

After silence, that which comes nearest to expressing the inexpressible is music.

Aldous Huxley

Expression Category Synopsis (Through Lea's Filter)

Emotional communication is the essence of the Expression category. The vocal skills, phrase delivery, vocal characterization and other facets of the category are the vehicles to attaining emotional communication. We experience many excellent performances in our lifetime but few totally embrace us – the ones that do stay in our soul forever. To be part of this level of performance is every singer's goal. In the handful of such performances I've experienced, I can't tell you how many chords rang or if phrases were extended, but I can tell you how I *felt*. Having the audience remember that special feeling is the ultimate for a performer.

Technical Requirements

- **Vocal Skills**
 - Vocal skills are the core of all four judging categories. In the expression category vocal skills affect the performance in the following areas: diction, including vowels and consonants; sustained and supported phrases; and control of dynamic range and the ability to produce and maintain the artistic elements of the song.
 - Breath support is the basis for good vocal production. The expression judge evaluates the result of good breath support and management (or the lack of same). Areas affected include synchronization, forward motion, tempo, dynamics, musicality, inflection and vocal textures, characterization, energy and finesse. [Okay, everything!] Reasonable proficiency in the basics of good singing must be achieved for expressive communication to be effective.
- **Synchronization**
 - The components of synchronization and attacks and releases are considered together because they go hand-in-hand; one is the beginning and the other is the ending. Musically, the term 'attack' is used to indicate the beginning of tone, while 'release' signifies its termination. There's a tendency to consider attacks and releases as occurring only at the initiation and termination of the musical phrase. In reality, each *syllable* involves an attack and a release! Singing out of synch makes words difficult to understand as well as making the tempo less compelling. Forward motion becomes less effective if singers are ending phrases at different times and overall unity is greatly diminished.
- **Vowels**
 - Matching vowels goes a long way to assist the listener in understanding the lyrics as well as facilitate the 'lock and ring,' which so important in the barbershop style. The five pure vowels – 'ah', 'ay', 'ee', 'oh' & 'oo' – are the vowels of Italian and Latin; in English, two of these vowels are treated as diphthongs. "Ay" is pronounced 'eh-ee', & 'oh' becomes 'oh-oo'.
- **Diphthongs, Consonants, Enunciation**
 - Important to the understanding of the lyrics, these elements impact forward motion and smooth lyric delivery. Omission of diphthongs can alter word meaning; i.e. "time–'ah ee', becomes "tom". Consonant over-articulation can result in synch issues and a choppy delivery. Omission of a consonant can also alter a word; i.e. "heart" without the 'r' becomes "hot". Higher skilled groups effectively utilize these elements to help in the emotional delivery of the lyric message.

Artistic Lyrical Interpretation

- ***Lyric Flow, Phrasing, Dynamics, Inflection, Forward Motion***
 - These elements are the heart of the category. They all are critical to effectively portraying the message of the song. Singing with a sense of internal forward motion gives phrases life and engages the listener. Fully extending and lifting phrase-ends helps bring the lyrics to life. Performing with a wide range of dynamics adds excitement and interest to the message. A beautiful phrase design with proper emphasis on the key words, fully supported with energized phrases, a variety of dynamic levels and vocal textures appropriate to the message is the goal.
- ***Tempo/Rhythm***
 - In an uptune, the tempo and rhythm are vital to a successful delivery. Missing or erratic beats cause the listener discomfort. A tempo that is too fast or too slow impacts the singer's ability to fully execute the phrase plan and may impede the vocal skills. Breath timing can impact the tempo – breaths must be within the pulse.
- ***Embellishments***
 - The proper amount and effective execution of embellishments add greatly to a performance and are a signature of the barbershop style. A contra-ascending/descending tension swipe can propel the audience off their seats. Occasional solos or patter add a lot of flair and interest. Embellishments are analyzed based upon their appropriateness and how well they enhance the lyric and emotional delivery.
- ***Energy***
 - Performances without energy seem to last forever. Adding an energized vocal delivery not only makes the performance much more compelling, the execution of all category facets increases. Judicious use of energy is important for the performer as too much (or insincere) energy can decrease the execution of the expression components.
- ***Finesse***
 - Finesse takes a solid performance to new heights. To be effective, the technical skills and artistic elements must all be well-executed. The updated category recognizes attempts at vocal characterization at all levels. The truly memorable presentation is loaded with heartfelt artistic elements that transcend the technique.
- ***Emotional Communication***
 - Emotional communication and finesse go hand-in-hand. It's difficult for a performance lacking some degree of artistry to effectively communicate with the audience. This facet is the crux of the Expression Category. All of the other elements combine toward the goal of a sincere, heartfelt delivery taking the listener to a new place and thereby creating a lasting memory. The power of this type of performance is tangible, and there is little doubt when it is totally achieved. At higher levels, when performances almost 'get there,' it's likely the singers are still focusing on the technique rather than 'letting go.' The rare performance that combines all the skills and sings in the moment is highly valued, rewarded and remembered!