

To all BHA Clubs and choruses. The discussion below relates to the current practice of awarding prizes for small, medium and large choruses at our National BHA Contest.

The review shows that there is no real relationship between chorus size and score.

An alternative proposal would be to award prizes based on a grading system (like A, B and C grades in sport and many other musical genres).

The BHA Council is seeking feedback from Clubs and/or individual members on this topic by 31 May.

Please send your responses to The Secretary, secretary@barbershop.org.au.

An Analysis of BHA Chorus Sizes and Contest Scores

Data from contests from 1993 to 2016 has been compiled and graphs of chorus size and contest scores have been plotted.

Chorus Sizes

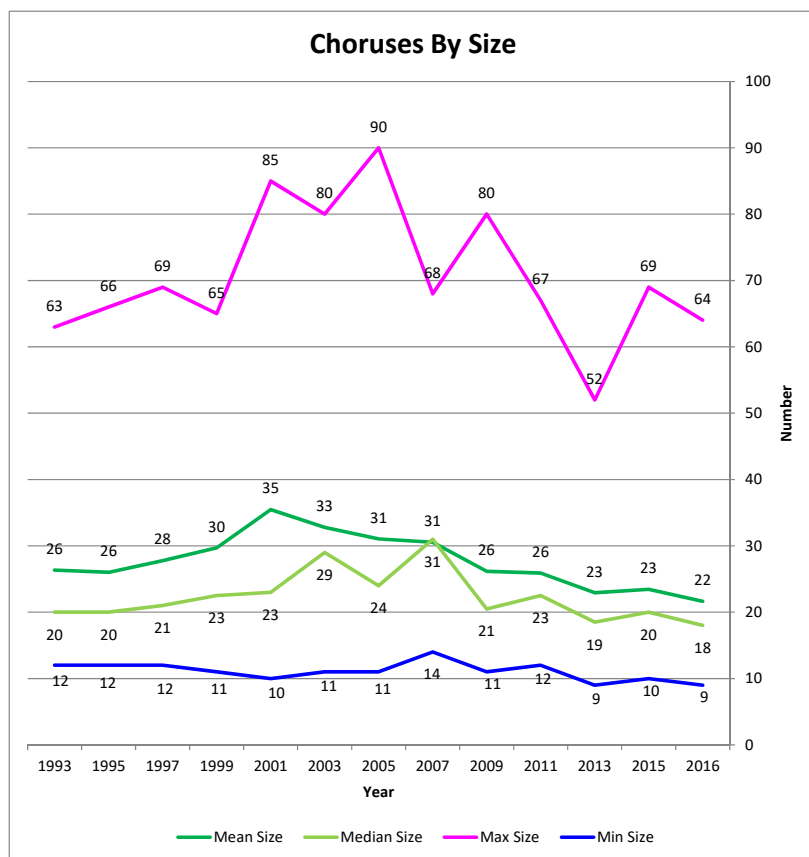
Figure 1 shows chorus sizes. The minimum, maximum, mean and median chorus sizes have been plotted.

Maximum chorus size in 1993 was 64 and in 2016 was 63. There has not been much overall change, except for the years 2001 to 2009 there was an increase in the maximum chorus size, which has trended down again. Over the 23 years the mean is 67.

Minimum chorus size has stayed fairly constant over the 23 years, with a range of 9 to 14 and a mean of 11.

Mean chorus size has shown the same general trend as maximum chorus size, but has trended lower in the last 4 years. The mean is 28 over 23 years.

Median chorus size is probably a more representative statistic and has more closely resembled the maximum chorus size curve. It is currently sitting at about 20, with a mean over the 23 years of 22.



Chorus Scores

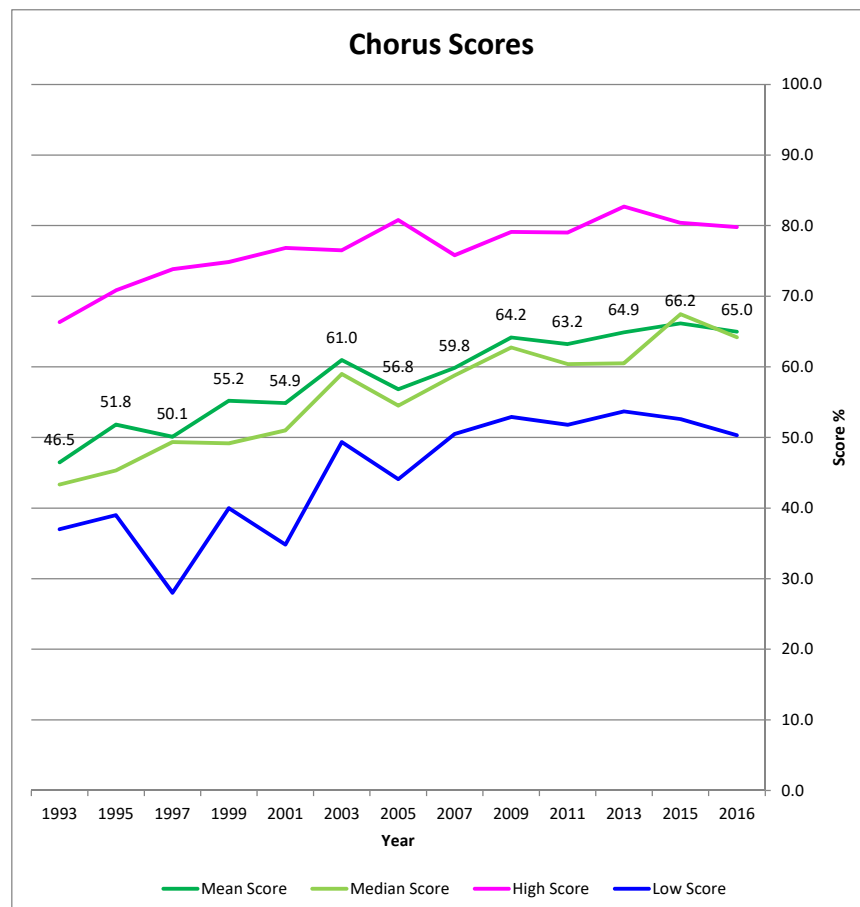
Figure 2 shows chorus scores, low, high, median and mean. There is not much difference between the mean and median scores. There is a clear trend of higher scores over the 23 years from 1993 to 2016. The mean score has increased from 46.5% in 1993 to 65.0% in 2016.

Given that judging standards have not changed, this could be due to two factors:

- (a) Singing ability is improving,
- (b) Lower scoring choruses are not competing anymore.

There is some evidence for (b), but the overwhelming evidence is that singing ability has been improving. This is independent of chorus sizes.

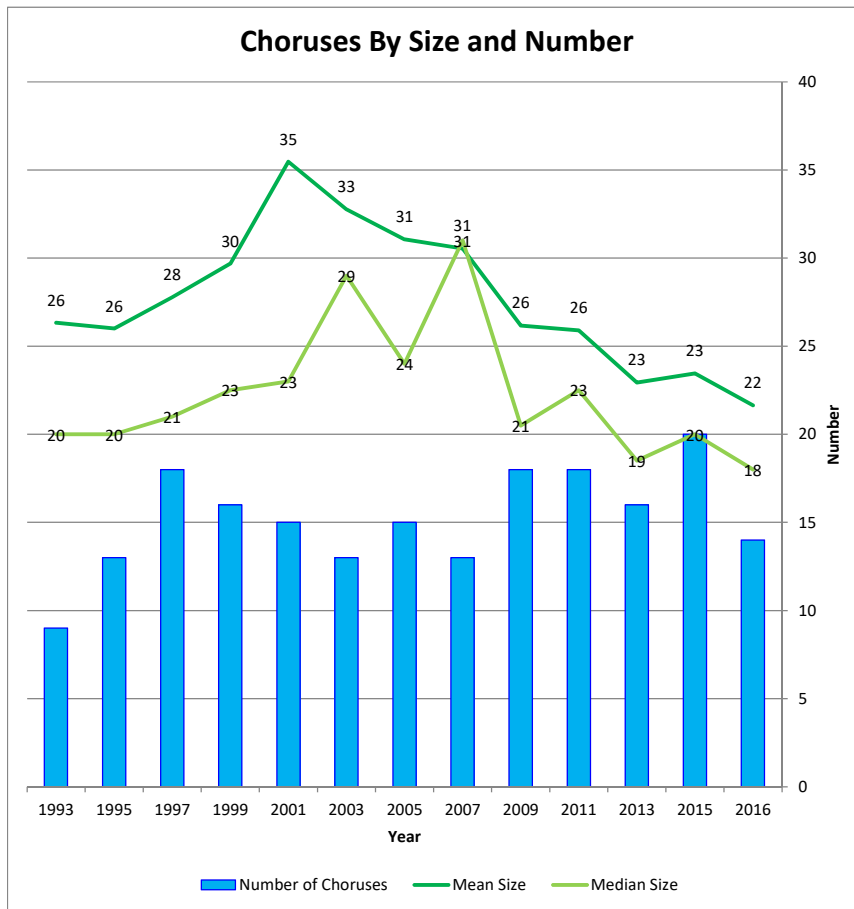
The minimum score is now consistently above 50, and the maximum score is around 80.



Chorus Size and Number of Competing Choruses

Figure 3 shows a graph of mean and median chorus sizes plotted against the number of choruses competing in any one year. There is a moderate inverse relationship between them. From 2001 to 2009, when chorus sizes were peaking, there were less choruses competing (because they were larger). As chorus sizes have become smaller, more are competing.

The mean number of choruses competing over the 23 years is 15, with a range of 9 to 20. The mean of the last 5 contests is 17 above the long term mean.



Conclusions

- Average scores have increased.
- There is a moderate inverse relationship between chorus size and the number competing.
- Chorus size is independent of chorus score.
- The median chorus size in 2016 was 18 and the mean was 22.
- There have been more but smaller choruses on average competing in BHA over the last 5 contests.

Implications for Chorus Contest

There are two possible splits for the chorus contest to create some extra interest:

- Chorus Size
- Chorus Score

Up until now we have divided the chorus contest into size categories, Large, Medium and Small. The size ranges have changed over the years to reflect the chorus size changes as noted above. However, what is also clear from the analysis above is that there is no relationship between chorus size and quality.

Using the chorus size criteria (remembering the notion is to have the field split roughly into thirds, the chorus size numbers over the last 5 contests (since 2009) would have been:

Year	Large-Medium	Medium-Small	Large	Medium	Small
2009	28	16	Blenders	VE	Festival
2011	28	17	Blenders	VE	Deep South
2013	28	17	Blenders	VE	Deep South
2015	27	17	VE	SC	AVU
2016	21	17	VE	Festival	Vox Canvas

Not really much variation, and close to the current splits of 16 and 30 introduced for the 2015 contest. There is no justification to changes the current size categories.

An alternative notion that has been proposed by members in the past would be to grade choruses and run the categories based on that. The concept is well-known and is explained below.

Using this notion (splitting contest roughly into thirds) the A, B and C division splits over the last 5 contests (since 2009) would have been:

Year	A-B Division	B-C Division	A Division	B Division	C Division
2009	69	58	VE	Deep South	MIH
2011	68	58	VE	Hills	Bayside
2013	70	59	VE	Hills	Novatones
2015	71	60	SC	Melbourne	Canberra
2016	70	60	VE	Hills	Novatones

Any new choruses that hadn't competed before would need to compete once for grading. If a chorus misses a contest, then their score is increased by 5% for each contest missed.

For example, if a chorus scored 65 and then missed a contest, their score would be 68.25 for the next contest – they would still be in B division. However, if they missed two contests, then their 65 would be increased by 5% to 68.25, then another 5% to 71.66% - now they are in A division. This would encourage choruses to keep competing. Depending on where they score in the contest they come back to, they may drop back to B division, or stay in A division.

The Open winners would receive medals and this would also be A division. A medallist from the previous year will always be in A division the next year.

As far as trophies go, it is envisaged that the Large Chorus Trophy will become the A Division trophy, Medium = B, and Small = C. Since these are perpetual trophies, perhaps they can be inscribed as such to note the change. Alternatively, new trophies could be awarded.

Chorus Rating Proposal

Acknowledgement to member Ian Fraser, who wrote and submitted this paper to the AAMBS National Council in November 2003. It wasn't acted on then, but is an excellent summary of the proposal.

Preamble

Since it was first introduced in 1992, the AAMBS "Small Chorus" Trophy has been awarded to the highest scoring chorus competing with no more than 20 members on stage, including the Musical Director.

Shortly before the 2003 Convention in Perth, the AAMBS executive issued a directive stating that, effective immediately, the definition would change and a "small chorus" would now be defined as "comprising less than the average number of singers for choruses registered in any particular competition."

There followed widespread and vigorous discussion throughout the membership at large and, after receiving feedback in various forms, the executive subsequently cancelled the implementation to allow for further review

The matter was discussed at the Open Forum session at the end of the Convention and several problems with the proposed new rule brought to the attention of the assembled members.

One of the main problems was as follows:

- If the new rule had been in place for the 2003 Convention, the size of a Small Chorus would have increased to 32. This means that Vocal Evolution, who finished 3rd overall, and River City Clippers, who finished 4th overall, would also have been competing as "SMALL" choruses.

As one of the stated reasons for introducing the new rule was to "*more fairly reflect the notion that choruses of a small size should still have the chance to win recognition for their efforts*", then, clearly the new rule failed in that regard.

In fact it would have had the opposite effect by further REDUCING the chance of the smaller choruses of gaining the award. They would now be competing against choruses of patently higher quality and so obviously not the class of chorus for whom the award was originally intended, that an actual DISINCENTIVE would likely be the result.

The suggestion was put that, if a change was in fact to be made, it should be made away from a system based on NUMBERS to one based on QUALITY.

The Proposal

Based on the last score achieved at an AAMBS Convention, each chorus would be graded as A, B or C Grade for the purposes of the next AAMBS convention.

Now follows some personal thoughts, as well as possible answers to some questions that may arise during discussion on this proposal.

How would each chorus be graded?

Possibly the easiest way would be for the top 3rd of finishers, irrespective of the actual scores awarded, to be graded as A Grade for the next Convention, the middle 3rd as B Grade and the lower 3rd as C GRADE

This would provide automatic elevation to the higher grade or relegation to the lower grade depending solely on the chorus' performance on the day. It would also do away with having to introduce any other sort of promotion/relegation strategy.

What about first time competitors? What grade would they go into?

First timers would not be graded. They would have to compete as "novices" in order to gain a ranking for subsequent competitions.

If, and only if, there were more than one novice chorus competing, the executive might deem to make a Novice Award to the highest scoring novice chorus.

Couldn't they just be graded automatically as C Graders?

No. That would not be fair to the current C Graders. For example, this year that wonderful new chorus Vocal Evolution competed for the first time and came 3rd outright. How would it have been fair to the choruses already graded as C grade if Vocal Evolution had been included in their group.

It is quite conceivable that this could happen again as the organisation grows and in some cases rationalises. What is to stop this happening at every competition? Some new group is formed from experienced singers and cleans up C grade every time.

No. Having to compete first as a novice for grading purposes is the only truly fair solution.

What if a chorus doesn't compete for a couple of conventions and then shows up at the next?

As it is reasonable to assume that a chorus will have improved during the intervening period, their score from their last competition could be increased by 5 or 10 %, or whatever, for each convention missed, and using the numbers determined as cut off points from the previous Convention the resulting total would be used to place them in the appropriate grade for this contest.

For example, supposing the lowest A Grade chorus scored, say, 410 points and the lowest B Grade chorus scored 300, then if the number calculated for the returning chorus was between 301 and 409, then they would compete in the next competition as a B Grade chorus. 300 or below = C Grade. 410 and above = A Grade.

This in itself may prove an incentive for choruses to compete every time.

Let everyone have a chance

At the moment there is a group of choruses in competition "limbo". They are too big to compete in the current Small Chorus competition, yet they're not able to challenge the more accomplished choruses who currently head the list.

These guys work just as hard within their own abilities as the more successful choruses but their efforts and improvement go unrecognised and unrewarded. This system would give them a real chance to achieve the recognition and reward for the advances they make.

Maintaining the Prestige

Competition within each grade should be encouraged and recognised with awards for AAMBS Overall Champion Chorus, AAMBS B Grade Champion Chorus and AAMBS C Grade Champion Chorus.

I would love to be able to put "2005 C GRADE CHAMPION CHORUS", or whatever, on my chorus publicity sheet. Most choruses would be delighted to be able to boast of such an achievement. I'm sure each singer would be proud to tell his family that "we placed 2nd in B grade."

It adds value and prestige to the chorus and value to each member as well as lifting the standing of the group within its own local environment. Certainly care should be taken not to overly inflate the achievement thereby undervaluing its importance, but here is a real opportunity to boost a group's prestige within their own arts community.

It is up to the Executive to maintain a culture that ensures that the champion chorus of EACH division, not just the A Graders, is given the recognition within the movement that it deserves. It has competed against choruses of similar abilities and gained success.

Scheduling Flexibility

One complaint that was heard more than once late in the recent Convention was like “Gee, we came all that way from NSW/QLD/VIC/... and we didn’t see a damn thing. We weren’t allowed to see the other competitors before us, and by the time our photo session was over, so was the contest. Then, since we had to appear in the Showcase concert, once again we didn’t see any other choruses”

The grading system MAY allow the option of having running the grades separately. For example, C Grade from 1pm to 2pm, B Grade from 3pm to 4pm, A grade 5pm, or something similar.

There is always going to be the situation where you don’t see the competitors either side of you, but I’m sure all the B & C graders would LOVE to see the A grade comp. Just a suggestion for consideration by the planning committees.

This same approach COULD also reduce some of the fatigue experienced and declared by the visiting judges. It easier and less demanding for them to judge 3 lots of 6 with a break between than 18 on the trot, or even 2 lots of 9.

It’s just a suggestion which may or may not avoid a repeat of the unfortunate situation with Jim Coates, but it does demonstrate the flexibility that may be a benefit of adopting this proposal.

Does this mean the end of the Small Chorus Award as we know it?

Yes. Sadly, one casualty would be the small chorus trophy, but that was always going to be the case whether this proposal is adopted or the one recently introduced and withdrawn by the executive was adopted.

Whenever the rules for winning ANY trophy are changed, the value of the previous winning is compromised. Winning when the upper limit of singers was 20 is vastly different to winning when the upper limit is 40, as could easily be the case if the rules remain based on membership numbers.

What about the “Most Improved Chorus” award?

No need for that to change as it is still an individual assessment not based on Grading.

Isn’t this out of step with international practice?

It certainly differs from the American system but I don’t see that as a problem. We don’t have to slavishly follow the American model. The two competitions are so different that it doesn’t necessarily follow that what works in USA is going to work in the tiny Australian movement.

I could be wrong but I believe we already differ from the American system by having the Most Improved Award, and the Small Chorus Award.

It should be noted that even in America, they do apply grades to their choruses. Just have a look at the scoring sheets and you'll see that they grade each category from A to D. What they do with that rating as far as competing is concerned, I don't know, but they are very familiar with the concept.

This is not a new concept. Look at all the other competitions in your district; cricket, football, netball, etc. Most of them have some form of grading.

Increased enthusiasm

Knowing where you stand and against whom you'll be really competing should result in increased enthusiasm and competitiveness similar to that which currently exists among the top 3 or 4 choruses. This can only be a good thing. Going into a competition knowing you have a good chance of success recognition in a fair contest is a real motivating force.

Not knowing if you are even in the running for an award does nothing to engender excitement and enthusiasm. Better to know exactly where you stand before you start your campaign.