

In the four years which we have been running our Olympic event and keeping track of the winning scores we have noted that, not unlike music festivals, the winner of an event usually wins by only a half point. The results are always very close and we are quick to point out that, while "today" this student took first place, tomorrow or next week the results might be completely different. Like all such competitive events, it is in preparing for the event that a student receives the most benefit.

Each student receives a score sheet which travels with them from one event to the next. On this sheet are two tables with room for four technical "aspects" (four scales, four triads, etc.). There is room for the judge to write the key played, the score received and a brief comment. Students and their teachers may review these score sheets at their first lesson following the Olympics and will benefit from knowing whether a poor score was the result of an overly ambitious tempo choice, a nervous note stumble or incorrect fingering.

Because the marks received are usually so close and the winners so marginally better than their competitors we have found it encouraging to have students compete both individually and by team. Each participant is placed on one of two teams when they register and they receive a red or blue pinny with their competitor number which they wear during the event. When the marks are tabulated we award medals for the best score in each event (Best Junior Scales, Best Senior Chords, etc) as well as candy-filled mugs for each member on the team with the highest total points. Arriving at the final team scores will take a little fast juggling of numbers and a ready calculator.

We also award each student a medal just for participating. In this way the time and effort which they put forward in preparing for this event is recognized.

EVENT EXTRAS

Few students need to be coached about taking this event seriously. On the contrary, we have found that students need to be reminded frequently that this is NOT an exam. Yes, they are performing publicly and, yes, they will likely make some mistakes, but they are not alone. To keep the spirit of the event light we always add a few fun touches. Colourful helium balloons and a large Olympic banner decorate the front of the main competition room. We bring a CD player and play the John Williams olympic theme music while competitors march into the main hall for the awards ceremony. Lively emcees at each event direct the competition, entertain the audience, lead the cheering and help deflect attention from the awkwardness of the occasional weak performance.

THE BENEFITS

While the tone of the Technical Olympics is fun, a student's preparation for this event will need to be strategic in order to yield consistent results. As a young teacher I remember being frustrated that many students failed to understand the "technique behind the technique," that scales and chords played with fluidity and control were beautiful enough to be considered "artistic." It is toward this level of technical mastery that we need to propel our students, to play their technique, not just till they have played it right once, but till they cannot play it wrong. A Technical Olympics celebrates the achievement of the very skills a musician requires to play his or her music well.

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