

## **HOW TO CHOREOGRAPH A DANCE PART 1**

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My name is Donna Caudill and I am a certified judge on the UCWDC circuit. I have several years of dance training, (started training in dance when I was 3) and continue to do so on a regular basis.

Part of my training is judge certification for the UCWDC. I would like to impart some of that information to the choreographers that read Carol's newsletter and especially those of you who are entering choreography competition at the events. After most competitions are completed, the judges receive a lot of questions from the choreographers about the dances they have judged.

When we judge choreography, we are asked to look at 4 criteria

Does the dance fit the phrasing of the music?

Does the dance fit the character of the song?

Is the dance easily teachable on the social floor?

Will the dance be popular and have longevity?

Pick music that makes sense.

Count the music and see how it is phrased. Most music that we dance to is written in 4/4 time, except waltz which is written in 3/4 time. For the sake of this discussion I will talk about 4/4 time. Music is made up of sentences and usually 4 sentences will make a paragraph. In that paragraph there are usually 32 beats. If your music doesn't fit this scenario, then we have to talk about a new way of choreographing a dance.

Pick steps that make sense to the music.

Picking steps that are everyday run of the mill, basics, don't always fit the music that is being danced. I am referring to coaster steps, kick ball changes, sailor steps, grapevines, etc, etc, etc. Just choosing a bunch of steps and putting them together is not what choreographing it about. I hear some great music when I'm judging, but the steps just don't fit.

When choreographing to music, we choose different parts of the music for the choreography. There are four lines in music that should be considered when choosing steps to be placed in a dance

The melody line

The rhythm line

The lyrical line

The vocal line

Each one of these is very important when choosing choreography for your dance..

## **HOW TO CHOREOGRAPH A DANCE PART 2**

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The Melody Line

This is the tune. Sometimes the vocal line and the melody line are the same. Sometimes the melody line is done instrumentally; sometimes the vocalist is singing this line.

The Rhythm Line

This line is usually what is happening on the bass clef in the music. Your percussion instruments, (i.e. drums, bass guitar, trombones, tuba, etc etc etc.), are the instruments driving the rhythm line.

This line is especially important in the Latin dances, cha, rumba, samba, etc. If the rhythm line is speaking louder to you than the other lines, then you should choose your choreography to fit this line.

The Lyrical Line

Lyrics are the words of the song. Sometimes this line will speak louder to you than the other lines in the song and this is when you should choose this line. Make sure that you are not miming the words of the song all the time in your choreography, but that you choose steps that fit the rhythm of the words.

One example that I use in teaching is the beat of the word triple step. There are 3 syllables in those two words, so if the artist sings words that are syncopated like triple step and they are speaking louder than the other lines choose a syncopated step to interpret those words. Examples of syncopated steps are sailor steps, shuffle steps, coaster steps, etc. All those words have 3 syllables and have an "&" count in the middle of them and have a count of 1 & 2. Again choose the line that is speaking the loudest to you.

#### The Vocal Line

This line is how the singer is interpreting the lyrics of the song. For example, the singer may choose to say "I love youuuuuuuuu" and hold that "you" for several beats before moving on the next line. So if we are speaking of 4 beats to a measure the "youuuuuuu" could take up 3 of those beats. Choosing steps to fit that vocal line might tell you to use a slow turn, a sweep of the foot, a slow ronde'en l'air, etc.

Make sure the steps fit the character of the dance.

When I talk about character, I am speaking of what kind of music is it? Is it a Latin beat, is it East Coast Swing, West Coast Swing, Two Step, Single Time Swing, Funky, Waltz, Fox Trot, Quickstep, Viennese Waltz, Bolero, Polka, Tango, etc?

There are certain steps that fit each of these characters and you should use them when choreographing. You wouldn't do a body roll in a Waltz, or a Twinkle in a Funky dance, or a hop, a skip, or a jump in West Coast Swing. Make sure that the character of your song and the steps go together.

When choreographing to Cha Cha remember that your break step happens on the 2 3 and the other steps happen on the 4 & 1 in the music. If you syncopate on the 2 3 or the 4&1, you must execute an additional syncopation to be back on the phrasing of the music. Cha Cha is a phrased dance and must be choreographed to hit those beats in the music. Some of your other phrased dances are Polka, Triple Two, and Night Club Two just to name a few.

Number 3 and 4 on the judging criteria list are self explanatory. Can you teach the dance and will it be popular?

Please let me know if there are any specific questions that you have to ask about choreography and I will be glad to answer those on an individual basis.

I hope this will help you all when choosing music and steps to combine into choreography.

### **"HOW TO CHOREOGRAPH A DANCE" PART III**

#### **"THE CHARACTER OF THE DANCE"**

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**FROM: DONNA CAUDILL [dkcaud01@alltel.net](mailto:dkcaud01@alltel.net)**

There's more to music than the bass line!

When I ask someone to listen to a song and then ask them to count it for me, the answer is always the same, 1..2..3..4..5..6..7..8. What that person is hearing is the beat of the bass drum. The bass drum or the bass are keeping the beat for the rest of the musicians to follow.

As judges for choreography, the first thing we hear in a song is the character or rhythm of that song. The second thing we look for are there steps in the dance that fit that character or rhythm? Then, the phrasing, teachability, and longevity, (refer to the article "How to Choreograph a Dance, Part I & II"). Once we determine that the dance doesn't fit the character and the phrasing, the last two categories don't count.

One size does not fit all! Choose your music and stay with the character!

As choreographers, picking a song is your first step. Listen to it carefully. What character or rhythm pattern is it telling you that it is? In other words, would you dance East or West Coast Swing, Two Step, Cha Cha, Polka, Foxtrot, Tango, Waltz, etc.? When we judge choreography, we see the same steps plugged into all different characters.

So, what are the characters and what steps fit those rhythms? First, let's talk about the different characters, and the timing, and I'll give you examples of songs that fit each character. These are just a few examples.

Polka 1&2, 3&4, 5&6, 7&8 Cowboy Sweetheart  
Night Club Two Step 1 2 &3, 4 5&6, 7 8&1 Breathe  
Waltz 1 2 3, 4 5 6 All In My Heart  
Cha Cha 4&1, 2 3, 4&1, 2 3 Sway  
Two Step 1&2 3, 4&5 6, 7&8 1 Suds in a Bucket  
East Coast Swing 1&2, 3&4, 5 6 Burnin' Love  
West Coast Swing 1 2 3&4 5&6 Memphis Women  
1 2 3&4 5 6 7&8

Let's just pick a random character and look at the count. Polka is an easy one to use. Looking at the count 1&2, 3&4, 5&6, 7&8, we should have some steps that are counted like the rhythm in our choreography. Let's try to name a few.

Shuffle step  
Coaster step  
Sailor step  
Brush hop step  
Kick ball change  
Vaudeville

Also, included in the character of Polka is the gallop step, (1&2&3&4...) flicks, kicks, and hitches. I'm sure you can think of several others. If these steps are not included somewhere in the choreography, you have totally lost the character of the dance or in this case, Polka.

If you're not sure about a song and its character or rhythm, please ask a professional dancer to help you. I am only an email or phone call away, and will be more than happy to help you out. I want to see your choreography make high grades and stay on the dance floor.