

RHYTHM DETERMINES THE DANCE

A song's "Rhythm" is how we determine which dance (or dances) is most appropriate for a given song. In most Country Music the Bass and Drums are the backbone of the rhythm section. Usually, it's the way they are playing that will determine the more appropriate dance. For instance, the difference between West Coast Swing or Schottische versus East Coast Swing is tempo. The latter use a faster tempo than the former two. However, the difference between Swing music versus Schottische music is rhythm. If the Bass player is "walking", the song is usually more appropriate for Swing. Also, for Swing music, there will likely be an accent on the 1st and/or 3rd beat of each measure.

If the Drummer is accenting (hitting his drum harder on) the 2nd, and particularly the 4th beat of each measure that is 1—2, 3-4, 1-2-3-4 etc. like in "Im Only In It For The Love" by John Conlee or "One Step Forward" by Desert Rose Band, the song is usually more suitable for Schottische. If the accent is on the first and/or third beats, or there is no particular accent, then the song is probably more appropriate for Swing. Other rhythmic differences separate Two-Step music from music that would be more appropriate for Pony, and so forth. Don't confuse "downbeat" and "upbeat" with "accent". We always begin counting BPM's on the downbeat, and most music is accented on the downbeat, however some songs are accented on the upbeat. One good example is "Thank God I'm A Country Boy" by John Denver. We count the measures 1&2&3&4&, but the music sounds like 1&2&3&4&. This accenting on the upbeat makes the song perfect for some Line dances.

MUSIC PHRASING FOR DANCE

Music phrasing is how we tell how many measures (groupings of four beats (or three beats for Waltz)) comprise a verse or chorus in a song. This includes the "extra" measures that may occur before the first verse (intro), between completing one verse, and beginning the next (modulations, turnarounds, key changes, etc), and at the end of a song (outro, coda, fade). These groupings of measures are usually in fours, eights, twelves or sixteens (even in the Waltz) before the "extra" measures are taken into account. However, if music didn't allow for lots of variation (extra measures, etc), all of the songs would pretty much sound alike. For some dance categories in some competitions (and for some competitors for any dance category) music that contains none of the "extra" measures is preferred, because then a "routine" can be choreographed that will work perfectly for that dance, to different songs in any competition. We call this "marching". Of course, this concept of no "icing" pretty much eliminates 99% of the danceable Country music ever recorded. Therefore, when we speak of phrasing, we only consider the groupings of measures as they relate to one cycle of the step pattern for certain dances. For some dances, such as the Two-Step, music phrasing is unimportant since while the music is in counts of four beats, the dance does not have a four or eight beat step pattern, and is only in phrase every 24 counts. Music phrasing does affect the Waltz and Schottische however, because two measures of music are necessary to complete one cycle of their step patterns, so where there is only one extra measure, the relationship between the rhythm of the music and cycle of the step pattern becomes reversed.

THE "TIME" IN "IN TIME"

Written (sheet) music uses a fraction (called a "Time Signature") at the beginning of a song to let musicians know what values to give the measures and notes. On those occasions when the time changes during the song, another time signature will signify that at the point where the change occurs. Hence, when a song is supposed to change from a polka rhythm to a waltz rhythm, there is a new Time Signature on the music sheet at that point which informs the musician to make that change. The most common time signatures in Country Music are 2/4, 3/4, 4/4 and 6/8. The top number tells how many beats are in each measure and the bottom number tells what kind of note gets one beat. 3/4 & 6/8 are Waltz signatures. Up to about 150 BPM, most Waltzes are written in 3/4 time, or 3 beats to a measure with a quarter note getting one beat. Faster Waltzes are written in 6/8 time, or 6 beats to a measure with an eighth note getting one beat.

Dance Accents on Counts 1, 3:

Two Step
Triple Two (can also be 2 & 4)
Nightclub

Dance Accents on Counts 2, 4, 6, 8:

Polka
West Coast Swing
East Coast Swing

Dance Accents on Counts 2(&), 5(&):

Waltz
Dance Accents on Counts 1, 5:
Cha-Cha

