

A Primer on Freestyle Creation

Expert panel explains the basics

By Jennifer O. Bryant

You don't have to be a maestro to know a good marriage of dressage and music when you hear and see it. The music draws you in and stirs your emotions, and you feel as if you're watching a dance, not a technical routine with background music.

Underpinning that seamless performance is, as you'd expect, a lot of attention to detail—and yes, a lot of technical savvy. In their “Fabulous Freestyles” presentation at the 2009 Adequan/USDF National Convention in Austin, TX, three noted freestyle experts gave an overview of the three main considerations in creating a freestyle. Here are some of the key points.

Music Selection

Riders and freestyle designers frequently begin by choosing music. The process starts with an understanding of how music and horses' gaits work together, said Ann Guptill, a dressage

sage instructor/trainer and owner of Equestrian Arts Productions LLC. Key concepts are:

Rhythm: in a gait, the footfall sequence; in music, the sequence of beats.

Tempo: rate of repetition of the beats (speed) of the gait or piece of music.

In equine terms, lengthenings and extensions tend to quicken, while lateral movements frequently have a slightly slower tempo, Guptill said.

Music tempo is usually measured in terms of beats per minute (BPM). The trick in freestyle is to, as closely as possible, match the tempo of the music to the tempo of the horse. A metronome and video analysis help the freestyle designer to assess the horse's gaits and to find suitable music.

Besides tempo compatibility, good freestyle music complements the horse's size, type, and way of going. A big warmblood stallion has a

completely different presence than a dainty pony mare. Music that suits one might seem ridiculous with the other.

Then there is the elusive enhancement factor: As Guptill described, the right music makes the horse's way of going look better than without music playing, for some intangible reason. You'll probably know it when you see it.

The rider needs to like the music, too, Guptill pointed out. It doesn't always work out that a song you love works for your horse; but if you hate country music, don't use it for your freestyle even if it would be OK for your horse. There is bound to be at least one musical genre that you like and that suits your mount.

Edits may be necessary to create your freestyle score, but the result shouldn't be choppy, Guptill said. The finished freestyle track should sound cohesive and pleasant on its own. And appropriate freestyle music contains variations that lend themselves to transitions, movements, gait changes, or other choreographic elements.

Today, finding music is easier than ever before, thanks to the Internet. Downloading sites, such as Amazon.com and iTunes, allow previews and instant purchasing. Many libraries have extensive music collections. Bor-



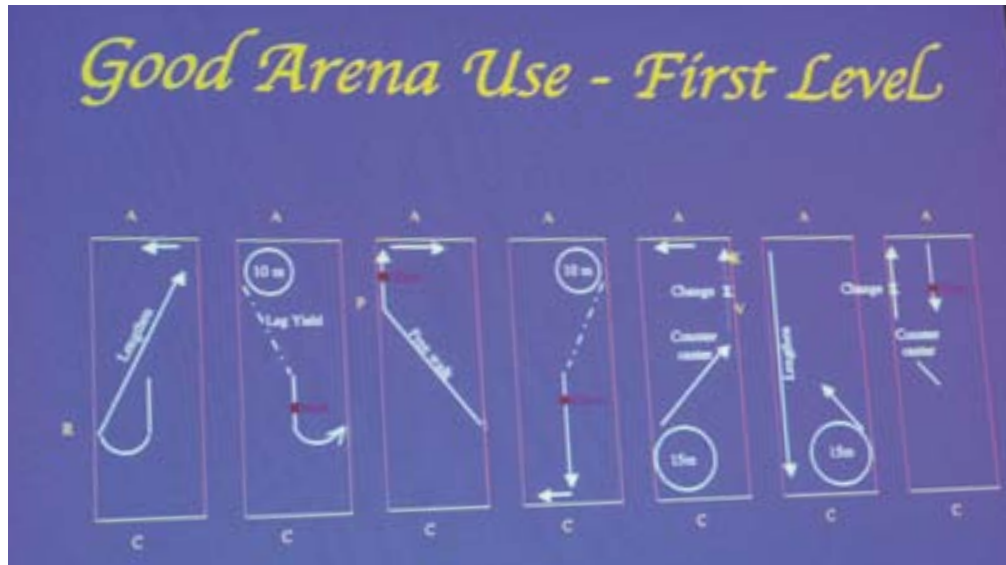
USDF ILLUSTRATION

ders and other retailers that sell CDs frequently allow shoppers to preview selections. Listen to the radio, and pay attention to the musical scores of movies and TV shows, Guptill suggested.

Choreography

Terry Ciotti Gallo of Klassic Kur tackled the subject of designing the freestyle routine. Just as getting a great score on a dressage test entails knowing the rules and what the judge is looking for, creating winning freestyle choreography requires understanding the elements and the criteria, Gallo explained.

Start by visiting usdf.org and examining the freestyle score sheets, Gallo advised. Learn what elements must be included at the level you plan to show, and whether those elements must be performed on both reins. Understand the difference among *figures* (circles, serpentine, and the like), *movements* (leg-yield, shoulder-in, pirouettes, half-pass, piaffe/pas-



BALANCED CHOREOGRAPHY: Graphic depicts example of good use of the arena in a freestyle

sage, and so on), *transitions* (between gaits, paces, or movements), and *patterns* (combinations of the above). Movements from lower levels may be included, but those from higher levels are forbidden—so no flying changes at Second Level, for instance.

The concept of difficulty is one that some freestyle competitors misinterpret, Gallo said. In freestyle, difficulty refers to performing an element in such a way that it's more challenging than the way it's done in the standard dressage test. An extra-step

Your Smart Farm™ Headquarters

We Make Your Farm More Intelligent

A SmartStall™ is a ComfortStall™ ...
Choose the very latest generation of stall flooring!

Don't settle for competitors' inferior components (carpet pad or undulating tube mattress & fabric based topcovers). Our exclusive GEN II anti-fatigue flooring is THE ONLY system on the market proven to deliver that 'Spring-in-your-Step' benefit coupled with the unmatched durability of our IronClad™ 2-ply rubber topcover. **Improve Your Horses' Performance...** minimize fatigue... provide extra cushioning... insulate against heat & cold... increase circulation... stimulate sole/bar/frog.

IronClad Topcover:
3-layer pliable rubber sheeting
Cannot stretch, wrinkle or tear!
100% waterproof & sterilizable.
Endorsed by Cornell Vet Hospital
Over 500 installations since 2008
with 100% satisfaction
15+ year longevity

Made in the USA

Engineered Padding:
Superior medical grade
Laminated for structural stability
Dense...Pliable...
Waterproof





"This footing is amazing,"
said Debbie MacDonald.

"It's even better than Aachen (Germany), and Aachen is pretty wonderful. You can ride on it in the rain, after the rain, and there are no puddles. The drainage system is like nothing I've ever seen."

Minutes after monsoon rains ended in Hong Kong, Olympic athletes were riding thanks to EquiBase™ Arena System's innovative drainage design and world-class materials.

For Details Visit Our Website at SmartFarmHQ.com

Toll Free 1-888-307-0855

The Secret is IN
AND UNDER the Sand™

EQUIBASE™

ARENA SYSTEMS INTERNATIONAL



TYPHOON TESTED!

Footing Secrets...
The SAND is EVERYTHING... its type, shape, grain size, durability. Call us to discuss affordable quartz/silica availability in your region. Olympic footing is made with properly blended long lasting Quartz/Silica sands and High Performance footing additives.

Talk to us before buying OttoSport...we offer updated engineering & new molds all for a better price!

half-pass is more difficult, for example; so are flying changes ridden on a curved instead of a straight line. Do not confuse difficulty with performing elements above the level, which, as we've mentioned, is forbidden.

An increased degree of difficulty earns a higher score—if the element is done well, that is. Done poorly, it'll cost you. Ramp up the difficulty only for those elements your horse shines at, so you show off his strong suits. For elements he finds more challenging—and no horse is stellar at everything—keep the difficulty level low.

Refer to your freestyle score sheet for the criteria the judge will use to assess your choreography: use of arena, inventiveness, design cohesiveness, balance, ingenuity, and creativity. Use of arena means that you make use of the entire space in a balanced fashion. Inventiveness, ingenuity, and creativity refer to choreography that's "not test-like," as the saying goes—that's interesting to watch. Directly combin-

ing the various elements is one way to achieve this, as is using uncommon lines, like short diagonals. Cohesiveness means that the pattern unfolds in a logical manner; the judge and spectators aren't left to wonder where you're going or what you're trying to accomplish. Balance is spending roughly equal amounts of time on each rein—although, as Gallo pointed out, mirror-like symmetry isn't necessary to achieve balance.

Musical Interpretation

Guptill discussed the importance of selecting music that contains inherent variations that lend themselves to choreographic interpretation. In her part of the presentation, Alexandra Howard explained some of the finer points of interpretation and music editing.

Changes in loudness may suggest bolder moves (such as extensions) or softer ones (such as a canter-walk

transition). A phrase with a gliding feel may lend itself to half-pass or another lateral movement. You may have chosen two or more pieces of music (for cohesiveness, related in some way by genre, style, performer, or the like) to suit your horse's tempos, so you may find yourself using the edits between pieces to make transitions between gaits or movements.

The music-editing process itself requires a lot of counting, Howard said. For instance, you'd need to figure out how many strides your horse takes to canter through a corner or to trot a ten-meter circle; then you'd need to count the beats of music for those sections to determine how long the music must play for those elements.

An edited freestyle piece sounds cohesive and pleasing when "splicing" of different pieces of music flows naturally and seamlessly, without sudden changes that grate on the ear. Edit to music's inherent phrasing: For the common four-beat rhythm, for example, don't interrupt the phrase before the fourth beat or it'll sound as if you hit the off switch too soon.

The finished choreography should be as long as necessary to include the elements you wish to show, but excess padding isn't necessary: At the USDF levels (Fourth Level and below), there is no minimum time requirement. Even at the FEI levels, the minimum time is just four and a half minutes until you reach Grand Prix, when the minimum jumps to five and a half minutes. And the maximum time allowed for all levels is five minutes except for Grand Prix (six minutes).

With music selected and choreography planned, it's time for the music-editing process. Using as a reference EquiChord's book *Rhythm Riding: A Guide to Riding with Music* (Trafalgar Square), Howard outlined some of the major music-editing software programs, or "digital audio workstations."

A top pick for PC users is Sound Forge Audio Studio (sonycreativesoftware.com/audiostudio), which earned praise for relative ease of use, variety of features, and low price. It's also

Meet the Experts

Ann Guptill is a USDF-certified instructor/trainer through Fourth Level and a certification faculty member. She is a Pan American Games team silver medalist and the owner of the freestyle-design firm Equestrian Arts Productions LLC in East Haddam, CT. Her freestyle clients have included Pan Am Games gold medalist Christopher Hickey.

Freestyles designed by Floridian **Terry Ciotti Gallo's** *Klassic Kur* have appeared in Olympic Games, World Equestrian Games, and FEI World Cup Dressage Finals, to name a few. Gallo has 30 years of experience in sports, dance, and music. She is the USDF Freestyle Committee chair and a volunteer for the freestyle-based Challenge of the Americas, a fundraiser for breast-cancer research.

Veteran competitor and freestyle creator and performer **Alexandra Howard** has represented the US numerous times in international dressage competition. She is a USEF "S" dressage judge and a member of the USDF "L" Education Program faculty. Among her areas of specialty are rider biomechanics and the dressage seat. She lives in California.



MUSICAL TRIO: Guptill, Howard, and Gallo

the only program reviewed that can remove vocals.

For Mac users, the top-rated program was Apple's own GarageBand, part of the iLife suite of programs that comes bundled on new Macs and also can be purchased separately (apple.com/ilife). *Rhythm Riding* says

that GarageBand has a slightly higher learning curve but is still fairly easy to master and feature-rich.

For the USDF freestyle score sheets and many other freestyle resources, visit usdf.org; select Education/Other Programs/Musical Freestyle. Have fun! ▲

More Freestyle Resources

Let the Show Begin" is a freestyle get-started guide from the USDF Freestyle Committee. Download the PDF at usdf.org; select Education/Other Programs/Musical Freestyle.

Pas de deux and quadrille are thriving segments of the freestyle world. Learn more at usdf.org. While you're at it, check out the new USDF quadrille handbook, *Why Do Quadrille?*

If you love freestyle and quadrille, you won't want to miss the annual Challenge of the Americas, a competition and gala event that raises funds for the Breast Cancer Research Foundation. This year's event is March 13 at the International Polo Club Palm Beach (FL). Info and tickets at challengeoftheamericas.com.

The Dressage Foundation's Dancing Horse Fund awards grants to equestrian groups (including USDF GMOs) to support freestyle education and participation. Info and application at dressagefoundation.org.

GREYSTONE *Get on with life!*

NOW AVAILABLE **ARENA RAKE PRO**

INTRODUCTORY OFFER **\$1299***

Flip down side grabber eliminates edge buildup

Powder in contact treads

Easily adjusted Steel Tires

Highly adjustable steel comb

ARENA \$999

- 7 foot comb width
- 2 Year warranty
- Save time grooming your arena
- Aerates and levels, providing an optimum riding surface

Visit our website to see a demonstration www.greystoneamerica.com

Tel: 2068173459

*Purchasing

TIME TO NOMINATE CANDIDATES

April 15, 2010
is the deadline for nominations for:
Participating Member Delegates in All Regions

June 1, 2010
is the deadline for nominations for:
USDF Vice-President
USDF Secretary
Regional Director in Regions 1, 3, 5, 7 and 9

Nominations for USDF Vice-President, USDF Secretary and Regional Director in Regions 1, 3, 5, 7 and 9 will also be accepted from the floor of the Board of Governors meeting at the annual convention in Jacksonville, Florida.

E-mail all nominations to nominations@usdf.org.