Cue Sheet Writing Promotes Insights

By Kaye West

In the past year or so I have been writing a cue sheet for my first time ever. Not only has it given me a huge appreciation for all of the choreographers who have shared their routines via the written word, but also I have learned a great deal in the process. And, it has left me with some unanswered questions.

I am so grateful for our shared heritage in the round dance community for the many choreographers and teachers who so generously share their knowledge and creativity with all of us! There is so much to learn about dancing, and one can't learn everything at once, so it is vital that we each continue to share what we know with each other so that our activity can continue to thrive!

The recent submissions for the proposed standards for classic round dance cue sheets are tremendously instructive. They provide information clearly and succinctly in a format with sufficient open space to make them very approachable (a topic of my research years ago!). Recognizing the value of the format, I immediately revised the quick cues for the three versions of the Cha Cha routines that Larry Caves and I choreographed to conform to that easily-accessible style!

Delving into the standards manuals, I noticed that most of the Cha Cha definitions for forward Chassés are FWD/**CL**, FWD and back Chassés are BK/**CL**, BK … even at Phases 4-6, though there are a few figures defined with FWD/**LK**, FWD and BK/**LK,** BK which is very much in keeping with the characteristics of the Cha Cha rhythm. In contrast, the components using the closing step (FWD/CL, FWD and BK/CL, BK) are defined in the Phase II Two Step manual as Quick Two Steps!

Two Step and Cha Cha characteristics are quite different. It doesn't make sense to me that a Two Step component is used for Cha Cha when at Phase II Two Step FWD/LK, FWD and BK/LK, BK are also introduced, so it can't be because the more characteristic components would be too difficult for the dancers! It also doesn't make sense that both styles are included in the definitions. Are teachers and dancers alike supposed to recall which figures require which component to use when one style doesn't even fit the rhythm? That isn't very logical.

I'm told that many teachers begin introducing the locking components, as suggested in the introductory Characteristics paragraph, at Phase 4. Does it make sense to teach it as FWD/CL, FWD and BK/CL, BK at Phase 3 and then almost immediately change it to FWD/LK, FWD and BK/LK, BK? I don't think so. Many dancers over the years have mentioned that they find such changes frustrating. Why not from the beginning teach the components which are aligned with authentic Cha Cha characteristics?

There is enough to learn to refine one's dancing as one progresses without having to unlearn something so basic and relearn something else when it is needless effort! Why teach something which irritates dancers when it is easily avoidable? It is not necessary initially to

explain WHY the locking action is used, but it seems entirely reasonable to me to teach the component which is aligned with the character of Cha Cha so dancers can enjoy the feel of the rhythm more authentically with the simple change of using the locking component from the beginning and throughout phases 3-6. Especially when using the Two Step characteristics can become so engrained that it can inhibit dancers from ever implementing appropriate Cha Cha characteristics. Old habits are very hard to break!

Another big question relates to how such components are written in cue sheets. Decades ago (about the time I started dancing), round dancers made the transition from oral step cues for each individual change of weight to using figure cues which convey meaning much more readily because they allow dancers to process larger "chunks" of information. Can we do something similar with certain components in cue sheets?

When a component such as FWD/LK, FWD is used as one single idea, the words can be hyphenated to indicate that together they comprise a single entity, just as compound adjectives or nouns are hyphenated in written English. The left and right footwork notations would include the standard timing conventions (a slash mark to indicate a count is divided into two parts and a comma or semi-color identifies the end of a count).

Which is easier to process?

(1) Rk-fwd L, rec R, bk L/XRif, bk L; rk-bk R, rec L, fwd R/XLib, fwd R;

(2) Rk-fwd L, rec R, bk-lk-bk L/R, L ; rk-bk R, rec L, fwd-lk-fwd R/L, R;

I'll vote for the second choice every time!