

Practising your “Ready-Ands”

Why bother? Because the ability to confidently have your dancers and your musicians starting together, will build accuracy in the step and self-confidence on all sides.

But, how often do you get the chance to practise this skill outside of the class? Hardly ever. So, here’s an at-home process instead, that doesn’t require participants.

First, play a recorded dance track – start with a steady reel or jig. You are aiming at a “Ready-And” leading into bar 9. Count bars, from the first bar up to bar 6. Then, at the start of Bar 7, say “Ready”, and on bar 8 say “And”. (It doesn’t matter where the second syllable of Ready goes, it’s a throwaway syllable.)

Try this until you are happy with your rhythm and confidence. Then provide yourself with a short dance space - about 2 to 4 steps long is fine. With the same music track, count yourself in and say the “Ready-And”, then start a few steps of skip-change. Notice how you prepare yourself with the hop on the up-beat, after the “And”. Then try it with pas de basque and slip-step.

You can experiment with different styles of jigs and reels (pipe tunes, twosteps, reels with more or fewer fast notes) but the counting remains the same.

Once you have fast tempo sorted, switch to strathspey. Choose a strong one (Glasgow Highlanders, maybe). This time, count the bars “1 – and” , “2 – and”, with the “ands” falling on beat 3, halfway through the bar. (If you are dancing to it, the “and” will fall as you place the foot for the second step in the step-close-step-through pattern.) Count through bars 1 to 7. This time, the “Ready” falls at the start of bar 8, and the “And” in the middle of the bar, as for previous bars.

Then try a few travelling or setting steps after your “Ready-And” in bar 8. Again, notice how you prepare after the last “And”, before the next bar. Experiment with different strathspey styles too – song, slow air, polka tunes.

Now you have a feel for the rhythm and speed of the “Ready-And”. But when you’re faced with a class, can you remember how fast to say it? Many tutors have “go-to” tunes (a very familiar jig, reel and strathspey) that they can recall easily, and they find that running a few bars through their head gives them the desired speed. “My” reel is Flowers of Edinburgh. What will yours be?

Musicians will play the up-beat for dancing, starting after your “And”. In fast tempo, it’s half a bar; in strathspey, it’s on the last beat. They try to pick up the speed that you want, from the way you say “Ready-And”, but if you want the music unexpectedly slow it’s a good idea to warn them first 😊

I’ll be interested in any feedback from these suggestions. Do keep sending it!

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