

Our judging systems have always attempted to balance several items. We attempt to give credit to the performers and to the writers while we attempt to assure that the audience is part of what we do. The performers, of course, do what the writers give them. Yet, we make every attempt to reward what the performers bring to the activity, especially in the Proficiency captions. The performers are also rewarded in both the Analysis captions and the General Effect captions.

Consequently, the writers (design team) drive the program, while the music and visual technical staff bring training to the performers. We most significantly reward the writers for their contributions in Composition and Repertoire. Without explaining all the interrelationships of this balance, our major objective is to understand that the writers and performers work together to bring a performance of compelling programming and precision to the paying audience.

All of the training and all of the writing are truly aimed at the objective of creating an audience reaction. The great rewards for our drum corps arrive through the standing ovation. With this in mind, we can make the conjecture that everything the design teams present, and all the work that the performers do, has one primary intent — bring appreciative, favorable response from the audience through the brilliance of performance, the creativity of the writing, the attraction of the concept, and an enjoyment of the journey through pacing, development, climax, and resolution.

Our General Effect sheets reward the *culmination* of the work of the design team and the performers. We skew the GE sheets away from the analytical and critical view of skills and achievement of the performers. We also skew the GE *sheets away from the reliance of excellence as a sole means of stirring the audience*. Indeed, in the broadest and most comprehensive statement, the proficiency sheets and the analysis sheets are a classical approach to the activity while the two GE sheets bring the romantic approach to the activity.

It is important, therefore, to be sure that we do not make the General Effect sheets another venue based solely on skills and construction. Of course, herein lays another balance point for the judging system. We want a sheet that is “romantic” — all about effect — while we still want accountability from the judges, and still want the judges to explain, as they react, about the reasons they do react, or, explain the reasons why they don’t react. While this reference is to a balance point, we may also create a conundrum for the judging community.

We don’t want to measure pure entertainment, given that there seems no universal guiding pathway, explanation, or comprehension of “entertainment”. In fact, we have carefully avoided the term. We understand that the contrasting audiences of yesterday and today — band fans or corps fans, Cupertino or East Rutherford — can result in changed perceptions. So today’s judging system moves the General Effect sheets from another direction, even though the end result is a cheering and enthusiastic audience.

We shall delve into some of the ideas that are offered to help the judges properly use the General Effect sheets and the two categories of “Repertoire Effect” and the “Performers”.

In our many previous conversations, we asked (and we now ask again) that the judges begin with the BACK of the sheet as the main area for understanding and delivering the GE sheet and its philosophy.

The first bullet looks to a ***realization of the repertoire and its conceptual vision***. The concept, or the conceptual vision, does not mean that the program must automatically have some kind of defining theme, story, or narrative. These past years have seen more units that give their program its own identifying name, as well as a growth in the development of central themes. All of us recognize many examples. At the same time, let us not ***hamper*** any unit if it wishes to be without a name and/or without that story from beginning to end. Our approach to ***conceptual vision*** needs to be as broad as possible. We must also allow units the freedom to be effective with or without a name or central theme. We ask that there be a ***consistency and unity*** within the 10+ minute performances, and that the elements presented ***agree with each other and the whole***, to be “cut from the same cloth” as it were. We ask that the production have a ***direction and focus that is compelling enough to elicit positive audience response and reaction*** consistent with a central vision for the program.

The ***realization of the repertoire*** is an indication that we have moved far from the inert dots on paper and far from the impersonal moving points that a software program generates. The realization is ***bringing to life the program by joining the music to live performers in front of a willing audience***.

As General Effect Judges, we are committed to being the most sensitive, most educated, and the most perceptive members of the audience.

The realization of the repertoire embodies all of the written material. Realization means that an audience member (a judge as well) sees and understands the musicality, feels the interpretation and understands the emotion, and can elevate the material into the realm of pure communication.

To engage the audience is to keep the audience riveted to the program. There are many ways to engage an audience. Over many years, stage productions — and our activity is certainly a stage production, with a stage far larger than most — bring the audience into the production by steadily pacing and shaping the program ***over time***. There are no lulls when the pacing and shaping are fully working and there is no lack of engagement as the audience travels the flow and ebb of emotions over time. Providing occasional powerful impact points is another helpful approach to maintaining an engagement with the audience. Contrasts in the visual, contrasts in the audio, along with moments of surprise and impact will assist the engagement of the audience. Be alert to the ***compelling approach to the program***. It may not be easy to explain the compelling approach but when all the influences and designs of the program are brought together, the judge will understand when the moment is compelling.

One of the more familiar approaches to general effect is the aesthetic, intellectual and emotional trio — the so-called “triad of options”. It may be familiar, but the “triad” has not been without its complications. One of issues is that judges often treat the so-called “triad” as though they are three different approaches to General Effect. ***In fact, the convenience of the words should not cover the complexity of the ideas that are in the background.*** A second issue surrounds the clarity of the words themselves. Everyone seems to have a rough grasp the emotional portion of the triad. In fact, effect is about a REACTION, and that can easily translate into a form of emotional impact. We need to stay vigilant that we not reward the shallow or easy entertainment reference. By the same token, we must renew our commitment to rewarding the expressive, the touching, the moving, the eloquent, for these are the artistic elements that affect the heart of our audience.

To explain the other two portions of the triad is often a bit more complex. A variety of experiences can certainly shade an individual interpretation of the ***aesthetic strength*** of effect and the ***intellectual power*** of effect.

Surely, with the adoption of this new system, we won’t abandon the triad of effect options. We will, however, take a close look at what they mean within the scale and scope of DCI. Foremost, we need to look at the triad as a set of ideas that inform each other and create a synergy. A unit can achieve effect by the strictly visceral and emotional considerations at any one moment during the program. If that is not supported, or related to, creative, well-designed structure, that emotional portion, in and of itself, may not stand the comparative process. For us, for 2012 and beyond, let us look at the ***triad of effect options as a balance*** of that which is creative, that which is well designed and that which creates a powerful engagement within the audience and for the judges who are also a part of that audience. In what ever way the individual judge sees this so-called triad, ***DCI judges today will coalesce their thinking around that which is creative, that which is well-designed and that which, ultimately, offers an engagement that the audience cannot resist.***

After all, there are often those times when we may well see what we consider a deep intellectual thinking behind a program or a part of the program. If that moment is bereft of an attraction, an engagement, we must think of the balance point. ***Is it effective to a wider audience who doesn’t study as judges do? If the audience sees the program for the first time, are they drawn into the program?*** Often, intellect can be used as a springboard for the audience to explore, question, and consider elements that they would not have examined in another context. Do always ask whether or not an EFFECT has been achieved.

We don’t tell units HOW to write their programs; however, the effect of the program cannot be locked away in a secretive intellectual and aesthetic covering. Let’s not dispose of the “triad of effect options” but let us always remember that the ***three items do not exist in isolation*** and that, ultimately, we, ***the judges, must be engaged and, surely, it is the audience who must understand and also be engaged.***

The performer caption — Performance Effect — completes the GE sheets. The performer involvement in General Effect is not the same as in the Achievement captions elsewhere. No doubt, achievement and excellence are alluring, and indeed contribute to the effect of each particular unit. The achievement and excellence of skills will be fully recognized and rewarded with other sheets. The GE sheet recognizes the achievement and excellence as a contribution to effect; however, the GE sheet also considers — perhaps more importantly — the ***power of the performer***. This power is the convergence of many items, not all of which are as recognizable as strengths or flaws in excellence or achievement. Significantly, there is a stage presence displayed by the performers — as well as an ability to bring to the audience all of the nuances of expression, performance and delivery inherent in the work.

Judging the performer requires the recognition and the realization that the performers have internalized the program and its challenges. Have they illustrated an understanding of details? Have they created a contrast? Have they portrayed an emotional trajectory that brings a variety of thoughts to the audience? Ultimately, if the content of the program is not delivered well, properly, or with the intended meaning, the program itself falters in effect. This is not so very different from a play, an opera, or musical theatre production. The actors can SPEAK and/or PLAY the notes and the words, and perform technically flawlessly. But the key question will always be whether or not the ***communication*** contains an emotional fulfillment of each event or phrase. This will occur when the performers internalize the play with a complete understanding, including the contour, shape, and emotional pitch, delivered in an external fashion to the waiting audience.

Our charge, as judges, is to be fully involved with the performers, with an experienced eye towards the recognition of Performance Effect as a dual competency. First, excellence and achievement do contribute to effect. The second competency is the intangible but nonetheless recognizable aspect — the judge sees the musicians/actors and actresses, in given roles, delivering a complete understanding of music, of characters, of emotion, of shaping, of dynamics and detail to an audience awaiting the presentation.

Once again, and well worth repeating, the performer portion of the GE sheet is much more than another excellence and achievement caption. It makes this area of the GE sheet significantly more challenging for the judge. The keen eye, the practiced eye, and the experienced mind will need to recognize these additional aspects and skills of the performer. In fact, it is these other characteristics that truly define the purpose and difference of Performer Effect from other performer captions.