

# QUICK GUIDE TO WRITING CHOREOGRAPHY

THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO APPROACHING CHOREOGRAPHY. IF YOU FIND A DIFFERENT WAY THAT WORKS FOR YOU, USE THAT; THIS IS JUST ONE WAY TO HELP YOU GET STARTED.

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## I. SONG SELECTION

- A. FIND YOUR SONG SELECTION. IF YOU HAVE A CERTAIN **STYLE** YOU WANT TO DO, MAKE SURE YOUR SONG FITS THAT STYLE. SOMETIMES IT WORKS TO GO AGAINST THE TRADITIONAL FEEL, SUCH AS DOING BALLET TO RAP, BUT UNLESS YOU ARE VERY FIRM IN YOUR IDEA, STICK WITH THE SAME STYLE OF CHOREOGRAPHY WITH THE SAME STYLE OF SONG.
  - I. AS A BEGINNING WRITER, STAY AWAY FROM SONGS THAT ARE NOT IN 4/4. THAT IS, IF THE SONG IS NOT FELT MOSTLY IN SETS OF 8, DON'T USE IT. IF THE SONG IS NOT IN 4/4, IT IS PROBABLY IN 3/4, IF IT IS A POPULAR SONG, AND WRITING IN THIS METER IS DIFFICULT FOR BEGINNERS.
- B. CHECK **LYRICS** OF YOUR SELECTION. IT IS AGAINST THE RULES IN ALL COMPETITIONS AND/OR PERFORMANCES TO HAVE EXPLICIT OR SUGGESTIVE LYRICS. IF YOUR SONG HAS JUST ONE OR TWO INSTANCES OF THIS, MAYBE THERE IS AN APPROPRIATE RADIO EDIT YOU CAN FIND, OR YOU COULD FADE OUT THE WORDS WITH A MUSIC EDITING PROGRAM. THOUGH, IT IS BEST JUST TO STAY AWAY FROM ANY IFFY SITUATIONS.
- C. CHECK THE **SONG DURATION**. MAKE SURE YOUR SONG FITS THE TIME RESTRICTIONS OF YOUR PERFORMANCE. USUALLY, THERE IS GOING TO BE A MINIMUM TIME REQUIREMENT AND A MAXIMUM TIME RESTRICTION. IF YOUR SONG IS TOO LONG, USE A MUSIC EDITING PROGRAM TO CUT IT DOWN. IT IS EASIEST TO EITHER CUT OUT TIME FROM THE BEGINNING OR END, IF IT TAKES A LONG TIME TO GET STARTED OR FINISHED, OR TO TAKE OUT A VERSE AND CHORUS. WHEN YOUR SONG IS EDITED, IT IS MORE IMPORTANT TO KEEP THE TEMPO/BEAT AND SET COUNTS CONSISTENT THAN TO HAVE A CLEAN EDIT, THOUGH YOU SHOULD TRY TO KEEP EVERYTHING SMOOTH.

## 2. COUNT OUT THE SONG

- A. YOU MAY HAVE MANY IDEAS ABOUT WHAT YOU WANT TO DO, BUT IT IS IMPORTANT TO **COUNT OUT THE ENTIRE SONG** BEFORE YOU DO ANYTHING. GET A PIECE OF PAPER AND JUST START WRITING THE SETS DOWN. FOR EXAMPLE, START AT THE TOP OF THE PAPER AND START WRITING “8” DOWN THE MARGIN AFTER EVERY SET OF EIGHT YOU HEAR. YOU MAY HAVE A FEW SETS THAT ARE NOT 8 COUNTS, THEY MAY BE 12 OR 4 OR 3, IT COULD BE ANYTHING, JUST MAKE SURE YOU KEEP TRACK OF THESE METER/SET CHANGES. WHEN YOU ARE DONE COUNTING OUT THE SONG IN SETS, LISTEN TO THE SONG MULTIPLE TIMES TO MAKE SURE YOU DID NOT MISS ANYTHING. IT IS VERY COMMON FOR A BEGINNING WRITER TO SKIP SETS AND THEN HAVE TO THINK OF SOMETHING TO SQUEEZE IN.

## 3. EQUIPMENT PLACEMENT

- A. IF YOU PLAN TO USE ANYTHING ELSE OTHER THAN FLAG, THIS IS THE TIME TO SEPARATE YOUR SONG OUT INTO SECTIONS. FIGURE OUT WHICH PIECE OF **EQUIPMENT** IS GOING TO BE YOUR MAIN ONE AND PUT THAT DURING THE HIGH POINT OF THE SONG, THEN FILL IN THE REST. TRY NOT TO USE A PIECE OF EQUIPMENT FOR LESS THAN 32 COUNTS; IT ISN'T WORTH IT AND CREATES A 'HICCUP' IN YOUR CHOREOGRAPHY FLOW.
  - I. **DANCE** IS ALSO CONSIDERED A SECTION, JUST LIKE ANY OTHER PIECE OF EQUIPMENT. BODY WORK WITH YOUR EQUIPMENT IS A MUST THROUGHOUT YOUR ROUTINE, BUT MANY PEOPLE PUT IN SECTIONS OF DANCE TO BOOST THEIR CHOREOGRAPHY POINTS. IT DOES NOT HAVE TO BE HARD, BUT IT SHOWS YOUR MATURITY AS A COLOR GUARD PERFORMER.

## 4. DRILL

- A. IF YOU WERE TO **WRITE DRILL** (FLOOR PLACEMENT), THIS IS WHEN YOU SHOULD DO IT. IT MAKES WRITING CHOREOGRAPHY EASIER AND ENSURES THAT YOU USE FLOOR SPACE EFFECTIVELY.
- B. FOR A SOLO, ALL YOU NEED TO DO IS USE THE **FLOOR SPACE**. DO NOT STAND IN ONE SPOT FOR TOO LONG. IF YOU STAND IN PLACE, THE ROUTINE SHOULD INCORPORATE BODY WORK. YOU DO NOT HAVE TO USE THE WHOLE FLOOR, BUT YOU DO NEED TO MOVE AROUND. USE BOTH SIDES OF THE FLOOR AND HAVE DEPTH, BACK TO FRONT. IF YOU WANT TO PLAN OUT YOUR FLOOR USE, THAT COULD MAKE IT EASIER. DON'T WORRY

ABOUT COORDINATES; JUST THINK ABOUT GENERAL AREAS YOU WANT TO BE DURING THE SONG AND WHEN.

## 5. CHOREOGRAPHY

- A. THERE ARE NO RIGHTS AND WRONGS TO CHOREOGRAPHY, BUT THERE ARE GENERAL GUIDELINES.
  - I. DON'T DO THE SAME MOVE TOO MUCH, ESPECIALLY A SPECIALIZED MOVE. CATCHING BEHIND YOUR BACK IS IMPRESSIVE, BUT ONLY IF YOU DO IT ONCE. THAT SAID, TRY **NOT TO REPEAT** ANY SECTION OF MOVES IN YOUR SONG. IF THERE IS A STRAIGHT OUT REPEAT IN YOUR PIECE, IT IS ADVISABLE TO CHANGE EQUIPMENT INSTEAD.
  - II. USE YOUR **SPACE** AROUND YOUR BODY. HAVE MOVEMENT HIGH, LOW, AND ALL AROUND. ALSO, DON'T STAY IN ONE PLANE FOR TOO LONG. HAVING WORK FLAT TO THE FRONT FOR A LONG TIME IS BORING. 45'S ARE A FAVORITE TO WORK WITH WHEN NOT IN FLAT FRONT; IT KEEPS IT LOOKING CLEAN WITHOUT BEING TURNED TOO FAR EITHER DIRECTION.
  - III. **ACT OUT YOUR PIECE**, DON'T JUST HAVE A SONG AND DO FLAGWORK TO IT. CREATE A CHARACTER FOR YOURSELF AND PROJECT YOUR FEELING TO THE AUDIENCE. IT IS BORING TO WATCH A ROUTINE THAT IS NOT PERFORMED IN THE SENSE OF ACTING.
  - IV. **DON'T COPY** ANYTHING EXACTLY. WE ALL LEARN NEW GUARD MOVES BY WATCHING OTHERS AND USING THEIR IDEAS, BUT IT IS AGAINST THE RULES TO COPY A WHOLE ROUTINE OR A CHUNK OF A ROUTINE.
  - V. FOLLOW THE **FEEL OF THE MUSIC**. IF THE SONG IS SLOW, HAVE FLOWING CHOREOGRAPHY; IF THE SONG IS FAST, HAVE FAST CHOREOGRAPHY. IF THE SONG HAS HARD HITS, HAVE HARD HITS IN YOUR WORK. IF THE MUSIC GETS LOUD, HAVE THE WORK HIGHER; IF THE MUSIC IS SOFT, KEEP IT LOWER. OF COURSE, YOU CAN GO AGAINST THE NORM, BUT MAKE SURE IT IS NOT DONE ALL THE TIME AND REALLY MAKES SENSE. FOR EXAMPLE, I LIKE TO RIGHT TOSSES DURING SILENCE AND HAVE THE CATCH WHEN THE MUSIC COMES BACK IN WITH A HIT.
  - VI. THAT SAID, ALWAYS WRITE WHEN YOU ARE **ACTIVELY LISTENING** TO THE MUSIC. SOMETIMES WRITING TO THE SONG IN YOUR HEAD ENDS UP BEING TOO SLOW OR TOO FAST AND LOOKS AWKWARD TO THE ACTUAL TEMPO.

- VII. IF YOU ARE NOT COMFORTABLE WRITING **BODY WORK** RIGHT AWAY, WRITE YOUR ROUTINE, THEN ADD IN LEGWORK AND ARM WORK. SOMETIMES, JUST BENDING YOUR BODY A CERTAIN WAY WILL GIVE A MOVE MORE IMPACT. WRITE A SKELETAL ROUTINE THEN TWEAK IT WITH BODY MOVEMENT.
- VIII. ALWAYS, STOP ALONG THE WAY AND **DOUBLE CHECK**. IT DOES HAPPEN, THAT DESPITE WHAT YOU THOUGHT YOU WROTE, YOU HAVE TOO LITTLE OR TOO MANY COUNTS IN ONE SET. TAKE THE TIME TO STOP, GO BACK AND AIR FLAG THROUGH TO THE MUSIC TO MAKE SURE EVERYTHING FLOWS CORRECTLY.

## 6. PRACTICE

- A. ONCE AGAIN, GO THROUGH THE WHOLE PIECE, **CHECKING** FOR ANY MISSED ANY COUNTS.
- B. IF YOU WROTE WITH SMALL EQUIPMENT AND/OR INSIDE, GO TO A SPACE WHERE YOU CAN TRY OUT YOUR WRITING WITH **APPROPRIATE EQUIPMENT AND SPACE**. AS A NOVICE WRITER, I USE TO WRITE WITH A SMALL FLAG IN MY BEDROOM, ONLY TO FIND IT WAS TOO FAST TO DO ON A 6' POLE. KNOW YOUR EQUIPMENT AND HOW IT MOVES IF YOU ARE GOING TO DO THIS METHOD, ESPECIALLY COUNTING FOR TOSSES. TO KEEP IT SAFE, JUST ALWAYS WRITE WITH THE CORRECT EQUIPMENT AND IN AN OPEN SPACE.
- C. ONCE EVERYTHING SEEMS TO BE GOING WELL, CHECK **BODY POSTURE** ALL THE WAY DOWN TO YOUR HANDS AND FEET. IF THERE IS SOMETHING EXTRA YOU CAN ADD TO THE BODY MOVEMENT, ADD IT NOW. SOMETIMES PRACTICING WILL BRING OUT NEW IDEAS.