

A JUDGE'S JOURNEY TO "The Pitch"

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Have you ever wondered how those four judges at your contest qualified to be evaluating your chorus or quartet? Do they have magical powers, an extra set of ears and eyes, or advanced degrees in music? Does every judge have to be a director or winning quartet member? Inquiring minds want to know!

Judges certainly do have special qualities, but magic or reputation has little to do with their abilities. If you polled the judges, certainly you would find winning directors and quartet queens in some of those chairs; however, you would also find chorus and quartet members just like yourself. What makes someone a judge isn't her accomplishments. The women who judge distinguish themselves by their desire, dedication and willingness to do whatever it takes to serve our members through strong, supportive evaluation and education. Could you be one of those women?

What does it take to become a judge? How do you know if you would be a good candidate? How long does it take and how much does it cost? Let's take a journey through the first five to ten years of a judge's life ...

Applications for the judging program are accepted at headquarters on or before February 15 of each year. At the June meeting of the Judge Specialists Committee, each application is reviewed and considered. When evaluating these applications, the Judge Specialists are looking for:

- a) Evidence of a selfless service to the members and organization of SWEET ADELINES INTERNATIONAL
- b) Strong knowledge of our organizational structure and the judging category for which you applied
- c) Solid history of chorus, regional and/or international service that provides positive references

If all these requirements are met, the applicant will be notified that she will need to begin the testing process. There are three tests that will be administered by an Internationally appointed person. The first test covers the structure, governance and workings of SWEET ADELINES INTERNATIONAL; the second tests the knowledge of the particular category chosen by the applicant; and the third is a live, trial scoring experience that indicates the aptitude for written evaluation and scoring. All of these tests will take approximately a year to complete and are reviewed and scored at the next June Judge Specialists meeting. Who knew it took so much time, effort and knowledge to even be accepted?

If all of these tests are completed successfully, the applicant becomes an "Approved Candidate Judge" (ACJ). Perhaps your region has hosted an ACJ workshop where all of the Judge Specialists gather with the new candidate judges for an educational workshop combined with contest. This is an intense learning experience that kicks off the trial scoring phase of becoming a judge — an incredibly exciting, nerve-wracking, and intense time that not only develops and grows the candidate's knowledge and evaluative base, but can also reveal and refine character and personality traits.

Trial scoring holds many experiences for the candidate judge — peaks and valleys, courage and fear, joy and disappointment, success and failure. Learning to deal with all of these reveal and highlight a judge's character — openness to critique and instruction, determination to learn and grow to meet a challenge, independence to work and prepare without constant guidance, strength to make decisions, and grace to work in a team. The process isn't easy and it isn't meant to be. Through the two to five years that candidates may remain in the trial scoring stage, they grow into a judge that respects and appreciates each competitor and fellow judge, providing each with support, education and understanding. Remember, most judges are competitors, too!

This is a good time to acknowledge that not everyone is cut out for the judging life. That doesn't make judges better, smarter or stronger, but it does reveal personalities that thrive on competition, personal critique and who foster a "never give up" approach. Judges are required to evaluate honestly what

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is presented at that time. Sometimes that is difficult for competitors to hear and they might not appreciate the judge's insights or even like her (for the moment, we hope). Judging requires confidence and security from those who will ultimately live the life of a judge.

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Each year during the regional competition season, candidate judges are asked to trial score one or more regional competitions. Usually, the candidates who are able to trial score two or three contests each season advance faster because the repetition provides valuable practice that leads to earlier success. All judges are required to prepare independently for each judging experience. Some judges and candidates participate in a judge boot camp to prepare for the judging season. Some prepare by reviewing previous competitions and practice judging by DVD. These preparations are done independently and are not official training. However, they are invaluable experiences that prepare our judges for a smooth and quick entry into the judging season. Candidate judges must jump into this practice quickly in order to progress effectively.

All judges are evaluated and scored on their competition performance each season. The candidate judges benefit from these evaluations as well. They provide overall direction for improvement as well as specific examples of what they did well and where they will need to develop better skills. (Does that sound familiar? The judges are “judged” just like our competitors!) These evaluations include commentary on their written elements as well as their scoring accuracy. Both areas must attain a high level of success before they can be considered for service on an official judging panel.

By now, most candidate judges have been working four or five years toward becoming a judge! Considering the time off work for competition weekends, the expense of hotels, meals and flights, as well as the energy it requires, becoming a judge is not an undertaking you can take lightly! We are very fortunate now to be able to offer judging scholarships through The Overtone Society; however, these only cover part of the expense. When you see a trial scorer at your regional contest, take a moment to give them an encouraging word or a hug of appreciation. They deserve it! Keep in mind that every judge who sits at that table in the pit has spent her own time, money and energy to learn how to help you grow and become even better. There is no other explanation for this amazing dedication than their great love of this musical art form, our members and SWEET ADELINES INTERNATIONAL.

When a candidate judge receives the scores needed to advance, she will be assigned to her first official judging panel. Her excitement is through the roof! If she is assigned to a panel, it is because she has proven that they are ready — still, nerves are expected. The panel chair is available to provide an encouraging word and monitor results. However, once the contest starts, it is amazing how quickly all the judges leave any other thoughts or concerns behind and are completely focused on the competitors. Nerves melt away in the desire to provide each contestant a valuable experience and to get it done in the short time allowed. It's the most exciting marathon type experience in which most of us will ever participate!

Once again, the candidate's performance on this official panel will be evaluated and scored. Success is sweet! The candidate is then assigned to other official judging panels in the next year's regional contests as well as being invited to trial score at an upcoming International contest. The first International trial scoring experience can be overwhelming in length of time and energy depletion as these candidate judges are judging both quartet and chorus contests throughout the week. It is usually a “best of times/worst of times” experience that most can't wait to do again.

Now you may think they have completed their training — not so fast! After a couple of successful official judging seasons, the candidate judge will be requested to write an essay/thesis paper on their category. This paper covers all the elements of their category as well as how their category relates and intertwines with all the others. Much like we would experience in college or graduate school, expectations and requirements are high. If this category paper is successfully submitted, this judge is getting close to certification.

The last remaining “test” required for certification is to successfully trial score or judge an International competition. This experience can produce a good deal of anxiety! Our judge has now spent six to eight years and untold amounts of money and energy preparing for this moment — it is both thrilling and daunting. Afterwards, the wait begins...

At the December Judge Specialist meeting, all judges from the International contest are reviewed and evaluated including any trial scorers. If the pressure has overtaken the candidate judge and affected her performance, she can be invited to do it again the next year. Hopefully, it was a successful experience and she will be recommended for certification.

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After the Judge Specialist's recommendation, both the Education Direction Committee and the International Board of Directors must approve the certification. It may be several months before the candidate judge hears her results. After approximately seven to nine years, can you imagine the party that takes place when she hears of her certification? She certainly deserves quite a celebration!

Are you a possible judge candidate? Do you have the determination, dedication and drive to travel the journey of a judge into “the pit?” Has SWEET ADELINES INTERNATIONAL offered so much growth and fun in your life that you want to give back some of the joy, education and thrill it has given you? If so, we are eager to meet you! Discovering potential applicants who can meet the challenge of judging is an ongoing process. If you are interested, talk to any judge about her experience, get her advice and find your application on the SWEET ADELINES INTERNATIONAL website. We are always looking for a few good women — you just might be the one! ■