

WHAT ADJUDICATORS ARE LOOKING FOR

This excerpt from a paper on choral adjudication was originally published by the Florida Vocal Association and is based on a presentation by Mark Scott & Dale Choate. A few elements have been added from elsewhere.

Obviously, in any adjudication, there is an element of personal taste, but the following lists of strengths and weaknesses give a good indication of what might be judged. The list is almost certainly not exhaustive and some items may be open to dispute!

The question is this: if choristers do not understand what is meant by these ‘strengths’ and ‘weaknesses’, how can they ever really compete against those who do understand? It is a compelling case for improving the singing competence of all choristers!

STRENGTHS

Tone Quality

Well-supported and energized
Well-focused and resonant
Not forced or pushed beyond beauty
Good vowel placement, not swallowed or overtly strident
Rounded and vertically-shaped vowels
Unity of vowel formation among singers
Proper use of high register (head voice)
Avoidance of too much vibrato
Proper posture
Tall, vertical vowel placement
Proper definition of diphthongs
Natural vowel sounds
Good understanding of language
Proper syllabic emphasis
Clear consonant treatment
Clear diction
Good blend

WEAKNESSES

Tone Quality

Lack of focus and space
Harsh, forced singing
Poor vowel placement, too far back or too far forward, giving strident tone
Spread tone caused by horizontal vowels
Lack of blend due to lack of consistent vowel formation among singers
Altos pushing lower register or male singers not utilizing head voice
Lack of breath support
Excessive vibrato
Lack of proper posture
Breathing is shallow
Small, spread vowel placement
Improper definition of diphthongs
Artificial, contrived vowel sounds
Lack of understanding language(s)
Lack of proper syllabic emphasis
Consonants unidentifiable
Poor diction
Poor blend – individual voices stand out

Technical Preparation

Good listening skills evident
Proper arrangement of singers
Appropriate balance between sections
Balance maintained during dynamic shifts
Accompaniments contributing to sense of ensemble
Proper balance between melody and supporting harmonies
Balance maintained consistently through extremes of registers and ranges
Ensemble listens well and adjusts to maintain appropriate balance
Correct pitches and rhythms
Evidence of good preparation
Pitch correctly maintained especially in a cappella pieces

Musical Effect

Proper tempo in regard to style, composer's intent, size of ensemble etc.
Accurate use of dynamic levels
Artistically shaped musical line
Sensitivity to text and lyric, nuance, shadings, word colour, syllabic stress
Appropriate treatment of marcato, staccato, and legato
Good conductor-ensemble communication
Vital, emotional involvement (including facial expression)
Successful communication of composer's message
Dramatically effective
Proper feeling of forward motion
Scholarly and intelligent understanding of composer's intent and style

Other Factors

Song selection displays strengths of ensemble while challenging them
Ensemble displays stage discipline, good appearance and presence
Variety of programme
Time limits observed, and time used effectively

Technical Preparation

Sliding to the pitch
Poor placement of singers
Singers fail to adjust to intonation challenges
Listening skills not evident
Balance problems between sections
Balance adjustments seldom made
Very little feeling of ensemble
Problems occur in extended ranges
Balance not consistent during changes of dynamics
Thematic parts covered by supporting harmonic parts
Accompaniments not serving the ensemble
Incorrect pitches or rhythms – pitch lost in a cappella pieces

Musical Effect

Range of dynamics is limited or too much contrast in dynamics
Phrasing is mechanical or contrived
Poor choice of tempo
Inconsistencies in phrasing and dynamics
Lack of understanding of stylistic elements
Lack of emotional involvement (including facial expression)
Failure to respond to conducting gestures and/or incorrect gestures
No feeling of forward motion
Lethargic, lack of energy
Lack of understanding of composer's intent and/or stylistic elements

Other Factors

Inappropriate song selection: too difficult or doesn't show ensemble ability
Lack of stage discipline
Attentiveness, proper posture, stage presence, poor appearance
Lack of variety in programme
Time not used effectively or time allowed is overrun