

## INCHING ALONG - THE TIMING OF A STEP

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What a topic title; everybody is taught from the very beginning to take a step when you hear the beat of music. We practiced taking a step to music until it becomes an automatic part of our movement. This action of stepping on the beat of the music is taught to all beginning dancers - not just Round Dancers. Everybody learns how to move to the music. Later in our dance development we learn that stepping on the beat of music is only one way of taking a step. Many times it is desirable to use another method for emphasis, styling, or to enhance the look of a figure. Lets look a little deeper into how we can take a step to music.

First, let's express a beat in terms of distance. For example, a quarter note is allowed a defined certain amount of time in a measure. We can represent this time as distance. For our discussion, we will represent a quarter note as a twelve-inch ruler. The quarter note will begin on the one-inch mark and complete on the twelve-inch mark. The distance of the quarter note will represent the amount of time it has in a measure of music. Now, let's take a step. When you hear the note, which will occur on the one-inch mark, take a step. Since you are moving as soon as you hear the note, you probably complete your step at the four-inch mark. Note, we are talking about taking a step in time not the length of our step. When stepping upon hearing the note, we complete the action early in terms of the amount of time the note has in the measure. Therefore, we hear the note and step then wait until the next quarter note begins before taking the second step. In terms of our ruler, we hear the note on the one-inch mark and start taking our step arriving on the four-inch mark. Now we wait until the note completes its allowed time in the measure - the twelve-inch mark. We waited eight inches or more than half of the ruler's length. While the concept of expressing time as distance may be new to a few people, it is a powerful concept for discussing and visualizing what a change in timing can create.

As discussed above, we can step as soon as we hear the quarter note and then wait until the note has completed its time in the measure before taking the next step. This works. Now let's say we want to change our step so that we complete the stepping action and transfer of weight at the same point the quarter note is finished. In other words, we will hear the quarter note on the one-inch mark but instead of commencing the step, we will wait and commence the step such that we complete the action as the note completed its time, i.e. at the twelve-inch mark. Using the above discussion we have identified a three inch distance "of time" on the ruler to take our step. That is how fast we move. We hear the note on the one-inch mark and complete our step on the four-inch mark. Therefore, the distance from the time we hear the note (the one-inch mark) and completed our step (the four-inch mark) was three inches. The distance of three inches just represents the speed of our step. Keeping our speed of stepping constant, we can wait until the nine inch mark on the ruler before taking our step and have the step and the quarter note complete at the same time (the twelve inch mark). Instead of hearing the note on the one-inch mark and stepping, we are hearing the note on the one-inch mark and waiting until the nine-inch mark before stepping. Now, our step and the quarter note will complete at the same time at the twelve-inch mark. Nothing has changed in the quarter note; it still requires twelve inches from start to finish. Nothing has changed in the speed of our step; we still use three inches. The only change was stepping to arrive at the end of the note instead of at the beginning of the note. By waiting until the nine-inch mark to take our step, we have all the time from the one-inch mark to the nine-inch mark to do other things. The time could be used to create a body action or to prepare the lady for a particular figure. Dancers and competitors use this "extra" time to create a different look to a sequence or to express a figure in a different way. In effect, we have found some time in a note to aid us in creating the look and feel we want. We can also use this "extra" time to create a better lead to prepare the lady for a figure. How does this apply to Round Dancing?

There are several figures in Round Dancing where a delay in taking a step allows the figure to develop more naturally and with greater ease.

For example, the Contra Check is a popular figure which when completed has the man's left foot forward and his right shoulder forward with the lady looking lovely and relaxed. But many dancers say they are twisted at the waist trying to get into position and the figure is far from relaxed and lovely. Will let's see what we can do to improve this wonderful figure. Using our twelve-inch ruler as a notional display of time, we will hear the beat begin on the one-inch mark. Now, instead of stepping forward, let's have the man over

the next four inches, lower into his left knee and rotate his hips and shoulders such that his right side will be forward in contra position. We are now at the five-inch mark and have our bodies in position for the contra check and are ready to step forward. The man will now step forward onto his left foot keeping his body in the lowered and contra position. This will take three inches so we are now at the eight-inch mark (one inch for the note plus four inches for the body preparation plus three inches for the step puts us at the eight-inch mark). We still have time (four inches) for the lady's head action before the note is complete. If desired, we could have spent more time in lowering and preparing the body before taking the forward step. By taking the time to lower and establishing contra position the common problem of feeling twisted is removed. By lowering and establishing contra before stepping the couples bodies are aligned - not twisted. By stepping as soon as the note begins, the bodies are aligned in a squared position as we move forward. Then to achieve contra position we twist our bodies. By taking the forward step later in the note, our bodies are prepared in ending or contra position and no additional body turning or twisting is required.

The Right Lunge is another example of where a step taken later in the musical note will allow for a smoother and more relaxed movement. With the Right Lunge, we will hear the note begin on the one-inch mark. Now the man will lower into his left leg over the next four inches maintaining good closed dance position. Staying in the lowered position, the man will push from his left foot moving his right leg sideways. We can keep our step constant of three inches to achieve a step to the right foot. We are now on the inch eight mark of music and still have time for the lady to create a head action. By stepping later we are able to lower and establish a good body frame before moving. If you wish, we have already established our ending body position before taking the step. This makes the figure look better and feel great.

Another great example is the Same Foot Lunge. To achieve this figure, both the man and lady require the right foot to be free. So let's start in closed dance position with lead feet free. When we hear the note start on the one-inch mark, the man will lead the lady to turn right face over the next two inches. The lady will turn right face to the man and take a weight change to her left foot. The man has not taken a weight change so both the man and lady have a right foot free. Now, the man will lower into his left leg and the lady will lower into her left leg over the next two inches. Now, the end position has been established and the man will step sideways onto his right foot and the lady will step back onto her right foot. The step will take three inches to complete. Now we are at the eighth inch mark on the ruler and still have time for the lady to create a head action.

The figures discussed show that delaying the taking of a step can allow the couple to establish a nicer looking figure which feels a lot better. To help delaying the taking of a step think first of setting up the end position of the step then take the step. By setting up the end position first, you will achieve the beautiful line and feel you want. Also, the lady will have a little time left in the note to add that head action she has may have been thinking about.

Happy dancing to all. Give your partner a treat - SMILE