



BACKGROUND

Barbershop Harmony Society

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How to watch and judge a barbershop contest

The first contest of the Barbershop Harmony Society, held in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in June of 1939, was an extremely casual affair. There were no scorecards, no trained judges—in fact, no one's quite sure how many quartets actually competed. We do know that the **Bartlesville Barflies** of Bartlesville, Oklahoma, beat the **Capitol City Four** of Springfield, Illinois, after a “sing-off,” and took home \$50 and the coveted title of “World Champion Quartet.” The second contest, held at the New York World's Fair in 1940, was judged by a panel of dignitaries that included Governor Al Smith, whom one competitor overheard whispering to a fellow judge, “They all sound good to me—who should I vote for?”

The Barbershop Harmony Society's judging system is far more precise today. Judges today undergo a rigorous three year-training process leading to certification in one of three scoring categories: **Singing**, **Performance**, and **Music**.

Singing

The Singing judge evaluates the degree to which the performer achieves artistic singing in the barbershop style through precise intonation, a high degree of vocal skill and appropriate vocal expression, and a high level of unity and consistency within the ensemble. Mastering these elements creates a fullness and expansion of sound, and when combined with expressive vocal skills conveys a feeling of genuine emotion to support the message of the song.

Performance

The Performance judge evaluates entertainment within the barbershop style. Vocal and visual elements, in the context of the song choice and delivery, are evaluated for their contribution to the overall entertainment effect of the performance.

Music

The Music judge adjudicates the song and arrangement as performed, taking into account melody, harmony, and the extent to which the musical performance displays the hallmarks of the barbershop style, and the degree to which the musical performance demonstrates an artistic sensitivity to the music's primary theme.

How contests are conducted

- Chorus and quartet contests are scored under the same Categories.
- In each round, performers sing two songs of their own choosing.
- The chorus contest is a single round.
- After each quartet round, **cumulative scores** determine who will advance. In the international contest, the top twenty quartets advance the semi-final round; ten quartets advance to the finals, and the quartet amassing the most points in three rounds is declared the International Quartet Champion.