

2020 Philosophy - Musicality

As the guards have grown, so have we as judges. We continue to emphasize ways to “dig deeper” to recognize and reward all aspects of design and choreographic choices. We want to expand our awareness of musicality, its relationship to design choices, its enhancement of the program effectiveness, and its variety of interpretation. Start to broaden your commentary to identify the ways in which the designer has chosen to use the music and to acknowledge the dynamic range used in the relationship of the events and choreography over time.

Please take the intent behind the discussion as it applies to your caption. There is no desire to see DA and GE come closer together in terms of “judging the same things the same way.” Rather the intent is to expand our discussion and awareness of design choices and how that affects the repertoire and overall depth of the performance.

A literal approach to music and the visual interpretation of music is not an out-of-style, nostalgic point of view that is no longer valued as an achievement. We still value the ability to create a multi-sensory effect that considers a connection between the visual choice and the audio setting! This includes commonly understood and recognizable approaches as well as inventive experimental approaches. However, a program with a literal interpretation of the music does not have more value than one that does not. Our purpose in this material is to open your awareness of what is musical.

In the manual as it stands now, we distinguish between “Visual-Musicality” and “Musical-Visuality” only as a way to illustrate a visual approach that may still contain aspects of good crafting of phrases but may not connect directly to the musical moment. It is in the crafting that we see intent and whether or not the Designer/Choreographer is ignoring, mirroring, contrasting, or extending the audio setting.

For 2020, we will add the term Visual Musicality to the General Effect sheets’ points of comparison to encompass all approaches to manipulating the visual response to the chosen audio setting. The Design Analysis point of comparison around musicality has been adjusted (see page 24 in the manual). The new statement reads, “relationship to and/or reflection of the audio through dynamic range efforts (space, time, weight, and flow).” Please consider the following:

1. Visual Musicality can exist independently or in conjunction with the audio.
2. The goal is to create a multi-sensory effect through an audio/visual agreement. This possibility exists in a multi-faceted soundtrack as well as an ambient soundtrack.
3. Mirroring and contrasting the audio setting are only approaches. It is the connection and elevation of one and/or the other in their relationship (visual choice and audio setting) that becomes the notable achievement. In the limitless approaches, there is a spectrum of possibility as well as spectrum of achievement. This is not a binary choice or achievement.
4. Judges are asked to divorce preconceived notions of what ‘being musical’ is, it is critical that we are open minded and are available to all choices of musicality.
5. Look for more options in how music is interpreted or used as a design component in and of itself (beyond pure reflection).

6. Speak to more of the experiential ways we see the music through dynamics visually. The dynamic ranges of space, time, weight, and flow may be enhanced by the relationship to and/or reflection of the audio.

We enhance our understanding of these design elements and the depth of their use through a broadened commentary surrounding musicality and its many facets. Please note that musicality and its multiple aspects and uses exists in both General Effect and Design Analysis. If you read a word that seems to relate to one caption, please consider how it relates to the other. Here are some areas to consider as you broaden your recognition skills in this area.

- Reflection - Often this is the easiest for us to comment upon and this may be the most familiar term. We say it often and it has a historical benchmark. At the start of our recognition of the music, judges spoke of reflection as what occurs at the start and end of phrases, and with the accents within the phrase. At times, we were involved with the dynamic aspects within the phrase -- crescendo, decrescendo, etc. Reflection remains a valuable tool. Reflection as part of musicality with regard to these basic items is but one aspect of dealing with musicality and the designer's "relationship" to the music. Let's return and keep in mind that musicality is an umbrella; however, musicality has much in the way of depth that can go beyond the idea of basic reflection of the audio. One moment is meant to visually reflect the music. The next may be in opposition or visually adding its own line to enhance the music. Be open and broaden your commentary. And consider when superior reflection of the audio as the sole choice may be maximizing only one aspect of the potential range. And determine how the choices and achievement create a totality and cumulative value over time.
- Counterpoint - In music, for non-musicians, we can think of counterpoint as layers of music, including harmony and melody. It can further mean two or more melodic lines of music traveling together and likely offering two similar musical stories or two opposing musical stories. For us in color guard, this could mean, for example, the flags carrying one line of music, while other handheld equipment or the body or the form development carry another yet different line of music. Within such moments, we may even hear different instruments helping to develop the counterpoint. The two musical lines may carry similar volume and essentially become coequal lines of music helping to provide an opportunity to the designers. This is clearly another way to display a relationship to the music and certainly another way for us to experience the choices and the journey in the show. Consider the range of choices over time or the variety in which the designer explores the relationship to, and experience of, the music.
- Mood - As with any great film or theater production, the music may be used to establish mood and evoke an emotional or intellectual response. Notice when such a response is the intention of the music. Perhaps, of course, literally reflecting the music visually is not necessarily capturing the musical moment fully. Options in DA and GE may provide an opportunity for us to dig deeper in both areas. Likewise, our recognition as judges may create deeper thought for the staff. Many advanced teams layer the music and create motifs, themes, and intellectual cues with sound. Recognize and reward that effort when achieved. It

may not be sufficient to speak of the visual reflection as the only aspect of the musical options in this setting. Indeed, what we see and feel initially is good but if we dig deeper, we can improve our dialogue and audio files. Reflection of, or relationship to, the music is something different in this choice and requires different planning and performance capabilities. Recognize and reward those achievements. For Design Analysis mood is seen and commented upon through dynamic efforts, variations, range, and artistic role. Many advanced teams layer the music and create motifs, themes, and intellectual cues with sound. Recognize and reward that effort when achieved.

- Production Value - As with mood, the music can be an integral choice by the designers to create the production. Comment on the crafting and choices with the music as it creates value in multiple points of comparison. Production value is a starting point for exploring the ways in which the music design is used. Too often we comment on the costume and the sets at the start of the program and say that is the production value overall. Dig deeper into the crafting and choices over time. Is there a unified idea to the plan and choices? Does the color and stage lend to variety and pacing and the storyline? How much detail is paid to the nuances over time to create a successful journey? For Design Analysis aspects such as use of space, scale, dimension, and overall performer responsibilities can relate to production value choices. Unity is foundational to compositional choices.
- Story - Related to mood, music could propel or inform the storyline. In general effect, work to recognize when the interpretation is not just mirroring the music back to you visually but when it is understood and embodied by the performers through dynamics and emotional intensity. Notice when the performers (though the designers) have internalized the music and externalize it to us and the audience in general. In both DA and GE, range, variety, and depth become critical to differentiate achievement as teams add complexity, skill, and risk through musical choices. When we recognize that performers become the role, we see true communication. When we recognize achievement that is not only achieved technically but also dynamically, we see total fulfillment in achievement.
- Range - Consider all of the musical challenges presented to the performers and audience. We can most easily hear a shift in the music and we need to look for performer understanding of dynamics. And we should expand our awareness to the full list of design choices involving space, time, weight, flow in the entire performance venue. How do the dynamics manifest through the equipment, body, and form? How about through the air space? Or floor space? Perhaps the musical shift is through body choreography and not density? Dig deeper.
- Audio Setting - Given design choices, the audio setting can expand the range of challenges for the performers and give them additional opportunity for achievement. Also, the setting creates potential for the overall effectiveness and unity of the show components. Does the audio choice add to the environmental effect? Does the audio stand alone as an intellectual effect? If the audio is coming out of different locations on the stage how is that both effective and contributing to the design approach? Some teams may choose varying rhythmic interpretations causing both intellectual challenges and effective contrasts. At a minimum, we should comment on the intention of the sound design and the range of options it explores, even if only in one dimension. If the team sings, the

performers both create and communicate the music. Does it fit into the overall design and plan? Perhaps we can acknowledge that the music, including its audio setting, often present significant environmental challenges though our floor is relatively small? Where the music originates, its complexity, its own composition may well provide challenges to the performers, likely most to be recognized in Design Analysis.

- Enhancement - Recognize and acknowledge the audio choices, the relationship of the design to the audio, and the overall experience of the show in totality. Apply a broader context as you comment upon and value what we used to look for as enhancement of the musical structure. Range of choices and ways to use the audio, not just reflect the audio, add significantly to the quality of the repertoire and composition. At a minimum, they can become differentiators between competitors.

As a combination of all of these elements, consider any year when multiple teams choose the same music. We often experience a team that uses the music as the basis for set counts and pure representation of the musical structure through color and choreography. Then another team incorporates an emotional aspect that elevates the journey. Another adds in a story line and intellectual components. Finally, there is a team where the visual representation and total experience cannot be separated from the music. The floor and set design evokes the relationship to the music, story arc, and emotional contour. There is an overarching plan and a totality. The tension and release and overall program contouring maximizes and joins with the music creating something more than either the music or the visual on its own. We have seen all of these examples and can (and should) speak to the qualitative differences, and reward them accordingly.

Of course, this is not an all inclusive list but is a start to expand our commentary, recognition, and reward. Indeed, all of us recognize that this conversation about musicality adds new layers to our mantra of “digging deeper.” We have an opportunity and a responsibility to grow and to broaden our understanding of the music and our perspective of the many opportunities and challenges it may provide to the performers. Broaden your process and recognition around musicality. As part of the overall judging process, remember that each point of comparison is to be valued in the areas of how much, how well, over time. At least that gets us to a value statement for each team and then makes comparisons more relevant and hopefully easier.