

# MUSIC CATEGORY

## I. INTRODUCTION

Music is defined as the song and arrangement, as performed. The Music Category judges the suitability of the material to the barbershop style and the performer's musicianship in bringing the song and arrangement to life. The Music judge is responsible for adjudicating the musical elements in the performance, judging the extent to which the musical performance displays the hallmarks of the barbershop style and the degree to which the musical performance demonstrates an artistic sensitivity to the music's primary theme(s).

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.

## II. MUSICAL ELEMENTS

1. Being an a cappella style, all songs must be sung without musical accompaniment or instrumental introductions, interludes, or conclusions.
2. Barbershop is a four-part, a cappella style.
3. The melody should be present and distinguishable, and is most consistently sung by the lead (an "inside" voice), with harmony above and below.
4. Chord progressions in the barbershop style are based on the harmonic practice of dominant seventh (and ninth) chords resolving around the circle of fifths (while also making use of other resolutions). The song's harmony must feature the natural occurrence of a variety of dominant seventh and ninth chords in circle-of-fifth progressions.
5. For barbershop contest purposes, lyrics should be sung by all four parts through nearly all of the song's duration.

## III. PERFORMANCE ELEMENTS

The Music category judges the performance of the song and arrangement, and the performer's musicianship in bringing them to life.

**Consonance** – Consonance is the degree to which an ensemble produces a good quality, locked, ringing unit sound. A high level of consonance is achieved through several factors, including choices of consonant chords in strong voicings (root position and second inversion), good vocal quality and precise execution of the music. Primarily homorhythmic arrangements with lyrics being sung by all four parts through nearly all of the song's duration, in a range where all singers can produce good quality, increase the inherent consonance potential.

**Theme (and Development)** – The theme is the principal musical statement of the song. It may be based on the song’s lyrics, rhythm, melody, or harmony, or a combination of these elements. The Music judge evaluates the performer’s understanding and use of the song’s construction, when developing the music, as well as the performer’s choices of appropriate voicings and embellishment.

**Embellishment** – Embellishments are one of the hallmarks of the barbershop style. The Music judge evaluates the effectiveness with which the performer uses embellishments for their intended purpose, such as the use of rhythmic propellants to create forward motion or key lifts to heighten the level of intensity. Alterations to the composer’s melody, lyrics and implied harmony are also considered embellishments and may be distracting. The performers’ ability to successfully execute the embellishments may influence the Music judge’s perception of the degree to which a particular song may be under- or over-embellished.

**Delivery** – Delivery refers to the musicality with which the elements of the song and arrangement are rendered. The Music judge evaluates the musical artistry with which the performer integrates melody, lyrics, harmony, rhythm, tempos, form, vocal color, dynamics, and forward motion to allow the song to come to life. The Music judge also evaluates how the flow and contour of phrases support and define the lyric’s climactic moments. Performers should strive to communicate the song itself in an authentic, sincere, heartfelt manner.

**Execution** – Execution refers to the extent to which the ensemble performs accurately as a unit. Well-executed music has accurate harmony and rhythm, steady tempos, clean synchronization, matched word sounds, and clear articulation.

#### **IV. SCORING**

The Music judge’s evaluation is based on the appropriateness of the music to the barbershop style and the musicality of the performance. The Music judge’s guardianship of the barbershop style serves as a screen or filter through which the music must pass. The Music judge evaluates the performer’s sensitivity in delivering the theme of the song and their accuracy in executing its musical elements.