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Barbershop Harmony Society Judge Perceptions of Expressive Performances and Contest Adjudication

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Abstract

The purpose of this basic qualitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) was to analyze Barbershop Harmony Society (BHS) judge perceptions of vocal and visual expression and what elements make up expressive performances. A secondary purpose was to explore how BHS judges perceived and utilized information gleaned from training. I interviewed ten current BHS judges from around the United States and Canada through a semi-structured interview process. There were four emergent themes: (a) authentic, believable communication, (b) relationship between vocal and visual expression, (c) first impressions, and (d) the continuous BHS judge training program. Each participant noted the importance of the BHS judge training program and its value in recognizing and evaluating vocal and visual expression. While not generalizable, this study starts to fill in some of the missing literature by providing insight into what vocal and visual expression are from the judge's perspective. Additionally, the role of vocal and visual expression, the development of musical line, and the intentional nature of expression may be useful findings for other vocal genres. Consistent storytelling and musicianship throughout each rehearsal may help singers feel more comfortable expressing themselves through song and may potentially translate to more impactful performances. Finally, for BHS judges, directors, and singers, the findings in this study may help clarify what BHS judges look for in vocally and visually expressive performances. This study potentially provides a road map for implementing expression in the rehearsal, concert, and contest stages. Judges across all three BHS scoring categories experienced vocally and visually expressive performances similarly but through the lens of their category's rubric.

Keywords: expression, barbershop, adjudication, qualitative

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Expression is an essential portion of the aesthetic experience of music (Juslin, 2010). Few scholars would argue against emotion as a key value of listening to music. According to Juslin (2010), vocal and visual expression enhance and clarify intended messages. However, isolating and defining vocal and visual expression can be a challenge due to the personal nature of expression, both from the audience and performer standpoints.

Clarity of vocal tone, diction, and intonation, when accompanied by authentic expression, can potentially create life-changing performances (Seighman, 2015). Additionally, scholars found when singers practice expression in the rehearsal, singers may become more comfortable expressing themselves in their daily lives and on stage (Beery, 2012; Jost, 2011; Seighman, 2015). Pan et al. (2019) showed when visual storytelling matches the aural message and musicality conveyed, the audience's experience and emotional satisfaction increase. Pan et al. further mentioned, "an interference effect was found on the music-induced emotion when the auditory and visual emotional information were incongruent" (p.16). So, there is a need to explore what is known about visual expression and how to visually convey the song's lyrical and musical message.

Due to the individual nature of expression, adjudicating vocally and visually expressive performances proved difficult in previous studies. Additionally, as scholars have noted, reliability and validity issues have occurred due to lack of adjudicator training or unclear definitions of assessment criteria (Bergee & Platt, 2016; Hash, 2012; Norris & Borst, 2007). While there have been studies on instrumental music adjudication (Fiske Jr., 1975; Hash, 2012; Springer & Bradley, 2018), there was a noticeable gap in the literature regarding the training of adjudicators to evaluate elements of the aesthetic experience of vocal performances. This study partially addressed the gap by exploring the scoring and judge training for a specific art form, barbershop singing.

The barbershop singing style arose in the late 1800s in the Southern United States as a mostly oral tradition-based singing style (Abbott, 1992). Initially, barbershop simply promoted the enjoyment of singing with friends and storytelling, not for awards or placement. The first official barbershop singing contest did not occur until the 1930s (Abbott, 1992). Therefore, the adjudication of these performances is not even 100 years old. Since barbershop is still developing as a vocal music style, there is less extant literature about the adjudication of barbershop performances.

Adjudication

Almost 150 years ago, Hungerford penned the famous quote, "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder" (1878, chap 12). Musicians have striven to create art, yet contests require rankings, ratings, and placements (Fiske Jr., 1975). This dichotomy asked music adjudicators not only to see the technical aspects of the performance but also to experience the beauty and aesthetics of the performance as well. Judging systems and performers ideally asked adjudicators to arrive at the most appropriate rating or score for the performance based on the prescribed rubric (Hash, 2012; Springer & Bradley, 2018).

Currently, the choral adjudicator, in many instances, may or may not have had sufficient training or opportunities for adjudication content discussions and practice (Bergee & Platt, 2016; Norris & Borst, 2007). This scenario could have led to adjudicator reliability issues, as noted by Norris and Borst (2007), who found adjudicators admitted there was a discrepancy of understanding among judges. These discrepancies may have been related to the individual adjudicator's interpretation of judging criteria. Other scholars found large choruses scored higher than small choruses on a consistent basis but did not conclude whether this phenomenon was an adjudicator bias or just a coincidence (Bergee & Platt, 2016). The authors further noted a need for more training and discussion of specific adjudication criteria (Bergee & Platt, 2016; Norris & Borst, 2007).

Scholars researched the role of formants, vibrato, and other elements of vocal expression based on evaluator training, singing occupation, and experience (Kisenwether & Prosek, 2014). These scholars found differences in evaluating the same vocal characteristics based on their job, experience, and occupation. Other researchers acknowledged challenges in evaluating vocal expression alone, noting that it would be easier to understand vocal inflection and intent if there was a visual stimulus to combine with the vocal stimulus (Green & Eigsti, 2017). Therefore, there is a need for continued research on vocal expression, what constitutes vocal expression, and how to recognize and evaluate vocal expression.

Due to the concerns of consistency in the evaluation of vocal and visual expression, this study explored the adjudication techniques of the Barbershop Harmony Society (BHS), which had an extensive judge training program and a specific category that focuses on visual expression within performances. By investigating the mechanisms of evaluating BHS vocal and visual expression, a foundational understanding of criteria for both performers and adjudicators can be further developed and applied in other vocal ensembles.

BHS Judging

Barbershop singing is a lyrically driven American art form that has promoted easy-to-understand lyrics, in-tune chords, and consonant, mostly homophonic textures (Abbott, 1992). The barbershop style has heavily focused on communication, textual delivery, and vocal and visual expression. BHS judges, who have had years of experience adjudicating vocally and visually expressive performances, may have been able to provide insight as to what vocally and visually expressive performances look and sound like in the barbershop setting. Additionally, these judges may provide insight as to how their training helped them recognize and evaluate these performances. While this study would not be generalizable to all vocal music settings, some findings may provide useful implications.

BHS, formerly known as the Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of Barbershop Quartet Singing in America, is the largest barbershop singing organization in the world. Founded in 1938, BHS restricted its membership and contests to men until 2014. Now all genders and all combinations of voices can compete (Society Contest and Judging Committee [SCJC], 2020).

BHS solicited applications for potential judges every three years (SCJC, 2020). An interested prospective judge must have completed an application, have two judges and five other current BHS members vet them, and have their district's chairperson recommend them. Once a judge applicant, they completed multiple scoring tests, practice videos, and content knowledge tests. If successful, they transitioned to candidate judge status, where they spent two years practice scoring, evaluating contests, and coaching competitors in live contests. If successful, the candidate received an invite to a seminal candidate school, where the candidate earned the right to be a certified scoring judge. The Society for Contest and Judging Committee (SCJC), overseeing body for judging in BHS, has expected judges to compete regularly as a performer, adjudicated two to three contests every year, and recertified every three years (SCJC, 2020). This rigor has been extensive, thereby potentially increasing consistency.

One can view the barbershop genre through a lens of technical and artistic elements. Due to this paradigm, BHS created a system with multiple categories, with each scoring judge adjudicating the performance through their trained lens. The judges' scores counted equally and averaged to a composite percentage score.

The three BHS judging categories were Singing, Music, and Performance. Singing judges evaluated the degree to which the performer delivers "...in-tune, quality vocalizations accomplished with a high degree of unity, ensemble consistency, and artistry" (SCJC, 2022, p. 4-3). In recent years, the Singing category has been redefined to also include a focus on vocal expression. Music judges evaluated song suitability to the style and the performer and "...the performer's musicianship in bringing the song and arrangement to life" (SCJC, 2022, p. 4-3). Finally, "The performance judge evaluates entertainment in the barbershop style" (SCJC, 2022, p. 6-1). Further, they determined the total effect of the performer's vocal and visual expression through genuine, believable storytelling.

At the time of this study, there was a need for the survey of barbershop adjudicator mindsets of vocally and visually expressive performances for multiple reasons. There was minimal literature about barbershop adjudication practices, so this study started to complete some of the knowledge gaps. Moreover, judges may have been able to provide more consistency in adjudication if they were aware of their preferences, biases, and what components made up expressive or non-expressive performances (Fiske, Jr., 1975; Hash, 2012; Springer & Bradley, 2018). Further, if judges had been more aware of new performance, choral, and entertainment trends, adjudicators may have been able to provide performers various comments about going deeper into vocal and visual expression while increasing the overall entertainment value (Neuen, 2020). Additionally, if chorus directors gained insight into the adjudicator mindset, singers and directors may have been able to better understand judge feedback (Fiske, Jr., 1975; Hash, 2012; Springer & Bradley, 2018). Finally, more conversations may have arisen about creating contest rubrics that reflected the kinds of musical entertainment that barbershop audiences valued regarding vocally and visually expressive performances, which could translate to other vocal genres.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study was to analyze BHS judge perceptions of vocal and visual expression and what elements make up expressive performances. A secondary purpose was to explore how BHS judges perceived and utilized information gleaned from training. Understanding what BHS adjudicators view as important elements of vocal and visual expression may inform future qualitative and quantitative surveys, focus groups, and semi-structured interview studies of barbershop and choral adjudicators. In addition, this research may start to fill in the literature gap as to how some adjudicators use their training to evaluate the aesthetic experience of other vocal genres. Also, BHS judges, directors, and singers may potentially be able to use the findings from this study to enhance their rehearsals, concerts, and contests. Finally, by knowing what BHS judges find vocally and visually expressive, directors and singers may have a clearer path to connecting with audiences.

The research questions were:

1. According to BHS judge participants, what elements create vocally and visually expressive performances?
2. What are BHS judge participants' perceptions of the BHS judge training system?
3. How did BHS judge training help participants' ability to recognize and evaluate vocally and visually expressive performances?

Method

I chose a basic qualitative study paradigm for this research, as outlined in Merriam and Tisdell (2016). This was considered a basic qualitative study because it did not fit within a specific type of qualitative research such as ethnography, phenomenology, or case study. One of the core tenets of a basic qualitative study is constructivism, where participant meaning is constructed through interpretation of experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, participant meaning came from their experiences as BHS judges and performers.

Participants

I used purposive criteria sampling (Palinkas et al., 2015) to gather the widest variety of years of experience, countries of origin, and categories while maintaining a homogeneous participant pool. Participants were all BHS scoring judges, who I found via the public judge roster on the BHS official website. Participants included choral music educators, barbershop chorus directors, district quartet champions, choreographers, actors, professional singers, and a radio disc jockey. I chose this diversity of backgrounds to help achieve the

greatest range of data possible and to see what commonalities occurred among a diverse sample. Since there were so few BHS judges around the world, approximately 140, it was virtually impossible to anonymize the study entirely. Therefore, I asked each participant if they would consent to waive anonymity or if they would like a pseudonym created. All participants consented to have their names, location of residence, certification category, and years as a BHS judge disseminated. Therefore, all names and demographics are real. See Table 1 for participant demographics.

Table 1.
Participant Demographics Table

Name	Location	Years as BHS Judge	BHS Judge Category
Jay D.	USA (Midwest)	5	Music
Brent G	USA (Southwest)	24	Music
Kevin K.	USA (Midwest)	24	Music
Marty L.	Canada (BC)	35	Performance
Shawn M.	USA (Southwest)	8	Performance
Gary S.	USA (Southwest)	16	Performance
Theresa W.	Canada/USA	2	Performance
Jay B.	USA (Midwest)	5	Singing
Steve S.	USA (Southeast)	5	Singing
Jordan T.	Canada (Ontario)	8	Singing

Among the ten participants, nine identified themselves as male and one as female. There were seven from the United States, two from Canada, and one with dual United States and Canadian citizenship. The average number of years served as a BHS judge at the time of the interview was 13.2 years. Since there is a three-year certification process, the average time served within their category for each participant was over 16 years. Of the 10 participants, three were from the singing category, three from the music category, and four from the performance category. See Table 1 for participant demographics.

Procedures

Based on extant literature and my research goals, I created research questions and interview questions. I created a basic qualitative interview protocol following interview procedures (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Tracy, 2019). I then developed and implemented a university institutional review board (IRB) approved protocol, containing a recruitment protocol, information letter, interview protocol, and member checking protocol. I sent the interview protocol to two academic peers, one in music and one outside of music, to check for validity and clarity of questions. I then created a list of desired participant attributes and created a spreadsheet of potential participants based on guidance from qualitative research scholars (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Tracy, 2019). The desired participant demographics were BHS judging category, number of years as a judge, gender, and location. I looked at the BHS judge roster on the official BHS website to determine which judges fit these criteria. Next, I selected and emailed potential participants and sent the IRB-approved information letter. If participants consented to participate, I scheduled a Zoom interview and asked if they wanted their real names disclosed or a pseudonym created. Finally, before starting official interviews, I piloted the interview protocol with two BHS judges who were not participants to check for question clarity.

Following qualitative protocols outlined in Ravitch and Carl (2016) and Tracy (2019), I conducted in-depth, one-on-one, semi-structured interviews lasting between 1.25 and 1.75 hours per interview. I conducted all interviews electronically via Zoom and audio and video recorded the conversation so that I could create a verbatim transcription. All participants consented to this interview and recording method. I asked participants the same ten questions, asking clarifying or prompting questions as needed. To understand how BHS judges evaluated which elements help create vocally and visually expressive performances, I asked participants about their background as a BHS judge and what performers can do to enhance their performances vocally or visually. I further interviewed them about how their training as BHS adjudicators helped their ability to recognize and evaluate vocally and visually expressive performances.

I then verbatim transcribed each interview and iteratively analyzed them, using Atlas TI 9, to discover emerging ideas, trends, and patterns (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Tracy, 2019). I studied each participant's interview individually, reading each transcript multiple times and making exploratory notes. I then coded and categorized the data further, which also included memoing as outlined in Ravitch and Carl (2016). Memoing helped me create meaning from each transcript while preparing for the following interview, not to stall the research process. I emailed participants for member checking to see if the quotes were their true and accurate words and intention. A few participants had minor typographical, accuracy, and intent corrections in the quotes. I proceeded to the next analysis phase once I received all ten participant approvals from member checking.

I sent all research questions, codes, definitions, themes, and descriptions to two academic peers, one current music educator and one non-music educator for a peer-audit. The

non-music educator had been a barbershop singer for ten years and has experience coaching visual communication techniques. These peer auditors provided unbiased analysis and feedback about this project, giving clarity, focus, and syntax information. These auditors helped promote dependability and confirmability of the results and interpretation of findings.

Reflexivity

Throughout the entire research process, I took several steps to promote researcher trustworthiness and data validity. In the planning phase, I created a series of research questions and supporting questions that aligned with the overarching questions. These steps led to the creation of my interview protocol. I used data triangulation (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Tracy, 2019) by piloting the interview with barbershop judges who were not participants to check for clarity of questions. These peer auditors also helped revise the interview protocol to increase clarity and potentially aid in more consistent interpretation. Analysis of interview transcripts and subsequent participant member checking helped triangulation. Several participants clarified wording and intent from the original quotations, which helped promote their true and honest views.

Throughout the interview process, I bracketed my personal views of expressive performances so that I could fully learn from the participants. Additionally, I used journaling to help process what I felt versus what I heard and saw. I watched each interview video multiple times and completed multiple rounds of coding through the iterative, recursive process to further clarify codes and themes. The goal of these measures was conformability, getting as close as possible to an objective reality within the confines of qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Tracy, 2019).

Positionality

At the time of this study, I was a barbershop singer and choral music educator with experience scoring contests in both paradigms. This experience was part of why I chose to study how BHS judges perceive vocal and visual expression in barbershop performances. In addition, due to the rigorous and lengthy certification process, I endeavored to explore if BHS judge training helped BHS judges' abilities to recognize and evaluate vocally and visually expressive performances.

While I was not a certified BHS judge, I applied twice and have been an applicant and a candidate pending. I participated in judge meetings discussing adjudication topics, trial scored several contests, and conducted practice coaching evaluation sessions. To maintain trustworthiness and mitigate undue bias, I used a journal to process my thoughts that were extraneous to what I saw in the interview, recording, or transcript. In addition, I conducted follow-up interviews and email correspondences with participants to check for the accuracy and intent of quotations. Further, I sought judges from all three adjudication categories to gain maximum insight and diverse opinions. These steps helped to describe only what the

participants said, did, and felt.

Findings

In this qualitative interview process, the ten BHS participants revealed several themes which highlighted their perceptions of vocally and visually expressive performances. Further, participants detailed how the BHS adjudicator training process helped their ability to recognize and evaluate vocally and visually expressive performances. See Table 2 for themes and descriptions.

Table 2.
Themes and Descriptions

Group Experiential Theme	Description
Theme 1: Authentic, Believable Communication	According to participants, what elements contribute to vocally and visually expressive barbershop performances?
Theme 2: Relationship between Vocal and Visual Expression	According to participants, what is vocal and visual expression in barbershop performances? How does vocal and visual expression relate to each other during a barbershop performance?
Theme 3: First Impressions	How does a performer's first impressions set them up to provide vocally and visually expressive barbershop performances?
Theme 4: Continuous BHS Judge Training	How does knowledge of one's preferences and biases help judges evaluate elements of vocally and visually expressive barbershop performances? How does BHS's judge training helped judge ability to recognize and evaluate vocally and visually expressive performances?

Theme 1: Authentic, Believable Communication

The first emergent theme in this study was authentic, believable communication. Participants consistently noted that vocally and visually expressive performances consisted of honest singing and storytelling, making use of the song's musical nuances to further highlight the lyrical and contextual meaning of the song. Theresa noted, "I really appreciate when a performer is quite comfortable and confident and believes what they're communicating, so that the belief system is really evident." Brent, Kevin, and Jay D. mentioned that the best ensembles take what the arranger or composer gives in terms of dynamics, musicality

markings, and chord structures to express themselves. They further divulged the belief that life-changing performances have vocal and visual expression congruent with the composer's intent.

Another aspect of expressive communication was the consistency of a performer's message. Gary revealed his thoughts on consistent message: "There are many groups who sing technically perfect but who do not make it to our hearts. It is those groups who both share their message through song and sing well who touch us." Marty mentioned he enjoyed performances where the ensemble looked like they were having a great time on stage because he felt like he was given permission to also enjoy the performance. Several participants expressed that vocal, mental, and visual preparation in the rehearsal allows performers the opportunity to think about communicating on stage with the audience instead of focusing on technique, nerves, or other factors. Brent expressed, "When everyone is a performer every time in rehearsal, the magic usually translates on stage." Marty, Theresa, and Shawn echoed this sentiment, stating when ensembles were so confident in their storytelling and technical abilities, the audience connects more and engages more.

Theme 2: Relationship between Vocal and Visual Expression

The second emerging theme centered around the judges' perceptions of the elements of vocal and visual expression and the relationship between them. For both visual and vocal expression, participants identified elements that enhanced their enjoyment of the performance. Moreover, participants noted an intentional nature of expression, where performers make choices that contributed to the overall product. Finally, participants noted the relationship between vocal and visual expression and how performers could utilize elements of both to enhance the overall performance, entertainment value, and audience connection.

Vocal Expression

Jordan responded to the question of, "What is vocal expression, and what does it look like?" with a question of his own. "So how do you utilize different vocal techniques to express the song that you're singing? That's vocal expression." According to the participants, vocal expression could consist of dynamics, dynamic contrast, tone color, more or less air, more or less emphasis, lyrical word stress, more or less resonance, or consonants. However, all participants noted the importance of using these techniques for artistic purposes, not merely to please a judge or director. Jay D. noted, "Vocally expressive performers treat musical nuances with intent and purpose. Their goal is to deliver the song's musical and emotional elements as clearly as possible." Jay B. and Kevin noted that for an ensemble to become masters of vocal expression, singers must know how the vocal instrument works and perform songs that build skills before progressing to more challenging techniques or songs. Jay B. and Kevin both cited a need for directors and singers to continuously learn about vocal pedagogy and singing practices to become more adept at being vocally expressive.

Visual Expression

According to participants, visual expression is the intentional, honest, and believable outer representation of internal storytelling (Shawn, Theresa, Gary, Marty). Everything the audience sees makes up the visual message, whether it is a clear or obscure message (Shawn, Theresa, Gary, Marty). Visual expression can include facial engagement, body language, staging, scenery, lighting, movement, and other elements that support the song's lyrical or musical message (all participants). Jordan highlighted the importance of unity and consistency of visual expression and singer engagement: "When some singers are fully present and engaged in storytelling and others are not, it is distracting. It breaks the unity of the performance. The audience wants a consistent message because it is easier to follow and connect to." Gary related this concept to a grand marquis sign that is considered beautiful until one notices the singular bulb that is out. Several participants noted all singers are naturally expressive as part of human nature. Therefore, the participants advocated the importance of consistent visual practice through lyrical, contextual, and style study to inform visual expression.

Relationship

All participants discussed the relationship between vocal and visual expression in life-changing performances. Jay B. and Jay D. described these life-changing performances as artistic moments, where visual expression enhances the vocal product instead of hindering it. Jordan noted, "Performers can do a lot of vocal things without being visually engaging. One enhances the other, and so my belief is that both things need to happen to give a really believable, phenomenal performance." Marty, however, described an example of what can happen when the visual presentation does not mirror the vocal product. "Okay, it appears that you put all your eggs in the basket of this incredible choreography plan, but what didn't come across was the audience connection. So how about if you did 'XYZ' with your singing to match it?" Jay B. referenced Franz Schubert's *Erlking* to sum his thoughts:

The Erlking, when he sings, you can hear fear, and you can hear the racing heart-beat in everything he does. Why wouldn't singers do that? I mean why would we waste the opportunity? It's like watching black and white TV when you can watch color.

Another aspect of the relationship between vocal and visual expression is contrast. Participants consistently noted that simply having dynamics, appropriate tone, and facial expression is not enough to create life-changing experiences. However, vocal and visual expression, echoing the song's musical and lyrical development creates heightened levels of believability and audience rapport (all participants). Gary described his optimal situation:

We've been in those situations where there is just so much beautiful music taking us on an emotional path with a musical and emotional development that has us feeling like that was the best or the most fulfilling experience we could have had. Those are the performances I remember.

When singers and directors started with simply being facially engaged, that was the first step (Jordan). The next step was to dive into the lyrics and musical elements to drive vocal and visual expression (all participants).

Theme 3: First Impressions

All participants discussed the importance of first impressions and their role in vocally and visually expressive performances. First impressions set the scene and tone for the performance, demonstrate a performer's level of preparation, and allow the performer the initial chance to make a connection with the audience (all participants). Every participant mentioned the first thing they noticed when a performer walked on stage was their confidence level. Jordan specifically mentioned,

A performer's confidence makes the judges perceive that they are confident and competent because that makes us nice and relaxed. I know when a group comes on stage, and they act like they own the stage-not through arrogance but from a storytelling perspective.

Kevin noted the importance of how a group walks on stage and what their body language communicates:

So as an ensemble walks on stage-the curtain opens, and I see a chorus. I instantly can assess what I think probably I'm going to hear just based upon their savvy walking on the stage. You know, just the way that they dress, the way they walk, the way they accept applause, you get a sense of who they are very, very quickly.

Participants mentioned how the ensemble, once onstage, engages the audience in storytelling affects their enjoyment. Shawn noted, "Before the song starts, I'm looking for the ensemble to tell me visually what the meaning of the song is." All participants noted the importance of setting the mood prior to singing so the audience could follow along. Each participant also mentioned setting the scene prior to the song shows another level of audience rapport.

Theme 4: Continuous BHS Judge Training

The continuous BHS judge training program influenced the participants' abilities to recognize and evaluate vocally and visually expressive performances. All participants men-

tioned that they brought a lifetime of musical, life-changing experiences to the table when judging. However, some participants said that they could not always quantify or qualify what made a performance engaging or compelling until they received more training and education. When the participants initially certified as BHS judges, the challenge was how to bring this lifetime of experiences and use the extensive training received to follow their category's values and the judging rubric. One strategy Kevin mentioned was, "It's not a judge's job to like something or dislike something. It's a judge's job to evaluate the performer's objectives...and evaluate how well they executed those objectives on stage." Regarding judge biases, Marty said, "I think if people say, 'I have no biases or I have no personal preferences or I'm whatever,' I think to myself, 'You'll be the first I've met.'" Brent said about biases, "Embrace your biases, preferences, and experiences because that is your expertise, but still judge based on the scoresheet."

A common phrase among the BHS judge participants was hot-button issue. According to Kevin, "A hot-button issue is a phrase commonly used in the barbershop judging community to refer to personal musical, emotional, staging, or content preferences or opinions about how a performance or song 'should be done.'" These notions could unduly tempt a judge to shift their score or rating up or down or merely distract a judge from being fully present in the performance (Kevin). An example of a hot-button issue in BHS culture could be a preference for formal attire over informal attire. Another hot-button issue could be an affinity for a certain composer or arranger's music or ballads versus uptunes (Gary, Theresa, Brent). Hot-button issues are natural extensions of these lifetimes of experiences, according to participants. However, they can potentially affect a judge's reaction to a performance. As Gary said,

I agree that a hot-button can be either positive or negative. I know that I have an affinity for comedy, and though I am unaware if I have a hot button in a positive way for comedy, it is possible that I am more alert or receptive for a comedic performance and that could be a lot like a hot button. I will say, however, that my reaction to a comedic performance can be as equally negative as it could be positive depending on the quality of the comedic entertainment value.

Theresa said that a challenge with a hot button issue could be,

You can stay on something all the time and never really get engaged holistically, and that can be a problem for a judge, because then you're not scoring to the level that they deserve, and you keep hammering, and for one thing, you're not taking into consideration all the great things the performers are doing.

Theresa elaborated that the continuous BHS judge training program helped her become aware of her biases and clarified what she should focus on as an adjudicator.

Every participant found value in BHS training discussions of contemporary trends in adjudication, music, and culture, whether it was awareness of current societal norms, trends,

and values or entertainment trends. Many participants advocated for watching multiple examples of entertainment across genres and assigning a score based on the prescribed rubrics. Shawn stated, “It’s just learning, not to be distracted and learning, not to overreact, and then, it will be true to yourself.” This was part of Shawn’s philosophy about recognizing one’s preferences for certain types of music, arrangers, and lyrical messages and focusing on what the performer presents and the extent to which they are successful.

Several participants noted strategies from their training that have helped them while judging vocally and visually expressive performances. Jay D. and Jordan recommended doing breathing exercises or standing up and walking around between every performance to reset mentally ... with a goal of goal remaining fresh and giving each performance its unique viewing. Brent advocated for staying focused on each song as its own entity and own unique performance, “The temptation is to compare one song or performer to another. That always leads to disaster as a judge because if you compare, your biases are more likely to influence as opposed to if you take each song as a separate performance.” According to Brent, judges must remember that they are to rate the success of a performance based on the prescribed rubric. Therefore, a judge can have an opinion of one song or performance, but when it is time for the next song to start, it is an entirely different performance. As Brent discussed, “What our training has done is allowed us to say, ‘Okay, I’m going to have this visceral reaction to these kinds of performances or these kinds of quartets or this kind of music and integrate that into our score.’”

Discussion

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to analyze BHS judge perceptions of vocal and visual expression and what elements make up expressive performances. A secondary purpose was to explore how BHS judges perceived and utilized information gleaned from training. These findings within this study may provide clarity to BHS judges, directors, and singers as to what current BHS judges find vocally and visually expressive. Additionally, the findings in this study suggest support for an extensive adjudicator certification and continuous improvement model. The findings presented should reinforce adjudication practices within BHS. Although the findings cannot be generalized past this study, some of the findings could be useful for other vocal music genres.

The participants’ views that authentic human emotion on stage had a significant audience impression echoes Juslin’s (2010, 2013) framework of musical responses. Jurgens et al. (2011) noted acting expressively, while effective, was not as effective in garnering responses or reactions as authentic expression. Brunetti (2006) described the phenomenon of being truthful on stage as “real living within imaginary circumstances” (p.1). Therefore, what participants looked for most was for performers to be their most authentic selves on stage while conveying the lyrical and emotional message of the piece. Since some singers are naturally more outwardly expressive than others, some singers may need to utilize characterization or acting techniques to help provide a cohesive performance. As Jurgens et al. (2011) not-

ed, acting can be authentic. Therefore, if the song is about joy, finding something joyful in a singer's life may help them more outwardly express the music. This is still considered a truthful expression, according to Brunetti (2006) and Carnelia (2021), because it reflects the singer's true emotion, even if not necessarily the exact lyrical message.

Participants outlined different ways to incorporate vocal and visual expression by first intentionally engaging the body and mind then diving into the score to determine the important musical and lyrical elements. Therefore, the optimal combination, as outlined by these participants, is great technique supported by genuine, believable storytelling that is congruent with the song and arrangement's intent. The participants' expressed beliefs echo previously mentioned scholarship (Carnelia, 2021; Jost, 2011; Juslin, 2013).

The performance has many details, from the musical product, the visual product, the lighting, and the staging. Every person plays a direct role in that balance. The findings here indicate an opportunity for barbershop directors and singers to look at all aspects of their individual performance and see what can be more effective, which reflects Jost (2011) and Carnelia (2021), who mentioned the importance of the emotional goals of music being more important than merely singing notes and words. Echoing Jost and Carnelia, many judge participants stated the emotional character development and musical plan development occurs in the rehearsal, and through consistent practice and reinforcement, singers can become excellent performers. Brent advocated that every person in the rehearsal, the conductor, and the ensemble, should be a performer in every rehearsal, so they create and maintain a higher level of singing, performing, and musicianship. Jay D. advocated a rehearsal mindset where singers and directors consistently ask themselves how they can be more vocally and visually artistic and expressive. Therefore, participants recognized vocally and visually expressive performances partially by evidence of consistent vocal, visual, and emotional education, awareness, and mindset in rehearsal, which translated to performances.

Participants overwhelmingly lauded the BHS model, which requires a minimum of three years of training, constantly watching and scoring practice contests and other playlists, and actively collaborating with competitors (SCJC, 2020). In three years, BHS judges will have viewed and scored several hundred contest videos. This experience with collaboration, reflection, and application of skills provided the participants an adjudication framework, which helped them feel comfortable recognizing and evaluating vocally and visually expressive performances. Having a training framework through listening and identifying common singing and performance behaviors and patterns may help alleviate some of the validity and reliability concerns noted in previous literature (Bergee & Platt, 2016; Hash, 2012; Norris & Borst, 2007). Future research would be useful in other areas of vocal and choral music to learn about various adjudication training programs and to what extent judges felt prepared to evaluate vocally and visually expressive performance.

Several similarities and differences become apparent when reviewing the literature on adjudication structures for choirs, bands, and barbershop choruses. The National Associa-

tion for Music Education (NAfME) and the SCJC oversee standards which make up state Large Group Performance Assessment (LGPA) rubrics and BHS judging sheets (NAfME, 2014; SCJC, 2022). However, each state has the power to create its own LGPA rubric, whereas BHS has a consistent system across all its member districts. In addition, training requirements among traditional adjudicators vary among states, which may lead to adjudicator and director concerns about the reliability of contest results (Bergee & Platt, 2016; Fiske Jr., 1975; Hash, 2012; Norris & Borst, 2007; Springer & Bradley, 2018). According to scholars, the BHS may provide greater opportunities for validity and reliability in the BHS system because all judges train and use the same rubrics, no matter where the contest takes place (Bergee & Platt, 2016; Hash, 2012; Norris & Borst, 2007).

Another similarity between the traditional music and barbershop adjudication systems is the lack of a definition for visual expression. In 2020, the BHS singing category added “visual expression” as a portion of their rubric; however, the term was not completely defined until 2022 (SCJC, 2022). According to scholars, a persistent effort to clarify specific terms used in criteria may help adjudicators provide more accurate feedback (Bergee & Platt, 2016; Fiske Jr., 1975; Hash, 2012; Springer & Bradley, 2018). For example, the BHS handbook positions the concepts of pronunciation and enunciation in its description that “lyrics should be heard and understood” (SCJC, 2022, p. 5-8). Therefore, BHS and traditional music judges may consider striving for more consistency and clarity of rubrics, especially when incorporating vocal and visual expression.

The reason I selected the barbershop genre was due to its extensive judge training program. The participants selected each trained for three years before judge certification, actively completed judging homework assignments quarterly, judged two to three contests annually, and recertified every three years (SCJC, 2020). As Kevin mentioned, this training taught him to be aware of his own biases, lifetime of experiences, and opinions. This awareness, stemming from training and reinforcement, led Kevin to become consistent as an adjudicator, coach, and mentor.

While this study is not generalizable, it may provide useful findings or implications for other areas of vocal music. Therefore, it does start to address some of the literature gap on what vocal and visual expression are and best practices for recognizing and evaluating them. In addition, the role of vocal and visual expression, the development of musical line, and the intentional nature of expression may be useful areas of emphasis for other vocal genres. Finally, consistent practice of expression throughout each rehearsal may help singers feel more comfortable expressing themselves through song and may potentially translate to more expression on the stage.

For the BHS community, there are several implications from this study. I purposefully selected BHS judges across all three judging categories. Participants across categories cited very similar experiences regarding vocal and visual expression, from their own unique judging lens. For example, performers conveying a sense of authentic joy manifested, according to judges, a more in-tune performance, a more believable performance, and a more musi-

cal performance. Another example was the importance placed by judges on a song's unity, development, and contrast. Some judges from the music category discussed the importance of singers using the arrangement's musical nuances, yet judges from the singing category noted the role of dynamic contrast, tone, and diction. For BHS singers and directors, these examples may provide clarity as they implement strategies to promote more vocally and visually expressive rehearsals, concerts, and contests.

For the BHS judging community, the findings in this study provide support for the current model of extensive pre-certification training and evaluation and continuous improvement post-certification. All participants lauded the current model, even though it is time-consuming. Participants noted the value of consistent category meetings to discuss current trends in entertainment, scoring calibration, and camaraderie. Several participants also noted that having judge accountability safeguards in place helped motivate active and prospective judges to continuously improve and strive to maintain consistency and validity in their scores.

Future studies might include repeating this study to incorporate other barbershop judges and/or replicating this study with choral music adjudicators to assess potential transferability of findings and interpretations. Future studies might also include Sweet Adelines International judges to survey primarily female, trans men, trans women, and non-binary barbershop judge perspectives. Furthermore, music researchers may consider investigating choral music adjudication training methods to continue to increase consistency and awareness of adjudicator experiences, biases, contemporary trends in choral music, and current trends in performance. Finally, a survey of choral adjudicators' perceptions of vocal and visual expression would be beneficial to compare findings across other vocal genres.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Welcome and thank you for your participation today. This interview will ask about your experiences as a Barbershop Harmony Society (BHS) judge, your perceptions about objectivity as a judge, and the role that biases may or may not impact judging. You were selected because of your experience as a BHS judge, your reputation, and your history of excellence as a Barbershop singer.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. Remember that you may withdraw your participation or modify the extent to which you participate at any time, with no repercussions. This interview will be audio and video recorded for transparency and researcher ability to create a verbatim transcription. The interview will consist of about ten open-ended questions. You have seen the questions ahead of this interview so that you know what to expect. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Then, with your permission, we will begin the interview.

Interview Questions, allowing for clarification or probing if needed:

- 1) Describe your experience as a Barbershop singer and a BHS judge.
- 2) What are the first things you notice when a chorus or quartet takes the stage?
- 3) What can an ensemble do visually to enhance or detract from their performance?

- 4) What can an ensemble do vocally to enhance or detract from their performance?
- 5) What role does the conductor play on stage?
- 6) What potential biases or “hot button” issues can a judge have?
- 7) Are these biases implicit (subconscious) or explicit (conscious)?
- 8) How do participants minimize their own personal values, preferences, or biases to maximize the accuracy of the assessment?
- 9) Do you have any recommendations for judges about how to minimize the role that the visual presentation has on the vocal product and vice versa in order to truly isolate the two?
- 10) Before we conclude, is there anything else you would like to share?

Thank the participant for their time and expertise.
