



IMPA CLASSIFICATION REVIEW PROCESS

The topic of classification in indoor percussion is a tough one. We know that a multi-tiered system of evaluation and assessment is what is best for our ensembles and performers. But we also know that whenever a system creates different paradigms based not on discrete metrics like ensemble size or school enrollment, but instead on skill sets, growth, and development, that determining the “best” class for each ensemble becomes difficult.

As one ensemble begins to move between basic skills and concepts to exploring intermediate responsibilities and capabilities (or move from intermediate to advanced) it can frequently be tough to determine a class-of-best-fit.

What many desire is a concrete checklist of skills that align with specific classes. If such a list existed, it would, hypothetically, make classification easy: play a certain rudiment, or move at a certain tempo and you belong in “X Class”. We realize though, that such a checklist would devalue our artform. It would encourage people to make programming and educational decisions based not on artistic vision or the needs of their students, but instead on a preordained list of compulsories, which is not what we, as an activity, desire.

Instead, ensembles are asked to design for the ability levels of their unique performers and then determine their class-of-best-fit by studying other ensembles and the activity at large. When difficult “on the bubble” classification decisions must be made, there is neither a perfect individual to make that determination nor a perfect process. IMPA classification decisions are made as a team by the Board of Directors along with select, highly qualified, judges and consultants after careful review and considerable debate.

These are the classification considerations used by the Board of Directors during the review process:

Classification Maxims

1. Classification is based primarily on skills sets, which are defined as the skills and abilities asked of and demonstrated by the performers. It is a combination of both the WHAT and the HOW; neither is more important than the other.
2. The attributes considered when determining the most appropriate classification are musical and visual skills sets, performer maturity, and production value -- in that order.
3. Appropriate classification is not tied to competitive score or placement earned.

4. Classification is not a grouping of competitive ensembles; it's a grouping of skill sets.
5. As the activity evolves from year to year, the lines between classes also evolve.
6. Misclassified ensembles rarely exhibit all the components of the next class up; if so, they'd already be competing in that class.
7. Being good does not mean you're in the wrong class. Good "basic" is still "basic". At the same time, one need not be ready to win the next class before it's time to matriculate up.
8. Appropriate classification can change as an ensemble and program develops over the season.
9. Extraneous factors (budget, staff, marching band reputation, consultants, etc.) should be ignored. These things certainly influence what we may see on the floor, but what we see on the floor can be evaluated without taking the rest specifically into consideration.
10. Past performance is no indicator of current or future performance. The product on the floor will speak for itself.

What to look for:

- What kind of information does this ensemble (both the performers and instructors) need in order to continue their progress and growth? Have they exceeded what the current paradigm can provide?
- If you didn't know what class they're in right now, which class would be most appropriate on a first read? Which class do they "fit in" with more?
- Consider the whole presentation: music, visual, battery, front ensemble, subsections, the complexity of the vocabulary, the maturity of the performers, the production value of the presentation, etc. - it all matters.
- When in doubt, focus on the performers: what they're asked to do and their ability to do it. Let them lead you to your conclusion.

Overall, few competing ensembles are truly "on the bubble" between classes, but for those that are, classification decisions can be very, very difficult, as there are typically compelling arguments to be made for both classes.

There is no perfect process, and not everyone will agree. Everyone involved in a classification decision will invariably value things differently and have different interpretations of the terms "basic", "intermediate", and "advanced". The most successful system devised thus far is to get the input of a group of experts that can evaluate the ensemble holistically and from different perspectives, and then allow the wisdom of the room to carry the day.

The following is a graphical representation of the considerations evaluated during a classification review, their relative weights, and the process for evaluating any ensembles that appear to be on the bubble.

