

Listen to the Music

by Harold & Meredith Sears

One of the peculiarities of Round Dancing, as compared to most of the rest of the ballroom world, is the extent to which we listen to the cuer. Especially when we are learning new dances, new figures, and new steps—we listen hard to our cuer. We focus on the cues. What is that figure? What is he asking us to do? What is my next step? We listen so hard to the cues that we sometimes forget to listen to the music.



Maybe it's not forgetting, exactly. The cuer just said Hover Telemark, and I'm thinking, oh-oh, what's the difference between a Hover and a Hover Telemark, and before I get that figured out, he's cued a Natural Weave. I know what a Weave is, but this one goes to the right instead of the left. Wait a minute! It only turns right in the first measure; then I have to swoop back to the left again. All this stuff is swirling around in my head. It's not that I've forgotten to listen to the music; my brain is full—there's no room for the music.

But we must *make* room. The brain really is vast. We can carve out room for the music, along with the cues. The problem is that the cuer is telling us what to do. He is telling us what figure to execute, maybe which way to face, what step to take; but he is not telling us when to take that step. The cueing tells us *what* to do, but the music tells us *when* to do it.

A good cuer is naming those figures well ahead of the beat. He might even “stack” a couple of cues: “Natural Weave to a Top Spin;” and this cue might be spoken a full measure before the first step of that sequence should be taken. You can't do all that right when he says it. You need to wait until the music tells you to do it. We're dancing Foxtrot: slow, quick, quick; quick, quick, quick, quick; quick, quick, quick, quick. The cuer will cue the sequence well ahead, but we need to wait for that “slow” to appear in the music. Dance the Natural Weave to the music. Don't rush, fearful that you won't be able to fit the Top Spin in. The choreographer made this dance fit the music. Don't start the Top Spin until the seventh “quick.” Is it like the game *Simon Says*? The cuer isn't Simon; the music is Simon.



Listen to the music. Can you hear the beats: 1, 2, 3, 4; 1, 2, 3, 4; slow (1, 2) quick quick; slow quick quick. How

can you tell the difference between a 1 (the start of a slow) and a 4 (a quick)? The 1 is a “downbeat.” It is a little louder or somehow emphasized. Listen. Tune out the cues for a moment. Listen to the rhythm—slow, quick, quick. Can you hear it? Try to begin your step before the beat actually falls, so that your foot hits the floor on the beat. You do have latitude here, but if you don't start to move until the beat occurs, then your step will feel late.

After all this, can you simply *not* hear the beat: 1, 2, 3, 4? Then try hard to sense the movements of your partner and dance to *that* rhythm. If just one in a couple can hear the beat, that is often enough—if the other will attend and respond.

