

All-State: Festival: Listening from a Judge's Perspective

by Linda Bell

This session shared information on adjudicator training programs, adjudicator training, and strategies for listening and commenting on festival performances.

As a young girl living in Florida, one of my fondest memories of high school orchestra involved the preparation and performance at the state evaluation festival. Students were well aware that every aspect of performance would be critiqued and a final grade would be assessed. There was no other event in the concert calendar that our orchestra prepared for more!

When orchestra directors and students work hard to diligently meet performance standards, it is imperative that adjudicators have adequate training. States such as California, Florida, New York and Texas provide in-depth adjudicator training and mentorship. The criteria used to invite adjudicators include 3-5 years teaching experience and the director's own teaching record at festival. Once a teacher has taught for the required number of years and received superior ratings for the majority of that teaching span, adjudicators attend 6 - 8 hour training sessions. Sessions include listening and watching video performances, receiving training from mentor adjudicators on maintaining standards, motivation and strategies to help each orchestra perform their best.

The role of the adjudicator is to maintain standards throughout the length of the festival, to value and respect the appearance of each orchestra and to motivate each group of students to reach for the next higher level of performance by pinpointing priority and secondary categories for improvement. Each of our orchestras is so very important, not only to the students, but also to the communities where they serve. Each group deserves clear and concise constructive criticisms that benefit the whole and can start as a point of departure for improvement.

Salient factors in successful adjudication include possessing credible listening skills, maintaining high standards in one's own

program, staying abreast of new literature and possessing a working knowledge of the established repertoire. Equally important is guarding against the shifting of standards,

maintaining a professional image and other factors as prescribed by the host organization that speaks to the overall impression/perception of a festival.

Today both tape recorded and written comments are expected at festival. It is important to make opening remarks so students and directors, alike, have an idea where the adjudicator teaches and at what level.

Share your name, where you are from and/or school, name of the event, date of the event and name of the group being evaluated. An introduction brings formality. Address constructive criticism to students on the tape. Students will most likely be hearing the tape in a rehearsal setting. Building ownership is a powerful reason for student-directed comments.

Highlight clear, concise comments to the director on the written comment sheet. When making comments on the tape, circle specifics in the score and highlight these later in your written comments. If your tape recorder is not working properly, specific comments must be noted for each selection performed.

As important as awarding appropriate ratings and comments are, it is equally important to check your approach to adjudication and define strategies to be used. Comments should be made in a professional manner and all remarks should be on an objective level. Try to avoid opinionated statements. However, when an opinion is offered, state "for my preference," "in my opinion" or "for my taste." Always try to state one or two positive remarks about the director during taped comments. This is so very important in building bridges between the director and students and making cer-

tain that the students realize the worth and value of their director.

Define your strategies or approach based on the performance level heard within the first phrase or two of the first piece performed. Speak to the finer points in performance in the "superior" performing orchestra; "excellent" performing orchestras should be exhorted to reach for the next level; offer some constructive criticism to the "good" performing orchestra and "poor" performing orchestras should only be offered one criticism area for improvement. Early on decide which categories are in need of primary and secondary improvement and continue to speak to these areas throughout all selections.

After the initial guidelines were presented, participants of this session listened to audio and video recordings of middle and high school orchestra performances. Participants critiqued each performance using the MNSOTA middle level festival adjudication form. Following each performance, participants shared and discussed their observations and gave constructive criticism and helpful comments. Many thanks to the participants for their enthusiastic discussion and comments!

Linda Bell teaches elementary strings for the Robbinsdale school district and has taught at Armstrong High School and the Technology Learning Campus (Robbinsdale). Linda began her teaching career at Countryside High School in Clearwater, FL. In conjunction with the Tallahassee Symphony Orchestra and Florida State University School of Music, she founded and directed the Tallahassee Symphony Youth Orchestra. Additionally, Linda helped establish the string program for the Leon County Schools in Tallahassee, FL. Linda has served as an adjudicator in Florida and Minnesota, where her high school orchestras have consistently earned superior ratings at festival. She served on the boards of the Florida ASTA chapter, Florida Orchestra Association, NSOA and MNSOTA. †



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