

# The Music Performance Caption

All sheets are broken up into two parts, generally, the written book and the performance, which we call Composition and Excellence. In covering the Music Performance caption, we'll look at both independently. But first, let's consider, from the judges' viewpoint, Composition.

## 1. The Judge (and Process of Adjudication)

When considering the composition in light of the Music Captions (Music Performance, Music Ensemble, and General Effect), the following statements as regards judging must be given weight by the design team and the judge:

- The judge must be aware of the Qualities/Dimensionality of the composition. Therefore, design with dimensionalities and artistic qualities.
- The judge must recognize and reward the Cumulative Aspects of design. Therefore, design with quality and variety throughout the entirety of the program.
- The judge must recognize, analyze, VALUE, and compare each composition. Therefore, design with artistic merit.
- The judge must recognize the triad of Woodwinds, Brass, and Percussion. Therefore, consider the triad and inventive use of triadic combinations in design.
- In assessing compositional quality, the judge measures the "whole," then measures the writing process within the whole. The judge adjudicates through time to experience the complete show.
- The judge should make commentary on the What (the Composition) and the How (it's Excellence through performance). The two are inseparable, and should be linked in commentary.
- Effect judges "react" to the composition and the performance and respond to pacing, impact, and the effect triad (Aesthetic, Adrenal, and Intellectual).
- Analysis judges deconstruct the components of the show and assess the logic, artistry, and orchestration of the composition, as well as the excellence of the performer.

There is an explicit understanding that the commentary will contain positive and negative comments for both the What and the How, as they are inextricably linked. Let's examine the writing process and its adjudication:

## 2. The Philosophy of Design

The mere existence of design elements will not ensure quality. It is the *skill* of composing, arranging and orchestrating that will denote quality. The judge should measure and credit the presence of design quality and their depth and artistry. Conversely, the fact that there are no orchestrational errors does not ensure quality of composition. Logic is the beginning of art.

In the composition, *form* should be evident. It is the structural outline and the conceptualization of planned events that occur through time. The choices of who, what, when, where, how, and why must not only be logical, but artistic and purposeful (without irrelevance). The form and soundtrack should be connected to the visual vocabulary.

In measuring the composing process (and its resultant performance), the judge should recognize the quality of design within the parts. A program with deficiency in the triad (see above) will be at risk, even if composed well. Be aware of polyphony, homophony and monophony. Be aware of shape and textural variation. Be aware of gradations in effort. Be aware of musical *motion* in the development and progression of design.

Elements of design should be recognized and valued: line, shape, dynamics, dimension, texture, density, direction, speed, weight, contrast, flow, balance, blend, articulation, quality of sound and the relationships between them. Note: these all sound different in different listening environments (close, short vs. distant tall stadiums).

Horizontal composing is the development of events through time, from the beginning of the show to the end. Vertical composing reflects the design of each event in isolation. Both are inseparable from the other. The judge considers when, where, how, and why events occur, and how they are linked logically and artistically. Development and transition to connected events drives intent and is evidence of planning and forethought.

The judge should recognize the characteristics for both solos and melodic statements. These characteristics might be important to the music, the role, identity, recurring motifs, or used to create expressive dynamics. They lend depth and interest to the program. They are part of the planned process and reflect layering, dimensionality, and thought. Existence, placement, and choice of detailing become an aspect of quality within the composing process. Choices about the audio and depth of program intent will inherently impact the visual vocabulary.

The judge should be aware of the importance of how connectivity impacts design. In musical composition, this is Transition and Development. That is not to say that connectivity and thematic relationships are absent from vertical events, merely that we recognize its use and value its composition between kinetic events differently. Transition moves the music between presentational ideas. Development is the use of musical ideas to create longer phrase events...transitions can be linked to create development. The distinction between transition and development is where we see the evolution from musical arrangements to musical composition. In shorter musical ideas, it is called phrasing.

Characteristic (a single design element)

Phrase (a moment of musical cell, theme or melody)

Vertical Event (a sequence of phrases, traditionally at an arrival point)

Transition (a planned moment of design, characterized by development of thematic ideas)

Development (linked moments of design, often through-composed or overlapping)

Horizontal Composition (the whole of the design through time)

Staging will always impact dynamics, intensity, dimensionality, and weight.

In composition, the number of performers within a design is not an issue; the imaginative and varied use of design components is always the priority. Size is immaterial to quality and artistry.

The concepts of Emphasis, Hierarchy, and Intent should be recognized. They denote a planned priority and importance in design.

All bands, of all shapes and sizes, with all types of instrumentation, have an equal chance of success. What we as designers do with our materials determine both artistry and outcome. Often, judges without years of experience fail to recognize this dictum. Size is often rewarded, as in music, volume is often rewarded. We must continue to have a discussion within our activity to educate all parties to the fact that “varied and imaginative use” does not come with a size restriction.

The following are Composition criteria on the Music Performance sheets:

**Musical Content:** The ability to demonstrate a wide variety of musical styles and nuances.

**Technical Content:** The degree of skill and stamina required to play the written book.

**Simultaneous Responsibility:** The combination of musical and visual responsibilities.

**Clarity of Intent:** The ability to deliver the clear and balanced intent of the written score.

**Variety of Musical Elements:** The ability to demonstrate contrasting musical styles.

**Idiomatic Expression:** The ability to convey the appropriate style of the music.

Let's examine what actually gets judged when the students perform, the excellence of their performance.

### **3. The Philosophy of Performance**

In Excellence, the judge compares multiple performers and recognizes the following:

Through the performance, the students should display the concept of sonority. The sound of the band should be mature, with a characteristic sound throughout. The students should display ensemble control throughout, involving clarity, and control through simultaneous effort. Student should display an understanding of precision in unison, sequence, and solo. Random events (non-unison, geographically dissimilar composition) still require timing. Students should display the concept of balance, the homogenous and harmonious similarity between like choirs of instruments. Students should display the skill of blending, the homogenous and harmonious similarity between like instruments. Students should be able to demonstrate the concept of pitch, which is control, both singly and over time, of note placement. Students should display artistic and expressive skills such as role, nuance, and detail, also, the ability to change dynamics, articulation, and intensity.

**Recognize and understand the Music Triad** - (Brass, Woodwinds, and Percussion). They are equal partners in design. They may be presented singly or in combination. The fusion of all three offers the best opportunities to create the most complex and challenging design options. The triad can be composed at many levels of complexity, and can challenge students in every class. The triad is not a guarantee for high credit. Its value is important for variety and interest in composition, and heightened opportunities in achievement. It adds depth and value to design and performance. The primary emphasis on the triad is to reinforce the development of skills in all three areas, and we reward designers for incorporating all three into their composition.

- Brass considers the use of trumpets, horns (mellophones), trombone, baritone, and tubas, and the effectiveness of their composition and performance. The inclusion of

concert instruments (piccolo trumpet, French horn, euphonium) as both soloists and ensemble participants can elevate the effectiveness of the program.

- Woodwinds considers the use of piccolo, flute, clarinet, bass clarinet, alto saxophone, tenor saxophone, and baritone saxophone. The inclusion of concert instruments (recorder, alto flute, oboe, bassoon) as both soloists and ensemble participant can elevate the effectiveness of the program.
- Percussion considers the use of Battery instruments such as snare drum, multi-tenor drums, bass drums, and cymbals. The inclusion of other instruments (flub drums, single tenor drums, rope drums) as both soloists and ensemble participants can elevate the effectiveness of the program. Percussion also considers the use of Front Ensemble instruments such as marimba, vibraphone, xylophone, glockenspiel, timpani, rack, concert bass drum, tam-tam, and any and all electronic instruments available, such as synthesizer, electric piano, acoustic guitar, electric guitar, and bass guitar. The inclusion of non-traditional concert instruments (conga, bongo, wind chimes, bell tree) as both soloists and ensemble participants can elevate the effectiveness of the program.

The following are Composition criteria on the Music Performance sheets:

**Tone Quality:** The ability of each segment and the whole to demonstrate proper timbres.

**Intonation:** The ability of each segment and the whole to demonstrate proper tone to allow voices to be in tune.

**Balance and Blend:** The ability of each segment and the whole to adjust timbre and volume to create an even proportion of sound.

**Dynamic Contrast:** The ability of each segment and the whole to demonstrate a wide variety of dynamic levels.

**Phrasing and Expression:** The ability of each segment and the whole to demonstrate musical emotion.

**Ensemble Cohesiveness:** The ability of each segment and the whole to implement consistent control in the chosen technical style.

**Rhythmic Accuracy:** The ability of each segment and the whole to demonstrate vertical and linear rhythmic accuracy.

#### 4. Musical Vocabulary in Design

1. *Design* - Grouping/arrangement of the elements of a composition, including, plan, function, time, and unity.
2. *Composition* - Arrangement of forms, lines, values, and other musical elements.
3. *Line* - A set of notes that lead the viewer's ear through a work of art. Line is used to define shape, and its diffusion can increase or decrease performer connection, and therefor composer intent.
4. *Shape* - The deliberate expression of dynamics within parts or within the whole.
5. *Balance* - A visually favorable distribution of musical weight purposeful orchestration and performance.
6. *Mass* - The feel of weight, heaviness, or musical density. This is usually achieved through thickness of line, fullness of orchestration, or intervallic compression.
7. *Weight* - The distribution of elements within a design. This element will impact of balance as well as on the emphasis within the design whole.

8. *Motion* - Combines design elements from static tone to moving design and vocabulary. Motion forces the consideration of time, and reflects range, flow and melody.
9. *Artistic Efforts* - Qualities that make an aesthetic contribution; role, effort changes, nuance, detail, and dynamic qualities.
10. *Orchestration* - The logical progression of ideas as well as the layering or combination of design options to enhance the intent and unity of a composition. It includes the musical enhancement of the visual and is reflected both horizontally and vertically.
11. *Emphasis* - Planned organization of design that establishes priority.
12. *Color* - It can influence the sound of weight, dynamic intensity, emphasis, clarity, readability, and perceptions of depth, most often created through the combination of instruments.
13. *Unity* - The purposeful agreement among design elements. It implies congruity and musical connection. The aim of unity is to make the design coherent and readable.
14. *Dynamics* - Essential efforts in space, time, weight and flow. "Expression" refers to performer communication on the GE sheet. "Dynamics" refers to those efforts as design elements in Music Ensemble. Gradations refer to "Dynamic Range."
15. *Technique* - Mastery of instrumental technical proficiency, and fluency in a variety of ranges, keys, and dynamics.

#### 4. A Planning Primer for Judges and Designers

As you plan your program, or judge the planning of a program, consider the following:

- Create *opportunities* for greater achievement through clarification and unification of soloistic, sectional, and ensemble efforts. Exposure to these efforts should be orchestrated in an individual, segmental, and ensemble manner, and must be related to the visual design.
- Consider how EMPHASIS, PRIORITY, PRIMACY and FOCUS are used to manipulate the audience's attention.
  - Emphasis through isolation (solo, with limited accompaniment).
  - Emphasis through stylistic differentiation.
  - Emphasis through differences in speed (quick to slow).
  - Emphasis through differences in dynamic (loud to soft).
  - Emphasis through differences in gradation of effort (appearing difficult/easy).
  - Emphasis through differences in weight (heavy to light).
  - Emphasis through differences in textural change (thin orchestration/thick orchestration.).
- Does your composition allow the students the opportunity to display the skills required of the program? A single high-achieving soloist will generate little credit on the judges' sheets. The degree to which all students display gradations in dynamic efforts through layered moments can impact both music sub-captions. Consider exposing single effort/high achievement moments between layered triad events to develop clarity, excellence, and uniformity of training. Glorification of the "busy" or thickly-composed show is a trend today. Let's start rewarding clarity and artistry in writing, and

involving larger groups to excellence, not "writing to hide." All instrument groups should be exposed to range, technique, and dynamic contrast.

- Compositional tools are typically utilized ineffectively as young staffs orchestrate with a weak soundtrack. Dynamic efforts viewed through the student's performance are not reflective of the composer's intent. A soundtrack that has little or no textural change, dynamic range, or instrumental variety can put your program at risk through limited opportunities to relate visual orchestration to the soundtrack. Visual weight, space, time, flow, shape, and all levels of the triad (equipment, movement, and staging) should relate to the theme/soundtrack/concept in some way...or the designer is just writing in a vacuum. Composition, orchestration, and depth are relational to the visual orchestration.
- Within the structure of each show is a chosen style. All styles have an equal opportunity for success, if applied with uniformity and conviction. Do not disregard styles with which you are unfamiliar or disparaging.

Always keep in mind the training considerations as we comment on performance in regards to:

Balance

Blend

Pitch

Quality of Sound (section, solo)

Articulation

Dynamics

Sonority (ensemble)

Endurance

Recovery

Stamina