

Hey all,

Shirlee's next email in the chain is about the program. This is a combination of music, concept, kids, staff, floor, props... To join in with Shirlee's thoughts, I strongly urge you to try to not over think the always asked question, "What do the judges like?" I can answer that question for you very simply: Judges like to watch kids succeed. They like to see shows that are well planned and well executed. They like to watch kids that are well trained.

Judges don't reward hard music or easy music, lots of props or no props, bright colors or earth tones, lots of kids or few kids. Judges reward programs that are put together well and achieved well. Everything else is simply the vehicle that allows for that planning and achievement. The gist of Shirlee's comments are that you need to think hard about what vehicle will put your design team, staff, and students in the best place to put together a well planned show that can be achieved by the students.

Often times, units will go down the path of trying to emulate what won the previous season. There are so many variables that go into what made that winning program successful that it would be impossible to replicate again for any group, even the one that did it in the first place! Consistently successful units are the ones that have a strong training program and find an identity that fits the kids and staff. Find that identity for your group, don't "over-program," and train your kids to be great performers.

When Shirlee refers to the judge administrators (Jim, Phil, and Kristen), she is referring to WGI's administrators. Locally, that would be our Chief Judge, Dennis Kerr. Dennis will echo Shirlee's thoughts to our judges and you can trust that they will be on board with these beliefs and approaches. Shirlee told me in my first judges training session many years ago that the judges' job, at the end of the day, is to determine who is the best guard there that day. The best guard is often the one that spins the best, moves the best, and performs the best. Content is very important, but it can never get in the way of the kids achieving...

Best of luck the rest of the fall and I hope to see you soon!!! Travel safely,

Chris

Thinking about the Program

Your Identity and your Message and just who are you?

By now everyone is searching for the ideal program and of course that involves listening to dozens of tunes. You are no doubt considering the "trends" and "what the judges' reward" and how to set your students up for success. While those are all important considerations, don't forget to put time into focusing on your group's identity and personality. This is where you craft a show that is "tailor made" for your particular situation.

Take stock of your guard's history. Ask yourself these questions and give careful consideration to your answers.

- What's been your success ratio? Are you always struggling to reach a goal? Are you always successful?
- Are you stuck in a rut in terms of repeating old choices?
- What are the social and economic influences your students exist in?
- What stumbling blocks do you repeatedly encounter?
- What are your weaknesses?
- What are your greatest strengths?

All of these considerations blend together to establish the common "personality" or "identity" of your students and subsequently your guard. **With this knowledge, it will help you to design a show that will allow your performers to "be themselves" and hopefully be most comfortable in communicating the program you create.** It's about building on a natural resource. It will also aid in guiding your musical considerations.

The next big question is this:

How do you program? Is it for the judges, the kids or the system? Can it be for all 3?

The typical designer is tempted to "follow the trend" and the motivation behind that is ALWAYS because that's what the judges reward. Over the past year and all through Spinfest, we have been encouraging you to be **ORIGINAL and take a creative step that will make you unique**. At the same time, our Judge administrators are asking Judges to be open to the diversity of programming that we are asking you to bring to our competitive stage. It gets to be that age old question of which came first, the chicken or the egg? If you don't break away from the "common" mold, what else can judges do but reward the best of what EVERYONE is doing?

It is proper that the Activity's standards are defined by the Guards. That's ALL THE GUARDS in all the classes. The judging community should always be the mirror that reflects the priorities of the system. This means they will credit successes of training, creativity, originality and entertainment!!! Somebody's got to take the lead in moving our activity to the next level. I am asking that all of you as a community of designers step up for that challenge. Know that Jim Mahoney, Kristen O'Melia and Phil Madden, as judge administrators, are reinforcing this within the judging community as well. We are all on **the same page in the goal to move our creative process forward!!!**

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SO NOW WHAT???

- Take what we discussed at the beginning of this memo and get a firm picture of your students/guard's identity and personality.
- Get out of your comfort zone and listen to diverse musical options. You can seek music to FIT that "personality" or you can just make sure that the "personality" can adapt to the role the kids will be asked to portray.
- You can be creative through clever displays of body/equipment, through unique costuming, etc.
- Most of this challenge is up to **YOU**. Your students can learn **whatever you are capable of teaching them**. I've seen guards with kids no more than 7 or 8 years old selling their shows with believable and entertaining skills. Just check out those Boston Cadets to get the picture I'm painting here.
- **Eliminate the fear of what judges will do**. I know that's hard, but you can be absolutely sure that your judge administrators are 100% on board in this effort and they are a constant resource to you within the competitive season. **Just don't sacrifice good sense in the establishment of training, logic in staging and planning your effects.**