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BRING IT ON!

THE BENEFITS OF COMPETITION

by Garrett Breeze

The music you make matters far more than any trophy your group could receive, but participating in competitions is one of the best things you can do to supercharge your choral program.

Competition Brings Out the Best in Your Students

At their most basic level, choir competitions provide a goal to work toward and a date by which it needs to be accomplished. We all try to teach that every performance is equally important, but there's just something different about performing for a panel of judges who will rank your performance versus your home crowd who will love you no matter what. The desire to leave one's best performance on the stage can be extremely motivating, and if you're in an environment where you are able to compete multiple times, that effect only multiplies.

My choir teacher was an excellent model of how to foster a healthy competitive spirit. She loved winning, but sometimes I think she loved in more

when we came in second or third place, because she knew that would light a fire under us to work harder for the next one. The vast majority of choirs know they are not going to win, but they still compete because they know it's going to make them better than if they didn't.

Competition Can Help Your Students Learn Faster

Many young singers only have one or two choral directors during their education, so the opportunity to receive feedback from multiple experts all at once is extremely valuable, both in exposing them to new ideas and in validating the education they have already received. Of course, there are lots of ways to get feedback in non-competitive ways, but the nature of competition encourages students to apply such feedback quickly.

As important as the judges are,

sometimes the best learning comes by watching your competition. In what other environment could you sit in one place and watch a dozen different choirs perform live? There's just nothing like it! It's an experience that just can't be replicated in the classroom (as wonderful as is.)

Competition Can Teach Life Lessons

There's a certain vulnerability involved with competition that can be a powerful teacher. You put yourself out there, never quite knowing how it will be received. You learn to recover when you make a mistake. You learn expectations management. You learn how to conquer stage fright and perform under pressure.

The biggest criticism of choir competitions is likely the fact that the judging is (by necessity) so subjective.

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But therein lies the greatest life lesson of all: the world is subjective. Auditions are subjective. College applications are subjective. Hirings and firings are subjective. So much of the “real world”—even in music—is competitive and subjective, and we need to prepare our students for that reality.

Competition Provides Professional Experience

The process of learning a show, performing it, taking it on the road, and making changes in response to criticism is an integral part of Broadway and other professional productions. For groups like show choirs and a cappella groups that engage in these processes week after week, this practice provides the closest thing to professional gigging experience students will ever get in school.

Competition Can Foster Community

The biggest draw of a competition is not the trophy, it is the fact that so many people who all enjoy the same activity get to come together and participate in a shared experience. At their core, competitions are a celebration.

Competition Can Provide Common Ground with Sports

Virtually all school choirs have to learn to co-exist with the athletic department. Although the events are different, competition is something both sides can understand and work together to support and encourage one another. Not only that, but participating in competitions can also help in recruiting and retaining student athletes who might also love to sing.

Competition Matters to Administration

This last point feels a little cynical, but I still think it’s true. You likely have administration or faculty in your building that have no idea what you do. They don’t understand choral music, but they understand competition—after all, placing well in a competition reflects positively on them, too. Regardless of how you place, showing improvement in ratings from one competition to the next is a tangible, documented way of demonstrating the learning and growth of your students.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: With more than 1,000 show choir arrangements in circulation, Garrett Breeze is a sought-after clinician and adjudicator whose credits include film and television, Broadway stars, and Grammy-winning classical artists. His show choir music is available at breezetunes.com and he recently launched a new catalog of music for concert and church choirs at holidaychoirmusic.com.

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