

THE BIG SING ADJUDICATION

The Process

A team of adjudicators is appointed each year to judge the regional Big Sing (TBS) festivals. Each of the team is assigned to between one and four festivals, depending on the number of days involved and their availability. All adjudicators are experienced choral professionals not currently involved with any TBS choir. They meet in advance for a 'training day', where they receive a thorough explanation of the grading system and do a series of dummy runs, using past, unidentified TBS recordings, to calibrate their rankings and numerical marks.

At the regionals, adjudicators are asked to write a constructive assessment of each piece sung and to mark choirs in relation to the assessment criteria (see below), as well as deciding on the recipients of the various prizes and certificates each region chooses to award. At this stage they can give no indication as to which choirs are in the running for Finale selection, for reasons the next paragraph makes clear.

When all festivals are completed, the adjudicators meet again to choose 24 finalists and some reserves. Here they spend a full day listening to and re-marking each other's choirs and adjusting (scaling) one or more sets of grades if necessary. It is assumed that each judge is sufficiently skilled to rank their given choirs in order from top to bottom (although there is some peer reviewing of this as well), but it is essential that, by the end of the adjustment process, the Unknown Chorale from Randomville receives virtually the same mark from every adjudicator. Particular attention is paid to the order of choirs around the Finale 'cusp', so that the team is eventually satisfied that the 24th-ranked choir is marginally better than the 25th.

Assessment Criteria

In their assessment of TBS performances, judges are asked to take the following elements into consideration. No specific mark weighting is applied to individual elements because each piece of choral music is very different in its demands.

Artistic merit

- Communication
- Interpretation
- Presentation
- Performance style

Technical skill

- Consistency of intonation
- Vocal quality and balance
- Diction and language
- Complexity of the score

The grading scale adjudicators apply is as follows. We do not publish marks and grades at regional level because it is impossible – and therefore highly misleading – to compare them across regions and years, and because, for reasons explained in 'The Process' above, they cannot be viewed as an accurate guide to Finale selection.

A+	90 +	B+	75-79	C+	60-64
A	85-89	B	70-74	C	55-59
A-	80-84	B-	65-69	C-	50-54

Grade	General statement	Detail
A+	An outstanding performance, with little reservation	Sophisticated performances, containing fine control of tonal nuances; polished and consistent presentations that present the essence of the music in a manner that is compelling to the listener
A A-	A very good performance, but with some reservation	Musically satisfying performances, despite some technical or other defects; awareness of style and musical character
B+ B	A competent performance, but with a number of reservations	Performances that indicate a willingness to communicate, but in which a number of issues significantly reduce the musical impact
B- and below	A limited performance, with some potential	Performances that fail to effectively communicate the essence of the pieces, owing to technique issues and/or musical limitations