by out-of-range passages?

8. CONSTRUCTION and FORM

MUS - Does the form and construction of this piece work as a musical composition?

PRS - Was entertainment value enhanced or hindered by the way the arrangement or song was constructed?

9. EMBELLISHMENTS

MUS - Were the embellishments appropriate and performed artfully and do they raise the musicality of the performance of the song?

PRS - Did the embellishments contribute to the entertainment value of the presentation?

E. Shared Elements

When any shared element influences the score of either a MUS or PRS judge, it is appropriate during the evaluation sessions to mention the favorable or unfavorable contributing impact of that element on the total score. However, if that element is the primary focus of another category, the contestant should frequently be referred to the appropriate category for “fixes.” As stated earlier, while some recommended corrections may be well within the judge’s coaching ability, care should be taken to relate the problem and possible solution to the principal role and perspective of his own category.

On the other hand, it is important to note that the shared elements are no less an integral part of each category than are its unique aspects. An effective evaluation will focus as much or as little on the shared elements as is appropriate to the performance.

“In the barbershop style?” The responsibility for adjudicating the Definition of the Barbershop Style, which is written in four distinct paragraphs (See Chapter 2 of the *Contest and Judging Handbook*), has been specifically allocated among the three scoring categories. Music judges adjudicate paragraphs 1 and 2, Singing judges adjudicate paragraph 3, and Presentation judges adjudicate paragraph 4.

“Suitable to the performer?” Each category will evaluate this element from different perspectives. MUS may view this element, among other things, with respect to the difficulty level of the arrangement or song as compared to the experience level or capabilities of the performer. PRS may view this element, among other things, with respect to its appropriateness for the performer’s physical image, name, attire, or perceived age in relation to the lyrical content.

Category Overlap

“From the heart?” This means “Performers should strive to commit themselves to contribute something to the audience in an authentic, sincere, and heartfelt manner.” This will be a primary focus of the PRS category, while ‘from the heart’ may affect the development of theme (MUS).

F. Areas of Concentration by Grade Level

The scoring and evaluation of different levels of competitors may cause both MUS and PRS judges to vary their focus considerably. As performance levels increase, some trends among performance attributes can be viewed along a few continuums.

First there is the continuum of musical “craft” skills. These are the basic skills of singers to make music. An example of overlap between MUS and PRS in this area would be how to remove un-musical choppiness in the delivery of lyrics. Second, there is the continuum of musical “artistry” skills. These are the more advanced skills exhibited by fine musicians. Certainly the scoring and evaluation of these skills will have an even larger overlap between MUS and PRS. Specific areas of overlap in this area would include natural tone-color change to support the musical theme, command of rhythmic involvement, and a natural flow in tension and release toward an emotionally satisfying conveyance of the song. Third, there is the continuum of “execution” of craft and artistry skills. This ranges anywhere from “out of control” to “complete command” of the skills. A description of the PRS/MUS overlap by scoring grade from “D” to “A” follows:

1. “D” level performances are significantly lacking in both performance and basic musicianship skills. Such performances will be characterized by lack of consistent meter, rhythmic integrity, and melodic flow problems. In the lower end of the range, it is not uncommon to find additional issues involving accurate notes and words. Although the evaluation/coaching “fixes” may be similar from both PRS and MUS judges at this level, the perspective of the PRS judge will be to remove distractions from audience enjoyment, while the MUS judge will be educating the performer on the basic elements of good music. To ensure the contestant understands the differences between the categories, this difference in perspective should be made clear to the contestant during the evaluation, since the specific areas to be addressed will be so similar.
2. “C” level performances are often characterized by inattention to, or lack of knowledge regarding, theme and theme development. At the lower end of the range, there may also be basic craft issues to address. The PRS perspective on theme and theme development will be to help the contestant discover the most entertaining aspect of the song and work to develop this to create an entertaining experience for the audience. Areas addressed will include the use of such tools as volume and volume change, tempo and tempo change, melodic flow, and key-word inflection. The MUS judge’s perspective on theme is to encourage the group to become advocates of the musical theme, and he will suggest many of these same tools mentioned above but in a skills-based approach to get the most out of the material. Since many of the same terms will be used in the evaluation to address the performance, it will be necessary for both categories to emphasize the difference in perspective (PRS – creating entertainment value; MUS – creating a higher level of musicality) to ensure the contestant understands the difference between the categories.

Category Overlap

3. “B” level performances begin to exhibit both enjoyable performance skills and more refined musicality through a closer attention to basic craft, or through natural musical skills, or both. The overlap between MUS and PRS will be in the area of developing the musical artistry necessary to create an emotional impact on the audience. For craft oriented groups, the PRS perspective will be to work with the performer to help them develop a more “heartfelt” approach to the presentation, while the MUS perspective will be oriented toward transcending basic craft into artistry. For performers whose strengths are their natural musical skills, both PRS and MUS will work to develop a more consistent underlying craft. To avoid confusion, it should be emphasized to the performer that the PRS perspective is to avoid distractions from the creation of a truly emotional experience for the audience, while the MUS perspective will be to raise what might be “good music” to the level of “artistic music.”

4. “A” level performances show strong command of both craft and musical skills. Overlap between PRS and MUS regarding the few technical areas that might be addressed will be very similar and difficult to distinguish even though the relative perspectives remain entertainment vs. musicality. Both category evaluations will be on a very high plane but may utilize significantly different approaches. MUS may address how the music can be raised to a transcendental plane to achieve the potential that exists within the song. PRS may discuss how the audience’s opinion of the character and image of the group may influence the approach toward the song and how to take advantage of the rapport that the performer has developed with the audience.

G. Recommendations and Summary

The MUS and PRS categories are perhaps overlapped to a greater extent than any other pair of categories. The MUS category’s charge to adjudicate the “sensitive handling of musical elements” is very similar to the PRS category’s charge to ensure the “delivery is sensitive to the song and arrangement.” Further, the MUS category description’s language regarding the need to ensure the “musical elements...support the theme” is very similar to the PRS category description’s language regarding ensuring the “musical...methods convey the theme.”

Because of the extensiveness of the overlap and subtle distinctions between MUS and PRS, it is recommended that specific training at Category School be designed to identify appropriate vocabulary and reinforce the need to relate observations and recommendations in terms portraying the primary role of each category. That is, for MUS, tie comments to the material being performed, and for PRS, link comments to the entertainment value of the presentation.

II. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MUSIC AND SINGING

One elegant feature of our judging system is the considerable overlap among the categories. In the part III of The Judging System in this handbook, we read the following:

Each of the three categories --Music, Presentation, and Singing --should be a particular orientation or perspective from which a judge views the total performance, rather than a blinder that restricts his focus to a certain domain. To some extent, accordingly, all judges

Category Overlap

should be judging the total performance and, to some extent, certain elements of a barbershop performance will be evaluated by judges in two, or even all three, categories.

Music and Singing are both vitally concerned with the barbershop sound. The Singing Category Description puts it thusly:

The 'ring' of a barbershop chord will always be the hallmark of the style. Any listener to a barbershop performance expects to be thrilled by the sound of a ringing climax, or awed by the purity and beauty of a soft and elegant expression of a song.

Compare that to this passage from the Music Category Description:

The primary hallmark of the barbershop style is its consonant harmony. Thus, the quality of any barbershop performance depends largely on the presence, accurate execution, and artistic delivery of the consonant harmony traditionally identified with the barbershop style.

The simplest musical definition of consonance is lack of dissonance. In terms of the Music category, though, we mean essentially, are we hearing that great characteristic barbershop sound? Thus, there is great emphasis placed in both categories on ringing chords in artistic fashion.

Interestingly, it would seem that all vocal sounds that go into determining the Singing score are also taken into account in some fashion by Music. It may well be, however, that since both categories judge the entire performance from their own vantage point, everything audible that affects Music relative to performance also has some effect on the Singing judge.

Of course, there are also differences between the two categories. Music has primary responsibilities regarding style issues. Theme will capture more of the Music judge's attention too, though it certainly bears on the artistry that Singing takes into account, especially at the higher levels. Singing will focus closely on whether the chords are ringing while Music pays attention also to the structures that allow chords to ring to a given degree.

Music concerns itself greatly with the structure of the song/arrangement and how musically the performer brings that material to life. Singing deals much more with the vocal quality of each individual singer and how the consistency of proper technique is carried throughout all voices. A sound in good vocal quality will be freely produced, resonant and well articulated, and will have depth, color, definition, and a forward focus.

Despite the fact that both categories place great emphasis on the barbershop sound, they do not always look at this area in the same way. Singing is more concerned with how the tone is produced in the context of vocal freedom, quality, and lock and ring while Music focuses more on the tone in the context of theme, delivery and overall musicality.

Music is more concerned with unity in the sense of execution, which may be roughly defined as each singer's having the same idea of what is to be done and then doing it effectively as an ensemble. Synchronization, precision, volume relationships, blending of voices, variations in dynamics, phrasing, intonation, vocal ranges, and other factors interweave in this important area, affecting the vital touchstones of theme, delivery, and consonance. If Singing judges hear a unit sound that has full, matched resonance and intonation, all sounds being freely produced,

Category Overlap

matched word sounds and the like, other execution problems will not disturb them as much as they do Music.

On the other hand, Singing is more focused than Music on unity in the sense of blend via a similar approach to vocal production with good quality, though that area is certainly important to Music as well. The latter is not quite as distracted by blend shortcomings that result in musical "noise."

A. Category Terminology

While a wide range of recommended corrections ("fixes") may be well within the judge's coaching ability, care should be taken during evaluations to relate the problem and possible solution to the principal role and perspective of his own category.

1. Music adjudicates how musically, artistically, and stylistically the performer brings the song/arrangement to life. Singing adjudicates the degree to which the performer achieves artistic singing in the barbershop style. Thus, some terminology will be unique to each category, and some will be shared.
2. Terms more likely to be used by the Music judge include chord progressions, homophony, consonance, embellishments, theme, and construction. Singing is more apt to use such terms as vocal quality, well supported, freely produced, formants, and articulation.
3. Since both categories are concerned with locking and ringing chords artistically, they use much of the same vocabulary; for example, intonation, resonance, unity, synchronization, sound flow, expansion, volume relationships blend, tone color and artistry. Because Music and Singing look for musical singing and correct singing, respectively, these terms are used in essentially the same fashion by each.
4. Singing deals more with terms involving the intricacies and specifics of vocal production per se while Music takes a more general approach to a musical barbershop sound. Judges must take care to use terms, and to provide assistance in evaluation sessions, in ways that are consistent with their category's focus.
5. Here are some examples of how each category might relate to a given area that concerns them. These examples are designed to illuminate possible differences in perspective, not to minimize legitimate overlap. In our evaluation sessions the most important issue is to establish category perspective up front and then to make certain that comments made are within that framework. And, indeed, within this framework, a tremendous percentage of the performance is "in bounds" for both categories.

a. TONE COLOR

MUS - Did it effectively support the song's theme, either throughout or in a given phrase?

SNG - Was it freely produced, in good quality and performed as a unit?

Category Overlap

b. RESONANCE

MUS - Were we hearing a consonant barbershop sound? If not, was the root cause in the material, in the execution, or a perceived defect in the musical skill set of the group?

SNG - Was the sound supported, tension-free, open, tall, and balanced by proper forward placement?

c. UNITY

MUS - How effective was the execution?

SNG - Did the voices blend well with good quality? Were the word sounds matched and performed together, and how did they affect expansion and sound flow?

d. DICTION

MUS - Did the delivery of the word sounds show that the group understood the musical theme of the song?

SNG - Was there clarity, accuracy, ease, uniformity, and expressiveness?

e. EXPANSION

MUS - Did we hear a musical, stylistic barbershop sound which supported the musical theme?

SNG - Did the group use proper technique to produce a quality sound that reinforced consonant overtones and produced combination tones? Was there sufficient resonance in the sound?

B. Shared Elements

When any shared element influences the score of either a MUS or SNG judge, it is appropriate during the evaluation sessions to mention the favorable or unfavorable contributing impact of that element on the total score. However, if that element is the primary focus of another category, the contestant should frequently be referred to the appropriate category for “fixes.” As stated earlier, while some recommended corrections may be well within the judge’s coaching ability, care should be taken to relate the problem and possible solution to the principal role and perspective of his own category.

On the other hand, it is important to note that the shared elements are no less an integral part of each category than are its unique aspects. An effective evaluation will focus as much or as little on the shared elements as is appropriate to the performance.

1. In the barbershop style? – The responsibility for adjudicating the Definition of the Barbershop Style, which is written in four distinct paragraphs (Chapter 2 of this handbook), has been specifically allocated among the three scoring categories. MUS judges adjudicate paragraphs 1 and 2, SNG judges adjudicate paragraph 3, and PRS judges adjudicate paragraph 4.

2. Ringing, in-tune sound? – Naturally SNG will be more heavily influenced by this area, as this is the core of the category. The MUS score will also depend significantly on theme and

Category Overlap

delivery. On the other hand, this aspect has much to do with a consonant barbershop sound, the hallmark of the style, so it is quite important to MUS.

3. In good quality? – Again, this is one of the SNG judges' main elements, so they are more concerned with this area, though MUS is affected in the core areas of consonance and theme.

4. Suitable to performer? – MUS will look at such matters as level of difficulty, vocal ranges, and the performers' personalities, ages and general ability to delivery the theme artistically. SNG will be more concerned with vocal abilities/capabilities and tessitura matters.

5. From the heart? – Though SNG is certainly concerned with artistry, this area impacts MUS more profoundly. If the singers are simply going through planned motions and not singing from the heart, it is quite difficult for them to render the theme of the song in musical fashion and to demonstrate their understanding through artistic delivery. SNG will be more focused on making the performers' vocal techniques less noticeable and more natural, so that they do not interfere with the perception of heart, and on giving them new techniques to enhance that perception.

C. Areas of Concentration by Grade Level

1. "A" Performances – In both categories, an overall perception of artistry that transcends technique is evident. Indeed, artistry comes into play more with the Singing category at this level than any other. MUS, on the other hand, is more focused on musical artistry, or the lack of it, at all levels. Since the barbershop sound is the most defining feature of our style, we count on the Singing category to make certain that the highest scores are given to the groups that lock and ring chords the best and most artistically. Still, the emotional aspects of an excellent performance rightly have some positive effect on the Singing judge. However, SNG has less leeway to be "blown away" by these aspects and thus is more analytical and critical at this level. In the A level, the Music judge sometimes finds that a group with low- or mid-A consonance can attain mid- or high-A musicality by virtue of outstanding theme and delivery. Conversely, a group that is ringing virtually every chord, but in mechanical fashion, will not achieve an excellent score.

2. "B" Performances – Groups performing at this level frequently demonstrate a good mastery of their art and craft. Though there will be plenty of overlap, this scoring range tends to require more than the others that each judge stick to his or her own category matters. Regarding tone color, for example, a Music judge might say, "This tender lyric message could be enhanced by a warmer tone color to deliver the theme more effectively. Try singing this warmer." In the evaluation session MUS should be free to offer some help in this area, though a deeper physical problem manifested by one or more singers ought to be referred to the Singing judge. The Singing judge will be more concerned with whether the tone color was produced well and done with correct vocal production. The Singing judge also can offer vocal techniques that would enhance and improve the group's musical plan.

3. "C" Performances – This may be the area where it is most tempting to give an inappropriately generic or broad evaluation. There is usually plenty of crossover available.

Category Overlap

The Singing judges will have plenty to do at this level, as these performances can span the gamut of their category, and will experience less temptation to stray than will the Music judges. MUS will have a wide field to choose from in offering suggestions to the group -- after all, every sound the ensemble makes bears on its musicality -- and overlap with SNG will be great. MUS must take care to focus on musical artistry, theme, and delivery, leaving specific SNG fixes primarily to those whose job they are.

4. "D" Performances – Again, SNG will probably have no difficulty finding lots in its own bailiwick to talk about, most likely the very basics of good vocal production and intonation. At this level, though, it is proper for MUS to spend considerable time on consonance, competent singing, and probably notes and words. After all, a group cannot get an effective theme established without good vocal tools. MUS needs to leave the nitty-gritty matters of vocal production, exercises, and such to SNG.

D. Recommendations and Summary

In evaluation sessions, MUS should de-emphasize recommendations on specific vocal-production techniques best left to SNG. Also, though consonance is vitally important, MUS must give adequate weight to theme and delivery.

It is confusing to our competitors when the two categories score a given performance differently and the Music judge(s) states that his or her (usually lower) score is heavily based on consonance. One explanation for this stems from the fact that SNG is more concerned with proper vocal production and technique. When fine vocal technique and production are present but other aspects of making a good barbershop sound (balance, intonation, synchronization and the like – all still important to Singing, of course) lag behind, MUS can be expected to view consonance in a less positive light than does SNG.

Secondly, since purely vocal matters constitute a smaller proportion of the Music category, MUS's view of consonance is more intertwined with other aspects of the performance (theme, delivery, and so on) than is the case with SNG. Thus, it can be said that MUS looks at consonance as something "in service of" other aspects of musicality. When a group sings with inconsistent intonation, then, MUS would be expected to be bothered more than SNG in light of the deleterious effects on theme and artistry. We heartily recommend cross-category training in this entire area.

Two aspects of consonance as judged by MUS are how the group is ringing what is written in the arrangement and what the potential is for these chords to ring. The latter is affected by whether there is a predominance of barbershop sevenths and major triads or, conversely, a goodly number of less ringable chords, such as minor triads, minor sevenths, and dissonances. Of course, chord voicing has a significant effect as well.

Tessitura and volume relationships are additional elements of overlap. Thus, we need to better educate our performers in choosing material that keeps each voice in its most effective range, as well as in balancing chords more effectively. SNG can be expected to be especially sensitive to

Category Overlap

whether voices are outside of their effective range while MUS can raise awareness regarding any structural matters – for example, chord voicing and voice leading – that cause problems.

Finally, we must make certain that each category's focus is clear to judge and competitor alike, and is maintained in both scoring and evaluation sessions. Establishing an appropriate context for all commentary, as MUS now does with the "nutshell," is critical. MUS must be certain that comments pertain to musicality, song elements, and stylistic acceptability and SNG must relate comments to producing the barbershop sound artistically. Considerable overlap among the categories is clearly beneficial, but blurring of category perspective can lead only to confusion.

III. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRESENTATION AND SINGING

The theory of overlap among the scoring categories is that each scoring category views the same performance but from a unique perspective. Some of the performance events that are observed may be the same (or “overlapped”) but described using varying terminology because of the different perspectives at play, or at times, using similar terminology but relating it to the central role of that judge’s category. The overlap areas will not necessarily contribute equally to the score in each category. The purpose of this paper is to state some principles that should be used by Singing and Presentation judges in dealing with issues where this overlap exists.

In general, the Singing judge evaluates the technical and qualitative aspects of the performer’s sound and vocal production while the Presentation judge evaluates the aspects of the performance that communicate the message of the song and generate emotional impact. Certainly, technical aspects of singing, such as intonation, synchronization, vocal production, and artistry, have a great impact on the generation of emotional impact. Just as certainly, techniques used by a performer to communicate a message, such as volume and tempo planning, vocal coloration, and staging and choreography, have a great impact on the perceived sound. The Presentation judge must remember to approach the scoring and evaluation of the technical singing aspects in terms of the effect they produce in generating emotional impact. Likewise, the Singing judge must remember to approach the scoring and evaluation of the presentation aspects of the performance in terms of how they impact the vocal production and sound of the performer. We have the potential to cause confusion in the contestants when a Presentation judge tries to offer fixes to the vocal production or vocal skill aspects of the performance or when a Singing judge tries to change the performance plan.

A. Shared Elements

When any shared element influences the score of either a Singing or Presentation judge, it is appropriate during the evaluation session to mention the favorable or unfavorable contributing impact of that element on the total score. However, if that element is the primary focus of another category, the contestant should frequently be referred to the appropriate category for “fixes.” While some recommended corrections may be well within the judge’s coaching ability, care should be taken to relate the problem and possible solution to the principal role and perspective of his own category.

Category Overlap

On the other hand, it is important to note that the shared elements are no less an integral part of each category than are its unique aspects. An effective evaluation will focus as much or as little on the shared elements as is appropriate to the performance.

“Ringing, in-tune sound” and “In good quality” are obviously primary concerns of the Singing category. These factors will have greater weight in the scoring by the Singing judge than by the Presentation judge. The technical performance of these factors and ways to correct any perceived problems should be addressed solely by the Singing judge in the evaluation session. The Presentation judge can note the influence of these factors on the effect of the performance but should not attempt to offer corrections to technical issues around problems in these areas.

While the Presentation judge might mention, for instance, a tuning problem in a featured chord, a segment of a song, or general intonation problems, he should not attempt to address what he thought the tuning issue was (“the baritone was flat on those two notes”). He might mention a perception of a mismatch between parts, or breath support problems, but if he does, he should relate it to the impact on the effect generated during the performance. He should never attempt to fix vocal production issues, even if qualified, as this will create confusion with the contestants.

The Singing judge might mention Presentation issues as they impact these factors. For instance, if the group does physical antics or uses a singing posture that he believes impacts the quality, tuning, etc., he certainly should bring that up in his evaluation. However, he should be careful to only relate it to the impact on the above and should not attempt to suggest changes to staging, choreography, etc., to avoid creating confusion. The contestant should get feedback from the Presentation judge on the impact of the staging or choreography on the effect produced and from the Singing judge on how it affected the SNG score, and the contestant then has to determine the best compromise between the two.

Other areas of vocal production, such as the placement of the tone (nasal, throat singing, etc.) and the vocal timbre and coloration used, certainly affect both categories. Again, the Presentation judge should be only scoring and commenting on these areas as they relate to the effect produced on the impact of the performance and should not evaluate nor comment upon whether he feels they are good or bad vocal techniques. Likewise, the Singing judge should only comment on these areas as related to the technical requirements of his category and how to use better vocal techniques to improve and enhance the performers plan. The Singing judge should address anything that he perceives to be incorrect vocal technique but should do so when it pertains to proper sound production and techniques to enhance the impact of the vocal performance.

“From the heart” is obviously the primary concern of the Presentation judge. The impact, or lack thereof, of the vocal and visual presentation plan and how to change or improve it to maximize the impact of the performance should be addressed primarily by the Presentation judge in the evaluation session. While the Singing judge might mention his perception of the presence or absence of “from the heart” singing in his evaluation and the impact this had on his score, he should only attempt to improve vocal techniques utilized in the presentation plan for the contestant and should not attempt to change the visual aspects of the plan.

Category Overlap

If the Singing judge is going to address suitability to the performer, this should be for technical vocal skill, capability or tessitura reasons, and not because he feels that the performer cannot suitably present the emotional content of the song effectively. Likewise, if the Presentation judge is going to address suitability to the performer, this should be from the perspective of a lack of performance skill or ability to effectively communicate the message of the song in all its fullness and not because of a perceived lack of vocal production skill.

B. Areas of Concentration by Grade Level

The focus of the scoring and evaluation of performances shifts dramatically according to the level of the performance. While each judge must obviously use his or her own experience to determine the right level of commentary for a given performer, below are some general guidelines, by scoring band, to use in helping to address those areas of potential overlap.

1. “D” performances: When evaluating a D performance, it is perfectly appropriate for a Presentation judge to spend most of his time talking about singing quality issues, while putting a slant on this around impact on communication of a message and mood creation. It is very important that the Presentation judge, when addressing singing issues, relate them in terms of the PRS category. This will reinforce the points that will doubtless also be made by the Singing judge but will keep the contestant from thinking that this was another SNG evaluation. For instance, if tuning is a major issue, the Presentation judge should certainly mention this in the evaluation but should make sure to address the fact that the reason he is mentioning it is that out-of-tune singing distracts the audience from getting into and enjoying the message of the song. The Singing judge will spend all of his time on category-specific comments, and not talk about much else, unless he saw obvious PRS issues (staging, for example) that impacted the ability to sing. In D-level evaluations, the focus is on the technical issues and not as much on the particular songs performed, except to reinforce the points made.

2. “C” performances: The C-level performance provides lots of opportunity for specific category-related discussion, but there are increased instances where crossover can occur as they relate to intonation, quality, etc., for the Presentation judge, and physical presence and delivery (energy, focus, gestures, etc.) for the Singing judge. For a C performance, it's perfectly appropriate for a Presentation judge to talk to the group about singing quality, tuning issues, etc. and how those impact all three categories. However, the Presentation judge should be using category-specific language and examples to make his points. For example, if the Presentation judge is going to talk about the flow of sound, legato singing technique, or energizing ends of phrases, he should make sure to tell the contestant how this impacts the flow of the emotion of the song. The Singing judge will talk mostly about technical issues from his category but might bring in more points around flow of the sound, physical energy support of the sound that might also impact the visual sell, etc. Again, the primary focus is more on the technical points to be made than the songs performed, other than to back up the points made with specific examples from the songs. Each judge must be careful to only talk to the contestant about the issues that are in his own category and not attempt to “fix” things that are outside his category description, even if he has the ability to do so.

Category Overlap

3. “B” performances: For B-level performances the focus for both categories becomes quality and competency vs. artistry issues. There will be many performance issues that impact both the PRS and SNG category in these performances. Each judge should spend the great majority of his time discussing his own category issues unless there is an obvious cross-category issue, like a group standing stiff with no expression mentioned by a Singing judge or a group singing occasionally out of tune or with some technical flaw (non-legato, etc.) that affects the Presentation judge. The focus of these evaluations is much more on the specific performance while still making general points to carry over to all songs.

There will be many opportunities for overlap in the evaluation sessions for ‘B’ performances, and it is vital that each judge keep his comments all related to his category’s perspective and that he not attempt to “fix” things that do not fall under his category description.

4. “A” performances: For A performances the focus of the evaluation changes to the identification of the few issues that were not at the quality level of the rest of the performance and to helping the group increase the artistry level of the performance. Presentation judges should feel free to comment on how the quality of the singing performance enhanced the PRS scoring and to point out any specific places where the vocal quality particularly enhanced or detracted. The Singing judge should feel free to point out any places where PRS aspects, such as particularly heartfelt singing, vocal coloration, and expression, perhaps even particularly supportive staging/visual enhancement, contributed to the overall SNG score. The focus of these evaluations is almost exclusively on details of the particular song performances in an effort to compliment the gems and correct the nits of the performances.

C. Recommendations and Summary

While it is important to acknowledge that natural overlap exists between performance items addressed by the SNG and PRS categories, it is equally important to remember that items that potentially overlap must always be addressed by each judge from the perspective of how they affect his own category. Each judge must be able to articulate how each item discussed is addressed in his category description and how it impacted his score. While other recommended corrections may be well within the judge’s coaching ability, care should be taken to relate the problem and possible solution to the principal role and perspective of his own category.

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