



# THE ROAD TO THE SPOTLIGHT

## WHY COMPETITIONS ARE THE BEATING HEART OF SHOW CHOIR GROWTH

BY ED BAUER

**“Show choir competitions aren’t just about trophies. They’re where talent meets teamwork, and where a little glitter turns into a lot of growth.”**





## **PART ONE: WHY COMPETITIONS MATTER**

### **The Program: Building a Legacy, One Jazz Hand at a Time**

For many directors, competitions are the spark that transforms a small show choir into a campus institution. When your group steps onto the competition stage, you're not just performing—you're putting your program on the map.

Administrators start to notice the arts program. Parents get involved. Sponsors call back. Before long, your once-overlooked choir room becomes the heartbeat of school spirit.

Competitions also raise the creative bar. Directors push themselves to outdo last season, choreographers invent new ways to defy gravity, and your costume

designer develops opinions about sequins that border on philosophical.

It's healthy artistic pressure—and the results are growth, innovation, and the kind of teamwork that can't be taught in a textbook.

### **The Students: Confidence, Character, and Camaraderie**

Competition season teaches students more than how to hit the high notes. It teaches life skills wrapped in rhythm.

**Discipline** comes from those early Saturday rehearsals. **Resilience** develops when a set doesn't go perfectly, or a judge's comment stings. And **teamwork**—that's the core. Every performer matters; one offbeat move can throw the visual balance, and one missed harmony can ripple through the sound.

By spring, you see it—students who once hid in the back row are volunteering for solos, helping younger members, and talking about “vowel shaping” at lunch like pros.

And let’s not forget the friendships forged on those long competition trips. Nothing bonds a group like singing “*Don’t Stop Believin*” at full volume on a charter bus at 1:00 a.m.

## The School: Spirit and Spotlight

When your show choir performs well at competitions, the pride spreads across campus. Students, teachers, and even the principal start humming your closer in the hallway.

For administrators, it’s tangible proof that the arts matter. For communities, it’s a reminder that creativity still thrives in schools. And for the program itself, a successful competition season can boost recruitment, funding, and prestige.

Show choir competitions give everyone—students, staff, and supporters—a reason to celebrate excellence. And in the process, they keep the performing arts shining where they belong: center stage.

## PART TWO: HOW TO PREPARE YOUR SHOW CHOIR (AND KEEP YOUR SANITY)

Preparing for competition season is part rehearsal, part logistics marathon, and part group therapy. To help, here’s a breakdown of the **judging categories** and how to prepare your group for each—without needing a caffeine IV drip.

**“There’s nothing like watching a shy freshman become a fearless performer. That’s when you know the season was a win—trophy or not.”**

## VOCALS — The Heart of the Show

### What Judges Look For:

Pitch, tone, diction, blend, phrasing, and overall musicality.

### How to Prepare:

- Start with solid warm-ups that target tone and blend.
- Record rehearsals—students rarely know how they sound until they hear it.
- Use sectionals for detailed harmony work.
- Remind your group that vowels, not volume, win the day.

### Director Tip:

Keep a stash of throat lozenges and water bottles. Hydrated singers = happy judges.



PHOTO COURTESY CLINTON ATTACHÉ

## CHOREOGRAPHY — The Sparkle that Sells the Song

### What Judges Look For:

Execution, synchronization, energy, and showmanship.

### How to Prepare:

- Drill until the routine feels muscle-memorized.
- Use rehearsal videos—reviewing footage is like instant replay for art.
- Coach facial expressions (“You look like you’re solving algebra—smile!”).
- Make it fun: host “Choreo Olympics” with goofy awards for most dramatic hair flip.

## SHOW DESIGN — The Story You Tell

### What Judges Look For:

Theme, song choice, pacing, flow, and transitions.

**PRO TIP**

**Test your costumes under stage lights. What looks “gold” under classroom fluorescents can turn into “traffic cone orange” under LEDs.**

**How to Prepare:**

Design your show like a movie: an exciting opening, a powerful emotional core, and a finale that leaves audiences cheering.

Transitions matter as much as the songs themselves. Keep the energy alive as you shift between numbers—mini-moments of storytelling make your show unforgettable.

## **BAND & ACCOMPANIMENT** — The Unsung Heroes

**What Judges Look For:**

Balance, rhythm, energy, and blend with vocals.

**How to Prepare:**

- Schedule joint rehearsals early.
- Teach students to listen across the ensemble.

Involve your sound team—mixing in a gym is a different animal than in your auditorium.

## **VISUALS & STAGING —** The Full Picture

**What Judges Look For:**

Stage use, formations, transitions, props, and overall visual impact.

**How to Prepare:**

Plan every move like choreography—no dead air, no confusion. Every student should know where they're supposed to be and why.

Simplify props. If it takes longer to assemble than perform, it's too much.

**Director Tip:**

Designate a "Stage Captain" to manage risers, props, and set pieces. It saves you from the dreaded "Where's the ladder?!" moment five minutes before showtime.



- ✓ **Balance vocals and band in multiple environments**
- ✓ **Assign a student to "ears" duty during run-throughs**
- ✓ **Rehearse with full amplification before competition week**

**“Plan every move like choreography—no dead air, no confusion. Every student should know where they’re supposed to be and why.”**



**PRO  
TIP**

**Add audience focus to rehearsals. Perform for parents, faculty, or anyone who will watch. Real reactions help refine the energy and timing.**

## **SHOWMANSHIP & OVERALL EFFECT — The Wow Factor**

### **What Judges Look For:**

Energy, emotion, professionalism, and audience engagement.

### **How to Prepare:**

- Remind your performers that they're storytellers. Encourage them to connect emotionally to lyrics and movement.
- Rehearse every detail—from entrances to bows—as if it's part of the competition. It is.

The audience can only love your show as much as your students love performing it.

## PROFESSIONALISM & ETIQUETTE — Winning Beyond the Score Sheet

Even if it's not officially judged, directors know the truth: your reputation travels faster than your bus.

Remind your students:

- Cheer for other choirs.
- Thank hosts and volunteers.
- Leave dressing rooms spotless.
- Keep the post-show pizza party clean, too (we can dream).

These gestures make your program memorable for all the right reasons—and they reflect the heart of what show choir's about: respect, community, and class.

## DIRECTOR'S SURVIVAL GUIDE

Let's be real: running a show choir through competition season is not for the faint of heart. It's for the organized, the passionate, and those armed with caffeine and a color-coded binder.

### Top Survival Strategies:

- **Plan backward.** Start from competition day and reverse-engineer your rehearsal schedule.
- **Delegate.** Trust your section leaders and parent boosters.
- **Prioritize health.** Students can't perform their best if they're burned out.
- **Celebrate small wins.** When the tenors finally lock that chord? Throw confetti.

## THE FINAL CURTAIN

At the end of the day, competitions are about far more than rankings and medals. They're about growth—of programs, of performers, and of the people who make the magic happen behind the curtain.

They give students confidence, directors purpose, and schools pride. They turn a simple set of songs into a full-blown experience that unites communities and fills auditoriums with applause.

**“You can survive on coffee and adrenaline for a while—but joy and teamwork last the whole season.”**

And as every seasoned director knows, the real reward isn't in the trophy case—it's in that one shining moment when your choir nails their closer, the audience erupts, and you realize every long night was worth it.

Because in show choir, the greatest victory is the moment they find their spotlight—and absolutely own it.

---

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Ed Bauer has been in publishing for over twenty years. He was introduced to Show Choir by his daughter and he is forever grateful to her for this wonderful gift.

# 2026 COMPETITION LIST

COMPETITION	DATE & LOCATION (2026)	CONTACT INFO
Show Choir Nationals 2026 (SCN)	March 19-21, 2026 – Nashville, TN	Phone: +1 205-305-8543 Email: scnhost@gmail.com Address: 2453 Kenvil Circle Vestavia Hills, AL 35243 <a href="https://www.showchoirnationals.com/">https://www.showchoirnationals.com/</a>
FAME National Finals 2026	March 14 & March 21 & April 11, 2026 – Orlando & Branson (various)	Phone: 800-289-6441 Fax: 480-654-2553 Address: 7255 E Hampton Ave Suite 127, Mesa, AZ 85209 <a href="https://www.showchoirs.org/">https://www.showchoirs.org/</a>
Heart of America Show Choir Contest 2026 (HOA)	2026 – Nashville (Gaylord Opryland Hotel) & Orlando (Hilton Disney Springs)	Address: 5348 W Vermont St Ste 200 Indianapolis, IN 46224 Phone: 317-683-0933 Email: info@hoachoir.com <a href="https://www.hoachoir.com/show-choir-competition.html">https://www.hoachoir.com/ show-choir-competition.html</a>
Indiana Show Choir Championships 2026	Saturday March 21, 2026 – Noblesville High School, IN	(Use NHS Choir Dept contact) – Registration form listed on <a href="http://NoblesvilleChoirs.org">NoblesvilleChoirs.org</a>
Hart Encore Show Choir Competition 2026	March 20-21, 2026 – Hart High School Auditorium, Newhall, CA	Contact: sanders@hartdistrict.org <a href="https://hartchoir.boosterhub.com/about/4641">https://hartchoir.boosterhub.com/ about/4641</a>

# 2026 COMPETITION LIST

COMPETITION	DATE & LOCATION (2026)	CONTACT INFO
America! Choral Festival (Show/Choir) 2026	March 19-21, 2026 – Washington, DC (National Cathedral)	See Music Celebrations International website – general contact info on site <a href="https://musiccelebrations.com/choral-festivals/">https://musiccelebrations.com/choral-festivals/</a>
San Diego Youth Choral Festival 2026	June 25-30, 2026 – University of San Diego / San Diego, CA	Email: (see application on site) – festival contact listed on SDChoir website <a href="https://www.sdchoir.org/festival">https://www.sdchoir.org/festival</a>
American Choral Festival Anaheim 2026	2026 – Anaheim, CA	Choirs of America / Harmony Productions Contact via Go2Harmony website <a href="https://www.go2harmony.com/2026-american-choral-festival-anaheim">https://www.go2harmony.com/2026-american-choral-festival-anaheim</a>
Show Choir Spectacular (SCVA) 2026	May 16, 2026 – Rowland Heights, CA (Rowland HS)	Contact: Rowland Schools (SCVA host) – website shows event info
Show Choir Invitational (Regional Listing) 2026	Various dates & locations	Contact info varies by host school/organization – check CarmenScoring listing & local host websites