

The “Wow” Factor

Take your freestyle to the next level with these music and editing tips

BY TERRY CIOTTI GALLO



NOVEMBER'S "FREESTYLE CONNECTION" ("Got Music?") covered freestyle music selection. But it's not enough just to pick the right music. Creating a freestyle with that "wow" effect takes a little more know-how. I'll cover those concepts in this article.

Music 101

Orchestras have a large range of sound, or dynamics, from a solo instrument to the swelling sound of the entire ensemble. Consider these in creating your freestyle. The music itself can vary in sound level: very soft (*pianissimo*), soft (*piano*), loud (*forte*), or very loud (*fortissimo*). It can change suddenly from one degree of loudness to another, or there may be a gradual increase (*crescendo*) or decrease (*decrescendo*) in volume. There are so many variations that you'd need a music degree to recognize them all.

A *crescendo* or a *forte* sequence can work well in expressing a powerful movement, such as *tempi* changes or an extension. Soft or gentle sequences may be appropriate for quieter movements, such as circles or *pirouettes*. Listen to your music repeatedly and it will begin to speak to you. You may even hear something in the music that suggests a leg yield or a half-pass.

If you have chosen rock music or selections by a small combo, you may not get the same dynamic range afforded by a larger group of instruments. In such cases, interpreting the musical phrasing is the most effective approach: When you hear a change in the music, you change the choreography. Doing so helps to give the freestyle its dance-like quality.

Ideally, your freestyle music allows for interpretation through both dynamics and phrasing. For example, a big cymbal crash might signal a phrase change. At the onset of the crash, you begin an extension, which continues through a *crescendo* or a *forte*. This is the kind of interpretation that gives the audience (and, one hopes, the judges) goose bumps. Achieving the effect requires time, patience, and good homework, but the results are worth the effort.

Music or Choreography First?

Some riders prefer to edit their music first and then to structure the choreography within that frame. Others develop the ride first and then have an editor cut the music around their choreography. Both methods have advantages and disadvantages.

FEI-level competitors frequently choreograph first. One benefit to this approach is that the rider can structure the freestyle to maximize the scores for

difficulty and choreography. Another is that the lack of required repetition takes a great deal of pressure off both rider and horse. Furthermore, choreographing first significantly reduces the time required to complete the project.

The disadvantage to this approach is cost. Unless you are also a skilled music editor, you will need to hire one. It takes more time to edit around existing choreography than to edit based on musical integrity alone. That difference will be reflected in the fee.

The music-first approach works quite well for the lower levels, with their fewer required elements. The advantages are musical integrity and cost. With the editing done first, music cuts are made solely based on the flow of the piece or pieces. A professional music editor could do the work in only a few hours, thereby minimizing costs. This method also works well for computer-literate do-it-yourselfers.

A few other musical tips: Aim to show interpretation at gait transitions and at the beginning and end of lengthenings by ending on the music. Include at least one or two other instances in which the dressage movement changes when the music phrase changes. This is an impressive start for the lower levels, although more sophistication is expected at the FEI levels.

Changes in movements do not need to occur at the letter, so there is plenty of leeway in using the music-first approach. There are some catches, however. First, make sure that changes between elements still occur at logical places and that all patterns will be clearly recognizable by the judge. Second, perform movements for long enough that the judge can register them. At the FEI levels, the recommended distance is at

MUSICAL TIPS FOR A BETTER FREESTYLE

The Perfect Music

- The music tempo matches the tempo of the corresponding gait.
- All selections are connected through genre, style, or theme.
- Choices are suitable for the horse and for the level.
- You enjoy it.
- The final composition is smoothly edited.
- Selections allow you to show interpretation.

Minimum Interpretation

- The first halt is on the music.
- The first move-off after the halt is on the music.
- The final halt or salute occurs on the final chord of the music.
- The horse changes gaits when the music selection changes.
- Extensions occur at a bolder part of the music.
- The freestyle includes two additional instances of phrasing.

least twelve meters. At Fourth Level and below, in which movements may be less confirmed, a distance of eighteen meters or more is suggested.

The Blended Approach

If you have given yourself lots of time to complete your project, you can start with a rough draft of your music, try your choreography within it, and then go back to the musical drawing board to adjust any parts that are not working.

In order to create a freestyle in this manner, you must have an idea as to how many footfalls it takes for your horse to complete each part of your pattern or to cover certain distances (a circle, a lengthening, a corner, and so on). Armed with this information, and assuming that the beats of the music match his footfalls, you can begin to choreograph on paper while listening to the music.

If there is any disadvantage to using the music-first or the blended approach, it is here. It takes patience to create the initial choreography using the footfall-counting system and to resist the temptation to rush through the process in your eagerness to try riding the pattern.

Now, test your theories. Have someone videotape you riding the patterns without musical accompaniment. This will al-

low you to concentrate on execution without distractions. Then watch the footage with the music playing. If the coordination between the music and your choreography seems to be working in your living room, do a test ride. If the freestyle works, give yourself a pat on the back; you've earned it! If you are happy with the overall flow of the choreography but want to make adjustments here and there, try re-editing the parts of the music in question. This process of alternating between music and choreography requires time and patience but yields excellent results.

Editing

If you wish to tackle the editing yourself, you will need a computer and software that are up to the task. Before you make any purchases, explore your needs carefully and then start researching music-editing software. A number of programs are available and offer various options and capabilities for PC or Mac users. Check out computer stores, computer magazines, online search engines, and instrumental-music stores. A good place to start is the "Music Editing Software" section on music-software-reviews.com.

Basic editing programs offer audio only and have as few as two stereo tracks. Some of these simple programs

are free and downloadable from the Web. Higher-end programs may offer audio and MIDI, unlimited tracks, and a multitude of plug-ins. The more features, the higher the cost of the program. To create a freestyle, you'll need software that can do at least the following: "rip" (import) music directly from an audio CD, change tempos, edit, and convert the final composition to AIFF (Audio Interchange File Format) so that you can burn your own CDs to take to shows.

A few editing tips: Good editing has a clean sound. Avoid long fade-ins, fade-outs, or cross-fades as well as abrupt cuts. Above all, be sure that the final composition has integrity and that there is nothing distracting to the ear.

It's a Wrap

The category of music choice and music interpretation has the highest coefficient on the entire USDF freestyle score sheet. This category comprises suitability, cohesiveness, editing, phrasing, and dynamics. The USDF Glossary of Judging Terms defines suitability as "music expressing the horse and his gaits" and cohesiveness as "music linked by genre, theme or orchestration." Although there is no specific mention of music matching the tempo of the horse's gaits, it is a major part of interpretation because it is the most noticeable feature that demonstrates a link between music and movement. (For more, see "Got Music?," November.)

Editing is an often-overlooked part of musical composition. Good editing is the polish—the fine-tuning of a freestyle program. Phrasing and dynamics are the second part of interpretation and, along with tempo matching, are the aspects that give a great freestyle the feeling of a dance. Putting all of these elements together will give you a memorable freestyle that wows the audience. ▲

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