

# "COMPETITION MUSIC OVERVIEW"

© Skippy Blair - 8-02 - Update 06-07 - 3-08

For more than 40 years, I have been talking about the "3-way" partnership - the **leader** - the **follower** - and the **music**. Sometimes the MUSIC can interfere with the partnership. That should NEVER be the case in a competition. Any standing ovation always includes **kudos for the music!** Go back through your videos and find the standing ovations. Yes - the dance was great - but the choice of MUSIC always added something "extra" to the dance. The dancers not only lived up to the music - but were inspired to use their creativity and expertise to make the audience hear things in the music that they would NOT have heard without observing the dance!

In competition for ALL styles of dance, there is specific music that is screened and considered "acceptable" for competition. Given a level playing field, all top level dancers will give great performances. **West Coast Swing** has the most variety of music that is deemed acceptable for the dance. Unfortunately, in an effort to impose little or no restraints on the dance, **we have avoided placing restraints on the MUSIC**. New arrivals on the swing dance scene cannot be expected to have the ability to tell the difference between questionable, or **unacceptable music for West Coast Swing**. Increasingly, our DJ's are studying the music they play and becoming experts in their field. In the meantime, until everyone understands that **certain music is unacceptable** - our dance is in trouble. It used to be that we bragged about being able to dance West Coast Swing to any music that was played. That is still a wonderful truth today! That thought was prevalent before the **emergence of unacceptable music**. The criteria for today's music selection should be this: **Only use music that contributes to the dance. There is no virtue in playing music that creates a challenge for the dancers. The word "challenge" is the "Key Word" here. It should not challenge you to dance.**

**A competition requires three participants: A Leader - a Follower - and Music that inspires them to dance. DJs must maintain a relationship with the Dancers that keeps them all on the same page. Great music encourages great performances.**

Some people describe music only by TEMPO - "It was too slow" - "It was too fast." **Tempo does not identify the music.** The underlying rhythmic feel of dance music should invite us to dance - (**sometimes insist that we dance**). The absence of that feeling sometimes suggests that we should sit this one out. **There is a "heart beat" deep in the rhythmic pulse of good dance music. It "cries out" to the dancer and brings them to the floor.** Good dance music does not make you scratch your head - or blink your eyes. **Dance Identification works hand in hand with MUSIC Identification.** It is time for everyone to wake up to the fact that music should be pre-selected and approved for competition. There are hundreds of pieces of music - (more like thousands) - which are desirable for Swing dancing. A good start would be simply to eliminate the unacceptable ones - just so that our newer DJ's are not tempted to play them.

Many new dancers (and a few not so new) tell me they 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 period of learning eventually leads to dance identification - but **ONLY if someone (hopefully the DJ) tells them what the music is**. If no one ever tells them the difference, the newer dancer assumes that ALL music played at a Swing dance is Swing music. Most advanced dancers can handle whatever music plays without having it interfere with their capabilities. However, beginner and Intermediate dancers are cheated out of experiencing the "thrill" of the dance - **if they are not conditioned by music that encourages the shaping that instills the "thrill" of the dance**.

**No matter how much you enjoy dancing Swing to Hanzel Martinez's "Love Potion #9" - it is still a Cha-Cha**. Of course a Swing Dancer can dance 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. Good dancers feel the rhythm of the dance in their bodies before their feet move. In this scenario, Cha-Cha music becomes a handicap. (It won't seem like a handicap, unless you know how to dance Cha-Cha). The point is that a dancer should not be penalized for being accomplished in more than one dance. **Would Swing music be allowed in a Cha-Cha or Hustle competition? Of course not!**

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

Respectfully submitted for all who would listen and learn.  
God Bless and have a great day,  
Skippy  
[Skippy@skippyblair.com](mailto:Skippy@skippyblair.com)