

## **WHAT THE EXPRESSION JUDGES WANT YOU TO KNOW...OR EXPRESSION CATEGORY FOR THE BEWILDERED**

**The following are direct quotes from Expression judges:**

Expression is the heart and soul of barbershop – without it, it's just words and notes on paper.

Basics are forever and in particular, uniform vowels, target vowels, and UNITY.

When the basics are almost perfect, and you sing with the most heart and soul in a contest, chances are, you would probably win!

First I want non-judges to know that it is imperative to learn and perfect the basics – the mechanics – before any beautiful music can happen.

Then I want an interpretive plan that fits the lyrics and is not an exhibition of vocal gymnastics and “I can sing louder than you can” mentality.

Lastly, I want all this delivered with heart and soul and integrity and nuances and finesse and artistry – and all the other descriptive words like this.

Sing with good vocal skills (louds, soft, and artistic phrase planning don't mean much if the foundation of good singing isn't there to display the artistic side).

Sing together, both vertically and horizontally (exact pitch and exact synchronization of vowel/consonant delivery).

AFTER both the above are solidly in place, use a variety of vocal textures and effects to enhance the musical and lyrical delivery.

I first listen for good vocal production and all of elements of the 40% portion of the category. Poor breath support, mismatched vowels and not sustaining the primary vowel sound in the turning of the diphthongs affects the score given. I listen for a unit sound within sections so that synchronization is not a major problem. Only then can I move to the lyrical interpretation portion of the category.

I listen for a strong feeling of tempo and backbeat in an uptune, and a sense of forward motion in both the uptune and the ballad. A wide range of dynamics well supported also adds to the message of the lyrics. Vocal textures and artistry can only be accomplished by the contestants scoring at least a low B+ level.

I guess what really turns me on is a performance which covers all of the basics of the category and shows mastery in telling the story so that the message reaches out and grabs the audience with a strong feeling of total involvement visually and vocally from the performer.

**Finally, as Judge Zoe Thompson says: “I ask you, is this too much to expect??”**









## PERFORMANCE LEVEL GUIDELINES

EXPRESSION CATEGORY	EXPRESSION CATEGORY	EXPRESSION CATEGORY
<b><u>A+ LEVEL (94-100)</u></b>	<b><u>A LEVEL (86-93)</u></b>	<b><u>A- LEVEL (80-85)</u></b>
<p>Complete mastery of vocal skills demonstrated</p> <p>Exemplary performance of open, matched vowels</p> <p>Flawless unit word delivery</p> <p>Flawless execution of masterful interpretive plan</p> <p>Excellent use of barbershop style and vocal drama</p> <p>Strong emotional communication captivates audience</p> <p>Performance fully transcends technique</p>	<p>Exceptional mastery of vocal skills demonstrated</p> <p>Vowels and diphthongs fully matched and resonated</p> <p>Total unity evident in word delivery</p> <p>Excellent interpretive plan consistently performed as unit</p> <p>Artistic use of stylistic elements and vocal textures</p> <p>Strong character and genuine involvement in message</p> <p>Performance consistently transcends technique</p>	<p>High level of proficiency in vocal skills demonstrated</p> <p>Vowels consistently matched as a unit</p> <p>Consistent vertical alignment of word elements</p> <p>Minor flaws in execution of strong interpretive plan</p> <p>Strong sense of unit delivery in barbershop style</p> <p>High degree of involvement in character and message</p> <p>Performance usually transcends technique</p>
<b><u>B+ LEVEL (74-79)</u></b>	<b><u>B LEVEL (66-73)</u></b>	<b><u>B- LEVEL (60-65)</u></b>
<p>Strong vocal skills demonstrated</p> <p>Minor internal synch problems</p> <p>Occasional problems in vowel alignment</p> <p>Interpretive plan well designed, minor flaws in execution</p> <p>Artistry and finesse frequently evident</p> <p>Genuine involvement in communication of message</p> <p>Artistry beginning to emerge over technique</p>	<p>Vocal skills strong but not habitual</p> <p>Internal synch problems with consonants and diphthongs</p> <p>Most vowels well matched, some consonant interference</p> <p>Good interpretive plan, but inconsistent unit delivery</p> <p>Some glimpses of artistry and finesse</p> <p>Inconsistent unit involvement in message</p> <p>Technique still evident and generally overrides artistry</p>	<p>Vocal skills generally good but inconsistent</p> <p>Frequent internal synch problems with word elements</p> <p>Vowels initially matched but not sustained as unit</p> <p>Good interpretive plan, but stronger unit needed</p> <p>Artistry only evident as part of technique</p> <p>Emotional involvement overshadowed by technique Focus on technique inhibits attempts at artistry</p>
<b><u>C+ LEVEL (54-59)</u></b>	<b><u>C LEVEL (46-53)</u></b>	<b><u>C- LEVEL (40-45)</u></b>
<p>Work on vocal skills apparent, but still in progress</p> <p>Consistent problems with internal synch</p> <p>Vowels not aligned as a unit, consonants interfere</p> <p>Interpretive plan evident but not executed as a unit</p> <p>Sporadic energy with lack of consistent stamina</p> <p>Insufficient support for effective stylistic use</p> <p>Concern with technique overrides sincere involvement</p>	<p>Vocal skills understood, but application inconsistent</p> <p>Frequent internal and external synch errors</p> <p>Vowels need unit approach to resonated production</p> <p>Interpretive plan emerges, but stronger support needed</p> <p>Vocal energy weak, choppy delivery results</p> <p>Stronger vocal skills needed to convey barbershop style</p> <p>Communication rarely reaches beyond footlights</p>	<p>Vocal skills weak, but beginnings of work apparent</p> <p>Consistent synch problems</p> <p>Vowels need free, unit approach to production</p> <p>Interpretive plan needs stronger vocal skills</p> <p>Phrase delivery choppy due to lack of energy and support</p> <p>Attempts at style lack musicality</p> <p>Nerves impair successful emotional communication</p>
<b><u>D+ LEVEL (34-39)</u></b>	<b><u>D LEVEL (26-33)</u></b>	<b><u>D- LEVEL (20-25)</u></b>
<p>Vocal skills weak, but brief glimpses of beginning work</p> <p>Unity impaired by inadequate vocal skills</p> <p>Lack of open resonance and target vowel production</p> <p>Interpretive plan ineffective due to lack of vocal skills</p> <p>Lack of vocal energy in phrase delivery</p> <p>Emotional communication not evident</p> <p>Need to focus on strengthening vocal skills</p>	<p>Vocal skills poor - need to focus attention here</p> <p>Consistent major synch problems</p> <p>No evidence of unit approach to vowel production</p> <p>Singers lack vocal skills to execute interpretive plan</p> <p>Energized lyric and phrase delivery non-existent</p> <p>Musical problems prevent emotional communication</p> <p>Need stronger vocal skills to raise performance level</p>	<p>No apparent understanding of vocal skills</p> <p>Consistent lack of vertical unity</p> <p>Consistent lack of vowel alignment</p> <p>No evidence of interpretive plan</p> <p>No evidence of energized lyric delivery</p> <p>High level of audience discomfort</p> <p>Need stronger vocal skills to raise performance level</p>

## PERFORMANCE LEVEL GUIDELINES

MUSIC CATEGORY	MUSIC CATEGORY	MUSIC CATEGORY
<p><b><u>A+ LEVEL (94-100)</u></b></p> <p>Highly creative arrangement of strong barbershop song                      Complete mastery of vocal skills demonstrated                      Tuning of all chords is instant and impeccable                      Interpretive plan captures essence of barbershop style                      Interpretive plan flawlessly executed                      Artistry and finesse epitomize the barbershop style.                      Performance completely transcends technique</p>	<p><b><u>A LEVEL (86-93)</u></b></p> <p>Creative arrangement of strong song                      Exceptional mastery of vocal skills demonstrated                      All chords instantly tuned into locked, musical unit                      Interpretive plan fully supports song and arrangement                      High level execution of interpretive plan                      Strong sense of barbershop style with artistry and finesse                      Performance consistently transcends technique</p>	<p><b><u>A- LEVEL (80-85)</u></b></p> <p>Strong song, arrangement shows some creativity                      High level of proficiency in vocal skills demonstrated                      Chords usually tuned into locked, musical unit                      Creative interpretive plan appropriate to song                      Strong execution of interpretive plan                      Strong sense of barbershop style usually evident.                      Performance usually transcends technique.</p>
<p><b><u>B+ LEVEL (74-79)</u></b></p> <p>Good song, arrangement shows some creativity                      Strong vocal skills demonstrated                      Minor tuning problems affect chord clarity                      Synch problems occasionally affect chord alignment                      Interpretive plan well designed for song and performer                      Minor flaws in execution of interpretive plan                      Artistry beginning to emerge over technique.</p>	<p><b><u>B LEVEL (66-73)</u></b></p> <p>Good song, well arranged                      Vocal skills strong, but not habitual                      Chord clarity inconsistent                      Minor synch problems affect chord alignment                      Good design for interpretive plan                      Focus on technique interferes with delivery of plan                      Some achievement in artistry and finesse evident</p>	<p><b><u>B- LEVEL (60-65)</u></b></p> <p>Good arrangement of acceptable song                      Vocal skills generally good, but inconsistent                      Frequent minor intonation and tuning problems                      Frequent internal synch problems affect chords                      Plan good, but some lapses in forward motion                      Delivery of plan controlled, lacks freedom                      Focus on technique inhibits artistry</p>
<p><b><u>C+ LEVEL (54-59)</u></b></p> <p>Good arrangement, presents challenges for performer                      Work on vocal skills apparent, but still in progress                      Consistent minor tuning problems impact chord clarity                      Sense of musical unity apparent, but inconsistent                      Interpretive plan evident                      Interpretive plan needs to be internalized for unit delivery                      Mechanical delivery overrides attempts at artistry</p>	<p><b><u>C LEVEL (46-53)</u></b></p> <p>Song and arrangement good, but may be difficult                      Vocal skills understood, but application inconsistent                      Tuning errors and some wrong notes impact chords                      Frequent synch errors, but some sense of unit apparent                      Interpretive plan sometimes apparent                      Delivery of plan needs stronger support and stamina                      Vocal problems make artistry difficult to recognize</p>	<p><b><u>C- LEVEL (40-45)</u></b></p> <p>Good arrangement, too difficult for performer                      Vocal skills weak, but beginnings of work apparent                      Consistent tuning and accuracy errors affect chords                      Consistent lack of chord alignment                      Interpretive plan sometimes difficult for performer                      Stronger vocal skills needed to deliver plan effectively                      No apparent attempts at musical artistry</p>
<p><b><u>D+ LEVEL (34-39)</u></b></p> <p>Musical demands of arrangement exceed abilities                      Vocal skills weak, but brief glimpses of beginning work                      Many wrong notes cause major tuning problems                      Infrequent glimpses of identifiable, aligned chords                      Energy level weak and inconsistent                      Occasional hints of interpretive plan                      Stronger vocal skills needed to support musical plan</p>	<p><b><u>D LEVEL (26-33)</u></b></p> <p>Arrangement not suitable for performer's abilities                      Vocal skills poor - need to focus attention here                      Major note accuracy problems make chords indistinct                      Consistent synch problems obscure four-part chords                      Energized delivery non-existent                      No interpretive plan clearly evident                      Stronger vocal skills needed to execute a musical plan</p>	<p><b><u>D- LEVEL (20-25)</u></b></p> <p>Arrangement beyond abilities of performer                      No apparent understanding of vocal skills                      Wrong notes consistently sung                      Chords not defined due to synch and vocal problems                      No apparent understanding of barbershop style                      Interpretive plan beyond performer's capabilities                      Stronger vocal skills needed to explore interpretive plan</p>

## PERFORMANCE LEVEL GUIDELINES

SHOWMANSHIP CATEGORY	SHOWMANSHIP CATEGORY	SHOWMANSHIP CATEGORY
<b><u>A+ LEVEL (94-100)</u></b>	<b><u>A LEVEL (86-93)</u></b>	<b><u>A- LEVEL (80-85)</u></b>
<p>Complete mastery of vocal skills demonstrated</p> <p>Superb command of the stage</p> <p>Strong theatrical skills used to project character of story</p> <p>Audience totally captivated throughout</p> <p>Energized visual performance breathtaking!</p> <p>Impeccable visual plan supports and enhances music</p> <p>Performance completely transcends technique</p>	<p>Exceptional mastery of vocal skills demonstrated</p> <p>Total command of the stage</p> <p>Complete involvement in character of story</p> <p>High degree of audience rapport</p> <p>High level of energy exudes joy of performing</p> <p>Strong visual plan reinforces musical plan</p> <p>Performance transcends technique most of the time</p>	<p>High level of proficiency in vocal skills demonstrated</p> <p>Poised and confident stage persona</p> <p>Character and personality well defined and projected</p> <p>Strong rapport with audience</p> <p>High degree of energy consistently demonstrated</p> <p>Visual plan works well to enhance musical plan</p> <p>Fleeting moments of technique evident</p>
<b><u>B+ LEVEL (74-79)</u></b>	<b><u>B LEVEL (66-73)</u></b>	<b><u>B- LEVEL (60-65)</u></b>
<p>Strong vocal skills demonstrated</p> <p>Confidence apparent, and usually in command</p> <p>Some flaws in unit delivery of visual plan</p> <p>Character of song maintained throughout</p> <p>Consistent level of audience rapport</p> <p>High level of energy with minor lapses in unit</p> <p>Creative visual plan generally supports music</p>	<p>Vocal skills strong but not habitual</p> <p>Comfortable on stage and generally in command</p> <p>Need to improve unit delivery of visual plan</p> <p>Moments of identification with character and story</p> <p>Audience not completely drawn into performance</p> <p>Inconsistent energy level within group</p> <p>Good visual plan does not interfere with music</p>	<p>Vocal skills generally good but inconsistent</p> <p>Stage command inconsistent in group and performance</p> <p>Need higher energy level in delivery of visual plan</p> <p>Some evidence of personality and characterization</p> <p>Audience has little involvement in performance</p> <p>Energy level shows peaks and valleys</p> <p>Minor flaws in design of visual plan</p>
<b><u>C+ LEVEL (54-59)</u></b>	<b><u>C LEVEL (46-53)</u></b>	<b><u>C- LEVEL (40-45)</u></b>
<p>Work on vocal skills apparent, but still in progress</p> <p>Some moments of command</p> <p>Inconsistent stamina in execution of visual plan</p> <p>Lack of consistency in personality and characterization</p> <p>Audience rapport not clearly established</p> <p>Energy sporadic, but frequent attempts evident</p> <p>Some attempt at creative visual plan</p>	<p>Vocal skills understood, but application inconsistent</p> <p>Need more confidence to project past footlights</p> <p>More stamina needed to deliver visual plan</p> <p>Little attempt at characterization or identification</p> <p>Audience communication not securely established</p> <p>Energy level falls short of crossing footlights</p> <p>Visual plan evident, but some conflict with musical plan</p>	<p>Vocal skills weak, but beginnings of work apparent</p> <p>Insecure and tentative stage persona</p> <p>Execution of visual plan weak due to lack of stamina</p> <p>No projection of personality or characterization</p> <p>Little evidence of attempt at audience communication</p> <p>Infrequent glimpses of energized delivery</p> <p>Visual plan does not consistently support music</p>
<b><u>D+ LEVEL (34-39)</u></b>	<b><u>D LEVEL (26-33)</u></b>	<b><u>D- LEVEL (20-25)</u></b>
<p>Vocal skills weak, but brief glimpses of beginning work</p> <p>Nerves detract from performance</p> <p>Lack of unit execution for visual plan</p> <p>No clearly defined personality or character</p> <p>No attempt at audience communication</p> <p>Energy level weak and inconsistent</p> <p>Visual plan limited and sometimes inappropriate</p>	<p>Vocal skills poor - need to focus attention here</p> <p>Nerves consume performance</p> <p>Serious lack of visual and musical unity</p> <p>No evidence of character identification</p> <p>Musical problems prevent effective audience rapport</p> <p>No demonstration of positive energy</p> <p>Visual plan vague and lacks support for music</p>	<p>No apparent understanding of vocal skills</p> <p>No evidence of effective stage presence</p> <p>Little evidence of attempt at visual unity</p> <p>Characterization and personality not explored</p> <p>High level of audience discomfort evident</p> <p>No attempt at energized delivery</p> <p>Little evidence of unit visual plan</p>

## PERFORMANCE LEVEL GUIDELINES

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