



**HARMONY**  
*harmony through harmony*  
**SWEEPSTAKES**  
*NW regional a cappella festival*

Rulebook & Philosophy

A handbook explaining the philosophy behind  
the Harmony Sweepstakes A Cappella Festival  
and how it works

# **Philosophy and Goals**

## **Purpose**

The purpose of the Harmony Sweepstakes A Cappella Festival is to promote the appreciation and performance of vocal harmony. It achieves this purpose by showcasing groups in the exciting atmosphere of a competition and by attracting an audience that is largely “a cappella friendly” to provide singers with an exceptional performance experience. Our essential purpose is twofold:

1. To put on a highly entertaining show.
2. To provide the performers with a positive experience, and with tools to help them progress in the performance of vocal music.

## **Philosophy**

Although it is a competition, it should always be a friendly and supportive one where the common goal is to create a special evening of camaraderie and intimacy for singers and audience alike. The majority of the participants already has this attitude and do not have to be asked to cooperate. However, on occasion, we do see individuals who can carry the competitive angle to such an extreme that they actually become rude and derogatory, and even malicious. This is not acceptable behavior and will not be tolerated by the Festival.

## **Goals**

The Harmony Sweepstakes A Cappella Festival is a widely recognized national showcase for vocal musicians, enabling its participants to achieve their goals through exposure to growing audiences. We seek to broaden the scope and appreciation of a cappella as an art form. We hope that the Harmony Sweepstakes will serve as a Mecca of sorts, for all vocal harmony enthusiasts. Our aim is to keep our events friendly and supportive, emphasizing the spirit of “harmony through harmony.” We want to offer growth experiences for singers in all stages of their careers through competitions, conferences and in ever increasing groups of regional events.

## **Original Arrangements and Original Song**

The PNW competition presents an award for the best original arrangement and best original song. For the arrangement, only the arrangement needs to be original, not the song. No charts are required. These will be judged solely as performed during the competition.

## **Closing Song**

At the end of each competition, the groups are all brought back on stage for the awards. After all awards are given, the show will close with everyone (including the audience) singing “Goodnight Sweetheart” together. Groups should review this song and words. The host group will lead a brief run-through downstairs in the dressing room area prior to the start of the show.

## **Questions?**

We know it is impossible to answer all of the questions that may come up in this little booklet, so please feel free to contact the NW Harmony Sweepstakes Regional Director, Gary Witley, at [gwitley@visionseed.com](mailto:gwitley@visionseed.com) (360-264-8303) with your questions.

## **Dressing Rooms**

Each venue will be different, of course, but it is safe to say that until we get to Carnegie Hall, groups will have to share dressing rooms and warm-up areas. Obviously, common courtesy will be essential here, and if there is a crowd, the group that is on deck should have priority over the others.

## **Programs**

Each group will be allotted at least a short paragraph in the printed program, which will include the name of the group, its members, and contact info.

## **Sound Checks**

Groups will need to provide a mic plot to the Regional Director (how you want the mics set up for your first number, how many do you need, etc.). Groups will be given sound checks in the order assigned. It is very important that you are on time for your sound check. The schedule is tight and you do not want to miss your opportunity to get the best sound possible. Please be aware that levels and placements will change throughout the evening so this will just serve to give you a feel for how you sound in the hall.

## **Sound System**

Every effort will be made to insure that the sound system used in each competition is of top quality with an emphasis on plenty of good monitors. The sound person is to be instructed to keep the mixing to the levels established at sound check. Once levels are set, each group will do their own mixing at the mics.

## **Special Effects**

These should be avoided. However, if a group wants to use special light or sound techniques, the guidelines are that it may be used only if it is made available to all groups and the technical staff is willing to spend the extra time needed to prepare it. Please consult your Regional Director well in advance of performance date to get approval and make necessary arrangements.

## **Rules**

### **General**

We try to remain flexible and if we find something that's not working, we'll look at changing it. If a question comes up and there is no written rule for it, the guideline we use is: Is it in keeping with our philosophy and purpose, and is it fair to all groups? When in doubt, ask!

## **Auditions**

All groups must audition in order to compete. This is done by sending a completed application packet, audio recording and entry fee to the regional director. Application forms can be downloaded as PDF files from the NW region's web site at [www.mce.org](http://www.mce.org). Click on "Harmony Sweepstakes" to find the page with the links for the application and rulebook downloads. Please send applications for the NW regional to:

## **Masterworks Choral Ensemble**

c/o The NW Harmony Sweepstakes A Cappella Festival  
PO Box 1091  
Olympia, WA 98507

## **Group Size**

Competing groups must consist of at least three members and at most seven members. Larger groups may select combinations of performers to compete, but only seven members will be allowed to compete and if they win, only the competing members will be flown to the finals.

## **Entry Fees**

The entry fee is \$10.00 per singer per group (that is \$40.00 for a quartet, \$30.00 for a trio, etc.). The fees are nonrefundable and are due with the complete application.

## **Multiple Entries**

One person singing in more than one competing group is allowed. If one or two singers bring a couple of good groups that will be positive additions to the concert, that's terrific. A group may not, however, rename itself and compete twice just by adding or deleting a member.

## **Competing Again**

If a group wins its regional competition but does not win the national finals, it must skip a year before competing in their regional again (they may host their regional following their winning year). If a group wins their regional and the finals, they will not be eligible to compete again, but they may certainly host, if possible.

## **Time Limit**

May vary with different regional competitions. The NW region provides ten minutes to each group). Timing begins when a group starts its first tune and ends when it finishes its last song. A group may use its ten minutes any way it likes (i.e. three songs or one long medley or five short songs, etc.). This time limit also includes any talking. The audience will be instructed to keep applause between songs to a minimum. Please stay within the time limit, as **groups lose up to 50% of their overall scores by going over time**. This keeps the show to a reasonable length and keeps the competition fair to all groups.

## **Song List**

Groups should let the Director know which songs they will be performing and in what order as far in advance as possible. A list needs to be made for the judges' reference, as well as the group scheduling, to avoid back-to-back song duplication. A group may change its song selection up until the show call (approximately 1 1/2 hours before show time) but the more advance preparation time we have, the better.

## **Instruments**

A cappella means without musical accompaniment, so basically, no instruments are permitted. Some hand-held percussion enhancements may be allowed, such as tambourines, maracas or the occasional kazoo. The basic guideline here is that, if the instrument were an integral part of the number as opposed to an incidental enhancement, it would not be acceptable. Please discuss these options with your Regional Director well in advance of the performance.

## **Music Style**

Any style of music will be considered, but the event is geared toward performance and innovation. Also, it should be kept in mind that this is a family show, and though we don't want to be "Disneyland clean," all lyrics and movement should be kept within the realm of good taste and PG acceptability.

## **Order of Appearance**

The order is determined by the Director and announced to the groups when they arrive at the hall or club on the evening of the competition. We schedule the groups carefully, to avoid similar groups going back to back, and to put some space between groups performing the same song.

Although there have been some complaints, we keep the order unknown for two reasons:

1. There may be upwards of 70 performers in the competition and the Director, stage crew and sound person will all need a word with you to run through show order, rehearse the closing tune, tour the theater and give any other info related to the evening. This is also the only time that you will be given a chance to run a sound check. Groups are advised to arrive as early as possible. Check with your Regional Director to see how early the hall will be available.
2. We do not want to take even one phone call from groups complaining about their spot in the program and trying to get it changed. Groups have won the competitions from all different places in the program and if you're good, it doesn't matter if you perform first, last or anywhere in between!

## **Hosts**

The host group (the previous year's regional winner) will open the show with one or more tunes. The host group also performs a 20 minutes set after intermission and while the judges complete the scoring. The host group may also participate in the award ceremony. Lastly, the host group leads the closing song: "Goodnight Sweetheart." The NW Region engages a Masters of Ceremony to introduce each group, explain the process to the audience each group, and filling time when necessary.

## **Judges**

We usually have a panel of three or more local celebrities from the music business, media and educational fields who are qualified to evaluate vocal music with great expertise. The NW Region typically has five judges. Most judges volunteer their services.

## **Judging**

Groups are judged 50% on musicality and 50% on performance, with an emphasis on originality. Good performance does not necessarily mean flashy costumes and tricky choreography. It simply refers to the degree in which the audience was entertained. Judges are encouraged to jot down notes that will help to improve the group's performance and to give an overall score to assist in the final placement, as opposed to scoring every little thing a group does or does not do. Each group will receive a copy of the judges' comments pertaining to their group.

## **Selling Your Stuff!**

All groups may sell stuff but it is subject to a 10% commission by the Washington Center. All sales must take place at the group sales table in the alcove in the lobby. Sorry about that! These are house rules, not ours. The show organizer will go over this with you're the day of the sound check. If you want to sell stuff, be sure to complete the attached Merchandise Report prior to the show and fill in the data and turn it in to the show organizer before you leave that evening. You may distribute literature or other free stuff at tables set up for your group in the lobby.



Lighting and Song Sequence Form
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Group Name \_\_\_\_\_

Please fill out this form indicating the songs that will be performed, the mood of the lighting required, and the range of the stage being used for each song. In order to strike a balance between providing a good show and a fair contest, the lighting changes for the show will be minimal. Please indicate the lighting mood desired using the terms indicated below:

**Lighting**

- Hot/Warm/Cool

**Stage Use**

- If you are planning choreography that spans the entire stage please indicate the Stage Area as "Full Stage".
- If you plan to perform in fixed spaces for the entire number, please indicate the Stage Area as "Center Stage".

In order to ensure proper lighting for your numbers, please indicate the songs in the exact order that they will be performed. Please indicate which songs are to be considered for original arrangement by checking the Orig column.

Title	Orig	Lighting Mood	Stage Area Used
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			

<b>Deadline: FAX to Gary Witley at 360-264-8302 by the deadline shown on the application Thanks!</b>
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# MASTERWORKS

C H O R A L E N S E M B L E

PO Box 1091 • OLYMPIA WA 98507 • (360)491-3305

## SAMPLE of Judge Tally Sheet for the Northwest Regional Harmony Sweepstakes

Groups (in performance order)	Judge #1	Judge #2	Judge #3	Judge #4	Judge #5	Total Points	Final Ranking
Group 1							
Group 2							
Group 3							
Group 4							
Group 5							
Group 6							
Group 7							
Group 8							

Ranking: 1=Best, 2=2<sup>nd</sup> place, 3=3<sup>rd</sup> place, etc.

1. Each judge will rank the groups from 1 to 10
2. Record each judge's ranking on this sheet
3. Total the rankings for each group horizontally
4. The group with the lowest score is ranked #1 overall
5. The next lowest is #2, etc.