

MUSICAL INTERPRETATION: Phrasing/Breath/Tempo/Rhythms

- Breath and Phrasing go hand in hand. Take a breath that will last throughout the entire phrase. Practice by singing the psalm, minus accompaniment, phrase by phrase.
- Next, work on adding dynamics within the phrase.
- Make sure the psalm is sung at the speed in which it was intended to be sung.
- The rhythms on the refrain cannot deviate from what is written on the page.

MUSICAL DELIVERY: Tone/Pitch/Intonation

- Pitch and intonation are the same thing.
- Breath directly affects intonation. When you breathe in deeply, the expelled air supports the sound you're producing through the vocal cords.
- When the air is not properly produced, the cantor will sing on the underside of the pitch or will manipulate their breathing apparatus to sing in tune. This could cause injury to the vocal cords and risk permanent damage.
- Further, when the apparatus is especially tight, the cantor will sing sharp.
- Having a pleasing tone when serving as cantor is an important component of the ministry.
- The psalm is not a solo where a singer shows off his or her style and pizzaz. Rather, excessive vibrato, slides into notes, and melismas should be avoided.

TEXT DELIVERY: Diction, pronunciation, flow

- It would be better for the cantor to read the psalm than sing with poor diction; the congregation must understand the words.
- Check any words out with the priest if you're not sure of pronunciation.
- Singing in a different language.

TEXT INTERPRETATION: Mood and facial expressions match the message and intent of the music.

- A congregation will be incredibly uncomfortable if a psalm or reading is "acted out".
- Your eyes and facial expression should match the emotion in the psalm.

INVITATIONAL SKILLS: Stance and Gestures

- Balance your body at the ambo. Adjust the microphone, use a stool, whatever you need to make sure you can look at the congregation when singing.
- Moreover, adjust as needed to ensure you can use both arms when bringing in the congregation.

Cantor and Vocal Techniques
NPM Summer Meeting – Sturgis, SD
Tammy Schnittgrund, presenter

- Back off from the mic when singing with the congregation.
- No “Touchdown Jesus”. Bring them in and bring ‘em down.

EXPRESSIVE SKILLS: Eye Contact, Engagement

- At a minimum, the refrain must be memorized.
- Look at the congregation as much as possible when singing the psalm.
- Connect with the congregation using eye contact.

INTERVALS

- Sight singing is hard. Practice by cracking open the hymnal and singing pieces you don’t know. The more you do it, the easier it gets.
- It’s 2023... get an app. Earpeggio, Ella (voice pitch analyzer), etc.

SCORING GUIDELINES

9-10 Exceeds Expectations: All aspects perfect or near perfect. (If a minor mistake occurs, the cantor is able to recover seamlessly and continue without any distraction.)

8 Meets Expectations-Accomplished: Accurate with minor mistakes in 1 or 2 areas (For example: A final consonant not pronounced, an incorrect rhythm, a note slightly under pitch, a noticeable breath at an inappropriate place in the music, demeanor does not align with the mood of the psalm, or style is not appropriate for liturgy)

6-7 Meets Expectations-Developing: Not consistently accurate, but music and non-verbals are understandable, and assembly is able to follow (For example: insufficient or excessive gestures/eye contact, excessive vibrato, inappropriate melismas or improvisation, multiple errors in diction, phrasing, rhythm, text, or notes)

4-5 Approaching Expectations: More mistakes than accuracy (musical and/or non-verbal). Cantor noticeably reacts to mistakes rather than recovering seamlessly.

2-3 Below Expectations: Frequent, significant mistakes in multiple areas (musical and non-verbal) which directly distract from prayer.

0-1 Unable to complete: Candidate was unable to (or declined to) complete this aspect of the adjudication.