

COMPETITION MUSIC OVERVIEW

Skippy Blair© 8-22-02

For more than 30 years, I have been talking about the "3-way" partnership - the leader - the follower - and the music. Sometimes the MUSIC can kill the partnership. That should NEVER be the case, in a competition. A standing ovation includes kudos for the music! Go back through your videos and find the standing ovations. Yes - the dance was great - but the MUSIC was something that inspired the dance. The dancers not only lived up to the music - but were inspired to go beyond the music and make it their own.

In other forms of dance competition, there is recognizable music that is considered "acceptable" for each particular dance. Given a level playing field, the top dancers will give a great show with great performances. West Coast Swing has the widest variety of music that is acceptable for West Coast Swing. Unfortunately, in an effort to impose very little restraints on the dance, we have neglected to place restraints on the MUSIC. Newer people on the dance scene should not be expected to have the perception to know the difference between good, bad, or **UNACCEPTABLE music for West Coast Swing**. More and more, our DJ's are studying the music they play and becoming experts in the field of swing music. In the meantime, until we all understand that **there is unacceptable music** - our dance is in trouble. A long time ago, everyone bragged that we could dance West Coast Swing to any music that played. That was a wonderful truth! That was also a time period before the onslaught of unacceptable music. The criteria for today's selection of dance music should be: **Only USE music that contributes to the dance** - not music that creates a challenge to perform. A competition requires three participants: A leader - a follower - and music that inspires them to dance. **The DJ and the Dancer are on the same team**. Together - they have the ability to produce a great performance. In social dancing - the DJ and the social dancer share a "relationship" that allows the dancer to get caught up in the music.

Today, there are still people who describe music by TEMPO - "It was too slow" - "It was too fast" - **Tempo does not identify the music**. It is the underlying rhythmic feel of Swing music that either tempts you to dance - (**sometimes insists that you dance**) - or - in some cases - suggests that you sit this one out. There is a "heart beat" deep in the rhythmic pulse of dance music. **It cries out to the dancer and brings them to their feet**. Good dance music does not make you scratch your head - or blink your eyes in an attempt to find out how to interpret what you hear. **Dance Identification walks hand in hand with MUSIC Identification. It really is time for everyone to acknowledge that music must be pre-selected and approved for competition**. There are hundreds of pieces of music - probably thousands - that are desirable for swing dancing. **A good start would just be to eliminate the impossible ones - just in case someone is tempted to play them**.

Many new dancers (and a few not so new) **have difficulty with music identification**. They ask how to tell a swing from a Cha-Cha or a Hustle. They wait until someone else dances - and then they get on the floor. **This is a period of learning** and eventually - if **someone tells them what the music is** - they will be able to distinguish one form of

music from another. If no one ever tells them the difference - the new dancer can only assume that ALL music is swing music. Most advanced dancers can handle whatever happens and it won't interfere with their capabilities. **The beginner and intermediate dancer - is cheated out of experiencing the "thrill" of the dance - if they are not conditioned by music that encourages the "shaping of the dance."**

No matter how much you enjoy dancing swing to "**Love Potion #9**" - **it is still a Cha-Cha**. Of course a Swing Dancer can swing to it - It might even be one of your favorite songs - but **hopefully NOT in a competition**. In a competition - an accomplished Cha-Cha dancer's swing dancing would be compromised. An accomplished dancer feels the rhythm of the dance - in their body before their foot leaves the floor. In this scenario Cha-Cha music can become a handicap. It is NOT a handicap if you are not a Cha-Cha dancer. The point is that a dancer should not be penalized just because they are accomplished in more than one dance. **Swing music would never be allowed in a Cha-Cha or Hustle competition.**

The main issue at the moment - is having to dance to music that does not contribute to the dance. Some music does not invite great dancing - but more than that - **some music does not ALLOW great dancing**. Just as every follower loves to dance with a leader who creates a balance of good leads with a little leeway for personal interpretation - so the music should do the same. Good music should provide a background that allows unlimited variety of interpretation. It all boils down to: "**Good SWING music - SWINGS!**"