

# A GUIDE TO THE RUNNING OF DISTRICT CONTESTS



**TO: Member Bands - Wellington District Brass Bands Association**

Earlier this year I completed a Contest Manual for the Brass Bands Association of New Zealand. The Manual is intended to guide any organisation or group that intends seeking, or has received, approval to organise and run a National Contest.

While the organisation of a District Contest is not as complex, many of the issues encountered are common to both types of contests. I have therefore prepared an edited version of the Manual for issue to all bands in the Wellington Association.

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It is readily acknowledged that there are numbers of band members, band officials and supporters with experience of running contests, either at the local or the national level. However, from time to time new people are given this responsibility, and are required to come to terms with the considerable detail involved in running a successful District Contest.

This manual is intended as an "aide-memoire" or guide to the preparations for, and operation of, a District Contest, and should prove useful to both those with previous experience and those who become involved for the first time.

## **1 THE COMMITTEE**

Give serious thought to the makeup of the Contest Committee. The chair or convenor of the Committee should have full control over all aspects of the work, and should be competent to organise, delegate and co-ordinate the responsibilities of individual members. The Committee should be only as big as is required to cope with all of the tasks, and those who serve should be able give Committee work a high priority.

## **2 LONG-TERM PLANNING**

- 2.1 It is essential that the Contest Committee commence its long term planning by setting up a project plan with target dates for all phases of the plan, taking into account any timing requirements advised by the Association.
- 2.2 It is never too early start planning the personnel requirements for the period leading up to the contest, as well as for the contest itself. For example, the transporting of materials and setting up of the halls and judges' boxes is an onerous task, and could take the resources of, say, six people for four hours on the evening prior to the contest commencing. There will be other similar peak workloads as the contest progresses and when it finishes.
- 2.3 General administrative arrangements must be put in place in the early planning stages. These include the printing of stationery, preparation of files, opening of a bank account, lodging of signing authorities and provision of petty cash. Close to the commencement of the contest, arrangements must be completed for withdrawal of cash "floats" and the security/banking of substantial ticket and programme sales income.

## **3 VENUES**

### **3.1 Selection of Venues**

- 3.1.1 This is undoubtedly the most difficult and time-consuming task to deal with in the initial stages of planning for a contest. The adequacy or otherwise of venues, particularly the one selected for the band events, can make the difference between a successful contest and a mediocre one. However, while in an ideal world the acoustic qualities of the venues would be the sole determining factor, in practice location, availability, rental charges, seating capacity, warm-up facilities and backstage capacity tend to have a major influence on the final selections.

- 3.1.2 Once the selection of venues has been narrowed down to a short list, an experienced musical director and one or two players should visit each one to assess the adequacy of the acoustics and the preferred location for the adjudicator's box. It may be possible to arrange for a local band to perform several items in the venues under consideration for the band events in order to give a better picture of the overall acoustic qualities of the venue.
- 3.1.3 A decision must be taken on whether the stage is sufficiently large and, if not, arrangements should be made for construction of an extension to the front of the stage. Bear in mind that it is customary not to operate the stage curtains during the traditional contest event, although they may be used during the concert contest event depending upon the type of venue chosen for the contest.
- 3.1.4 At this point it is worth considering whether, for band event venues that have a proscenium arch, there would be some advantage in suspending a large panel at an angle above the area where the bands' bass sections will be seated and located just below the top of the arch, in order to deflect the bass sounds out towards the audience.
- 3.1.5 Do not overlook making a thorough assessment of the areas that can be used for band, party and solo event warm-up purposes, and the need for these areas to have adequate acoustic isolation from the stage. Many standard theatrical venues are deficient in this regard, not having been designed for at least two brass bands to be warming up while a stage performance is in progress.
- 3.1.6 Clean toilet facilities with adequate supplies must be available at each venue.
- 3.1.7 Check whether a working telephone is available so that an ambulance can be called in the event that there is an accident or someone becomes ill. If a reliable telephone is not available, arrange for mobile phones to be made available for at least the day on which the band events are scheduled.
- 3.1.8 Once final venue selections have been made, it is essential to put in place written contracts with the hiring organisations so that there can be no misunderstandings about what facilities are to be provided. It is particularly important that the times during which the venues will be available for contest activities (including construction and dismantling of adjudicators' boxes and the setting up and testing of various facilities at the venues) be clearly set out in the contracts. This must also include any period during which a venue will be made available to competing bands for a pre-contest acoustics check, if such an opportunity is to be offered.

## **3.2 Stage Facilities and Access**

- 3.2.1 Given that the issues outlined in section 3.1 have been resolved and the final selection made, it is essential to take time to plan in detail the route that bands will take from their warm-up room to the stage, and on leaving the stage at the conclusion of their performance. It is important that congestion is avoided as far as possible. It is also necessary to plan for the backstage storage of the ever-increasing quantity of percussion equipment and assess how many sets of this equipment can easily be stored backstage at any one time.
- 3.2.2 Adequate access to the stage loading dock for coaches and vans must be arranged so that the transfer of heavy percussion equipment can take place in comfort and safety. It may also be necessary to set aside designated parking spaces for coaches and vans. In some cases it will be possible, with co-operation from the local authority, to hire suitable “Reserved” parking signs or parking meter covers.
- 3.2.3 It is important to consider what changes would need to be made to the overall arrangements for access by bands and their equipment in the event of wet weather, and also to ensure that such arrangements could be put in place at short notice.
- 3.2.4 Ensure that the supervisor has a well lit table and a chair at a convenient location at the side of the stage, and that there is also space for a presenter at events where one is used.
- 3.2.5 Provide at each band event venue a minimum of 35 music stands and 35 straight-backed chairs. Although most music directors prefer to use their own stands, it is customary to supply one robust stand at each venue for the use of those who do not bring their own. Provision of a musical director’s rostrum is normally the responsibility of individual bands.
- 3.2.6 Provide a suitable lectern for the use of the presenter at the band events.
- 3.2.7 The music stand and seating requirements for the solo and party venues will depend on the events scheduled for those venues.
- 3.2.8 Provide bottled water and disposable cups for the competitors’ use at all solo event venues.
- 3.2.9 Arrangements should be made at each venue for the display on stage of the trophies associated with the event being held at the time.

### **3.3 Electrical and Audio Requirements**

- 3.3.1 It is necessary to work with backstage staff to plan the stage lighting arrangements and have existing lights supplemented where necessary. Remember that uneven lighting will create shadows of bodies and music stands, which will be annoying and perhaps even severely distracting to some of the players. Lights should be positioned as high as possible so that no player is prevented from seeing the music director properly because of a bright light in his or her direct line of vision.
- 3.3.2 Bear in mind that it is also necessary to have a reasonable level of lighting in the backstage area so that percussion equipment can be moved around without the risk of noise or accidents.
- 3.3.3 These days much brass music calls for the use of one or more percussion items, which require a power feed. Therefore at least one power outlet should be available at each side of the stage for this purpose, and a check should be made to ensure that the selected outlets are alive and are not controlled remotely from some other switching system. Bands are, of course, expected to supply their own extension cords to meet their own requirements.
- 3.3.4 It is important that any public address requirements are agreed with the venue owners and installed, where necessary, and tested in good time. It is not acceptable to leave the final adjustments and testing of any electrical or audio facilities until the day of the first event - there is too much potential for trouble.
- 3.3.5 It is also important to ensure that any temporary cabling associated with electrical or audio equipment is securely taped down in order to avoid the risk of accidental tripping by either performers or members of the audience.

### **3.4 Heating Requirements**

- 3.4.1 The venue should be comfortably warm - neither hot nor cold. It is therefore very important to find out well in advance what heating is available and whether it needs to be supplemented. Remember that the ambient temperature can affect the concentration of adjudicators and competitors alike.
- 3.4.2 Plan to have some background heating left on overnight at each venue where a piano has been tuned the day prior to the contest. There is little point in having the piano tuned at a normal temperature and then letting the temperature drop significantly overnight.

- 3.4.3 Make sure that the supervisor at each venue has someone available who is familiar with the mysteries of the heating, ventilation, lighting and audio systems and the relevant controls. Do not expect the supervisor to work it out on the day. He or she will be busy enough attending to the needs of the adjudicator and competitors without this added burden.

### **3.5 Adjudicators' Boxes**

- 3.5.1 In choosing a location for the adjudicator's box, the acoustic qualities and limitations of the venue will be the primary considerations. However, take care to select a location that will, as far as possible, be free of draughts from windows or ventilation grills.
- 3.5.2 The box should be large enough to accommodate the adjudicator and writer (or tape recorder operator) in comfort, and be equipped with a desk of adequate size to accommodate all music scores, report forms and tape recording equipment where necessary. It is essential to screen all four sides of the box if there is any possibility of the adjudicator being distracted by members of the audience moving behind the box.
- 3.5.3 The screens must be high enough to permit a 2 metre tall adjudicator to stand without any possibility of inadvertently seeing over the top of the screens. Take care to tape over any slits at joins between the screen panels to ensure that competitors are not seen accidentally by the adjudicator. The top of the box is, of course, left open.
- 3.5.4 It is also necessary to rope off access to the rows of seating adjacent to all sides of the box, or otherwise provide a clear space around the box, so that the adjudicator cannot hear conversations between members of the audience.
- 3.5.5 In venues where the desired location of the box dictates that a row of fixed theatre-type seats must be used for the adjudicator and writer (or operator), it is usually necessary to provide them with additional cushions so that they can be seated at a comfortable height relative to the desk.
- 3.5.6 It is essential to provide supplementary lighting so that the adjudicator's and writer's (or operator's) ability to carry out their jobs is not compromised by low lighting levels or changes in lighting in the venue during the day. Also plan to provide some supplementary heating by means of a portable heater.
- 3.5.7 Make sure that the power cable to the box is secured well away from the audience and is fed from a power outlet that cannot be knocked accidentally, switched off or otherwise isolated during the course of an event.

3.5.8 If the adjudicator's comments are to be recorded, it is necessary to employ an experienced technical operator with good quality audio equipment to carry out the recording function. The standard arrangement is to use a microphone mounted at the top of the judge's screen to record the band's performance on one track of a stereo tape, and to use a separate microphone to record the adjudicator's comments on the other track. This permits the band, when playing back the tape, to listen to either track, or a mix of the two with any adjustment in the balance between the two tracks that is desired.

3.5.9 Bottled water and disposable cups must be provided in the box.

### **3.6 Personnel**

3.6.1 It is essential to appoint a hall manager for each venue, so that the contest supervisor has someone upon whom to rely for the overall organisation and control of the personnel assigned to that venue. That person should be someone who has had some previous experience in the running of contests.

3.6.2 An assistant should be made available to each supervisor to cope with the multitude of unforeseen small tasks which occur on the day, and for which the supervisor cannot leave the hall.

3.6.3 It will be necessary to ensure that there are adequate personnel available during the contest to sell tickets and programmes, control the hall doors and to marshal bands as required.

3.6.4 It will usually be necessary to arrange extra assistance in setting up the stage for presentations at the conclusion of the main band events, as the event supervisor will be working with the adjudicator to record, collate and check the results.

### **3.7 Other Requirements**

3.7.1 Make sure that there is adequate signage, both in the front-of-house and backstage areas. It is better to err on the side of too many signs rather than too few, so that there can be no excuses from performers or accompanists that they could not find their way around a venue when under time pressure to prepare for a performance.

3.7.2 Signage should, where possible, carry the logo of any sponsor(s) of the contest.

- 3.7.3 It is essential to advise bands that those requiring special lighting, video or audio effects as a part of their concert contest event must commence planning these requirements at least two months before the event so that liaison between the bands' presentation planners and the venue staff can be arranged at an early stage in the planning. It is highly desirable to delegate to one person on the committee, preferably with some experience in stage management, responsibility for this liaison between the bands and the venue staff, so that there are no unnecessary multiple points of contact which can lead to misunderstandings about the usually complex arrangements.
- 3.7.3 Provision may be made in the front-of-house area for any trade displays and publicity material relating to the Association and its activities.
- 3.7.4 Each hall manager should have available a basic tool kit with a hammer, several screwdrivers, pliers, knife, nails, screws, sticky tape, cord and similar useful items which are often needed for last-minute adjustments or to make urgent repairs to some item or aspect of the venue.

## **4 CONTEST PROGRAMME**

- 4.1 The contest programme is regarded as a joint venture between the Association and Contest Committee, and the respective responsibilities should be agreed well in advance of the contest.
- 4.2 The Contest Committee should endeavour to sell advertising space in the programme, principally to local organisations. The objective is to meet as much of the programme preparation and printing costs as possible from advertising income.
- 4.3 The Contest Committee will normally be in the best position to propose suitable artwork for the cover of the programme.

## **5 PUBLICITY**

### **5.1 Sponsorships**

- 5.1.1 The Contest Committee should make every endeavour to attract sponsorships.

- 5.1.2 It may sometimes be possible to obtain separate sponsorships for particular venues or events. These give the opportunity for a good level of exposure of sponsors by means of advertising within the venue. It also enables supervisors at the venues to acknowledge the contributions of sponsors at the beginning and end of each event.

## **5.2 Advertising**

- 5.2.1 Drawing up the advertising budget always creates problems because it is difficult to know how to spend the very limited funds available to best effect, bearing in mind the limited public appeal of most events at the contest. It is therefore customary to concentrate the largest proportion of the budget on those events which can reasonably be expected to attract significant public interest.
- 5.2.2 The Contest Committee must make every effort, well in advance of the contest, to attract local media interest as this can be a valuable source of free advertising if handled with flair and imagination. No potential “photo-opportunity” should be overlooked, either in the run-up to the contest or during the contest itself.
- 5.2.3 It is often possible to arrange with a local paper for a special feature a day or so before the contest begins, paid for by the advertisements of local companies and including articles and pictures of local bands preparing for the contest.
- 5.2.4 Another good source of free publicity is an interview on a local radio station with the chair of the Contest Committee, and possibly the principal adjudicator and local music directors and/or players over the days running up to the start of the contest.

## **6 ACCOMMODATION**

The Contest Committee is expected to recommend to the Association suitable accommodation for any out-of-town adjudicators at a location in close proximity to the contest venue.

## **7 TRANSPORT**

The Contest Committee should take responsibility for meeting any out-of-town adjudicators at the airport or coach station and transporting them to their accommodation. Similar arrangements should also be made at the conclusion of the contest.

## **8 CATERING**

- 8.1 It is necessary to ensure that adjudicators, supervisors, hall staff and other officials are provided with lunch and morning and afternoon teas.
- 8.2 It is also customary to arrange for light lunches and morning and afternoon teas to be available for purchase by competitors at or near the venue. Any other catering arrangements and/or provision of social facilities are a matter for the Contest Committee to organise if it so wishes.