

Which comes first, the costume or the songs?

Category Description Booklet

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PERFORMANCE (0-70 points per song)

OVERVIEW

All of the facets of performance considered by the showmanship judge combine to achieve a specific goal: “selling the song.” As stated earlier, selling the music is the primary focus of the showmanship category. **Costuming**, makeup and choreography are a few of the tools available to assist the performer in making that musical sale. However, there must be two parties to any sale: a seller and a buyer. For our purposes, the chorus or quartet is the seller; the audience is the potential buyer. In order to consummate the sale, the product – the music performed – must be of acceptable quality.

While the average audience is not sufficiently educated in the barbershop art form to recognize the finer details of an arrangement, as evaluated by the music judge, the general public can distinguish between performances that are in tune and those that are not. The average audience can also recognize the basic qualities of musicianship that are **inherent** in a good musical performance. No amount of clever choreography, dazzling **costumes** or exquisite make up can compensate for a lack of accuracy and basic musicality. The showmanship judge rewards the performer who actually makes the sale.

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CHARACTERIZATION

Characterization is an effective skill that can be used to enhance the audience’s enjoyment of the chorus and quartet performance. Our musical presentations are enriched through **costuming**, **choreography**, facial animation, and physical expression. While these skills can energize a performance and assist in transmitting the lyrical interpretation across the footlights, characterization is another aspect that deserves the performers attention.

Characterization is creating a dramatic persona, or creating a role for the stage. After the musical and lyrical interpretations are designed, the characterization can be created. Decide exactly who is telling (singing) the story. Is it a comedic, broadly drawn character, or is it more subtle, sophisticated individual? Does the character remain the same throughout the song or does a transformation take place? How does one convey that change? Appropriate emotions throughout the entire song should be decided upon, followed by methods of conveying those emotions—raised brows, a tilt of the head, a cocky attitude, and so on.

Define who the character is by devising actions, facial expression, and demeanor that will delineate the character for the audience. The choreography and **costume** plans should be congruent with, and part of, the characterization. It is important that all members of the ensemble participate fully and commit themselves to creating the same character by giving up thoughts of self and inhibition. All must give themselves over to the characterization. This will help to create a more complete and believable character that

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can have a dynamic impact on the audience. When the performer skillfully creates strong characterization, those very characterizations serve to draw the audience emotionally onto the stage and into the performance.

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POSTURE

One of the most recognizable tools of the showmanship category is **costuming**. It is mandatory that positive, correct posture be maintained, allowing the costumes to be appreciated for their creative style and detailing and not distorted by bad posture. The appearance of the **costume** as worn by the performer is an easily identified indicator of proper or improper singing posture.

PREPARATION (0-30 Points per song)

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COSTUME

Costumes are generally selected to denote a **theme**, to **illustrate a song** or the **name of the performing group**, or to reflect the **personality** of the performer. Costumes that demonstrate **originality and flair** are highly desirable, but it is **not necessary** that they be **expensive or elaborate**. The performer's primary consideration should be presentation of a **unit appearance** with a costume that is **suitable to the performing group** and **appropriate for stage wear**. The same suitable and appropriate costume may be worn during more than one appearance as a contestant, including successive sessions of one competition or a competition in a subsequent year.

Costuming is one of the **tools** available to the performer in achieving a unit appearance, and costumes should be **uniform in style or theme**. While most performers reinforce unity by choosing costumes that are uniform in *both* color and style, it is sometimes possible to depart from this sameness while maintaining the unit appearance. When costuming is not identical, though, care must be taken to insure that the reason for the difference and the meaning of the costume plan will be obvious to the audience. When this is not the case, the audience may become so involved in trying to determine the connection that they are unable to enjoy the performance.

The effective costume **points up the faces** of the performers rather than directing the viewer's attention elsewhere. Accessories such as belts, collars, appliqués, sequins, rhinestones, gloves or jewelry should always complement the costume rather than providing a point of visual focus for the viewer.

In selecting **color and fabric**, the performer should consider how it will be affected by the intense stage lighting used in Sweet Adelines competitions. When colors or textures are combined, differences that may not be apparent under normal lighting sometimes become very noticeable under stage lights. When colors or textures are combined, the showmanship judge evaluates their compatibility and the effectiveness with which the combination is implemented, so that emphasis remains on the performers' faces.

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In selecting a costume for the chorus **director**, many options are possible. It may be the same style and color as that of the chorus; it may be the same style but of a complementary color; it may be the same style but, when colors are combined, a reverse of the combination (e.g., chorus in red with white accent, director in white with red accent); it may be the same color but a different style; or it may be a different color and different style. The showmanship judge bases her evaluation on the overall effect, bearing in mind that the goal is a **unit appearance**.

The costume chosen may be suitable to both songs or it may specifically apply to just the first, but it should **not conflict with one or both songs**. For example, a clown costume is suitable to two clown or circus songs but is in conflict if the second song is an Irish ballad.

Quartets can generally select costumes in a style and color combination flattering to each quartet member. In a chorus, however, so many sizes and shapes are encountered that it is rarely possible to select a style and color combination best for each individual. Chorus members must bear in mind that emphasis is on the *overall* visual effect rather than on the individual, so long as the costume is flattering to those members readily visible to the audience.

An effective costume is appropriate to the performance, both in **style and length**, and within the **boundaries of good taste**. For a quartet, **hemlines** that are a uniform distance from the floor provide visual unity. Chorus hemlines may be successfully varied so that they are appropriate to the individual; provided members are positioned in such a way that visual distraction is not created by uneven hem heights. Shoes should be the same color and style. It is desirable, but not necessary, that **heel heights** be uniform. Any noticeable difference in heel heights can usually be concealed by strategically positioning the performers in question. In dealing with such differences in costume as hemlines and heel heights, the performer should bear in mind that animated, involved facial expression keeps the audience attention on the performers faces, not their feet.

A final aspect of costuming considered by the showmanship judge is **fit**. Costumes that do not fit properly present a visual distraction of such magnitude that the viewer is often unable to respond to the performance. The costume that fits properly also allows sufficient room for the breathing mechanism to function properly. There is no excuse for the performers' failure to ensure, before going onto the stage, that costumes are **clean, well pressed and fit properly**.

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CREATIVITY

The inventive performer finds room for creativity in many aspects of preparation – entrance, break, exit, costuming, makeup and choreography. In evaluating creativity, however, the showmanship judge must still consider **propriety to the musical presentation**. She cannot reward ideas implemented just because they are new and different; they must also be appropriate to the music, to the barbershop style and to the

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performing group. Originality is refreshing, and creativity that meets the above criteria will be rewarded.

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SCORING THE CATEGORY

In evaluating the preparation portion of the category, the showmanship judge considers the basic requirements. It is expected that the performer will come to the stage in costume, appropriately groomed, and that some degree of planning such details as entrance, break, exit and pitch-taking technique will be evident. The performer who demonstrates that careful attention has been given to all the details involved in creation of a visual plan that supports the music in a superior fashion will be rewarded.

The ideal Sweet Adelines International performance creates an illusion so real, so alive, that both performer and audience are caught up in its spell and all else is forgotten in the magic of song.

RESOURCES

www.southeastern-performance-apparel.com

www.stageaccents.com

www.rivars.com

www.performanceattire.com

www.showchoirdesigns.com

How to Design Stage Costumes

By eHow Arts & Entertainment Editor

Costumes are essential to the believability and success of a stage production in the theater. Designing costumes is a job that is fun, creative and challenging. Many factors must be considered when costuming a show, and if you follow these steps you can be on your way to experiencing the immense satisfaction of seeing your designs on stage.

Step 1

Measure everyone who will be performing in the play. This includes the bust (or chest for women), waist, hips, length from waist to knees, length from waist to instep, around upper arm, around wrists, shoulder to shoulder and shoulder to wrist. Record these measurements on individual charts for each actor.

Step 2

Talk to the director of the play and learn her "concept" and plans for the show. Directors have their own style and ideas, and it is very important to include her at this stage of the planning.

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Step 3

Research the time period of the play in which the costumes designs will be used. Look up pictures, colors and patterns.

Step 4

Determine your color palate. Color plays an important part in the presentation of the play and in the concept of the director. Keep the director in the loop at this stage of the planning. Keep in mind the skin and hair colors of your actors when planning the colors and use them to enhance, not detract the character he is playing.

Costume Creation Planning

Step 1

Present the director with a set of material swatches representing the color scheme of the costumes. If you are artistic, sketch examples of the main character's planned costumes.

Step 2

Hire or recruit several seamstresses to help with the sewing if you are creating costumes from scratch. Cut out patterns using your selected material. If you are recycling clothing or old costumes, it is still wise to have helpers to make alterations to clothing used.

Step 3

Do preliminary fittings with actors, and keep a record on their individual charts of what has been done, which costume pieces are finished, what is lacking and what needs to be changed.

Finishing Touches

Step 1

Finish changes and final touches.

Step 2

Arrange with the director a time for a 'costume parade' on the theater's stage to give him a chance to view the costumes as a whole before the play opens.

Step 3

Lay out your costume policies and rules to the actors. Let them know what they are and are not allowed to do in their costumes, such as smoke, eat or drink. Also make it clear that they must hang up their costumes and take good care of them.

Step 4

Enjoy the show! Be aware that depending on the length of the run of the show, you may have to be available at the theater to make repairs to damaged costumes and wash some as well.