

Helpful Hints for Choreographers/Coaches/Judges

Becoming a Better General Effect Choreographer

Essentially, it is about having artistic vision and being able to translate that vision to the floor. As a judge, I can supply you with guidelines to help you create and increase the impact of your performance. But what I've done is similar to supplying an artist with paint, brushes and some rules of composition – the ultimate painting (in our case, the performance) will be your own artistic expression.

You can, however, develop your artistic expression and hone your choreography skills by exposing yourself to more and more dance. Watch everything! From “So You Think You Can Dance” to Broadway shows and MGM musicals, from drill team to concert dance. Get your hands on tapes from other states – see what they are doing – don't copy – just get inspired and then bring your vision to reality!

Be True to Your Artistic Vision

Although there are general “rules” of choreography and composition, evaluating general effect will always have a subjective element to it. Do not compromise *your* artistic vision contest to contest. Do take advantage of all comments you receive at each contest. Ask question, find out what hit a home run and what fizzled, but don't seek out specific changes to the choreography or make wholesale changes to please any one judge. Be true to *your* artistic vision – use judges comments and guidelines to help you communicate your vision and bring your ideas to life!

Comments to Consider:

Concept, Theme, Mood or Idea

- Apparent at beginning
- Unfolds during performance
- Brought out in choreography, costume and music (must have all three)
- Leaves audience with a definite memory

Music Selection has Dimension

- Not just a strong rhythm
- Other lines of music audible: percussion, strings, brass, background vocals, lead vocals, fills, flourishes, etc. (more orchestration = more opportunities)
- The “top 40” may be over used – look back in time, look in other genres, look for different/unexpected arrangements of a song
- Expert splicing or cutting of music that doesn't interrupt the natural progression of the music. (One piece of music can be great – it's not always necessary to use a music mix)

Attention Getting or Commanding Entrance or Beginning

- Asymmetrical or unusual formations
- Explosive starts
- Build ups
- One actor pantomimes – usually not effective, unless highly dramatic and dancer is a great actor!

Choreography – Composition and Musicality

- The “WOW” moments
 - ✓ Great display of facility or technique
 - ✓ Incredible timing
 - ✓ Dramatic change in levels with flawless recovery
 - ✓ “Never saw that before!”
- The “Musicality” Moments
 - ✓ Layering choreography
 - Performing to different lines of music at the same time
 - Highlighting different parts of music at different times
 - Use of “phrasing” or choreographing to vocal lines
 - ✓ That subtle move/look that captures the essence of the performance
 - A develop, a flip of a hand, a turn out, head tilt, or any more subtle movement at just the right moment in the music
 - ✓ The “Ensemble” Moments
 - Creating the mirror image
 - “June Taylor dancers” making a visual image
 - Displaying a sense of style

Composition (a.k.a. “TRIAD”)

- Seamless combination of choreography, movement of form and use of equipment (done all at once, not in sequence)

Technique – “It’s not just an execution comment anymore!”

- Wonderful technique impacts GE
- Poor technique impacts GE
- Style
- Body line, carriage (upper body) and port de bra (arm movements)

Staging and Transitions – Moving the Forms

- Staging
 - ✓ Purposeful use of the floor (don’t move just because its time)
 - ✓ Directional movement designed to enhance music
 - ✓ Directional movement designed to direct or capture attention
- Transitions

- ✓ Danced - never walked
- ✓ Seamless, almost disappearing as when movement has been charted
- ✓ Continuous flow, transition doesn't interrupt the pace of the performance
- ✓ Logical

Equipment/Prop Use

- Use of a unique or creative piece of equipment
- Creative, new use of a common piece of equipment
- Great visual impact
 - ✓ Large enough to make an impact (get up in the stands – can it be seen?)
 - ✓ Too much stuff – using too many props can cause visual clutter
- Mastery of use
 - ✓ Performers are confident and “fearless” in using equipment
 - ✓ Many different things are done with the prop (no “one trick ponies”)
 - ✓ Chosen props make sense with concept
- Invisible set up and construction
 - ✓ Surprising introduction of a new prop – the audience did not see it coming
 - ✓ “Diversion Choreography” to take audience attention away from or otherwise mask an exchange, construction or other “mechanics” of dealing with the props
- Sets VS Props
 - ✓ Drapes, legs, masks or other backdrops can enhance the show, but can't carry the day, if the rest of the performance is lacking
 - ✓ They are not considered props unless they are manipulated by the performer(s)

Personality – Audience Appeal

- Expressions are genuine – not forced or stages
- Mood and tone are projected not only in face by the expressive upper body
- There is a whole range of emotions – not just “drill team ecstatic” and “intense hard-nose” - the performers can distinguish a subtle mood or expression can portray that throughout the performance
- Expressing the style in face and body line

Memorable Ending

- Makes a “bookend” with start of program
- The final “WOW”
- Brings performance to a logical and fitting conclusion
- Creates a lasting image long after the team leaves the floor (Really the goal of the performance as a whole!)