

## **Dancing To Contemporary Songs - How to Select The Dance That Best Fits The Music Playing.**

Many times we find ourselves in a place where the music playing is contemporary songs - not the strict Ballroom or Latin rhythms that we are accustomed to. How do you go about selecting the dance that best "fits" the music playing?

First, it's helpful to understand that (with the exception of the Waltz), most songs have four beats per bar or measure of music, and you can choose patterns from most any dance and apply them to any song that is playing.

Deciding what to dance is based mostly on the tempo of the song and your mood:

- Is it slow and melodious? - a Rumba will feel great
- Too slow for a Rumba? - the Blues/Slow Nightclub will do the trick
- Does it have a bouncy sound? - try the Samba, or the Salsa
- Does it have a sharp staccato beat? - try Cha-Cha, West Coast Swing, or Hustle
- Is the tempo medium and undefined? - try East Coast swing, Hustle, Rumba, or Foxtrot
- Is the tempo very fast? - Try Salsa, Retro Swing, Merengue

As you can see, you can have fun trying different dances to the different tempos. You can even try different dances to the same songs. The more dances you know, the more options you have. There is no right or wrong - only what works best for you.

While driving and listening to music on the radio, try to feel which dance you would do to the song playing. With time and practice, you will become experienced in deciding the best dance for a particular tempo as soon as you hear it.

Have fun with your dancing,

Blanche & Emilio

## How to Hear the Beat in the Music

Learning to hear the different beats in music is like learning a new language. When you first start to learn a foreign language, it seems as if all the words run together into one long sentence. However, after you get familiar with the words, and get used to listening to the foreign language, each word becomes clear and easy to identify.

Music is a language; a very easy language to learn. It basically has four main words. One; Two; Three; Four.

One or First Beat, is the strongest sounding beat in each measure of music.

Two or Second Beat, is a light sounding beat following the strong First Beat.

Three or Third Beat, is a strong beat but not as strong as the First Beat.

Four or Fourth Beat, is the lightest beat in the measure or bar of music.

Waltz music is the exception to the rule with only three beats of music. The first beat is heavily accentuated and it is followed by two light beats. The rhythm is - heavy, light, light - heavy, light, light.

### HEARING THE MUSIC AND CHOOSING THE DANCE

The first step in dancing to the music is to identify whether the style of the music has an American flavor, or a Latin flavor.

American Style songs, like Swings or Foxtrots (e.g. Frank Sinatra style), are easy to identify. The music has a heavy base drum sound on the First Beat that makes you want to tap your foot down.

A good exercise, while standing or sitting, is to practice tapping the foot on the First Beat and the Third beat of music - leave the heel on the floor and lift the front of the foot on the second and fourth beat. After getting comfortable hearing and tapping on the First and Third beats, start stepping on those beats instead of tapping.

Dances in the Latin Style tend to have a Latin flavor to all of them. However, they can have many rhythmic variations within the style. Slow melodious Latin songs, like Rumba, are the easiest to dance and

identify. Rather than a feeling of tapping with the foot the First beat on the Rumba makes you want to move.

American bands, playing Latin music, play easier to hear beats than Latin bands because they use drummers. Since most Latin Bands do not have drummers, many times you feel more like a "tempo" or a "pulse" - a wave that carries you, rather than hearing a clear beat (e.g. like feeling a pulse in someone's wrist). Some dances like Cha-Cha have a strong staccato feeling while others, like Samba, have more of a bouncy feeling.

The best exercise for Latin Music is to listen to a lot of Latin songs. Do not try to hear the beats, or dance to them. Just listen to the music and let your body respond to it when it wants to. After a while all four beats of the music will become very obvious.

Like any foreign language, learning to hear the beats in the music requires practice. Listen to dance music and let the music move you as you concentrate on other things. There will be two benefits to this practice; the beats will become very obvious to you, and you will develop a very strong sense of rhythm.



## Understanding Musicality in Dancing

Dancing is the expression of harmonious movement to music. Our range of expression is limited by our physical ability to control our body movement as well as our understanding of music and possibilities of expressions.

When we learn a pattern in a dance, we learn a particular rhythm that allows us to express ourselves to the music in a basic manner. As our dancing evolves we tend to add small variations to the musical interpretation of those patterns. Those changes in musical interpretation add color and flavor to your dancing - making your dancing more fun and rewarding as well as more exciting to watch. We call this art of music interpretation "Musicality".

Although musicality is in essence an internal and emotional quality, we can learn a few basic options that will allow us to increase the range of our musical interpretations.

We have to start with the understanding that music has a very definite structure; without that structure you will merely have noise. Musical structure is very similar to written structure:

- Words = "Measures" or Bars of Music - usually four Beats in each Measure
- Sentences = "Phrases" - usually eight Measures in each Phrase
- Paragraph = "Chorus" - usually 4 Phrases in each Chorus
- Sub-titles = "Bridges" - usually four Measures in each Bridge

There are variations to this arrangement. Waltz for instance, has three beats per measure instead of four. Bridges, sometimes can consist of 6 or twelve measures instead of four.

Dance choreographers start by becoming familiar with the arrangement of a song, and then include patterns in a way that best match the changes and style of each musical segment.

If you have never done any choreography or counted the measures in a song to discover its musical structure, we recommend you try. The process is fun and enlightening.

Start by picking a song that you can hear the beats very clearly. Get a pencil and a piece of paper. Be ready to stop the song and repeat it as many times as you need. If you need help on how to hear the beats in the music refer to our tip with that headline - you can find our previous tips on our facebook page "BallroomDance101.com", or we can we can email you a copy if you let us know you want one.

Start the song and begin counting the Measures, e.g. 1,2,3,4 - 2,2,3,4, - 3,2,3,4 - etc..

- You will find an "Introduction" - usually 4 to 12 Measures
- You will then hear a change - the starting of a "Chorus" (you will identify some type of melody and main instruments playing in the background)
- Start counting the Measures again 1,2,3,4 - 2,2,3,4 etc., usually you will have 8

Measures for the first "Phrase" or sentence. Then it will start a new Phrase within the same background and melody

- Keep counting the measures; you will notice that (usually) after the fourth Phrase there will be an ending to that Chorus
- You will then hear a Bridge of four Measures and a new Chorus will start
- Repeat the same process until the end of the song
- Remember, your song may have some variations to the above arrangement

At the end of this exercise you will know exactly the musical structure of that song. Now, the matching process starts.

- Decide on the dance and patterns you would like to do to that song
- Count the measures for each of the patterns
- Start mixing the patterns so a new pattern starts with each new Phrase
- Try matching the style of patterns you put in a Chorus to the background melody (high energy or mellow) if there are no strong distinctions between patterns, try dancing them with different energy.

Congratulations - You are now a choreographer!

Like any art form, musicality in dancing, has both a scientific side as well as an artistic side. The above exercise is basically a mechanical process. In the next issue we'll be entering more into the artistic realm of musicality.



## Understanding Musicality in Dancing - Part 2

In our previous issue we covered "Musical Arrangements" (how songs are structured.) We also provided an outline on how to choreograph a dance to a particular song.

In this issue we'll be covering "Phrasing" - how to give different interpretations to a particular dance pattern within the same musical segment.

Let's start with the basic zigzag in Foxtrot (the forward and back basic with quarter turns). The basic rhythm is slow, slow, quick, quick - a total of six beats of music. We'll describe the man's part (lady's will be the natural opposite)

- Forward basic with normal count (start facing diagonal wall):
- Man left foot forward - count slow (two beats)
- Man right foot forward - count slow (two beats)
- Man left foot side - count quick (one beat) – commence 1/4 turn to right
- Man right foot together transferring weight - count quick (one beat) – completing 1/4 turn to right
- Backward basic with normal count (start backing diagonal center)
- Man left foot backward - count slow (two beats)
- Man right foot backward - count slow (two beats)
- Man left foot side - count quick (one beat) – commence 1/4 turn to left
- Man right foot together transferring weight – count quick (one beat) – completing 1/4 turn to left

At this point we are going to suggest a very small change in the way we dance this pattern. Everything will be the same with the exception of the side together at the end of the forward and back basics.

Instead of taking one beat for the "side step" and one beat for the "together step", we are going to break those beats in half. We are going to give the "side step" one beat and a half, and the "together step" only half of a beat. Instead of "quick, quick, the rhythm is now "slow, &."

You are going to dance this pattern like this:

- Forward basic with modified count:
- Man left foot forward - count slow (two beats)
- Man right foot forward - count slow (two beats)

- Man left foot side - count "slow" (beat and a half) – commence 1/4 turn to right
- Man right foot together transferring weight - count "&" (half of a beat) - completing 1/4 turn to right
- Backward basic with modified count:
  - Man left foot backward - count slow (two beats)
  - Man right foot backward - count slow (two beats)
  - Man left foot side - count "slow "(beat and a half) – commence 1/4 turn to left
  - Man right foot together transferring weight – count "&" (half of a beat) - completing 1/4 turn to left

You will need more control using this type of timing; use the floor to drag the free foot ("together step"), as you will be spending more time on the supporting one ("side step")

As you become more comfortable with this exercise, you can introduce these same changes anytime you have two or more consecutive quick actions (box steps and grapevines).

You can also adapt this expression or phrasing to the Waltz. Instead of dancing "1, 2, 3" evenly, you can make count "two" longer by borrowing a portion of beat number "three". Your count will be "1, 2., &" (beat 3 is replaced by "&".) Remember, you will need more control using this type of timing. Use the floor to drag the free foot ("&") as you will be spending more time on the supporting one ("2..")

This small change may seem insignificant; however, it will transform the look and feel of your Foxtrot and your Waltz. That's the beauty of musicality.

On the next issue we'll be covering some fun rhythm changes in dances like Swing and Cha-Cha.

## Dance Instruction - Understanding Musicality in Dancing - Part 3

In our previous issues we covered "Musical Arrangements" and introduced the concept of "Phrasing". We'll continue covering "Phrasing" and introduce some fun rhythm changes in dances like Swing and Cha-Cha.

**Introducing the Hitch-kick.** This fun rhythm change action is very popular in the swing dances. We are going to use the triple step basic in the East Coast Swing as an example.

**Regular triple basic in the East Coast Swing** (man's part - ladies will be the natural opposite)

- Left foot side - count "1" (3/4 of a beat)
- Right foot together - count "&" (1/4 of a beat)
- Left foot to side - count "2" (1 beat)
- Right foot to side - count "3" (3/4 of a beat)
- Left foot together - count "&" (1/4 of a beat)
- Right foot to side - count "4" (1 beat)
- Left foot back (rock step on ball of foot) - count "5" (1 beat)
- Right foot replace forward - count "6" (1 beat)

Now, you are going to keep everything the same except the rock step, counts 5 and 6. Instead of a rock step, you are going to do a hitch-kick or kick-ball change.

**Triple basic in the East Coast Swing with Hitch-kick** (man's part - ladies will be the natural opposite)

- Left foot side - count "1" (3/4 beat)
- Right foot together - count "&" (1/4 beat)
- Left foot to side - count "2" (1 beat)
- Right foot to side - count "3" (3/4 beat)
- Left foot together - count & (1/4 beat)
- Right foot to side - count "4" (1 beat)
- Left foot point forward - count "5" (3/4 beat)
- Left foot back (rock step on ball of foot) - count "&" (1/4 beat)
- Right foot replace forward--count "6" (1 beat)

This fun action will allow you to change the musical interpretation of the Triple Swing basic.

It can replace any rock step without affecting your partner since it takes the same amount of time as a regular rock step.

This action can also be lead (continuing to hold your partner's hand down) - which allows you to dance repeated hitch-kicks for several measures for a playful and fun musical interpretation.



Next Issue we'll cover Guapacha rhythm in the Cha-Cha. A fun rhythm change that will give a fun twist to the music interpretation of your Cha-Cha.

Have fun with your dancing,  
Blanche & Emilio

## Dance Instruction - Understanding Musicality in Dancing - Part 4

In our previous issue we introduced the concept of "Phrasing". Here, we'll continue the concept and introduce a fun rhythm change in the Cha-Cha.

**Introducing "Guapacha Rhythm" in the Cha-Cha.** This fun rhythm change can be used in the cha-cha during the rock steps (either forward or back rocks).

### Regular Cha-Cha Basic (man's part - (Lady's will be the natural opposite)

- Left foot side - count 1 (1 beat)
- Right foot back - count 2 (1 beat)
- Left foot replace forward - count 3 (1 beat)
- Right foot side - count 4 (3/4 beat)
- Left foot together - count & (1/4 beat)
- Right foot side - count 1 (1 beat)
- Left foot forward - count 2 (1 beat)
- Right foot replace back - count 3 (1 beat)
- Left foot side - count 4 (3/4 beat)
- Right foot together - count & (1/4 beat)

Now, we are going to keep the footwork identical, however we are going to change the timing we are going to allocate to count 1 and to count 2.

### Guapacha Cha-Cha Basic (man's part - (Lady's will be the natural opposite)

- Left foot side - counts 1, 2 (1 and 3/4 beat)
- Right foot back - count & (1/4 beat)
- Left foot replace forward -count 3 (1 beat)
- Right foot side - count 4 (3/4 beat)
- Left foot together - count & (1/4 beat)
- Right foot side - counts 1, 2 (1 and 3/4 beat)
- Left foot forward - count & (1/4 beat)
- Right foot replace back - count 3 (1 beat)
- Left foot side - count 4 (3/4 beat)
- Right foot together - count & (1/4 beat)

In order to lead your partner to hold the timing longer on "Count One" and part of "Count Two", you will need more control - make sure to keep both feet on the floor for as long as possible before moving the free leg to the next placement. Also, you will need a solid frame and connection (refer to our previous issues on connection).

When danced apart, it can replace any rock step without affecting your partner since it takes the same amount of time as a regular rock step. This fun action will allow you to change the musical interpretation of the Cha-Cha basic giving your musicality a wider range of expression.

Next Issue we'll cover "Syncopations" - different ways to take three steps in two measures of music.

Have fun with your dancing,

Blanche & Emilio



## Dance Instruction - Understanding Musicality in Dancing - Part 5

In our previous issues we covered "Musical Arrangements" and introduced the concept of "Phrasing". We'll continue covering "Phrasing" and introduce ideas on different musical interpretations you can dance to one measure of music.

We'll start with an awareness that in the majority of musical arrangements there are four beats of music in a measure of music. (1, 2, 3, 4)

We could dance those four beats in many different ways - we could for instance:

- \* Take four forward steps of 1 beat each. (1, 2, 3, 4) -  
Rhythm= quick, quick, quick, quick
- \* Take one step using the entire measure. Take one step and drag the free leg on the floor slowly towards the supporting leg. (1234) - Rhythm= slowslow
- \* Take two steps and use two beats in each step. (12, 34) -  
Rhythm= slow, slow
- \* Take three steps, using one beat for step one, one beat for step two, and two beats for step three. (1, 2, 34) - Rhythm= quick, quick, slow
- \* Take three steps, using two beats for step one, one beat for step two, and one beat for step three. (12, 3, 4) - Rhythm= slow, quick, quick
- \* Take three steps, using a half beat for step one, one and a half beats for step two, and two beats for step three. (&, 12, 34) - Rhythm= &, slow, slow
- \* Take three steps, using one and a half beats for step one, a half beat for step two, and two beats for step three. (12, &, 34) - Rhythm= slow, &, slow

Anytime you are taking three steps in a measure (last four samples above), you can convert them to progressive rocks. Instead of taking three forward steps, take the first step forward, the second step back, and the third step forward. This action can be used in any direction, and you can use any of the rhythms shown above.

As you can see, even a simple walk to one measure of music, can provide almost an unlimited amount of expressions. Experiment, listen to music, practice, and above all have fun. There is great joy in expressing yourself to music - the joy of Dancing!

Have fun with your dancing,  
Blanche & Emilio

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