



CATEGORY CRITERIA FOR EXCELLENCE

Georgia High School Musical Theatre Awards – aka *Shuler Hensley Awards* adjudicators evaluate how each participating high school and high school musical meets or exceeds its potential, utilizing its available resources. Each musical is evaluated and scored against itself for consideration, rather than against all other school productions, charging schools to create the best possible work in their unique circumstance and environment. **The following category criteria provide suggestions and helpful ideas for what Shuler Hensley Awards Adjudicators may consider Excellent on the judging Criteria Rubric. This is a companion document meant to support and provide transparency to the adjudication process.**

Award Eligibility:

The following people are eligible for individual category Awards:

1. High school students officially registered at their participating high school in 9th-12th grade
2. Faculty members employed full-time or part-time by the participating high school or elementary/middle school feeder program

Guest Artists, parents, volunteers, K-8 students or anyone other than Award Eligible students and faculty mentioned above, **do not qualify for individual category Awards**. However, categories that are ineligible for awards will **still receive written feedback**.

Direction:

The 2023 Shuler Hensley Awards participating school musical qualifies for the Direction Award category if the director is a faculty member, employed full-time or part-time by the participating high school or elementary/middle school feeder program or is an officially registered student at the participating high school in 9th-12th grade. Schools using a professional/guest/parent director are not eligible.

Criteria for adjudicating excellence in the category of Direction is demonstrated through the director's ability:

1. to showcase a creative collaboration among the director(s), designers, cast, and production team reflecting a unified artistic vision of the play;
2. to ensure staff, facility, budget, time frame, and crew meet the technical demands of the script;
3. to ensure actors meet the vocal, dance, and emotional range of the script;
4. to reflect an understanding of the musical's dramatic structure, meaning, the author's intent, the setting and cultural background, history, and style of the script;
5. to respect the musical theatre conventions found within the play, paying *homage* to the past history of an iconic show or evolving a totally original vision which does not distort the musical's meaning;
6. to clearly focus each scene and beat, and ensure that all acting choices, designs and technical elements contribute to and support that focus;
7. to ensure performers know and follow safe physical, dance and vocal practices;
8. to ensure actors are heard easily evaluating and encouraging breath control, articulation, volume;
9. to ensure blocking, even within a virtual space, makes actors clearly visible, entrances and exits contribute to dramatic structure and focus, and actors are not upstaged by other actors and/or elements;
10. to fully exploit all areas of your virtual and/or actual stage and set and ensures actors use costumes & props effectively;
11. to support character development, encouraging big character choices and subtext, helping actors understand focus and identify climactic beats;
12. to ensure characters are playing to and with each other, and not at each other;
13. to ensure the ensemble understands their dramatic function as individual actors and as a group;
14. to determine and demand the optimum pace of show from actors and all departments;
15. to ensure scene changes are swift, soundless and beautifully staged to serve the musical; and
16. to provide direction that ensures performers and departments respect each other's contributions and needs for space and safety.

Music Direction:

The 2023 Shuler Hensley Awards participating school musical qualifies for the Music Direction Award category if the music director is a faculty member, employed full-time or part-time by the participating high school or elementary/middle school feeder program or is an officially registered student at the participating high school in 9th-12th grade. Eligible schools may use live music, OrchExtra, or track accompaniment. Schools using a professional/guest artist/parent/volunteer musical director are not eligible for an award in this category.

Criteria for adjudicating excellence in the category of Music Direction is demonstrated through the music director's ability:

1. to make specific stylistic choices that directly enhance the period and location of the musical (character, voice, accents, dialects, etc.);
2. to support the actor's ability to memorize music and lyrics and understand their meaning;
3. to support the actor's ability to emote and tell the story through the lyric(s);
4. to support the actor's ability to vocally support and sing the proper notes (staying on pitch), use appropriate rhythm, tempo, phrasing and range of dynamics;
5. to support the actor's ability to articulate and enunciate appropriate diction when singing the lyric so that all audience members (regardless of knowing the musical) are able to understand and interpret the story;
6. to support the actor's ability to use the music to evoke an emotional feeling suitable to interpretation of each scene; and
7. to ensure that the music direction provides a balance and blend (togetherness) of the ensemble.

Orchestra:

The 2023 Shuler Hensley Awards participating school musical qualifies for the Orchestra Award category if live music accompanies the performance. Live music includes anything between a single pianist to a full orchestra. The orchestra, including the conductor, must consist of at least 90% students and/or faculty. 10% of the orchestra may consist of professional, guest, or parent musicians (e.g. one professional/guest per every ten students/faculty members). Schools using more than 10% professional, guest, or parent musicians are not eligible. Schools using tracks do not qualify for the Orchestra Award.

Criteria for adjudicating excellence in the category of Orchestra is demonstrated through the orchestra's ability:

1. to play in tune and with good intonation;
2. to correct instrumentation and necessary tools to perform (e.g. music stands, chairs, proper lights, sightline, etc.);
3. to play the music with technical proficiency and to ensure that the instrumentalists' capabilities are appropriate for the difficulty level of the music;
4. to complement the actors, regarding volume, dynamics, tempos, entrances, etc.; and
5. to confidently and efficiently be led by a conductor.

Choreography:

The 2023 Shuler Hensley Awards participating school musical qualifies for the Choreography Award if the choreographer is a faculty member employed full-time or part-time by the participating high school or feeder school, or is a 9th-12th grade high school student(s) who is officially registered at the participating high school. Schools using a professional, guest, or parent choreographer are not eligible.

Criteria for adjudicating excellence in the category of Choreography is demonstrated through the choreographer's ability:

1. to use both choreography and song staging/movement to enhance the message of the song and overall theme of the musical;
2. to polish a cast's choreography/movement (where appropriate) to be in sync with each other and the music;
3. to ensure that all choreography is clean, memorized, and properly rehearsed;
4. to utilize patterns and space effectively;
5. to utilize patterns that are clean, fresh and rarely repeated (e.g. levels, clumps, circles, diagonal lines, straight lines, straight lines that feed through each other, columns, v's, peel-offs, contagions, etc.);
6. to create choreography that allows actors to continue to tell the story through dance/movement;
7. to ensure that all choreography is designed for actors to be seen and voices to be heard while dancing/moving;
8. to craft dance/movement that best accentuates the actors' abilities;
9. to create choreography that embodies the intended comedic, dramatic or tragic elements of the song/scene; and
10. to ensure that all choreography/movement is executed safely (l.e.g. lifts, pointe work, partner work and/or gymnastics, etc.).

Ensemble:

The 2023 Shuler Hensley Awards participating school musical qualifies for the Ensemble Award if 70% of the ensemble are award eligible high school students. The remaining 30% may be K-8 students as long as they are registered at an elementary or middle feeder school. **Schools using faculty, guest, parent, or faculty ensemble members are not eligible.**

Criteria for adjudicating excellence in the category of Ensemble is demonstrated through ensemble's ability:

1. to execute an awareness and willingness to connect to other actors that they are sharing the stage with;
2. to stay completely immersed in their characters throughout the entire performance;
3. to reveal well-developed characters with obvious goals exhibited throughout the musical;
4. to perform succinct and well-executed dance/movement;
5. to execute precise and musically intended vocal moments;
6. to use vocal expression that is character appropriate and adds clarity to the scene;
7. to never break focus, even during missed lines/cues or mistakes in the music; and
8. to execute an ability to work consistently as a team.

Technical Execution:

The 2023 Shuler Hensley Awards participating school musical qualifies for the Technical Execution Award if the technical implementation, flow, and execution of the stage crew's responsibilities (set and prop changes) and technical cues (audio-visual, animation, automation, and rigging) is coordinated by eligible 9th-12th grade student stage manager(s) and/or faculty member(s). Schools using professional, guest, or parent stage managers and/or technical directors are not eligible.

Criteria for adjudicating excellence in the category of Technical Execution is demonstrated through the artist's ability:

1. to reveal creative collaboration among the designers and the director(s) to ensure design consistency;
2. to integrate smoothly into the production as a whole;
3. to showcase a stage manager (or team of stage managers) who calls the show cues smoothly and efficiently;
4. to allow set pieces and props to enter and exit the stage effectively;
5. to allow set pieces and props to flow seamlessly throughout the performance (set changes are quiet, brief, and not distracting);
6. to indicate that cues are called and implemented appropriately;
7. to indicate that actors' microphones are cued properly and live when appropriate;
8. to include successful use of projection, if applicable; and
9. to ensure that the crew is dressed in all black or in costume.

Lighting:

The 2023 Shuler Hensley Awards participating school musical qualifies for the Lighting Award if the lighting is designed, coordinated, and executed by eligible 9th-12th grade student(s) and/or faculty member(s). Schools using professional, guest, or parent lighting designers and/or engineers are not eligible.

Criteria for adjudicating excellence in the category of Sound is demonstrated through the designer and engineer's abilities:

1. to reveal creative collaboration among the designer(s) and the director(s) to ensure design consistency;
2. to integrate their design smoothly into the production as a whole, reinforcing the theme, mood, style, time period, and location of the musical;
3. to provide sufficient illumination to see the action taking place and to help focus the audience's attention to the correct stage location where faces and scenery are distinctively lit;
4. to use effective color palette throughout the production to establish mood, location, time of day, etc.;
5. to utilize the venue's capabilities and resources effectively;
6. to utilize followspots effectively without causing distraction (if applicable);
7. to provide creative uses of lights (e.g. specials, gobos, streetlight shining through a window, pools of light for specific moments, effective uses of color, etc.); and
8. to ensure that all instruments are appropriately and safely rigged.

Sound:

The 2023 Shuler Hensley Awards participating school musical qualifies for the Sound Award if the sound is designed, coordinated, and executed by eligible 9th-12th grade student(s) and/or faculty member(s). Schools using professional, guest, or parent sound designers are not eligible.

Criteria for adjudicating excellence in the category of Sound is demonstrated through the designer's ability:

1. to reveal creative collaboration among the designers and the director(s) to ensure design consistency;
2. to integrate their design smoothly into the production as a whole, reinforcing the theme, mood, style, time period, and location of the musical;
3. to ensure that each performer is clearly audible;
4. to achieve an even balance between the music and the actors' microphones to assure an excellent audible experience for the audience;
5. to ensure that sound levels are comfortable (not overbearing or too soft);
6. to reflect an orchestra that is amplified and balanced properly, allowing the audience to hear the full complement of the provided instrumentation;
7. to create a sound performance that is positively unnoticeable (meaning it was so good you didn't notice there was a sound system involved); and
8. to ensure that all instruments are appropriately and safely rigged.

Scenic Design:

The 2023 Shuler Hensley Awards participating school musical qualifies for the Scenic Design Award if the set is designed and coordinated by eligible 9th-12th grade student(s) and/or faculty member(s). Schools that rent more than 30% of their set pieces and/or props are not eligible. Schools using a professional, guest, or parent scenic designer are not eligible.

Criteria for adjudicating excellence in the category of Scenic Design is demonstrated through the designer's ability:

1. to reveal creative collaboration among the designers and the director(s) to ensure design consistency;
2. to integrate their design smoothly into the production as a whole, reinforcing the theme, mood, style, time period, and location of the musical;
3. to contribute to the atmosphere of the production;
4. to provide a palette of shapes, and textures that make an impactful visual statement;
5. to embody a cohesive color palette, originality, and attention to detail;
6. to offer interesting and varying options and levels for actor movement;
7. to include contributing/appropriate furniture and/or props;
8. to utilize appropriate materials applicable to the story's needs; and
9. to safely and thoughtfully design a set that is securely constructed for actors and crew movement.

Costumes:

The 2023 Shuler Hensley Awards participating school musical qualifies for the Costumes Award if the costumes are designed or coordinated by eligible 9th-12th grade student(s) or faculty member(s). Wigs, hats, and hair accessories all qualify as costumes. Schools that rent more than 30% of their costumes are not eligible. Schools using a professional, guest, or parent costume designer are not eligible.

Criteria for adjudicating excellence in the category of Costumes is demonstrated through the designer's ability:

1. to reveal creative collaboration among the designers and the director(s) to ensure design consistency;
2. to favorably compliment their costume design with thoughtfully designed hair/wigs;
3. to smoothly integrate their design into the production as a whole, reinforcing the theme, mood, style, time period and location of the musical;
4. to reflect the characters' intended appearances;
5. to provide a palette of shapes, colors and textures that make an impactful visual statement;
6. to embody a cohesive color palette, originality, and attention to detail;
7. to personify information about character personalities (economic, social, and occupational status, gender and age, etc.);
8. to be able suggest relationships between characters; and
9. to include appropriately designed accessories (e.g. jewelry, belts, shoes, gloves, wigs and hats).

Acting:

The 2023 Shuler Hensley Awards participating school musical qualifies for any of the **four** acting awards (Leading Actress, Leading Actor, Supporting Performer, Featured Performer) if the actors must be 9th-12th grade students officially registered in the participating school. **Guest artists, parents, faculty members, or K-8 students are not eligible.**

Criteria for adjudicating excellence in the category(s) of Acting is demonstrated through the performer's ability:

1. to understand the meaning of the play, their character, the director's vision, the setting, style, focus and pace;
2. to create a thoroughly, consistently, and easily believable character, playing actions not attitudes or emotions;
3. to make strong and imaginative character choices, invested in the importance of motivation and urgently fights for intentions;
4. to create the "illusion of the first time" via their performance;
5. to consistently hold focus (nevering breaking character), even during missed lines/cues or music mistakes;
6. to relate honestly to other actors, actively listening, sharing stage and focus, and exhibiting humanity through vulnerability;
7. to move/dance with technical skill, taking and sharing their virtual and/or actual stage as directed;
8. to move/dance in character and with sensitivity to the time, place, style, and pace of the piece;
9. to consistently sing and speak with technical skill, exhibiting diction, phrasing, pitch, articulation, breath control, dialect, timing and pacing appropriate to the musical production and character with sensitivity to the time, place, style, and pace of the piece;
10. to exhibit excellent team work abilities; and
11. to approach the virtual and/or actual stage with confidence, appearing to enjoy and relish performing.

Overall Production:

The 2023 Shuler Hensley Awards participating school musical qualifies for the Overall Production Award if they apply to participate in the Shuler Awards program, complete the registration process, are selected as a participating school, and if they are producing a show included on the [Broadway League Qualifying Show](#) list. If a participating school is producing a show that is not on the Broadway League Qualifying Show list, it is that school's responsibility to submit an appeal to the Broadway League in partnership with ArtsBridge Foundation. **Being ineligible in any awards category does NOT disqualify a participating school from the Overall Production Award.**

The Overall Production Award is a comprehensive look at the entire production. This category ties together all other adjudicated categories and reflects the musical's overall synergy and accomplishment.

Six schools will receive nominations in this category, while four schools will receive honorable mentions. All six nominated schools will be invited to perform one of their production numbers live at the 2023 Shuler Hensley Awards at the Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre on Thursday, April 20, 2023.

Juried Awards:

In addition to the award categories listed above, all Shuler Hensley Awards participating schools will be considered for the Shuler Showstopper and Shuler Spotlight Awards. These are special juried awards that are determined by the Shuler Advisory Committee.

The Shuler Showstopper Award honors a stand-out musical performance or theatrical moment in a production or the performance of a song which arouses enthusiastic response from the audience. Showstoppers are most often group numbers with high energy and strong vocals. All schools not nominated for Overall Production are eligible. The recipient of the Shuler Showstopper Award will perform the award-winning number at the awards ceremony.

The Shuler Spotlight Award is given to a school that demonstrates a singular, unique ensemble moment of excellence in musical theatre worthy of being recognized separately from the other adjudicated categories. It should be an over-the-top, magical, or a-ha moment of theatre that also serves as a dynamic and reproducible theatrical moment for the stage. The recipient of the Shuler Spotlight Award will perform the award-winning moment at the awards ceremony.

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