

Kathleen Lohrenz Gable and Garry Gable on Adjudicating

5 topics of discussion:

- 1) Recognizing and honouring the Individuality of each festival.
- 2) What is the role of the adjudicator?
- 3) Stay on time/Time Management
- 4) Develop Grading Strategies
- 5) Assessing Performances

Recognizing and honouring the Individuality of each festival.

It is easy to assume all festivals are the same when you have had a strong festival in your upbringing. While all festivals are strong, they are also very different. Each festival has a culture that is specific and individual. It is like a family reunion for that community and as adjudicators we must be cautious to not upset the balance. You will respect that community if you understand that classes are scheduled in very specific ways. As adjudicators, we don't know the conflicts taken into account by the scheduling committee that result in programming choices.

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What is the role of the adjudicator?

We recognize that every performer in festival is a potential concertgoer. To assure a continued interest in the future of music throughout their lives, it therefore behooves us to welcome every person and encourage their strengths while giving constructive suggestions that may further their musical growth. We should be compelled as adjudicators to explore options that will address the students' issues and still be kind and encouraging. We don't know the back-story to each student's journey and therefore must be cautious in our assessments both in word and spoken comments. Flowery and overt use of adjectives in assessments are not necessary. Honesty, sincerity, and respect are.

To this end, adjudicating can be gruelling, highly intense and tiring, both physically and emotionally. Learn to recognize your state of mind and work to not seem impatient, intolerant, or worse, uncaring.

Adjudicators reflect a perspective standard of music performance levels across the province and even the country for that community.

You are ALWAYS advocating for "live music" in a community, and for the future of concert attendance by participants and their families beyond festival.

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Time management

Develop strategies – examine the program to understand that festival’s take on what your ‘time-management’ should look like.

Refrain from reading aloud all your comments for each participant. Select two or three pertinent points for each and move on. Remember you are speaking to the whole community and not just the individual.

Consider strategies for getting music scores from participants. We like students to keep scores until they go to the stage (to allow them to be able to refer to the score right up to their performance). Consider having the participant bring the music to the table on their way to the stage.

Consider developing traffic-control solutions for handing back music and adjudication sheets.

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Develop Grading Strategies

Your marks must be consistent throughout the festival. It is dangerous to start marking low and give higher marks only at the end of the festival. A good performance deserves a good mark. Always.

Resist ‘equalizing’ grades to make things appear ‘fair’. The adjudicator must reflect a standard for grades based on the quality of ‘each’ performance.

Scholarships and grading: Scholarships require care with grading throughout the festival. Spend time with the program and cross reference that with scholarships. If you know that you have classes separated by days or sessions that are all eligible for the same scholarship, then be sure to grade with that awareness from the beginning to avoid conflicting grades within these groups, to avoid controversy. Track your grades all week, especially if multiple classes are tied to a scholarship award – e.g. Sonatina class, etc. Some festivals have prepared grids with potential winners/classes listed and cross-listed. This helps a lot in planning.

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Assessing Performances

It is imperative that we self-monitor both our tone of voice and the actual words we use to convey ideas and opinions in both written and oral assessments. Very often the students and their parents have an elevated sense of the importance and knowledge base of the adjudicator. It is therefore incumbent upon us to choose our words carefully, remembering to always be honest AND kind. Being kind does not mean saying a performance is ‘fantastic’ when it is not, and being honest does not mean pointing out obvious weakness in an insensitive manner. Stress to students that the true value of festival happens before the actual class ... the preparation and

level of commitment to their learning, attending masterclass and recitals, and listening to their fellow students.

It is most important to remember that we are there to support teachers, students, and community, and NOT TO TEACH! For students, it is rarely comfortable, and for parents it is rarely comfortable to sit and just watch their child endeavour to succeed. So, for them to be publicly critiqued is a whole other level than most professions ever must endure in such a broad public forum.

This is why adjudicators must strive to remain neutral even while having to make decisions. It is important to honour and acknowledge the strength and dedication it takes to perform. This is an experience that will help them in the rest of their life when they must get up and talk or state an opinion in their work or friend circles. Adjudicators cannot assume why mistakes in performance happen. A performer has a history and we do not know that. Offer observations and solutions. It is entirely likely that teachers have already addressed problems and the participant may have just fallen back on old habits, or over-worried about something else, causing a lapse.

Set goals and avoid involving participants in Q&A's regarding their performances or festival experiences. Remember that the rules request that performers not speak to adjudicators, and some are triggered by such scenarios that could cause other issues no one wants. They are there to perform and not to have to verbally express feelings and thoughts that they have not explored.

Plan your comments-page so that you can have constructive space for opening and closing statements, and observations in the middle. Consider a scratchpad for noting bar numbers and other points that want including in your notes. Avoid marking in other peoples' scores, especially in pen or coloured pencils.

Make a habit of observing lots of other adjudicators to get a sense of the variety of approaches and methods. This also provides you a compass for how others' words impact on you and your students.

Celebrate music and music making in your adjudicating!

Garry and Kathy