



OPINION : by Alison Hams

"JUDGES AND JUDGING SHEETS"

Thanks to everyone who has read, and made comment on this series of columns - it has been a pleasure to write them, and hopefully some of my opinions on how to prepare for, and be part of talent quests will continue to help those of you who compete, and go on to be guest artists at festivals!!

This month I am writing about "Judges and Judging Sheets"

As we all know, art is a very subjective thing - and there is no right or wrong to the visual or aural side of performance, so any competition boils down to three or four people's opinions!

If you all had to sing the same song or perform the same piece - then it would be easy to just compare the technical ability of each of you, and judge your abilities accordingly.

But...

Because Country Music talent quests are based on Entertainment Value, Presentation of your song (and yourself) and Musical Talent, then personal opinions come into play, as does a judges interpretation of whether the audience likes or dislikes your performance. For example: while one judge may love you singing Crazy by Patsy Cline, another judge may think that by singing a Tania Kernaghan song, you may have better covered more of these bases.

So, in the end - like it or hate it, you need to trust the adjudicators on the day to use their considerable experience, and knowledge to give the right decision, based on these things.

As for Judging Sheets, there are many misconceptions from contestants, based on a number of variables.

NB: The judges generally have NO SAY on the judging sheet they use, and the criteria to be met. They are usually handed the sheets shortly before the competition starts, and have to quickly assess the scoring format to be used.

As there is no governing body to control our Talent Quests, or our Judging Sheets, committees can choose to use whatever format they like. Some just give each section an overall score, adding up to 100 - some have each section broken into sub-categories- some give levels out of A,B,C, D, E (with no numerical values given) and a final score.

Let's touch on an example of the A,B,C,D,E sheet in more depth.

Let's say the first section is out of 50, there are 5 sub-categories - the Judge gives you five C's. If we were to work this out mathematically, this would be worth around 30 points. Five B's would be worth 40, and an A and four B's would be worth 42.

But...

There ARE no guidelines given on these sheets to work it out mathematically!! One judge may pick up his sheet; think no-one is ever worth less than a C, so therefore a B is really only middle-of-the-road (fifty percent) and may give you 25!! Yes, it sounds confusing, but once again, the sheets themselves come down to interpretation.

Another common complaint is "This judge gave me 45, but this one gave me EIGHTY!!!" Remember that EACH judge is only comparing YOU to the OTHER contestants.

A Judge will set his or her benchmark and judge accordingly to that! So the low scoring judge may only give the obvious, absolute winner of the quest SIXTY FIVE, with all other competitors scoring lower than that. A second judge may give the winner NINETY with all other competitors scoring lower than THAT! So, laying your judging sheets side by side doesn't achieve anything!

And because of these variables, you may score highly at one festival, and then much lower at the next. That means nothing, as its different sheets, different judges, different day!

The comments given on the sheets on the other hand, are VERY important. Earlier we spoke about the experience and knowledge these judges have - and these comments are given to help you improve. It's called "Constructive Criticism"

Approaching a judge after the event for clarification of these comments is usually fine. Approaching the judges to question their scoring is not, and approaching someone to ask them about ANOTHER JUDGES sheets is definitely uncool!

As you can see, there's already more than enough for the judges to think about while you're singing - and a very short time to fill out, add up, write comments on, and collate your sheets between acts.

Something to remember - if you are first on in your section - you'll probably NEVER receive FULL MARKS!! The judges have to leave themselves somewhere to go - and you are setting the benchmark!

Corrections on a judging sheet are usually made and initialled, to ensure the best artist on the day does win. A lengthy section will see many of the performers receiving similar scores, and countbacks are sometimes necessary to ensure the placings are correct.

Final Note - the onus for good judging doesn't rely ONLY on the judges themselves - it relies on good organisation and preparation by event committees, so that judges have prior knowledge of what's expected of them.

It also makes a judges day so much easier to receive well laid out judging forms with contestants names and details already filled in - allowing them to concentrate on the performances, not the paperwork.

A contestant CLEARLY and SLOWLY introducing themselves also helps the cause. And remember! First impressions count, so grab the judges' attention early - and dress well!!

Questions? Email me: ali@alisonhams.com

Cheers, ALISON HAMS.