

London West Coast Swing - 6 Week Musicality Course - Week 1

Musicality

Musicality has two main components, receptivity and creativity (Danceadvantage.net). "

Musical receptivity is ones ability to receive, comprehend, be sensitive to, and have a working knowledge of musical concepts like rhythm, tempo, phrasing, and even mood.

Musical creativity (or musical artistry) is the ability to connect with accompanying music, interpret it, or phrase and add movement dynamics that relate to music even in the absence of accompaniment, in a way that is unique or interesting.

Musicality in dance then might be considered a measure or degree to which a dancer is receptive *and* creative in his translation or rendering of music through movement. It is a key ingredient in a dancer's display of artistry."

Phrasing

If you look up phrasing you will find many different definitions but for our purposes here we will consider phrasing to be "a short passage or segment, often consisting of four measures or forming part of a larger unit." So for our purposes we will call a set of 8 beats a **measure**.

32 Beat Phrase (4 Sets of 8) – Contemporary Music – (Not Ur Girl – Katherine McPhee)

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8
2	2	3	4		5	6	7	8
3	2	3	4		5	6	7	8
4	2	3	4		5	6	7	8

48 Beat Phrase (6 Sets of 8) – Blues Music – (I Got the Blues)

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8	-----
2	2	3	4		5	6	7	8	-----
3	2	3	4		5	6	7	8	^^^^^^^^
4	2	3	4		5	6	7	8	-----
5	2	3	4		5	6	7	8	!!!!^^^^
6	2	3	4		5	6	7	8	----!!!!

The **bolded** 1, 3, 5, 7 in the music is considered the down beat.

The Down Beat (Take Me To The River)

Almost every song that we dance to in West Coast Swing the breaks on 1 or 5 of an 8 beat measure of music. If you dance on the down beat you will more likely to be "naturally" hitting it. By having your patterns beginning on the downbeats you will hear the break or phrase change coming a few beats early and will only have to pause or not start a pattern and they will hit the music.

If you were to dance on the upbeat you will have to interrupt the patterns or wait an extra count once they hear the break coming. The upbeat dancer will be forcing the breaks as it is more likely that they will be beginning a new pattern on the 8 and have to wait from 7 until the break on 1 or start and stop their patterns.

As far as the interpretation of music goes, it is in most cases more beneficial to the overall dance to dance on the downbeat.

Hitting the 1 in the pattern (measure) – 6 and 8 Beat Patterns

WCS patterns don't neatly fit into musical phrases. We dance six and eight count patterns, yet our songs have accents on the first beat of each eight beat phrase. Being able to acknowledge those accents when they occur in the middle of a pattern is thus an important skill to develop. This drill is the first step in acknowledging those accents; you will learn to dance your basic patterns while recognizing the start of each phrase.

But Before We Do

How do we count?

When learning our basic patterns we would count in either 6 or 8 beat counts to suit the pattern but here in musicality class we are more interested in the measure and phrase which consists of 8 and 32 or 48 respectively so it would not be wise to count in 6 beat patterns.

So we now have to revert to either counting only 8 beats as in 1,2,3...8 even if we are doing 6 beat patterns or go to Walk, Walk, Triple Step. If you choose one of these 2 methods, it will not take long and you will not be counting at all.

The Drill: Put on a WCS song and dance basic passes, sugar push and maybe whips but only count in one of the above methods (**Let It Burn – Ray Beadle**)

How do we know when the one is coming in the music?

1. The Beat

- a. If you were to listen closely to a song you will hear the emphasis on the 1 and the 5 but you will also hear a build in the music or vocals on the 7 and 8 of the measure.
 - i. **Chains – Tina Arena** – Shows the emphasis on both the 3,4 and 7,8 making it easy to pick up where the 1 is in the measure
- b. In a lot of the new acoustic versions of songs is there not a strong beat from a drum so you have to look at other instruments for the beat
 - i. **Tracks of My Tears** – This song only has a guitar – Listen for the down beat

2. The Lyrics

- a. Lyrics in a song are like that of a poem, so I think of a line of a poem the same as a line in a song starting on the 1 and ending on the 8. This will also help you determine where the 1 in the measure is. But not all vocals will start on the 1. Many start on the 7 building to the 8.
 - i. **Cruisin – Huey Lewis** – Mainly starts at the 1 or 2 of the phrase – easy to pick out the 1

The Drill: Put on a WCS song with clear phrases and that doesn't have tag-on and dance push breaks. Every time the 1 of the phrase occurs, simply point your finger in the air. The timing of the point will move as you continue this drill: if you start the first push break at the start of the phrase, your finger will point on count 1 of the first push break, count 3 of the second push break, and count 5 of the third push break, before returning to count 1 of the next push break. Don't try to actually count how many push breaks you've done; simply use the 1 of the phrase as your guide.

- **Cool My Heels – Nicki Yanofsky**
- **Change the World – Eric Clapton**

Bonus Variations: Once you are comfortable acknowledging the 1 of the phrase at various points in the pattern, try dancing to a mix of your basic six and eight count patterns. Again, simply point on the 1; your goal is to become comfortable acknowledging the start of the phrase regardless of where you are in the pattern.

Notes:

The Tonic

Also called keynote, in music, the first note (degree) of any [diatonic](#) (e.g., major or minor) [scale](#). It is the most important degree of the [scale](#), serving as the focus for both melody and [harmony](#).

Above is the dictionary version of the Tonic, but for us as dancers and in our reference, the Tonic will be the first note of the next phrase and will always be the same as the first note of the phrase before (except for the chorus). In simple terms it will be like starting over.

In a 32 beat phrase, the first beat will be the same as the 33rd beat (1st beat of the next phrase)

In a 48 beat phrase, the first beat will be the same as the 49th (1st beat of the next phrase)

The Drill: Put on a WCS song with clear phrases and that doesn't have tag-on. Step the first 8 beats to the WCS rhythm (Step, Step, Triple-Step, Triple-Step). On the 9th beat start to free style dance until the first beat of the next phrase starts. Go back to your 8 beat WCS rhythm pattern and repeat.

Pop or Stretch

When you listen to the phrasing of a song and you listen to the end of a measure, you will hear the music do 1 of 2 things. The end of the measure will either POP or it will STRETCH and the more you listen to the song the more you will pick this out.

Dash – Mya (Pop or Stretch)

Mapping the Song:

As mentioned above songs we dance to, the majority of the time, will either be of 32 Beat phrases or 48 beat phrases and will almost always follow a particular pattern.

The Breakdown: (When Something is Wrong – Joanna Cotten)

A majority of songs will have 3 parts to them; an introduction, the verse and the chorus.

The Introduction: The introduction is not a standard set of beats and can range anywhere from 8 beats to a full 32 and many times an off number like 20. This is a good time to get a feel for the music before you actually get into the song. (**Don't know Why – Norah Jones**)

The Verse: The verse (phrase) will usually consist of 32 beats or 48 beats and in many cases will be repeated twice. I do not mean the words will be repeated twice but the melody will come back with another 32 beats. So even if you have never heard the song before, if you listen closely to the first verse you will know what is coming in the second.

The Chorus: The chorus will usually happen twice in a song and it is a build up from the verse and in most cases will come on more powerful than the verse.

The Bridge:

If you listen closely to most songs you will hear a distinct difference between the verse and the chorus that will help you dictate how you dance to the song.

Team Exercise

You will be broken down into teams of 4 and asked to fill out a 32 beat phrase with patterns that will start on the 1 of the phrase and then repeat when the second phrase starts.

If time permits, we will do this for a 48 beat pattern as well, if not we will do it next week.

32 Beat song – **Walk On – Ruthie Foster**

48 Beat song – **I got a mind to go to Chicago – Jackie Payne**