

SINGING CATEGORY

Barbershop singing shares elements of good singing with other forms of ensemble vocal music. Primarily, the listener expects to hear the pleasing effect of in-tune singing from voices that are free and resonant and that exhibit no signs of difficulties. The listener expects to hear the ensemble as a unit, free from distractions by individual differences of quality or delivery. The style of barbershop singing is enhanced by the choice of harmonies, voicings, and voice relationships characteristic to barbershop allowing the ensemble to achieve a sound that feels greater than the sum of the parts. The "ring" of a barbershop chord will always be the hallmark of the style.

The Singing judge evaluates the degree to which the performer achieves artistic singing in the barbershop style. Artistic singing is accomplished through precise intonation, a high degree of vocal skill, a high level of unity /consistency within the ensemble, and appropriate vocal expression. Mastery of these elements creates a fullness and expansion of sound, the "ring" of barbershop chords, and the expression of genuine emotion in support the message of the song.

SINGING CATEGORY ELEMENTS

The following five elements are evaluated by the Singing category judge:

Intonation: Barbershop singers strive for more precise tuning than is possible with the fixed 12-tones-per-octave of the equally tempered scale of fixed-pitched instruments, such as the piano. Barbershop singers adjust pitches to achieve perfectly tuned chords, and yet sing a melodic line that remains true to the tonal center. Maintaining precise harmonic intonation and melodic tonal center is the responsibility of all the singers in the ensemble. All singers, including the melody singer, tune to an anticipated melodic line that would maintain the tonal center.

Vocal Quality: Good vocal quality features a tone that is well supported, freely produced, and resonant. Support may best be defined as breath management. Breath management (singing on the breath supplied by isometric involvement of the diaphragm and abdominal muscles) is a prerequisite for producing a good tone. Tension or lack of free production can be caused a number of factors, but often related to improper breath management. A resonant vocal tone that conveys the sensation of a single pitch, that is produced freely and without apparent stress by well-managed breath support, and that enhances the artistic impact of a song may be said to possess good quality.

Unity: The ingredients of ensemble unity include:

- Matched word sounds, timbre, and resonance
- Synchronization and precision
- Continuity of sound flow
- Uniformity of diction and articulation.

Expansion Quality: Expanded sound, sometimes called “lock and ring,” creates the aural impression that the composite ensemble sound contains more than the total sound the individual voices produce. The volume relationships (relative loudness of the tones being sung by each voice part at any moment) must be adjusted to produce optimum harmonic reinforcement. The Barbershop style by definition provides greater opportunities for the reinforcement of consonant overtones and the production of combination tones. Several factors contribute to this reinforcement.

- The melody is sung primarily within the chord rather than in the top voice.
- The chord must be in tune.
- There must be good vocal quality which promotes resonance and “ring” in the voice.
- The word sounds must be sung uniformly and the vowels should match.
- There must be good precision, which increases the proportion of time during which expansion can occur.

Vocal Expression: Vocal expression involves the appropriate execution of various singing elements combined produce a personalized, meaningful expression of the song. The following areas represent the most common singing elements performers employ to create an expressive phrase:

- enunciation and diction allowing the listener to understand the lyric’s meaning
- appropriate and lyrical word sound execution
- tone color choices to enhance the meaning of the lyrics
- appropriate vocal inflections

In order for all these techniques to be artistic, they must effectively communicate the emotional content of the song. Great vocal skill allows the performer to express many subtle variations of emotion such that believability is enhanced. Performances come across as honest, sincere, and genuine when the execution of vocal expression is delivered in a transparent manner.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CHORUSES

The basic sound of barbershop is found in the quartet performance. We have learned to evaluate the sound of chorus singing as its own unique form. Choruses singing barbershop emphasize the quartet-like cleanliness of the sound – the perception of individual voices, voice qualities or precision issues within the sound of each section may impact the goal of a quartet like sound.