

SOUND

UNIT SOUND (0-70 points)

VOCAL SKILLS

Posture
Breathing
Phonation
Resonation
Articulation

ACCURACY

Notes
Intervals
Chords
Tuning/Intonation
Section/Part Accuracy
Synchronization

BARBERSHOP BLEND

Tone Production
Vowel Production

BARBERSHOP BALANCE

ARTISTIC SOUND (0-30 points)

Energized Vocal line
Tone Flow
Dynamic Flexibility
Vocal Style

MUSIC

SONG & ARRANGEMENT (0-30 pts)

Merit as Barbershop Material
Form/Melody/Lyrics
Arrangement
Harmonization
Voicing

PERFORMANCE (0-70 points)

Vocal Skills
Harmony Accuracy
Barbershop Style
Tempo
Rhythm
Musical Unity
Phrasing
Dynamics

Musical Energy
Musical Artistry
Suitability to Performer

EXPRESSION

BASIC REQUIREMENTS (0-40 points)

Vocal Skills
Synchronization
Vowels
Diphthongs
Consonants
Enunciation

ARTISTIC LYRICAL INTERPRETATION (0-60 points)

Lyric Flow
Phrasing
Forward Motion
Embellishments
Dynamics
Tempo/Rhythm
Inflection
Energy
Finesse
Emotional Communication

SHOWMANSHIP

PERFORMANCE (0-70 points)

VISUAL COMMUNICATION of
MUSICAL PRODUCT
Vocal Skills
Poise and Command
Entrance/Break/Exit
Pitch pipe technique
Physical Expression

Posture

Unity

Choreography

Characterization

Audience Rapport

Energy

PREPARATION (0-30 points)

VISUAL PLAN

Entrance/break/exit

Costume

Makeup/Grooming

Choreography

Creativity

KEY ELEMENTS OF UNIT SOUND

- ▶ Pitch (a spot, not an area)
- ▶ Open resonance that promotes “ring”
- ▶ Freedom from tension in the vocal mechanism
- ▶ Breath at onset
- ▶ Word Stress
- ▶ Rhythmic Patterns
- ▶ Open vowels (produced through open resonance space, shaped in the resonator, not by lip tension)
- ▶ Consonants treated as punctuation or connectors
- ▶ Erect posture
- ▶ Skilled “chorus” breathing
- ▶ Vocal stamina
- ▶ Dynamics
- ▶ Special effects, finesse, artistry
- ▶ Facial - visual involvement

THE A+ PERFORMANCE Sound Category

UNIT SOUND

In a quartet, all members sing all chords in tune instantly.

In a chorus, all members of each section sing the same correct pitch so that all chords are in tune and in balance.

This means that:

No wrong notes are sung by any member at any time;

All intervals are precisely tuned by every singer;

All vowels are properly produced so that no intonation errors occur.

All voices in the group consistently produce tones that are:

Of even, consistent, good quality;

Free and relaxed and demonstrate properties of both depth and brilliance;

Appropriate for the voice part being sung;

Supported and energized;

Well resonated and projected.

All voices in the group combine to consistently produce a blend that results from a common approach to good singing;

There is vibrato that results from good tone production, but it is not present in such degree that blend or accuracy are affected.

All chords are in balance so that:

The bass actually sings with the most volume;

The lead predominates because of her quality (not volume);

The baritone sings a full tone between the bass and the lead and a lighter tone between the lead and the tenor;

The lead broadens lower tones when she sings below the baritone;

The tenor sings a light tone unless she is below the lead, in which case she broadens the tone to fill out the cone.

This balance is consistently maintained throughout the vocal range and through all dynamic changes.

(If all of the above is true at all times, score 70 points.)

ARTISTIC SOUND

All of the above properly produced, blended and balanced sounds are energized and given the vitality appropriate to vocal music in the barbershop style.

Having met the criteria defined above, the performer adds the element of excitement by consistently using the vocal style and delivery appropriate to the message of the song within the boundaries of the barbershop style.

(If all of the above is true at all times, score 30 points.)

PERFORMANCE LEVEL CHARACTERISTICS

SOUND	A	The "A" level is characterized by open, free, and relaxed tone production that appears effortless, by a consistent wall of sound, and by chords that consistently lock in total accuracy. The unit sound shimmers with open, matched resonance, and vowels seem to float on a stream of sound with no interference from consonants. Artistry, finesse, and vocal energy abound, and use of appropriate vocal textures helps to paint a musical picture of the message conveyed.
	B	The "B" level performance lacks the mastery of vocal skills found at the "A" level. Tuning and synchronization errors creep into vocal lines, creating varying degrees of error in accuracy and unity. Artistry and vocal energy are sometimes evident, but not a consistent due to focus on technique.
	C	The "C" level shows varying degrees of vocal skill and a need for better support and stamina. Early diphthongs and consonants often impair vowel match, and lack of consistent support affects attempts at vocal artistry, barbershop style, and the ability to produce sustained and energized vocal lines.
	D	The "D" level performer may or may not have begun work on building vocal skills. There are varying degrees of major accuracy or tonality problems, and no effort appears to have been made to match vowels or to align chords. There is no apparent understanding of vocal energy, artistry, or the barbershop style.
MUSIC	A	The "A" level performance uses its mastery of vocal skills to present a song that seems made for the barbershop style. The arrangement combines skillful use of the implied harmony, which requires an interesting variety of strong barbershop chords, with creativity in musical embellishments. The performer utilizes a wide range of dynamics and artistic, flowing phrases, or a combination of steady tempo, appropriate pulse, and rhythmic interest to captivate the listener.
	B	The "B" level performance often has "the horse before the cart" because the arrangements would be more successful with the foundation of basic skills found at the higher level. The inconsistencies in tuning and musical unity, together with the inability to produce and sustain a fully energized vocal line, keep the performers from getting the most out of the arrangement. There may also be balance problems due to the range demands and vocal inconsistencies.
	C	The "C" level performance frequently appears to have concentrated on the interpretive plan before strengthening the vocal skills needed to perform that plan effectively. In a chorus, there are generally more than four notes in each chord. The arrangement may be beyond the present ability of the performer.
	D	The "D" level performance suffers from lack of attention to the basics of good vocal production. At this level, anything but the simplest of barbershop arrangements will present challenges the performer is unable to meet. The only road to a higher level is work on vocal skills.
EXPRESSION	A	The "A" level performance, with its mastery of vocal skills, takes musical storytelling to its highest level through genuine involvement, character identification, and skillful use of dynamics, flowing phrases, vocal energy, stylistic delivery, and appropriate pace. The fully synchronized unit is characteristic of this level.
	B	The "B" level performance attempts the interpretive ideas found at the higher level, but inconsistencies in vocal ability often impair success. Plans are good, but consistent delivery as a total unit seems just beyond reach. Synchronization problems within words and at phrase endings are characteristic here.
	C	The "C" level performer often concentrates on the creative area of this category without attending to the detail found in the basic area that needs to be in place for interpretive plans to be successful. The performer appears more concerned with delivering the plan than with genuine involvement and communication.
	D	The "D" level performance suffers from lack of attention to the basics of good vocal production. At this level, work on dynamics is ineffective because of the lack of support and stamina. Unity is fleeting. At this level, the only path to higher achievement is work on stronger vocal skills.
SHOWMANSHIP	A	The "A" level performance, with its mastery of vocal skills, takes visual storytelling to the highest level through physical energy and intensity that establishes a charisma that envelops the audience. Characterization is strongly established, and the planned choreography or staging totally supports and reinforces the musical product. Attention to the details of costume and appearance fully supports the visual image portrayed. The stage was made for this performer!
	B	The "B" level performance often demonstrates ideas at the higher level that aren't as effective here because vocal skills lack complete mastery. The visual plan sometimes interferes with supported vocal lines. Performer can't consistently meet visual and vocal demands concurrently, and energy levels are inconsistent.
	C	The "C" level performer often concentrates on the choreographic plan without integrating it into the musical plan or realizing that "moves" are a whole-body effort. Visual sell is in and out because performers' attention is on the mechanics. The visual plan needs to be considered as support for the musical plan.
	D	The "D" level performance, though sometimes enthusiastic, suffers from lack of attention to the basics of good vocal production. The performer needs to recognize that Showmanship is about selling, and that it is almost impossible to sell a product that needs major repairs. The performance is often characterized by nerves that border on fear, and the message communicated is discomfort. The only road to a higher level performance is work on vocal skills.

SYNCHRONIZATION ERRORS AFFECT TUNING IN ALL FOUR CATEGORIES

COMPLEXITY OF VEHICLE

- jumpy part lines
- too high/low for one or more parts to control or balance well
- phrase length demands
- dynamic demands sometimes leading to vocal overdrive
- fast tempos with many words per measure

TEMPO / METER AGREEMENT

VOWELS:	"CHEWED"	SLOW TO OPEN	TOO SHORT
	TOO LONG	UNCLEAR	DIFFERENT
	INCORRECT	DIPHTHONG OMISSION	

BREATHING: DIFFERENT TIMES
DIFFERENT STYLE
TENSION CAUSING GASPING

DIFFERENCE IN INTERNAL PHRASE EMPHASIS

"MUSHY" OR POOR ARTICULATION

VARYING EMPHASIS ON CONSONANTS (including omission)

"CHOPPY" SINGING (lack of tone flow)

TENSION IN JAW AND/OR TONGUE

"BOUNCY" CHOREOGRAPHY

LACK OF ENERGY/INCONSISTENT BREATH PRESSURE

OVERSINGING (diminishes vocal flexibility)

UNLIKE MENTAL FOCUS

INCONSISTENT LISTENING AND TEAMWORK

STAGE FRIGHT

- Diminishes unit sensitivity and vocal control
- Diminishes visual/vocal congruity

NOTE AND WORD INSECURITY

NEED FOR VISUAL UNITY

PERFORMANCE LEVEL GUIDELINES

SOUND CATEGORY	SOUND CATEGORY	SOUND CATEGORY
<p>A+ LEVEL (94-100)</p> <p>Complete mastery of vocal skills demonstrated Tuning of all chords is instant and impeccable Flawless delivery of vowels with matched resonance Barbershop balance is instinctive and always present Seamless vocal lines appear to float on a pillar of energy Artistry and finesse epitomize the barbershop style Performance completely transcends technique</p>	<p>A LEVEL (86-93)</p> <p>Exceptional mastery of vocal skills demonstrated All chords instantly tuned into locked, ringing unit Vowels consistently produced with matched resonance Balance maintained at all dynamic levels and ranges Seamless vocal lines consistently energized and flowing Strong sense of barbershop style with artistry and finesse Performance consistently transcends technique</p>	<p>A- LEVEL (80-85)</p> <p>High level of proficiency in vocal skills demonstrated Chords usually tuned into locked, ringing unit Vowels usually produced with matched resonance Balance usually maintained throughout performance Vocal lines usually seamless and fully energized Strong sense of barbershop style usually evident Performance usually transcends technique</p>
<p>B+ LEVEL (74-79)</p> <p>Strong vocal skills demonstrated Minor tuning problems affect chord accuracy Synch problems occasionally affect chord accuracy Minor errors in vowel production and resonance match Balance generally consistent throughout performance Vocal lines generally well energized and supported Artistry beginning to emerge over technique</p>	<p>B LEVEL (66-73)</p> <p>Vocal skills strong but not habitual Solid sound overall, but chords not consistently locked Minor synch problems affect chord accuracy Most vowels matched and properly resonated Balance suffers at extreme ranges and dynamic levels Energy and support for vocal lines inconsistent Technique still evident and generally overrides artistry</p>	<p>B- LEVEL (60-65)</p> <p>Vocal skills generally good but inconsistent Frequent minor intonation and tuning problems Frequent internal synch problems affect chord accuracy Vowels initially matched but not sustained as tuned unit Singers need better awareness of balance adjustments Vocal lines occasionally supported and energized Focus on technique inhibits attempts at artistry</p>
<p>C+ LEVEL (54-59)</p> <p>Work on vocal skills apparent, but still in progress Consistent minor intonation and tuning problems Consistent minor synch problems affect overall unity Frequent errors in vowel production and resonance match Balance inconsistent due to vocal limitations Energy sporadic, with lack of consistent support Fleeting glimpses of at vocal artistry</p>	<p>C LEVEL (46-53)</p> <p>Vocal skills understood, but application inconsistent Intonation and tuning errors, and some wrong notes Frequent synch problems impact chord alignment Vowels occasionally match in passing, not sustained Balance good in mid-range, but not at extremes Energy level weak, need for improved vocal stamina Attempts at artistry masked by vocal problems</p>	<p>C- LEVEL (40-45)</p> <p>Vocal skills weak, but beginnings of work apparent Consistent tuning and accuracy errors Consistent synch problems keep chords from aligning Vowels generally lack common approach to resonance Unable to maintain consistent, cone-shaped balance Vocal energy rarely demonstrated No discernible attempts at vocal artistry</p>
<p>D+ LEVEL (34-39)</p> <p>Vocal skills weak, but brief glimpses of beginning work General lack of chord accuracy with many wrong notes Vertical alignment rarely achieved Vowel match generally not achieved Cone-shaped balance rarely achieved Energized vocal line impacted by weak support Vocal artistry cannot be evaluated at this level</p>	<p>D LEVEL (26-33)</p> <p>Vocal skills poor - need to focus attention here Major accuracy and/or tonality problems Consistent major synch errors Individual voices rather than musical unit Barbershop come not recognized Energized delivery lacking due to poor breath support Vocal artistry cannot be evaluated at this level</p>	<p>D- LEVEL (20-25)</p> <p>No apparent understanding of vocal skills Chord accuracy rarely achieved due to wrong notes No apparent effort to sing together as a unit Blend impossible due to lack of vocal skills No understanding of barbershop cone No evidence of vocal energy Vocal artistry cannot be evaluated at this level</p>

The Sound Category Sharon Babb (for the Pitch Pipe)

I love the dictionary definition of *sound*: *vibrations that stimulate the auditory nerves and produce the sensation of hearing*. We in Sweet Adelines International are privileged to hear many *sensational* sounds on a regular basis, sounds that not only stimulate us auditorily but emotionally as well. Additionally, other definitions of sound have to do with stability, accuracy, reliability, and fidelity, just as do the ensembles of people who sing barbershop. Also, one other definition of *sound* is to plumb, explore, and measure the depths of something, and that's what the Sound Category in our organization does for our unique style of singing.

The most important words in the Sound Category include: **harmony accuracy, breath support, unity, synchronization, resonance, tuning, blend, balance, energy, emotion, tone production, vowels and vocal skills**. This category may be the most technical in nature since the judge is always evaluating group skills, individual proficiency, and overall effect in sound. Since no one sound exists as the perfect model, each ensemble must be judged on how it delivers that locked, ringing, accurate package of good barbershop singing that affords us those moments of absolute artistic delight. As the late organizational leader Bev Sellers used to say, "No one said barbershop was easy—just fun!"

Seventy percent of the category rewards unit sound, and thirty percent recognizes expressive sound. The basics must be in place first, however, before expressive sound (tone flow, dynamics, vocal style) is taken into consideration. The sound must be instantly accurate, instantly tuned, absolutely synchronized and dependably supported. Judges seek a wall of sound from the chorus, a beautiful bass/lead match from the quartet. That beautiful collection of sounds made by 4, 40 or 140 voices, a song "spoken" from the heart, absolutely locked, supported and delivered without seeming effort—these are the elements that keep us coming back and back for more and more.

After vocal skills, the biggest concern of the category is Accuracy with a capital A. Accuracy of notes, words, intervals, chord balance, and lock and ring depend upon so many variables: the skill of the singer; the suitability of the arrangement; a singer's memory and execution of intervals; her knowledge of how to sing a third within a seventh chord; the amount of breath energy needed to lock a seventh within a ninth chord; and even the facility where the singing is done. All of these very demanding requirements and more are dependent upon the acuity of our minds, our ears, our instruments, and our hearts. Acoustical music is special because of the many vicissitudes of our instrument and our minds. From that meeting of balance and unity and energy and support, we derive the special pleasure we experience when we hear our best performers.

As a sound judge, I listen for all of the important words and perfect synchronization, unique blends of voices, and tone flow. Sound judges can isolate any part, duets within a foursome, and

sections within a chorus. A good sound judge should seek many opportunities to listen to and work with voices throughout her career. The human voice and its relations to others are our special source of interest.

Finally, how do we improve that sound score? A chorus is only as good as its posture, its breathing, its accuracy. Work on the five basic singing processes. There's no substitute for individual vocal lessons, coaching, individual and group vocal work. Duetting, sectionals, individual voice coaching are also essential. Choruses and quartets need to practice monthly benchmark taping—not only for accurate words, intervals, and notes—but also for vocal skills, breathing, dynamics, emotional involvement, energized phrase endings, sustained notes, synchronization, and musicality.

Bev also summed it up best when she prepared a handout about barbershop basics for one of her classes. What she says in her final point about team singing is so true. Team singing can be subject to the greatest catastrophe or to the greatest emotional synergy of voices. The sound category is the creed and the sound judges are the guardians of our special style of singing, those special vibes which define music for us.

