



# Association of Brass Band Adjudicators

## **PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT CRITERIA (PAC)**

### **INTRODUCTION**

1.1 Several years ago, the Association of Brass Band Adjudicators (ABBA) issued a constructive list of performance assessment criteria (PAC) that was designed to help conductors and players to improve levels of performance. Aimed primarily at those involved in the lower sections of the classification systems in the United Kingdom and those aiding the development of youth bands, many found difficulty in understanding that the relative importance of individual aspects of this published criteria was interchangeable and flexible depending upon the precise point in the score of the music being performed. This is now widely known as the “Holistic Approach” to performance assessment.

1.2 To help create a greater transparency and awareness of the significance of performance assessment criteria. ABBA has revisited their original guidance and now grouped together their helpful criteria into a series of categories that clearly reflect the order of importance of each category and the individual aspects that form each category.

This criteria refers to the preparation and performance of music used in contests and concerts.

1.3 Using this revised format as an ‘aide memoire’ will also encourage adjudicators to demonstrate more evidence of consistency when producing order of merit lists at contests.

1.4 ABBA have also considered suggestions that the use of a series of individual boxes complete with numerical scores could be used by adjudicators at solo, ensemble and band contests. Whilst this approach is effective for individual examination purposes, it does not effectively address the comparative assessment aspect of the competitive situation. The adjudicator’s written critique should provide a sufficient audit trail for competitors

## REVISED PAC CRITERIA

### 2.1 FUNDAMENTAL REQUIREMENTS

- Accuracy - Note Values, Pitch, Rhythm
- Precision of Ensemble
- Balance, Blend, Tonal Quality
- Tuning, Intonation
- Control, Pitch, Dynamics

DO WE HEAR WHAT WE SEE!!! Quite simply these are the basic requirements of ensemble or solo playing. The requirements of the score must be reproduced in sound to ensure that what is written is heard.

Each note must be correctly played – in time, pitch and value. Notes from each player must be precisely together, as shown in the score. Chords balanced and blended to achieve an effective tonal (sound) quality.

Inaccurate pitch between consecutive notes (intonation) will adversely affect these aspects as described. Discrepancies should not be difficult to identify – they are either right or wrong (black or white!). No shades of grey!

### 2.2 MUSICIANSHIP

- Consistency of tonal quality (Band Sound)
- Use and range of dynamics
- Control and use of Vibrato
- Phrasing, expression and shape
- Convincing soloists – control, style, shape
- Effective communication of composer's score

Having satisfied the fundamental aspects as described, the conductor and players can now combine to explore and express musical qualities that include, tonal colours, relative shaping of dynamics, phrasing, expressive mood changes to convey the nature and characteristics of the music.

An effective stylistic approach must be adopted that incorporates aspects such as attack, release, correct note length, use of rests, vibrato, idiom and vibrato that effectively portrays the composer's intentions as shown in the score. Solo and accompaniments need to be effectively balanced and committed. The relevant rhythmic pulse is essential.

## 2.3 SCORE READING

- Accuracy of score reading
- Interpretation
- Tempo, relativity to style
- Tempo, relativity to technical ability (Too fast/slow)
- Shape, delivery, impact
- Communication, commitment

Has the score been read accurately by the conductor and players. This is a vital aspect especially during the development stages of band personnel.

- Has the reading which must be accurate been faithfully reproduced in sound, style and rhythm?
- Are the fundamental requirements as described being adversely affected in flow and delivery?
- Is the music sterile and lifeless or is it vibrant with latent energy in evidence?
- Is the performance unique in musical shape or more simply incorrect musically and technically?

## 2.4 PERFORMANCE RELATED ASPECTS

- Soloists, assurance, delivery, errors
- Accompaniments, security, empathy
- Anxiety, nerves, impact upon fundamental aspects
- Ensemble mishaps, breakdowns, recoveries

Rehearsals may have demonstrated that fundamental aspects have been achieved and performances are well shaped and secure until individual nerves, tensions and anxieties blight the contest performance to varying extents.

Adjudicators should be able to differentiate between lapses of the moment and those aspects that have almost never been corrected in rehearsals. This will enable performances to be assessed effectively and accurately. It is important to realise that all blemishes both Fundamental and Performance related will be taken into consideration and penalised accordingly.

Sometimes complete breakdowns in a performance will occur. When this happens the adjudicator should seek to ascertain the reasons for the breakdown, before making an appropriate assessment.

## 2.5 INSPIRATIONAL QUALITIES

- Exceptional communication with listeners
- Exceptional interpretive insight of score
- Exceptional quality of performance
- Query, perceived inspirational approach that detracts from fundamental aspects and musicianship

This is a sparkling facet for the very elite performances, mostly at the higher level, but occasionally experienced in lower sections too!

This results in memorable and readily recalled performances, that have highlighted parts of the music not heard in other performances.

Commonly known as the WOW or X factor in today's jargon. In some memorable instances this will be so, otherwise there could be an impression that this may result in just a "perceived inspirational" performance.

## 3. CODA

3.1 This timely and helpful revised format of the guidance originally given by ABBA in their advisory note on PAC is a welcome source of information to those (especially the less experienced conductors involved) Bands and Ensembles for both competitions and concerts.

3.2 Previously, this criteria was presented as a simple and easy to follow list, but it seems that many conductors who have minimal experience found difficulty in applying this criteria holistically.

3.3 Consequently, this advice is now presented in a more structured manner that progresses from the fundamental requirements that form the basis of all performances, to the level where performances which are extremely effective and memorable for their technical consistency and excellent artistic merit.

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