

# So You Think You Can Dance?

*Our create-a-freestyle series continues. Part 2: choreography.*

By Sally Silverman

When adult-amateur dressage rider Betsy Juliano decided that she wanted to ride a freestyle with her horse, Wild-est Dream, she soon set the process in motion. As we explained in this series' introduction last month, Juliano, 55, of Middlefield, OH, connected with

building the choreography of Juliano's planned Fourth Level freestyle.

## Choosing the Elements

"I listened to the flow of the music and imagined the possibilities," says Gallo, of Winter Springs, FL. "Then I cho-

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low a horse to complete a movement, she can copy it so that it repeats.

## Filling the Toolbox

While she is working on music for a client, Gallo encourages the rider to try different movements. "I may ask the rider if they have ever done a transition from extension to pirouette, for example. I like to throw out some ideas so the rider can be preparing the movements way ahead of time," she says. That way, the required tools are at the ready when the choreography begins to take shape.

For those riders who create their own freestyles, Gallo recommends beginning the choreographic process by reviewing the appropriate score sheet, which lists the required elements for that level of freestyle. At Fourth Level, for example, Juliano is required to show 20 meters each of collected and extended walk; trot and canter half-passes; shoulder-in; extensions at trot and canter; four-tempi flying changes of lead; and working pirouettes.

Build on the required elements by then considering what nonrequired, permitted movements the horse can do well; such extras add variety and perhaps a level of difficulty to the freestyle, Gallo says. At Fourth Level, a good example is three-tempi changes, which are allowed but not required.

Last, and equally important, know what you can't do (piaffe and passage are no-no's at Fourth Level, for instance).

"Before you bake the cake," says Gallo, "make sure you know your ingredients."

As Gallo brainstormed choreographic possibilities, she engaged Juliano's trainer, George Williams, in the conversation.



DRY RUN: Betsy Juliano practices riding her freestyle choreography while designer Terry Ciotti Gallo (right, in corner) videotapes and trainer George Williams looks on

noted freestyle designer Terry Ciotti Gallo to help make her dances-with-horses dream come true.

The women's first step was to select the music. Drawing on video of "Wilhelm's" gaits, Juliano's musical tastes, and Gallo's massive music library, they arrived at a compilation that Gallo calls "Mister Soul"—a medley of R&B tunes by Barry White and Earth, Wind & Fire, plus some jazz pieces. Now they were ready to begin the process of

reographed based on what the music could allow me to do."

Musical phrasing, natural highs and lows, and other elements help to suggest appropriate gaits and movements. When needed, Gallo can also manipulate the music, thanks to her 30 years of experience editing music—a process that's made somewhat easier today with music-editing software. For example, if she needs to make a section of music longer in order to al-

"I wanted to make sure that we presented the movements in a way that Betsy would be comfortable," Williams says. "It's always a challenge to present a degree of difficulty that doesn't overface the rider, in a pattern that the rider feels comfortable with."

Williams's input influenced Gallo's placement of the movements and also helped to give Juliano on-the-fly options regarding the difficulty. "For example, the flying changes aren't on a straight line but on a loop, so that she can make the loop deeper or more shallow depending on how the horse is going on a particular day and how much she wants to push the envelope," Williams explains. "Similarly, he can have very good half-passes, so we chose lines that allowed the half-pass to really develop and show them at their best."

### To His Best Advantage

Using the required movements as building blocks for the final routine, Gallo considers how she can use those moves to play to the horse's strengths: "If a horse is better at short, quick lines, for example, we might put in a half-pass zigzag. With a horse that can maintain a lovely half-pass, we would want to do them on long lines." The horse's ability will dictate how steep Gallo can make the half-pass, and "I also need to know if it is the same for the trot and the canter."

Shoulder-in is another example. If it's not very strong, it may have to stay on the rail. A horse with a really strong shoulder-in can perform it away from the wall for an added level of difficulty.

Together Juliano, Williams, and Gallo discussed Wilhelm's strong

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suits. "We talked about what to lead with and what to do more of," recalls Juliano. "George and Terry both have a lot of experience, so I followed their lead and threw in my own two cents."

Gallo, for one, gives a lot of consideration to elasticity. If your horse can go from extension to collection easily, showcase that in your freestyle, she says. Likewise, a rider whose horse can perform beautiful tempis on a curved line may want to introduce that level of difficulty into the choreography.

"These are the questions that I ask my client," Gallo says. "Once we have figured out what the horse can do, we listen to the flow of the music and loosely place the movements."

Showing off a horse's strengths is not the same as hiding weaknesses, Gallo warns: "That can send up a red flag." She advises minimizing a weakness instead. "In other words, if the horse swings from side to side in his flying changes, don't do them down center line toward the judge. At Second Level, keep the lateral movement

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on the rail if your horse still needs the support. For a small horse or pony, you don't need to lengthen across the whole diagonal, so plan to do it on the short diagonal."

## Establishing the Pattern

"Once we had the music, the rest happened pretty quickly," says Gallo. "I drew up the choreography, including a couple of combinations of shoulder-in to half-pass. The horse did well keeping them off the wall, so we took them off the wall."

Gallo doesn't believe that the entire freestyle has to be symmetrical, with mirror-image sequences; but she does strive for balance.

"I am looking to make it interesting, so it doesn't look like a test. It's an opportunity to let the horse do what he does best, with the lines where he looks good and some creativity," she says.

For Wilhelm, Gallo did want the trot patterns to be symmetrical. She chose to put the first extension on a long diagonal so that Juliano could show off her horse's lateral work going toward the judge. Then, "In order to present it off the other rein, we had two choices. We could put the next extension down the long side, but I thought that was boring. Since this horse is so elastic, we did the extensions from H to B to K and then did the same half-pass pattern off the other rein. He does the walk from M to E to F so there is a sense of balance in the arena."

Gallo also chose to include three-tempi because Wilhelm does them so well out of a pirouette—a transition that adds not only a level of difficulty but also visual interest.

However, don't get too caught up in increasing difficulty, Gallo cautions. "The difficulty score has a coefficient of two. But it is better to execute cleanly than to add difficulty."

## Making Adjustments

With the choreography on paper, Gallo and Juliano met to review it and made some adjustments. For one, Gal-

lo originally had Juliano going from B to H for the pirouette, but it wasn't working, so she repositioned the pirouette at G.

"Things are not written in stone," says Gallo. "If a rider is having difficulty for any reason, we change things around. Sometimes I am involved; sometimes the rider does it on her own."

After the pattern was finally set, Gallo videotaped the ride. (When she is not able to be on site, she asks her client to ride the choreography in its entirety and send her the DVD.)

"Once I had the video, I was able to tailor the music to match Betsy on Wilhelm. It has to be timed so that when the horse is ready for the first step of the extension, the music is right there for him. Then it goes 'Pow!'"

For Juliano, the first time she saw the video footage of the ride proved very revealing. "I liked the music a lot when I initially heard it, but I thought the choreography needed to be more exciting. When I watched the videotape, I could see that it was very robust."

As with the music, it's important to Gallo that the rider enjoys the choreography.

"Wilhelm has great half-passes and tremendous extensions," says Juliano. "The trot work starts with a right half-pass to the quarter line to a left shoulder-in. That's really fun. He's a really big horse, but when he is forward and through he is very elegant, and it's fun to ride that."

After the music is edited to match the choreography, Gallo puts a voice-over on the musical track, narrating the movements. She explains: "I want the rider to know what is supposed to happen when so that we can have good music interpretation."

Then the practice begins. ▲

*Next month:* Putting it all together.

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