

**EXPRESSION CATEGORY**

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## EXPRESSION CATEGORY

### INTRODUCTION

The focus of the expression category is the evaluation of the performer's ability to communicate musically. In vocal music, communication is strengthened by the meaningful delivery of lyrics, musical diction, artistic phrasing, appropriate dynamics and a projection of sincere emotion.

The expression judge listens to a performance with her primary concentration directed to evaluation of the degree of artistry achieved in the verbal execution and delivery of the song. Although specific areas require her scrutiny, they are inseparable in that, blended together, the result is an artistically satisfying entity. She rewards a performance wherein:

- Reasonable proficiency in the basics of good vocal production has been achieved, so that a proper foundation for expression is present.
- All members of the performing group have achieved reasonable proficiency in the vertical synchronization of all elements of the song, including production of vowels, injection of consonants, turning of diphthongs, attack and release of all syllables and use of nuances and vocal inflections, so that the lyrical presentation demonstrates absolute unity.
- Techniques of phrasing, dynamics, tempo and rhythm are used effectively to support the subtler elements of inflection, finesse and smooth delivery of the words, so that the result is a sensitive, artistic, musical presentation.

For purposes of evaluation, the expression category has been divided into two major areas: basic requirements and artistic lyrical interpretation. These will be discussed separately.

### BASIC REQUIREMENTS (0-40 POINTS PER SONG)

The broad area entitled "basic requirements" encompasses the components that comprise the technical portion of the category. Since the basis of the barbershop musical art form is the American popular song as outlined in the music category, it follows that the language of barbershop is standard American English, free from the regional speech dialects encountered in various areas of the country and the world.

### VOCAL SKILLS

In the expression category, vocal skills affect the performance in the following areas: diction, including vowels and consonants; sustained and supported phrases; and control of dynamic range.

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Breath support is the basis for good vocal production. The expression judge does not evaluate breath support as such; rather, she evaluates the result of good breath support or the lack of same. Reasonable proficiency in the basics of good singing must be achieved for expression to be effective.

## SYNCHRONIZATION/UNITY

The components of synchronization and attacks and releases are considered together because they go hand-in-hand; one is the beginning and the other is the ending. Musically, the term “attack” is used to indicate the beginning of tone, while “release” signifies its termination. There is, therefore, a tendency to consider attacks and releases as occurring only at the initiation and termination of the musical phrase. In reality, each syllable involves an attack and a release. The term “internal synchronization” is often used to refer to the vertical togetherness that must exist within words and within phrases if the unity of the presentation is to be maintained. The following example illustrates what happens when all elements are not produced by all voices at the same instant:

### I STOLE THE GOLD FROM YOUR HAIR

Tenor:	Ah --- eeStol - l - theGol - l - ldFro -- mYou --- rHai ----- r
Lead:	Ah --- eeSto - - l - theGol - - l - dFro -- mYou --- rHai ----- r
Baritone:	Ah - ee- - Sto - - l - theGol - - l - dFro - m -You --- rHai ----- r
Bass:	Ah --- eeSto - - l - theGol - - l - dFro -- mYour - r - Hair - r - r - r

In the example, all voices should be synchronized with what the lead is producing (since that line indicates correct techniques). When this is not the case, errors in synchronization occur. Because Sweet Adelines International’s music is vocal ensemble, as opposed to solo music, this added element of synchronization is necessary for an effective performance.

Like the sound judge, the expression judge is seeking a consistent *unit* presentation. Errors such as that in the illustration result in a lack of unity, which cannot be rewarded by the expression judge. Part of her scoring will be based on the degree to which the performer has fulfilled the requirements of synchronization.

## WORD DELIVERY

### Vowels

As noted in the sound category description, vowels are the basis of vocal sound. In seeking a blended unit, the sound judge requires that vowels be uniformly produced by all members of the ensemble. The expression judge takes this requirement a step further, for she also requires that the vowel sounds for the word in question be correctly pronounced, according to the American English language.

The five pure vowels — “ah,” “ay,” “ee,” “oh” and “oo”— are the vowels of Italian and Latin; in English, two of these vowels are treated as diphthongs. “Ay” is pronounced “eh-ee,” and “oh” becomes “oh-oo.” In the American English language, seventeen vowel sounds have been identified. These can be found in that Table of English Vowel Sounds and International Phonetic Alphabet. (Refer to Appendix D.)

The expression judge must recognize that correctly produced vowels all modify toward a neutral vowel at highest pitches. As pitch rises, for example, “ee” takes on the quality of “ih,” and “ah” modifies toward “uh;” an attempt by the singer to keep the vowel from modifying will result in a pinched, improperly produced tone. Because of the range involved in Sweet Adelines International music, this phenomenon is generally experienced only by the tenor and only in the highest portion of her range. Vowels that are modified naturally will not result in discernible distortion of blend or unit sound.

The most common vowel distortions encountered by the expression judge result from:

- a. Failure to resonate vowels naturally, in a uniform manner.
- b. Use of the wrong vowel sound, resulting in mispronunciation.
- c. Sustaining the incorrect vowel sound of a diphthong, or turning to the secondary sound either too early or at different times.
- d. Failure to sing the final sound of a diphthong, e.g., singing “smile” as “smahle” rather than “smaheele.”
- e. Failure to produce musical vowel sounds.

When errors are detected in the performer’s delivery of vowels, the expression judge must discern whether those errors are consistent, sporadic or rare. Her score will be based on the effect of these errors on the overall, musical performance.

### Diphthongs

Simple or pure vowels have but one sound, such as the “ih” in “sit” or the “oo” in “moon.” Diphthongs are a combination of vowel sounds. Of the seventeen vowel sounds listed in Appendix D, six are diphthongs. “Ay” (eh-ee) and “oh” (oh-oo) are discussed above. The “i” sound in “high” is pronounced “ah-ee,” the “ou” in “now” is the combination “ah-oo” and the “oi” in “joy” is pronounced “oh-ee.” In all five of these instances, the primary vowel sound is given musical emphasis; the secondary sound is attached at the moment of release. In the one remaining diphthong, the reverse is true. The “u” sound in “mute” is the combination “ee-oo” but the primary vowel (ee) is passed over very quickly so that the secondary sound (oo) can be sustained. The expression judge will evaluate the performer’s delivery of diphthongs in the same manner as she evaluates the production of vowel sounds.

### Consonants

If vowels are the basis of musical sounds, consonants can be considered the punctuation. In speech, consonants are articulated in a manner that will add distinction to the spoken word and vowels are not sustained. Singing requires an opposite approach; consonants must be adequately articulated so that lyrics are understandable, but not to the degree that tone flow is noticeably interrupted.

The manner in which consonants are delivered can add style, meaning, artistry and individuality to a performance. This is particularly true of the pitched consonant sounds — “m,” “n,” “l” and “ng”— and the performer can often sing through these sounds to articulate words effectively without disturbing the musical line. Other consonants can be classified as voiced or unvoiced — those that have pitch and those that do not. Proper treatment of voiced consonants requires that they be produced at the same pitch as the vowel sound contained in the syllable in question.

The musical approach to the singing of final consonants — those at the end of a word or syllable — dictates that the singer delay articulation of the consonant until the last instant before singing the next word/syllable and that the consonant be seemingly attached to the initial sound of the new word/syllable. This is similar to the principle of elision used in speaking the French language, where every spoken syllable ends in a vowel sound, no matter how written. When handled correctly and without emphasis, this practice insures smooth word delivery. When poorly handled, so that the final consonant is given undue emphasis, the result can be extremely unmusical.

Consonants are de-emphasized in singing for a very important reason. The articulation of most consonant sounds requires use of the swallowing muscle mechanism, which, as discussed in the sound category description, creates vocal interference. When consonants are delivered properly, the required muscles will tense only for the instant involved in articulation, then will relax to allow the singer to produce a free vocal line, without noticeable interruption.

The most common problems the expression judge will encounter with regard to consonants are:

- a. Overemphasis of unimportant consonants, e.g. “lasTuh nighTuh was the enDuh of the worlDuh;”
- b. Anticipation of consonants, particularly “r,” in a sustained tone, e.g. “mother-r-r-r-r;”
- c. Dropped consonants in the middle of words, such as “remebber” instead of “remember” or “hot” instead of “heart;”
- d. Noticeable use of the wrong consonant sound, such as “sweedie” instead of “sweetie.”

The expression judge will evaluate consonant delivery in much the same manner as she considers vowels. Her score will reflect the degree to which the overall performance was adversely affected by the flaws detected.

### Enunciation

Enunciation in singing has been defined as the manner of pronouncing words clearly and distinctly. In reality, enunciation involves articulation, but they are not the same. Articulation refers to the physical process involved in the method or manner of enunciating any utterance, either speaking or singing, whereas pronunciation means uttering or articulating words or sounds in the required or standard manner. Articulation relates to

the physical use of the vocal mechanism, pronunciation relates to propriety of sound produced and enunciation deals with the clarity of sound produced.

In the preceding paragraphs, attention has been given to methods or techniques utilized in striving for understandable lyric delivery without damaging the artistic element. Diction must be clear, sound natural and lend itself to smoothly flowing phrases.

The expression judge rewards a performance in which lyrics are understandable but not over-enunciated, so that musical flow is ever present and the message of the song is not lost. Her evaluation will be based on the degree to which the performer has achieved that goal. However, she will recognize that effective delivery occasionally requires a suitable compromise to insure retention of the flowing musical phrase.

#### ARTISTIC LYRICAL INTERPRETATION (INTERPRETIVE PLAN) (0-60 POINTS PER SONG)

A successful interpretive plan will capture the essence of the message of the song. The elements of a successful interpretive plan are:

- Lyric Flow
- Effective Phrasing
- Forward Motion
- Meaningful Dynamics
- Appropriate Tempo/Rhythm
- Musical Inflection and Embellishment

#### LYRIC FLOW

Artistic presentation of vocal music requires that consideration be given to expressive delivery of the lyrics. The lyrics of a barbershop song, if separated from the music, would resemble a poem, because there is a specific meter and rhyming pattern. In setting lyrics to music, the composer reinforces this metric pattern by assignment of notes, note values and placement of important syllables on emphasized musical beats. Proper word stress is essential to the effective performance of vocal music. This involves not only proper inflection of the important words of a phrase but also correct stress of important syllables within each word.

Effective delivery also requires that stressed syllables be connected by forward movement. This is achieved through use of a controlled, continuous sound, allowing the performer, by slight variation in volume, to emphasize important syllables and de-emphasize those that are less important.

#### PHRASING

The lyrics of a song should be grouped together into meaningful phrases that flow smoothly. Proper accent or emphasis should be given to dominant words or syllables, minimizing those that are unimportant or subordinate.

The concept of phrasing is not unique to vocal music. Phrase markings are found in instrumental music and are determined by characteristics of melody, harmony and rhythm. In a barbershop song, the words and music work together so that the demands of the musical phrase coincide with those of the lyrical phrase. If the lyrics are considered alone, there is frequently more than one acceptable emphasis point. For example, the line “you sacrificed everything for me” can be read with emphasis placed on the first, second, third or final word and the differences in emphasis will convey subtle changes in meaning. However, when the melody is added, the placement of the highest melody note on “everything” makes the intended emphasis clear. The arranger has reinforced that intended emphasis by use of a dramatic chord voicing on that syllable. The expression judge, therefore, cannot rely on lyrical considerations alone to guide her evaluation of phrasing; she must use a musical approach, being aware of the demands of melody and arrangement. Should musical demands appear to be in conflict with the lyrics, the music will take precedence.

Pauses, strategically placed and timed, are an important part of musical expression. Continuous sound, as demonstrated by the compulsive talker, readily points up the need for occasional silence in communication. Pauses are as important as sound itself, for they enable sound to have an effect; they are tools of emotion. The length of a pause also has a direct effect on the creation of musical drama. A short pause for a quick breath can create or maintain excitement; a lengthy pause in just the right spot can create a mood change, a feeling of futility or fulfillment, and can set up the proper dramatic climate for the succeeding passage. Not all songs require a dramatic pause and few can support more than one. The expression judge will evaluate the performer’s use of this technique, based on its propriety and the skill with which it is handled.

## FORWARD MOTION

Because music in the barbershop style is performed without instrumental accompaniment, constant forward motion of the singing tone is required. Occasional periods of rest are necessary, both for vocal effect and/or relief to the ear of the listener and to build toward an effective climax of the story line. Within each phrase smooth connection of sounds is necessary for artistic delivery.

The musical term for the desired style of delivery is *legato*, a basic style of vocal technique consisting of a seemingly uninterrupted flowing vocal line with corresponding non-interfering articulation and pronunciation.

Choppiness within words and phrases occurs when a *legato* delivery is not present. This may result from one of the following:

1. Failure to support tones with the breathing mechanism;
  2. Tension in the jaw and interference from the swallowing muscles;
  3. Incorrect use or overuse of the articulatory mechanism;
  4. Overenunciation;
  5. A directing style that lacks flow or that stresses beats rather than phrases.
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When musical flow is not present, the listener's attention is drawn to each individual syllable rather than to the overall story. The objective is a performance that tells a story, not a vocal exercise.

## EMBELLISHMENTS

One of the elements of performance in the barbershop style is the creation of musical tension. This is sometimes achieved by the manner in which swipes are executed, when the performer often holds the next-to-last chord prior to final resolution. Although de-emphasis of unimportant words, i.e., "of," "and," "the," etc., is the norm, there are some instances where this is highly desired, as in embellishments or at the tag. With barbershop tension and release chords, sometimes the tension chord demands prolonged emphasis before resolution. The expression judge will base her evaluation not on whether proper emphasis was given but rather on whether the musical effect created was in keeping with a performance in the barbershop style. If the performer fails to achieve the planned effect, however, the attempt cannot be rewarded.

The effectiveness of the execution of other embellishments will be rewarded by the expression judge. These include bell chords, solo passages, patter background, modulations and instrumental effects. (For further explanation, refer to the "Creative Devices" section in the music category description, Section II-B, pages 7-8.)

## DYNAMICS

The expression judge, like the sound and music judges, rewards a performance that demonstrates substantial variation in meaningful dynamic levels. The dynamic level at which a song is performed will generally carry with it inherent expression. For example, medium volume usually conveys a satisfying emotional reaction or matter-of-fact narrative. High volume is generally used to express joy and happiness or, at the other extreme, uncontrollable anguish. When the volume is low, the performer is usually conveying such soft emotions as tenderness or regret or the deeper emotions of sorrow or reverence.

In assessing the effectiveness of the dynamics used, the expression judge takes the same musical approach used to evaluate phrasing. She recognizes that dynamic patterns are often indicated by chord voicings and chord progressions, not by the lyrics alone.

The contestant should display musical artistry in the delivery of dynamics, not merely demonstrate the ability to sing at different volume levels. Abrupt volume changes for the sake of "shock value" alone are neither artistic nor musical and cannot be rewarded in the expression category. When loud volume levels go beyond singing quality, becoming unpleasant, or when softs lose support, the expression judge can give no reward for effective use of dynamics.

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## TEMPO/RHYTHM

The terms “tempo” and “rhythm” are defined in the music category portion of this book. The expression judge is concerned with whether tempo and rhythm are appropriate to the effective delivery of the message of the song.

The lyrics of a ballad are usually more dramatic, more meaningful and more emotional than those of a rhythm tune. Presentation of a ballad in the barbershop style generally employs *ad lib* or *rubato* delivery and the smooth-flowing phrase is of paramount importance. In ballad delivery the performer must consider not only the smooth flow of words and emphasis of accent points but also the pace at which lyrics are to be delivered. The musical techniques of *ritardando* and *accelerando* can frequently be effectively employed in ballad presentation, since different rates of movement can imply different emotions.

In the delivery of a rhythm tune, the rhythm becomes the primary factor and lyrics must be artistically handled within the confines of the established beat. The accent points of the lyrics will generally coincide with the accent points of rhythm. The pulse of the rhythm should be apparent but words must still move from one to another in a smooth, connected sequence.

## INFLECTION

In speech, one of the primary tools used by the speaker to achieve word inflection is variation in pitch or tone of voice. In singing, inflection emphasizes the intended meaning of words and hopes to create an emotional response in the listener. This can be achieved through the use of variations in volume within a word (rather than variation of pitch, as in speaking) and by the dramatization of vowel and consonant sounds. A vocal music presentation that lacks inflection is as dull and uninteresting as a speech delivered in a monotone.

## ENERGY

Energy is the vital element in the overall presentation. Indeed, energy is the key to whether or not the listener will continue to listen to the performance. A performance that is belabored and tedious is lacking in energy. There must be an energized vocal presentation in all four parts and there must be vitality in the presentation. The contestant must maintain the energy, not allowing the level of energy to drop for even one moment.

## FINESSE

Finesse refers to the fineness or subtlety with which skill is displayed. A performance may demonstrate that the performer has acquired all of the skills discussed in this category description; but if those skills are individually obvious, the performance undoubtedly lacks finesse. Finesse, or artistry, can sometimes account for the difference between a group whose performance demonstrates competence in handling the basic

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requirement but fails to evoke an emotional response, and another whose might not be technically perfect but, nonetheless, leaves the audience breathless. The expression judge rewards a performer whose techniques are artistically combined so that they become integral facets of the total musical performance.

## EMOTIONAL COMMUNICATION

From the standpoint of the expression judge, emotional projection and communication can be considered the result of a valid, artistic, lyrical interpretation. The goal of the performer in the barbershop style is to project a sentiment appropriate to the song and to produce an emotional response in the listener.

Word delivery, inflection, finesse, phrasing, dynamics and tempo/rhythm are the tools used by the performer to establish an appropriate mood or convey the desired emotion. These elements, when skillfully and artistically combined by the performer, help to touch upon the feelings of the listener. Before the performer can emotionally involve an audience, however, she must become intensely involved. Although it is possible to simulate emotional involvement through the careful and practiced use of certain vocal techniques, it is rarely possible to completely disguise the artificial.

Emotional communication occurs only when the performer demonstrates skill in the “basic requirements” portion of the expression category. In the optimum performance the audience is not distracted by flaws in the presentation but is aware only of the beautiful or happy or poignant story that the performer unfolds.

## SCORING THE CATEGORY

The primary responsibility of a Sweet Adelines International judge is to determine the level of proficiency in her category for each competitor’s performance and to place each competitor in the proper ranking in relationship to other competitors in the contest. To perform this task, the judge assigns numerical scores which accurately represent the level of each performance in her category. The composite numerical scores of the entire judging panel establish final placement for all contestants and are the basis for determining the winners of the awards.

The expression category has been divided so that the 100 points available for each song performance are allocated as follows:

Basic Requirements	0 – 40 points
Artistic Lyrical Interpretation	0 – 60 points

In her evaluation of the basic requirements, the expression judge considers the mechanical aspects which, when perfectly synchronized, result in a flawless performance of the vertical elements of vocal ensemble music. These include correct use of vowels, diphthongs and consonants, enunciation, and synchronization of all attacks and releases.

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The 40 available points are not divided into separate increments for the facets included but are considered as a whole. For the maximum score to be awarded, there must be total perfection in this portion of the category. The other extreme — a score of zero — indicates that all possibilities for error have been exploited. It is conceivable for a performance to be so lacking in a single area (e.g. vowels or attacks and releases) that all or any part of the available points can be withheld. The expression judge bases her score on the degree to which the performance fulfills the combined standards of this portion of the expression category.

As was previously stated, reasonable proficiency in the basics of good singing techniques must be achieved for expression to be effective. It is pointless for the expression judge to give constructive direction regarding musical expression when the performer needs to master the very basics of proper singing, the first of which is proper breath support. Additionally, complete evaluation of the performer's achievements in the artistic portion of the category is possible only if the basic requisite of "togetherness" has been fulfilled.

The expression judge evaluates a performance from two different listening orientations. The basic requirements that receive her attention are discussed in the preceding portion of this category description. She has also been given the responsibility of assessing the degree of artistry with which the lyrics, or message, of the song are performed within the context of a total musical performance.

Because artistry must be founded in good technique, to evaluate artistic lyrical interpretation the expression judge must first consider the degree to which the contestant has mastered the basic requirements of the category. It is possible for a performance to be technically perfect but lacking in artistry. It is not possible, however, for a performance to achieve perfection in the area of lyrical interpretation but be lacking in the basic requirement.

Credit for emotional communication is reserved by the expression judge for the performance which so nearly meets all of the criteria established that sincere emotion is projected to the audience and a response is immediately forthcoming. In assessing this response, the expression judge must be cognizant that the response will vary with the mood of the presentation. A rousing, fast-moving, exciting rhythm tune will evoke an enthusiastic, excited response from the audience. This type of reaction, however, is undesirable after a tender, moving ballad, where often the most appropriate immediate response is silence, indicating reluctance to break the spell that has been cast. The type of emotion must be appropriate to the song and compatible with the range of emotions possible for performance in the barbershop style. When a performer has exhibited true emotional communication, the audience will respond in kind with similar emotion, indicating they have received the emotion projected by the performer.

When a Sweet Adelines International quartet or chorus has complete command of all the technical elements of singing and then adds this final bit of frosting, making the audience unaware it is hearing anything other than a beautiful song, straight from the heart, the performers have achieved the ultimate in this category — true musical expression.

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