Scott's interview is a reprint from an earlier edition of the RMPA newsletter. Much of his information applies marching band percussion in addition to indoor drumline. Hopefully this will also encourage instructors to think ahead going into the 2027 RMPA season.

Scott Johnson Interview

The incredible **Scott Johnson** graciously took time out of his crazy travel schedule over the holidays to answer these interview questions I sent to him. In addition to sharing his vast knowledge about marching percussion in general, I wanted to get his perspective as a WGI music judge, so most of the questions have that focus. If you want to know more about Scott, here's a link to his bio. It's so extensive that I'm afraid to include it here for fear of crashing my laptop. 😊

It's important to note that Scott will be judging the Music caption for the RMPA Prelims on March 28, 2026, at Mountain Range High School.

As a music judge what are some of the most important fundamental skills you expect to see in both battery and front ensemble sections, including Concert Class, especially at the A Class levels?

Scott: When I think of fundamental skills, I think of the exercise program. The program needs to prepare them to be able to perform the music with success. I see too many times groups not being able to physically play their show, and the instructors being stubborn and not changing it so they can be more successful.

You've judged a seemingly infinite number of indoor shows. What are some of most common weaknesses you see everywhere?

Scott: For me, the biggest weakness I see in indoor shows, is the lack of quality playing diddles. I'm convinced in this day and age around 70 to 80% of our vocabulary, especially with battery music, is diddles. Most of our music is some form of right right, left left. So, with that in mind, I would hope that 70 to 80% of our exercises deal with diddles.

What are some key elements you feel make a great composition as opposed to just a good one?

Scott: I am a big believer in tailoring your program to the talent level of your group. Even if you purchase an already written show, you need to change it for the talent level of your performers. That's up to the instructional staff to figure that out.

In the Music caption, what makes a performance special to you, besides really, really clean beats?

Scott: In the music caption, you cannot say besides really, really clean beats :-) Clarity is the strongest word on that score sheet. And that's what's usually very successful.

If you had to name one pet peeve as a judge, what would that be?

Scott: Watching the performers struggle to physically play the vocabulary that is given to them. It's the job of the instructors to change it and physically make it possible for them to perform their music to the best of their abilities.

Example: “We hit that bass split in the parking lot” we probably hit that bass split one out of 10 times and still we kept it in the show. If that was a snare triplet roll that you hit one out of 10 times, you would have changed it.

I don’t think any instructors want to sabotage their ensemble’s success, but that does happen due to things they choose or don’t choose to do. What are some of those major pitfalls/mistakes you’d like to see instructors and writers avoid?

Scott: As a music judge, I see too many groups, sacrifice the musical intent for the visual intent. It is obvious as a judge that some groups spend way too much time on visual, and not enough time on basic skills to perform the music on their given instruments. There are still more points for music than there is for visual…

You’ve judged several RMPA competitions over the years. Based on your observations, do you have any words of advice for our instructors, directors, and designers on what they need to do to help their students, ensembles, and the circuit get to the next level.

Scott: I remember when RMPA was leading the country in the indoor activity. I think what has changed there is the visual intent versus the music intent. There have been many great shows that have come out of the Colorado area, and back when it was successful, they all played extremely well to go along with a great visual package.