

Rhythmic Patterns

Last month, we introduced the relationship between music types and dance styles by showing current standards for time signatures and tempos. This month, we will explain the rhythmic patterns that further differentiate various dance styles from each other. The “rhythm” can come from drums or other percussive instruments, as well as other musical instruments such as piano or guitar. We are interested in identifying differences in music that connect it most appropriately to a given dance style.

The figures represent a very simplified notation, in which the **bottom row** represents a bass drum (or bass instrument), and the **upper row** represents snare or conga drums, or cymbals, the clavé or other instruments. A filled symbol signifies a hit on that beat. The vertical bars represent the beginning and end of measures, the commas separate the beats, and the slash represents a split beat.

or	Measure division
●	Hit on that beat
○	No hit on that beat
'	Separates each beat
/	Split beat

Clips of various types of music can be found at: <http://www.dancevision.com> and <http://www.ballroomdancers.com/Music/>.

Waltz is the only dance style with music in a 3/4 time signature. This makes it easy to identify, though confusion with 6/8 time is possible. There is a range of musical styles written in 3/4 time; some of these styles are easier to identify the beats while others are more subtle. The traditional waltz percussion has a strong pulse (often bass drum) on beat one, followed by weaker sounds (hi hat cymbal) on beats 2 and 3. Making a “boom-chink-chink” type sound. Music examples utilizing this style include “Answer Me”, “Could I Have This Dance”, “Singing Piano”, and “Autumn Nocturne”.



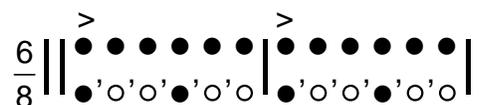
More complex patterns add interest to the music and can smooth out the “boom-chink-chink” of the traditional pattern that can lead to bouncy or mechanical dancing. “The Old House”, “Nocturne”, and “Serenade to Spring” are examples of this more subtle waltz rhythm.



Viennese Waltz has similar patterns, but they tend to have a more “floating” feel, and of course a faster tempo. Viennese Waltz music examples include “Que Sera Sera” and “Falling In Love With Love”.



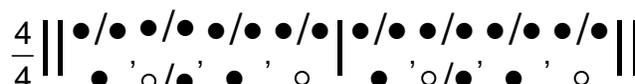
Music with the 6/8 Pattern can be used for Slow Two Step, and is characterized by a strong bass pulse on beat one and a softer pulse on beat 4. One can see that Slow Two Step danced to 6/8 music (for example, “Unchained Melody” aka “Are You Still Mine”) will have uneven 2nd and 3rd steps, in contrast when it is danced to 4/4 slow two step music, like “Evergreen”, “What A Wonderful World”, and “My Hawaii”. The S will consist of 3 – 1/8 notes, the first Q of 2-1/8 notes, and the second Q of 1-1/8 note, giving it a SQ& feel. Usually, a Slow Two Step dance style will be chosen when the music is too fast or too slow for foxtrot, bolero, or rumba.



Foxtrot usually has a very simple percussive pattern. The best music invites a gliding movement, which occurs through subtle percussion. Good examples are “September Foxtrot”, “Foxtrot Tonight”, and “Maria Elena”.



Jive or Swing Music can be similar (but much faster), but with a much stronger beat that invites a more bouncy dance style. Due to the



large variety of musical styles that are appropriate to swing, jive and rock and roll, the diagram is but one example. Suffice it to say, however, that there is usually much more syncopation than with foxtrot. Good jive examples are “Crazy Eyes”, “Let Me Show You How”, and “Runaround Sue”. “Zoot Suit Riot” (“Fat Cat Boogie”) is an example of swing.

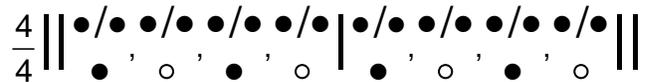
Latin music typically has a number of instruments working together, but can be represented in a simple (compared to the actual patterns of a multitude of instruments) fashion for cha cha as an example, as follows (remember that the upper row is the total pattern of a number of instruments).

The Cha Cha Cha pattern can be seen in the syncopated 4th beat and the 1st beat, leading to what is known as “4 and 1”. Since most cha cha music (not all) has this type of percussion, performing the “cha cha cha” dance steps on these beats can be easier. In round dancing, we almost always do the “cha cha cha” steps on “3 and 4”, somewhat ignoring the details of the percussive pattern, but it works because of the other complexities of the percussion, and because we have become used to it. This pattern represents classic cha cha such as “Gazpacho Cha” and “Tea for Two”, but some modern hip-hop music also works well with cha dancing, for example “I Like It Like That” and “Everybody”.

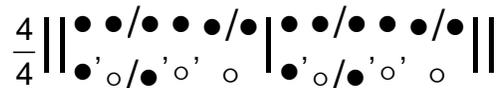
Rumba, in addition to having a slower tempo, has a slightly overall different pattern, as well as different uses of the Latin percussive instruments. One rumba pattern is shown to the right. Examples of rumba music include “Non Dimenticar”, “Para Esto”, and “Amapola”.



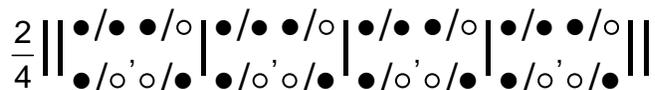
Bolero has a distinctive rhythmic pattern that is similar to rumba. The following is an example pattern. Traditional bolero music includes “Sleeping Beauty”, “Solo Bolero”, “Beautiful Maria of My Soul” and “Almost There”.



Mambo in addition to being fast (and having roots in common with cha), also has a characteristic rhythmic pattern. Examples of mambo music are “Limbo Rock” and “Mambo Tonight”



Samba also has a unique pattern that may not be fully understandable with this simple notation. Notice, however, the “a1” pattern that distinguishes samba from the other Latin rhythms. Examples include “Iko Iko” and “No Name Samba”.



We have not discussed all of the dance rhythms, but hopefully this provides a starting point for your thinking on this topic. This discussion is meant to remind the choreographer to be aware of the rhythmic patterns present in the music being used. In Round Dancing, choreographers have complete freedom to place any figure they choose into any routine. The goal, however, is to create routines that provide maximum enjoyment for the dancer through match with the music, challenge, and creativity. The tools presented in this and the previous article are meant to help the choreographer move closer to this ideal. Choreography is a learning process. Get help and advice from choreographers whose routines you like and whose opinions you respect. There is at least one great Round Dance routine within each of you. Share it with us!