

## Keeping in Time

By Richard Fiore

(Licentiate, (LAB, LAR, T) US Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing)



Keeping proper time with the music makes dancing a more enjoyable experience. It provides one of the most gratifying forms

of creative expression ever. A good sense of timing allows dancers to express the music more empathetically through their dance movements. This article addresses the fundamental aspects of rhythm and keeping in time with the music.

One of the most captivating features of ballroom dancing is the many rhythms and their relationship to the various dances. The word rhythm is believed to be derived from the Greek word 'rhein' meaning to flow. Rhythm describes a musical flow or timing pattern of beats in a piece of music. It can be further described as a continuous pattern of accented and un-accented beats. Music is written in specific time signatures that depict the amount and type of notes that a measure contains as well as setting the timing pattern for the music. A common time signature is 4/4 in which there are typically four ¼ beats in each measure of music. Dancers have to be especially aware of the accented beats. Accented or heavy beats have a greater intensity than the other beats. The first beat in the measure is known as the downbeat and



Quarter Note = One Beat

is the most prominent. Dancers need to be able to identify the downbeat in order to commence the first step as it serves as a musical starting point. From that point, the synchronization between the steps, beats and measures are continuous and typically follow a repetitive pattern.

Tempo is another feature of rhythm. It describes the pace of the music expressed as the number of measures that occur in one minute. For example, foxtrot is danced to 4/4 rhythm with an average tempo of 28 measures per minute (MPM). Experienced dancers intuitively know the tempo range and musical characteristics for a specific dance. For example a slow foxtrot tempo is 26 to 28 MPM. As the tempo gets beyond 36 MPM, foxtrot becomes more difficult to dance and loses its character as such. As the tempo approaches 44 MPM it starts to get into the range of a slow quickstep. It is interesting to note that foxtrot and quickstep have common origins. Historically, the tempo range for foxtrot was blurred during the 1920s and 1930s as bands started to play music increasingly faster. Back then and before quickstep existed, a very fast tempo foxtrot evolved that became known as quick time foxtrot. It later evolved into a separate dance known today as the quickstep. Another example of a fast tempo dance is the Peabody. It was created in 1915 by William Frank Peabody, a NYC police lieutenant and enthusiastic dancer. Peabody was commonly danced at jazz clubs in the 1920s and 1930s specifically to ragtime and Dixieland jazz music at a tempo between 60 to 62 MPM.

The terms quick and slow are used in the dance world to indicate how much time to take for a given step. Simply stated, slow is danced over two beats and quick is over one beat. A typical and repeated timing pattern in many dances is quick-slow, or 1+1+2 = 4 beats = 1 measure. Another example is slow-slow,

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or 2+2 = 4 beats = 1 measure. Equally as important is the transition between quick and slow and vice versa. Skilled dancers may stretch the time of a given step and then catch up at the beginning of the following measure. This adds an enhanced element of style. A clear example can be readily seen in waltz where the step occurring on the 2<sup>ND</sup> beat is often stretched beyond the actual time allotted for that beat in order to express the music more empathetically.

The music associated with each ballroom dance style has its own unique rhythm. Having a good sense of the various rhythms is always a great plus on the dance floor. Listen carefully to the music and do not rush. Try to accurately interpret the beats, accents and tempo of the specific music. Use all of the time on a slow two beat step by counting it as 'slow-and'. In that way your body will be more able to dynamically move over the entire two beat time interval.

Dancers that become adept at keeping accurate time with the music develop an enhanced quality to their dance style. Their bodies move more smoothly and effortlessly as they accurately implement the elements of timing into their steps. They are always pleasing to watch because they possess a notable quality of movement in relationship to musical rhythmic patterns.