

THE JUDGING SYSTEM

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I. DEFINITION OF THE BARBERSHOP STYLE

The barbershop style can be viewed as having two major components: technical and artistic. The technical aspects of the style relate to those elements that define the style regardless of how well it's performed. The artistic aspects relate to those performance aspects that are equally essential to the style's preservation.

A. Technical (Structural) Aspects

1. Barbershop harmony is a style of unaccompanied vocal music characterized by consonant four-part chords for every melody note in a predominantly homophonic texture. The melody is consistently sung by the lead, with the tenor harmonizing above the melody, the bass singing the lowest harmonizing notes, and the baritone completing the chord. Occasional brief passages may be sung by fewer than four voice parts.

2. Barbershop music features songs with understandable lyrics with melodies that clearly define a tonal center and imply major and minor chords and barbershop (dominant and secondary dominant) seventh chords that often resolve around the circle of fifths, while also making use of other resolutions. The chords are almost always in root position or second inversion, with a predominance of barbershop sevenths and major triads.

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B. Artistic (Performance) Aspects

1. Barbershop singers adjust pitches to strive for perfectly tuned chords in just intonation, while remaining true to the established tonal center. When chords are sung in tune with matched and resonant sounds, a “lock and ring” results. Locking, ringing chords are the hallmark of the barbershop style.
2. The use of similar word sounds sung in good quality and with precise synchronization, as well as optimal volume relationships of the voice parts, creates a unity that helps produce the most desirable barbershop sound.
3. The barbershop style is typified by natural, resonant, full-voiced singing, though tenors may not be singing in full voice.
4. Performers have the freedom to bring a variety of styles, interpretations, and performance preferences to the stage.
5. Performers should strive to present the song to the audience in an authentic, sincere, and heartfelt manner.
6. The music and the presentation of the music must reflect the fact that barbershop music features relatively straightforward, ingenuous songs, sung from the heart, that are easily understandable to the audience. The delivery should be believable and sensitive to the song and arrangement throughout.
7. Barbershop music typically has a balanced and symmetrical form and a standard meter. As long as these are recognizable, the performer is free to be creative within the forward motion of the music.
8. Arrangements in the barbershop style use various embellishments. The devices chosen, as well as their performance, should support and enhance the song.
9. The presentation of barbershop music features appropriate musical and visual methods to enhance and support the song and provide the audience with an emotionally satisfying, entertaining experience.
10. Barbershop groups are free to employ a wide variety of dramatic staging plans, interpretive or staging devices, postures, motions, props or standing formations, as long as these do not detract from the barbershop sound and are appropriate to the song.
11. A song may have a simple or complex setting and still be in the barbershop style. Performers are encouraged to choose music that they enjoy singing and that features the strengths and minimizes the weaknesses of the ensemble.

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II. SCORING CATEGORIES

The performance of each song is judged by three categories: Music, Presentation and Singing. Each category judge will determine a single quality rating or score, on a scale of 1 to 100. The judge will determine whether the level of the performance is excellent (A-level, from 81-100), good (B-level, from 61- 80), fair (C-level, from 41-60), or poor (D-level, from 1-40), and award an exact score based upon an evaluation of all the elements in the performance that have an impact on his category. If no quality rating is appropriate, owing to an unequivocal and definite violation of the rules, the judge will forfeit his score by awarding a zero.

There is no appropriate formula for weighting the various elements in a category; rather, it is up to the judge to view the total performance from his particular orientation, and evaluate the elements of the performance on a song-by-song basis. Elements that are particularly crucial in one song performance may be less important in another song performance. The judge will evaluate the overall effect or value of the performance.

The major responsibilities of each judging category are as follows:

A. Music

1. *Music* is defined as the song and arrangement as performed. The Music judge evaluates the suitability of the song and arrangement to the barbershop style and the performer's musicianship in bringing the song and arrangement to life.
2. Major elements in the category are: consonance; theme; delivery and musicality; execution; and embellishment.

B. Presentation

1. *Presentation* is defined as the net impact of the performance upon the audience. The Presentation judge evaluates to what degree the audience is entertained through the performer's communication of the story/message/theme in its musical and visual setting.
2. Major elements in the category are: entertainment value; "from the heart" delivery; audience rapport; artistry and expressiveness; and unity between the presentation's vocal and visual elements.

C. Singing

1. *Singing* is defined as quality, in-tune vocalization accomplished with a high degree of unity, ensemble consistency and artistry. The Singing judge evaluates the degree to which the performer achieves artistic singing in the barbershop style.
2. Major elements in the category are: intonation; vocal quality; unity of word sounds, flow, diction and synchronization; expansion and "ring"; and artistry.

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III. STYLE ELEMENTS SHARED BY ALL CATEGORIES

An audience member experiences the art form of barbershop music as a whole. Thus, even while evaluating a performance from a particular perspective, an audience member will experience the total performance. 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. Accordingly, all judges judge 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. Those artistic aspects of a barbershop performance that are evaluated by judges in all three categories are: ringing, in-tune singing; vocal quality; the suitability of the song to the performer; self-expressiveness and heartfelt performance.

A. Preservation of the Barbershop Style

Judges in the Music category are responsible for preserving the technical (structural) barbershop style and adjudicating the elements described in I.A.1 and 2 above. The degree to which each category is affected by the artistic elements of the style varies, as described in the each of the Category Descriptions (Chapters 5-7, below) and the Description of Category Overlap (Chapter 10, below).

B. In-tune Singing

Barbershop harmony is a style of vocal music characterized by consonant four-part chords for every melody note. The harmony parts are enharmonically adjusted in pitch in order to produce an optimum consonant sound. Hence in-tune singing is a concern of every judge.

C. Vocal Quality and Matched Word Sounds

1. The use of similar word sounds sung in good quality helps to produce the unique full or expanded sound of barbershop harmony.
2. Performances should be characterized by a natural, resonant, full-voiced presentation, though tenors may not be singing full voice.

D. Suitability of the Music to the Performer

1. All judges will evaluate the suitability of the music – the song and the arrangement as performed – to the performer, though the orientation of judges will differ from category to category.
2. Performers are encouraged to choose music that they enjoy singing, and that features the strengths and minimizes the weaknesses of the ensemble. It may be risky for performers to choose a particular piece of music because another ensemble has achieved success with that music. Judges evaluate the performance of the music rather than any inherent advantages or disadvantages in the elements of the music. Moreover, there are no benefits in choosing difficult or easy music – only in choosing music that your ensemble can perform well.

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E. Self-Expressiveness and Heartfelt Performance

1. Within the parameters of the judging system there is sufficient freedom to bring a multitude of individual styles and performance preferences to the contest stage. Judges will adjudicate each performance on the basis of an individual lifetime of listening and viewing experience, and evaluate the particular performance as much as possible without regard to prior performances of the music and without preconceived ideas of how the music “should” be performed.
2. Performers should strive to commit themselves to contribute something to the audience in an authentic, sincere, and heartfelt manner.