

# PRESENTATION CATEGORY

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The goal of any art form is communication. In a barbershop performance “Presentation” is communication via the transformation of a barbershop song into an entertaining experience for an audience. The words, notes, and other symbols on the printed page are the composer's and arranger's gifts to the performer. The presentation of the song is the performer's gift to the audience, whose experiences, memories, and imagination translate that gift into an emotional experience.

The performer’s goal, then, is to create a high level of entertainment through the performance of a barbershop song. The means to that end are as varied as the creative skills and abilities of the performer will allow.

The Presentation judge evaluates how effectively a performer brings the song and arrangement to life -- that is, to what degree the audience is entertained by the performer’s communication of an emotional experience in its musical and visual setting. Each vocal and visual event that occurs in the presentation will be evaluated for its contribution to the overall effect of the performance. The Presentation judge will principally evaluate the interaction of the vocal and visual aspects as they work together to create the image of the song.

In short, the Presentation judge evaluates everything about the performance that contributes to or detracts from the entertainment of the audience and determines a single score to reflect the quality and appropriateness of that overall effect.

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### II. PRESENTATION ELEMENTS

#### A. Characteristics of the Barbershop Presentation

##### 1. Entertainment Value

a. The Presentation judge is principally responsible for evaluating the entertainment value in a barbershop performance. Entertainment can be defined as a desired emotional experience on the part of the audience. This can appear in many forms, from the simplest and gentlest of feelings, such as pathos, tenderness, or cuteness, to the most dramatic feelings, such as deep sorrow, exhilaration, or hilarity. Regarding the nature of barbershop entertainment, it is important to note that barbershop is a *musical* art form, and therefore the type of entertainment with which we are concerned must principally be 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 presentation, the barbershop style of music remains a key feature of the performance.

b. Creativity is an important ingredient in designing an entertaining presentation. While wide latitude is afforded barbershop performers in terms of creativity, it is also desirable for barbershop presentations to maintain contemporary standards of good taste.

c. The full scoring potential of any song is realized by excellence in performance through quality singing and quality visual portrayals appropriate to the presentation. The strength of emotional content of a song is not the main determinant of a score. A song with simple, light-hearted emotions presented within a totally believable vocal and visual setting can score at the top of the scale, as can a song with great emotional content. The important performance concept to be maintained is faithfulness to the true emotions of the song.

##### 2. Audience Rapport

a. The degree to which the audience will allow themselves to be entertained is somewhat dependent upon the degree to which the audience is receptive to the performer and the performance. Part of the performer's responsibility is to create this receptivity, or rapport, with the audience. Simply put, the performer must get the audience to "like" them.

b. Audience rapport may be affected by past events of which the audience is aware, such as a finals set built upon an idea developed in an earlier round. The Presentation judge scores only the current performance but may recognize that the effectiveness of certain elements of the presentation are built upon this awareness.

c. There is significant freedom for the performer to explore an individualistic style of the performing unit, provided this individualistic style does not override the bounds of good taste. Every performer is gifted with individuality. At the same time, our intent is that individuals combine into performing groups within the barbershop musical style. Within these bounds, great freedom is permitted for the individual, for the performing group, and for 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

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song in the barbershop style. Each performing group must find its own style and sell that style to the audience.

### 3. Artistry and Expressiveness

a. 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 Presentation judge's sense of the degree to which the audience is being entertained.

b. Believability is one of the strongest and most important tools in creating a performance's entertainment value. The believability of the delivery is what facilitates the emotional "buy in" of the audience, which enhances the entertainment value. In certain types of performance, however (notably some forms of comedy and fantasy), believability must be suspended for maximum effectiveness. For example, many forms of comedy would be offensive to an audience unless it is fully understood that what is being presented is unreal and is not to be taken at face value. Since much of comedy comes at the expense of the dignity and perhaps even the physical well-being of another, the suspension of believability may at times be required to ensure the audience is not made to feel uncomfortable.

c. Although barbershop vocal and visual interpretations allow considerable artistic freedom, they are subject to the condition that they should be clear enough to be understood by the listener/viewer in one performance. Presentations where the meaning is unclear, by virtue of obscure lyrics, or abstruse visual or interpretive planning, are less effective. (See Position Papers, Chapter 9 of the *Contest and Judging Handbook*.)

### 4. Vocal/Visual Agreement

a. In an internally consistent performance, there should be a strong sense of agreement between the vocal and visual elements, appropriately balanced to the song's purpose, message, theme and style. The appropriate and congruent usage of each dimension will lead to a more believable and effective performance.

b. Artificial distortion of the appropriate balance between vocal and visual aspects may confuse the audience and decrease the effectiveness of the presentation, except when incongruence is used for comedic purposes. For example, a tender love song may not tolerate a dancing act. A visual/slapstick element may not support extensive vocal styling unless it supports a comedic presentation.

### 5. From the Heart/Believability

a. Performances that are delivered "from the heart" are perceived by the audience to be more believable and are more entertaining, because the audience is moved to emotionally "buy in" to what the performer is communicating to them. These performances are characterized by effective mood creation through the performers' sincere and genuine visual involvement and vocal expressiveness. The ebb and flow of moods throughout a

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song will normally result in a build to a climax, which should be supported both vocally and visually to result in an emotionally satisfying experience for the audience.

b. Artificial musical or visual devices, such as crescendos ranging from pianissimo to fortissimo in the space of one or two notes or overly obvious staged motions, could be considered contrived and detract from the believability of the performance.

c. Songs or arrangements that are especially suitable to the performer can add to the believability of the presentation, whereas unsuitable material may distract from the presentation's effectiveness.

### **6. Integration with Other Categories**

The effectiveness of any presentation will be affected by the performers' skills and abilities in all aspects of barbershop performance, many of which are also evaluated by the Music and Singing Categories. The Presentation judge must recognize when the performance impact is being affected positively or negatively by an element primarily judged in another category and must make note of that element's impact from the Presentation Category perspective.

### **B. Themes of Song Presentations**

In any given performance a performer can emphasize many different thematic aspects to effectively communicate a message to an audience. The performer might choose to emphasize the lyrical content of a song. The performer might choose to emphasize a musical element, such as a tempo or rhythm treatment, the rich texture of chords or chord progressions, or the beauty of a well-crafted or memorable melody. The performer may choose to feature the skills and abilities of the performer(s) themselves, or the complexity of an arrangement, or the portrayal and development of characters, or the creation of a visual setting and interpretation of a song. Any of these themes, and many more, alone or in combination, can be developed by a performer to create a desired effect upon an audience. The Presentation judge must be open to identifying and experiencing the theme of the performance as presented and analyzing its impact and effect on the audience.

### **C. Presentation Techniques**

1. The ability to effectively communicate the emotional content of a song requires the intelligent selection of suitable songs for the performer and the audience as well as the use of good vocal expression and visual staging. The vocal and visual interpretations should be in proper balance to effectively portray the emotions of the song. The performer must communicate his understanding of the song, from his point of view, so that each audience member can experience the song from his or her individual perspective. The ability to effectively communicate the emotional content of a song is the talent of an artist.

2. Emotional development in music usually proceeds from one level to another, typically in the direction of stronger and stronger feelings. There is usually a fair degree of ebb and flow of emotional level before reaching the peak, somewhere at or near the end of the song. Performers may employ a vast array of vocal and visual techniques to support these emotional peaks, but care must be taken not to "overload" the presentation. If too much

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intensity appears before the actual climax occurs, it can desensitize the audience and thus take away much of the impact of the climax. Likewise, a failure to recognize and properly treat the climax will leave the performance without an objective and the audience without a means to resolve the emotions contained within the song. In short, failure to utilize the tools of the expression is just as bad as an excess of artificial devices.

3. Vocal expressiveness is used to define and maintain the performer's chosen theme for the song and includes the use of musical tools, elements and descriptors, such as forward motion (tempo, pace, flow, rhythm and their variations), attention to meter, dynamics (volume, fullness, vitality, tone color, inflection, rhythmic emphasis), and style descriptors such as legato, staccato, marcato, and rubato. Often, one of the musical elements will predominate, depending on the theme of the song. 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 barely apparent but their effect is profound. Additional factors that can either enhance or detract from vocal expressiveness are the groups' ability to sing with synchronization and to lock and ring chords. The Presentation judge evaluates the quality of the performer's vocal expression as it relates to its overall effect on the presentation.

4. Visual expressiveness is communicated by the physical presentation of the story or theme of the song and may use devices in a manner similar to that of the vocal elements. For this expressiveness to be believable and natural, the audience must believe the emotions that the performers are conveying are in the context of the song's story line or theme. The believability can be created, supported, and enhanced through appropriate attire and staging, together with a continuity of understandable facial expressions, visual focal points, body energy and movements and gestures that are performed from the heart. The use of any props or other mechanical devices should support, rather than detract, from the presentation of the song. The Presentation judge evaluates the quality of the performer's visual expressiveness in terms of appropriateness, timing, precision (where appropriate), unity, naturalness, and believability as it contributes to the overall effect of the presentation. The audience should also be able to perceive that there is an agreement of purpose among each member of the performing group. This agreement may be communicated in part through the internal rapport and interaction within the group.

5. During a performance, the audience and the Presentation judge interpret the presentation through their eyes and ears simultaneously. To optimize the effectiveness of the presentation, the performers must unify the vocal and visual aspects to create an integrated performance. For a given song, either aspect of the presentation - vocal or visual - may predominate. As a result, the judge takes into account the appropriate balance between vocal and visual elements. An excess or deficiency of either element may reduce the effectiveness of the overall presentation.

6. The performer's ease and comfort on stage, including the artistic integration of entrances, exits, and taking pitches, as well as the group's look, costuming, make-up, confidence, poise, joy of performing, sincerity, and humility are all elements that can act to build rapport with the audience and increase the effectiveness of the presentation. Also, the ability of the

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performer to “read the audience” in terms of its expectations and knowledge of the barbershop art form, and to play to that audience, are characteristics of an artistic performer.

7. Comedic presentations require the recognition of what is funny in terms of overall concept, as well as the preparation of the audience for the delivery of that humor through the creation of believable (or sometimes unbelievable) characters or another method. Comedic presentations, like non-comedy, may span a wide range of emotions: from subtle humor intended only to gently tickle the audiences’ funny bone to wildly hilarious acts intended to produce nonstop belly laughs. The timing of actions and reactions and visual or vocal punch lines used to accomplish the comedic effects are judged by the Presentation judge as to how they contribute to the overall effectiveness of the comedic presentation.

### **III. SCORING**

#### **A. Scoring Methodology**

1. The scoring methodology is uncomplicated: those performances that convey the most entertainment value with the highest degree of artistry should receive the highest rewards. The use of the defined Scoring Levels is a guide for the assignment of scores. The judge takes clinical notes during the performance to provide helpful information for the evaluation sessions with the contestants.

a. The Presentation judge must simultaneously experience the performance and analyze it. Through training and experience, the judge learns to position himself mentally and emotionally so that the two thought processes occur in parallel. The judge virtually functions as two persons: one, the surrogate audience, and the other, the analyst.

b. The Presentation judge measures the overall emotional effect of the performance with a focus on entertainment value, and a score is awarded based on the degree of entertainment value achieved. Events that affect the entertainment value, either positively or negatively, are noted for communication with the performer at the evaluation.

c. The Presentation judge identifies visual and vocal interferences and distractions that might prevent the group from realizing its maximum potential. Since the performance is looked at from an overall perspective, performance errors must be placed in their proper perspective. Minor performance errors may or may not be relevant. The Presentation judge determines, from an overall perspective, those performance events that, if changed, would result in a measurable improvement in the overall effect of the performance.

d. When the attention of the listener is drawn to a technique in use, there may arise a question of believability within the presentation. The judge evaluates the overall emotional effect of the performance with an ear and eye toward appropriateness. The judge will be aware that when his attention is focused on an obviously featured technique, the true emotions of the song presentation may have been given secondary consideration

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### 2. Balancing the visual and vocal components

The concept of the Presentation Category includes an appropriate balance of the contribution of all dimensions of the musical performance. That contribution may vary from largely vocally-oriented to largely visually-oriented with all variations in between.

### 3. Rewarding performances that are representative of the barbershop style

a. It is important for the Presentation 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 his awareness of societal and musical influences on the barbershop style as a backdrop against which to evaluate performances.

b. Performances that strongly appeal to the audience's sense of barbershop entertainment are to be rewarded. Performances that are less entertaining due to a weak connection with the audience's sense of barbershop entertainment, such as the use of excessive theatrics and contrived musical devices are not in keeping with the style and are assigned lower scores. For example, crescendos ranging from pianissimo to fortissimo in the space of one or two notes or beats could appear to be artificially contrived. Similarly, extremes of vocal dramatics or staged motions could be considered unnecessarily flamboyant and outside stylistic limits.

### 4. The Presentation judge awards his score for a song or medley on a scale of 1-100 points. The quality of the total emotional effect upon the audience and the entertainment value of the performance are weighed against a concept of "total perfection" and a point value is awarded.

a. Each performance is judged on its own merits. The Presentation judge will consider neither personal preferences and expectations nor comparisons with other performances (by the same performer or anyone else) when evaluating a performance.

b. The score represents the evaluation of the overall effect achieved. There may be a substantial difference in quality between the vocal and visual components. Therefore, the Presentation judge derives the score only from the overall effect, while properly evaluating the contribution of each component.

c. Since the Presentation judge is evaluating the overall effect of a performance, which may be most deeply understood near the climax of the song, the judge may not be able to fairly assess the total impact level early in the performance. It must be recognized that the skilled performer attempts to take the audience on a dynamic journey toward an emotionally satisfying conclusion. While the Presentation judge will make note of events and degrees of impact along the way, he must be sure to remain open to the ebb and flow of entertainment value and emotional impact throughout a song and award an appropriate score at the conclusion of the performance that reflects the impact of the entire performance.

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### B. Scoring Levels

#### 1. The A Level

- a. A-level scores (81 to 100) reflect outstanding levels of entertainment resulting in totally appropriate and believable emotional effects. Emotions are presented believably, and the audience has totally bought into the emotional impact of the performance. There are no significant traces of artificial or unnecessary embellishments.
- b. To achieve an A score, only 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.
- c. The upper range of A scores is assigned to very exceptional achievements. There are no discernible flaws and the applicable adjectives are all superlatives: superb, exquisite, breathless, captivating, hilarious, overwhelming, deeply moving, etc.
- d. The mid-range A score is given for presentations that exhibit unyielding excellence. The listener is normally unaware of the vocal and visual techniques employed; he or she is caught up in the artistic effect of the total presentation. The presence of “star quality” is unmistakable.
- e. At the lower end of the A range, the feeling of excellence is definitely present, but some minor interruptions are felt.
- f. Traits that distinguish between A and B levels of Presentation relate to the presence of subtlety and artistry. The A score implies an extremely high level of consistency in the generation of emotional impact – there are almost no distractions. 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 frequently appropriate and believable emotional or entertainment content. Such presentations are frequently of high quality. They will usually exhibit good musicianship, rapport with the audience and good performance skills.
- b. The upper range of B scores indicates increasing levels of excellence in the presentation. Such performances keep the audience almost totally involved, moved emotionally, or entertained, as appropriate. Some instances of A-quality performance are common.
- c. In the mid-B range, the judge may find that all achieved effects are appropriate and properly presented. These performances are quite enjoyable.
- d. At the lower range of B scoring, nominal consistency is demonstrated but distractions may occur. The result is usually a competent but undistinguished presentation.
- e. Traits that distinguish between B and C levels of Presentation relate to the presence of skill mastery and competence. In a B performance, there is an obvious grasp and use of barbershop performance techniques throughout most or all of the presentation. In

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summary, the B score denotes competence and consistency in the use of performance skills

### **3. The C Level**

a. C-level scores (41 to 60) are given to performances that have an adequate emotional effect but are generally marked by occasional severe interruptions in the generation of emotional impact. The interest of the listener is frequently lost due to lack of consistency, poor execution, stage intimidation, or, frequently, poor understanding of good presentation approaches.

b. At the upper end of the C range, some consistency is displayed. These are fairly entertaining performances despite some occasional significant interruptions.

c. Performances in the mid-C range are marginally acceptable for public performance. A mid-C performance is recognized as adequate barbershop but will likely be characterized as a basic rendition of the song without exhibiting skills that add a significant level of interest or entertainment value.

d. At the lower end of the C range, the limited vocal and/or visual presentation skills being exhibited produce presentations that are fairly poor in overall effect.

### **4. The D Level**

a. D-level scores (1 to 40) are assigned to presentations that are poor in execution, plan and/or skill. The performer may totally disregard, or be unaware of, proper approaches to presentation of a barbershop performance. Little or no entertainment value or conveyance of the song's emotional potential is evident in either the musical or visual components.

b. The upper half of the D-level is for performances where performance skills are severely lacking or absent but most of the notes and words are being sung. The lower half of the D-level is for performances where not only are the performance skills lacking, but also many notes and/or words are being missed.

## **C. Use of the Score Sheet**

1. The judging form for the Presentation 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. Key elements within that scale are Entertainment, Audience Rapport, Expressiveness, Vocal/Visual Unity, and Believability.

b. The qualitative scoring guides serve as a reminder of the distinguishing characteristics of the A, B, C and D levels as described above. The five key elements listed are not all-

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inclusive, but they assist the judge determining a score for the performance. The degree of Entertainment, Audience Rapport, Expressiveness, Vocal/Visual Unity and Believability are references to the total performance quality, both in scoring and in relating evaluation comments.

c. The main body of the sheet is left open and unformatted, allowing the judge to adopt his own preferred note taking style and to record data for evaluation counseling. 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 Attire, Entrance, Pitchpipe Technique, Break, Acceptance and Exit. Spaces are provided to make reference to General Strengths, Areas for Improvement, Reason for any penalty or forfeiture of score (if applicable) and the judge's score for the performance.

f. The judge strives to document two to three main performance areas with which to help the performers improve their presentation.

3. The final score is first written in the box on the scoring form (CJ-27) and then copied onto the judging form (CJ-24) in the box in the lower right corner.

### **D. Differences between Quartets and Choruses**

1. The basis of barbershop music is the quartet. Although larger ensembles have the ability to use a greater dynamic range in vocal or visual performance elements than a quartet can use, the ensemble must be careful to adhere to the principles of genuine, heartfelt performance and not draw undue attention to the devices or the techniques used in the performance.

2. An ensemble larger than a quartet typically has a director. The director should be integrated into the performance in such a way as to support and enhance the presentation and not become a distraction to the audience, unless this is intended for comedic or other purposes.

a. As with quartets, the larger ensemble performs for the benefit of the audience, and the director is an integral part of the ensemble. That is, the believability and emotional content displayed by the ensemble should reach past the director to the audience in order for the performance to be received as truly effective.

b. 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.

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### E. Penalties Up To and Including Forfeiture

1. Penalties and forfeitures are reductions in score for performances wherein the contestant has violated one or more of the BHS Contest Rules. Forfeiture is indicated by awarding a score of zero. A penalty is a lesser reduction in score that yields a net positive score for the performance. When a penalty or forfeiture of score has been applied, judges should note the reason for such on the judging form on the line, “Reason for penalty or forfeiture: \_\_\_\_\_” and on the appropriate line(s) of the reduction grid on the scoring form.

2. Article IX 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 “style” issues, Presentation judges also have a responsibility to preserve the style through particular attention to the artistic aspects of the style noted in paragraphs I.B.4, 5, 6, 9, 10 and 11 of The Judging System (Chapter 4 of the *Contest and Judging Handbook*). These aspects are adjudicated in terms of the quality of the presentation but are not subject to penalty or forfeiture.

3. As specified in Article IX.A of the contest rules, songs must “be neither primarily patriotic nor primarily religious in intent...” 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, Chapter 9 of the *Contest and Judging Handbook*.) Violations of Article IX.A may result in penalties up to and including forfeiture.

4. Presentation judges are solely responsible for adjudicating Articles X, XI, and XII of the contest rules. (For further information, see Position Papers, Chapter 9 of the *Contest and Judging Handbook*.)

a. Article X.B prohibits contestants from using their own electronic amplification, but does permit limited, brief, and relevant sound effects or electronic means of pitch taking. Violation of Article X.B may result in penalties up to and including forfeiture.

b. Article XI.A.1 prohibits persons who are not members of the competing chorus or quartet from appearing on stage during the performance. An exception to this rule permits non-member chorus directors, who may appear with their chorus provided their appearance and performance is in conjunction with their role as a director. Notwithstanding the previous sentence, non-member directors may not sing with their chorus.

c. Article XI.A.2 states “Actions by any contestant that are deemed suggestive, vulgar or otherwise not in good taste will not be allowed.” Staging is defined as the use of props or sets, the handling of props, the use of physical actions, or a combination of these. Unacceptable staging is staging that is suggestive, vulgar or otherwise not in good taste. Violations of Article XI may result in penalties up to and including forfeiture. (See Position Paper III, Chapter 9 of the *Contest and Judging Handbook*.) The use of “black face” is prohibited and must result in forfeiture by the Presentation judge as a violation of Article XI.A.2 as action not in good taste.

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d. Article XII states, in part, “Non-singing dialogue is generally not a part of a contest performance...” Spoken words may be used by an ensemble before, during, between or after songs to help enhance the entertainment value of the performance. However, any spoken words must be directly related to the performance and must be brief enough that they are perceived to be part of the musical performance and not an end in themselves. Violations of Article XII may result in penalties up to and including forfeiture.