

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 or Cadenza selection, for reasons the next paragraph makes clear.

When all festivals are completed, the adjudicators meet again to choose 24 Finale and 36 Cadenza invitees, as well as 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 'cusps', so that the team is eventually satisfied that the 24th-ranked Finale choir and each 12th-ranked Cadenza choir is marginally better, respectively, than the 25th and 13th.

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.

Technical skill

- Intonation, blend and balance
- Vocal quality
- Diction and language
- Complexity and accuracy

Artistic merit

- Communication and presentation
- Interpretation and style

The marking scale adjudicators apply is below. We do not publish marks at regional level because it is impossible – and therefore highly misleading – to compare them across regions and years, and because, for reasons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/Cadenza selection.

85-100	Outstanding 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 compelling manner.
75-84	Very Good A very good performance, but with a few reservations.	Engaging performances, with minor inconsistencies that do not detract from the overall impact of the performance.
65-74	Good A good performance, but with some reservations.	Satisfying performances; awareness of style and musical character but with some technical or artistic weaknesses.
55-64	Competent A competent performance, but with a number of reservations.	Promising performances, although technical or artistic weaknesses reduce the musical impact.
54 and below	Developing A developing performance, with some potential.	Performances that do not always communicate the essence of the pieces due to significant technical issues and/or artistic weaknesses.