

So You'd Like to Have a Go at Dressage to Music?



BE WARNED – IT'S NOT A FIVE MINUTE JOB!!! Putting together the music for a Freestyle to Music test is time consuming, even for those who've been doing it for years, and it will probably involve hours of listening to pieces of music before you find the right bit plus the help of mum, dad, husband, partner, friends and anyone else who happens to be around to help you time your test, time your horses paces, change cd's, hit the start button on your music player whilst you practice over and over again, cast their opinions on your choice of music.....the list just goes on.

Still keen?? In which case, the purpose of this guide is to help you with the planning and creation of your dressage to music test and to give you some idea of the choices you have when putting your test together. If you stick with it, you'll find it to be a captivating and enjoyable new aspect to dressage I'm sure.

PLANNING YOUR TEST

Your starting point is to have a rough idea of what your test will look like. Remember it is a *freestyle* test which means you must show all the required movements described in the British Dressage test sheet for the level you are riding (Intro, Prelim, Novice, Elementary etc), however you can put the movements together in any order.

Always check at the time of entering a competition whether your chosen class will be run in a 40mx20m or 60mx20m arena as it could be either and if you've choreographed a test for a 40m arena and it ends up being in a 60m arena you're in trouble!!

Required Movements – the required movements to be shown in your test will be listed on the BD test sheet. For example, at **Novice** level you are required to show the following:

20m of medium walk – eg 2 half 10m circles

20m of free walk – eg free walk across the diagonal

15m circle in working trot on **both** reins

Some lengthened strides in trot - unspecified distance but use your diagonals or long sides of the arena
20m circles in working canter on **both** reins
Halts at the **start and the end** of the test which must be on the centre line and facing the judge!

Outside of the compulsory movements to be shown, you can use any movements that can be found currently in use in other tests at the level you are riding. As an example at Novice level you could show working canter across the diagonal with a change of leg through trot over X as this can be found in Novice 25, however you couldn't show a flying or simple change of leg over X as this movement is one of a more advanced level to be found in tests of Elementary and above

If you perform any movements that are of a higher level than the test you are riding (even if your horse can do them well) you will have 2 marks deducted from your final score for each and every time you perform them in your test!

Length of Test – the time allowed for your test is shown on the BD test sheet. Unlike standard dressage tests, there is a **minimum** as well as a **maximum** time allowed – for a Novice test it is a minimum of 4 minutes and a maximum of 4½ minutes.

Your test is timed from the move off after your first salute to the halt before your final salute. Try and aim for your test to have a total running time that is between the 4 and 4½ minutes to allow for any slippage in your test, that way you have a little time in hand and are unlikely to finish too soon or over time. Run over or under time and 2 penalty points will be deducted from your final score.

DESIGN or CHOREOGRAPHY of YOUR TEST

Remember, everything you do in your test is about impressing the judge!

Remember that this is still a dressage test and your judge will still be looking for your horse to be going in the correct way using the Scales of Training. It is worth keeping in mind at this point if you make the choreography of your test too complicated, your horse may struggle to maintain rhythm and balance and you will lose the 'flow' of the test and it will look awkward and disjointed. Sometimes the rule of 'simple but perfectly executed' is best and this I relate to *Straightness* in the *Scales of Training*!

That said, do try to make your test interesting and a bit different to the standard BD tests that a judge will have sat through many times **BUT** not so different it is hard for the judge to follow! Your judge will need to be able to easily identify the compulsory movements – the 15m trot circles, the 20m

canter circles etc. Pay particular attention to showing your free walk and lengthened strides in trot.

So often I have judged a test where the free walk is not clear and I haven't known whether it was a free walk or a medium walk or there's no obvious attempt at showing some lengthened strides in trot – was it another movement in working trot?? Remember, unlike a standards dressage test your judge does not have a list of what movements are performed at defined points in the arena as it is a freestyle test - don't keep the poor judge guessing but make things obvious where you can.

It is not compulsory, but I would recommend always trying to make your changes of transition at a specific marker to give clarity to your test, however in a freestyle test if your transition doesn't happen quite when you had planned it to, at least you are not marked down as the judge doesn't have a sheet that says 'At 'C' medium walk' etc. The only thing that might give your error away is your change in music which we will come on to later.

Again, it's not compulsory but it is worth considering 'mirror imaging' the movements of your test. If a judge isn't sure if they saw a movement on one rein they may be reassured they have if they see you repeat the movements on the opposite rein. Overall, try to give your test a 'balanced' feel as it makes your test far more comfortable for the judge. *One point to bear in mind when designing your test – judges will tend to 'switch off' if treated to too much walk!*

One thing that is compulsory is a halt at the start as well as at the end of your test. Your halt and salute at the start of your test is the point from which your test is timed and lets the judge know when to start their stopwatch – remember this important point when designing and timing your test!

WRITE DOWN YOUR TEST in the same way as a BD test is written. *It's your test and you won't find it written down anywhere else!* We all forget things and forgetting the order of your test when you're trying to put your test together with the music, or in that 'blank' moment we sometimes get just before going into the arena, isn't helpful. It is at times like this when having your test written down will come in very handy!

Ride your test through many times. Ask yourself 'Does it flow?' How does it feel to ride? *If you make any changes make sure you also change your written sheet!*

TOP TIP: Once you are happy with the design/chorography of your test *you can go to www.dressagediagrams.com where you can use a menu of movements, transitions and shapes that cover from the most basic test up to Grand Prix level. The website will then produce your Freestyle Test for you to print out.*

All that remains at the end of this stage of your Dressage to Music journey is to ride your test again and again until you know every inch of the test and can ride it in your sleep.

TIMING YOUR TEST

The next step is to break your test down into sections eg:

1. Entry to Halt & Salute
2. Move off and first trot section
3. Canter section
4. Walk section
5. Final section to final Halt & Salute at the end of the test.

Make sure your horse is working correctly in all paces and going forward into the contact with regular active paces, as this is how you will want to perform on the day of the competition to maximise your marks. This may be a Freestyle to Music competition but 50% of your marks are judged as in a standard dressage test and the judge will still want to see your horse rhythmic and supple whilst going forward with impulsion into the contact and will be using the *Scales of Training* when considering what marks to award the movements of your test.

Ride each section and ask your helper to time, *with a stopwatch*, how long each section takes. Ask then write the time down next to each section in the order the sections are ridden in your test. Once this is done, ask your helper to time the whole test from your first halt & salute to your final halt and salute to check that when all the sections are ridden together, the whole test does not fall outside of the time allowed for your level of test. With luck you will find (give or take a second or two) the individual sections add up to the total time taken to ride your test.

These broken down timed sections are vital information and will be needed when it comes to choosing and recording your music.

TIMING YOUR HORSES PACES

Your starting point before listening to music is to time and write down the speed or tempo of your horses paces at walk, trot and canter. You can then use this information to help you choose a piece of music that fits your horses paces so that it really does '*compliment and enhance your horse*'. Your music should fit your horses paces as closely as possible as trying to rush or restrict your horses paces to fit a particular piece of music you like will only result in you losing valuable marks for the way your horse is going. Remembering the *Scales of Training* this is the *Rhythm* part!

It's also important that you like your music. Try to find something that 'lights you up' every time you hear it. If your music inspires you every time you hear it, you and your horse will give an inspired performance for the judge. It's a very personal thing but you will know when you get it right as you will 'feel' as well as hear the music and is what gives the *Impulsion* of the *Scales of Training* to your test!

Make sure your horse is properly warmed up and going correctly as described earlier then grab your trusty helper again and explain to them what you need them to do.

Time your horses' paces in walk, trot and canter. It should be said at this point that some people will do this part of the process using a video of your horse, thus dispensing with the need to find a helper. My personal belief however is that measuring the paces as you see them in 'real time' is always better if it can be done.

You can time your horse's paces – or BPM (beats per minute) in two ways – using a metronome or a stopwatch.

My preferred method is using a metronome as it will be accurate and can then be used again set to your recorded BPM when trying to find the right music. It just makes the whole job so much easier and if you have a musician in your family or amongst your friends they may well have a metronome they could lend you. If not you could buy one from a music shop or I bought my last two very reasonably on eBay where there always seems to be a plentiful supply!!

A small, inexpensive, wind up, plastic metronome will do the job just as well as the rather grand looking wooden pyramid ones you may have seen sitting on a piano at school and is much easier to slip into your pocket!

The other method you can use to time your horses paces is with a stopwatch and counting to see how many steps per minute your horse takes in each pace. Start your stop watch and each time one of your horses hooves hits the ground. You should really count the hind hoof beats as this is what judges are trained to look at - in walk and trot you count the rear hoof beats and in canter you count the beat of the inside rear hoof. Count the beats for 30 seconds, then all you need to do is double the count for a minute and you've got your BPM. beats of the inside rear foot.

Whichever method you use, you should find that generally speaking most horses paces fall somewhere between the following range of beats per minute (BPM):

Walk 96 – 116 PMP
Trot 125 – 185 BPM
Canter 85 – 115 BPM

You should now have in your possession all the information you need to select your music. You can tuck your horse up in bed and prepare yourself for hours of listening to music in the search for the perfect accompaniment for your horse that makes your test stand out from the crowd!

CHOOSING YOUR MUSIC

British Dressage's guidance says the music you choose '*should enhance and compliment the performance of your horse*'.

Again making reference to the *Scales of Training* you could say that your choice of music is the *Contact*. If your music is well matched to your horse and inspiring to listen to you will make *Contact* with yourself, your horse and the all important judge

Do try and be original in your choice of music and not just select music you have seen others perform to.

Your music should fit your horse's paces. As mentioned before it's no good trying to rush your horse or slow their paces down to fit a piece of music you like. You end up losing valuable marks and comments on your sheet such as 'tipping onto the forehand at times' or 'lacking impulsion' as a result. This is still a dressage test and paces and way of going will be marked accordingly.

In theory, almost anything goes when it comes to choosing your music, however that's not very helpful when you stop and think about just how much music there is out there.

It is sometimes helpful to get the 'creative juices' flowing to take a structured approach to your music. Perhaps think of a theme – military music, music from the movies, TV programme theme music or perhaps a favourite classical composer – it doesn't really matter but having a theme does help to eliminate great oceans of music and helps to focus the mind.

If you change your mind about your theme somewhere along the line, it doesn't matter because you still have a focus – it's just a different one!

It is also good to take into account the character and type of your horse as this all serves to '*enhance and compliment*' your horse's performance. Military band music may lend itself to a big bold horse or a solid cob, whereas *The Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy* would suit far better a dainty thoroughbred. Music from children's TV programmes or films would work well for a junior on a pony or humorous music could work well if your horse tends to be a bit cheeky!

I would also advise avoiding music that has a lot of vocals over it. A small section of vocals may enhance a certain part of your test but in general judges do not tend to like too much singing.

I would also avoid anything too weird, radical or ultra modern – drum and base, house or garage is unlikely to go down with a judge of a 'certain age' and you don't want to switch your judge off as soon as the first few notes of your music is played – remember you are trying to make a connection with them!

Music can be sources from so many places, your own music collection, your

friends and family and their friends and families. The music library in your local library is also a good source plus the internet now provides a rich source of websites where you can download endless pieces of music of all genres. I also find the local 'bargain' racks and baskets in my local supermarket or on the bargains page of such websites as CD Wow or Play.com an excellent source of cheap music too

Of course if you are lucky enough to know a musician there is nothing to stop you putting together your own personal recording, however all the guidance in the next section will still apply.

Probably the easiest of the paces to find your music for are the trot and the walk as there is a wealth of two and four time music at various speeds to be found. You will hear music on a daily basis that makes you think 'that might be good for my trot music?' Canter can be a bit trickier as most three time music is a waltz rhythm which is usually too slow, however here is music out there and quite often you find a piece of music that isn't truly three time will still 'work' as the overall rhythm still fits the horses canter pace.

Once you find something you like and you think will work, test it by playing it and setting the metronome (or stopwatch) against it to see if the BPM and rhythm is right. If the answer is 'YES' first time – lucky you! You've just found the right piece of music for your walk/trot/canter on your first attempt, however don't be surprised if the piece you heard on the radio on the way to work that sounded just perfect, is actually anything but perfect when you check it against the metronome. But don't despair as you will find the right piece of music eventually and when you do you will know its right because it will feel really inspiring when you ride to it.

The main points that a judge will be looking for as far as the music goes are:

- ✓ The beat of the music corresponds with the rhythm of the horse's paces
- ✓ The character of the music suits the pace/movement of the horse - the 'jump' of the canter, the marching of the walk is captured.
- ✓ The type of music suits the horse's character and his way of going.
- ✓ The music brings out highlights and quieter moments of the test so that there is for example crescendos for lengthened strides, entry, final salute etc
- ✓ There is a common theme to the music, the different pieces of music for the paces (walk, trot, canter) are of a similar style/genre – don't mix classical with big band music etc
- ✓ That the music is put together well so that there are smooth and harmonious transitions between the different pieces of music – no long silence between the trot and the canter music – and reproduces well at volume over the PA system.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Once you have found your music for each pace, you will then need to use the information your helper recorded about the timing of each of the sections of your test, to help you select the best pieces of music for each section of your test.

The timing of your test starts as you salute and move off at the start of your test however the reason you should also record the timing of your entry to the first Halt & Salute is because it is permissible under BD rules to have a piece of music for your entry. *This is your golden opportunity to 'make your entrance' and get the judge and your audience to sit up and watch – don't waste that opportunity, try and find a section of music that really announces your arrival in the arena!* Your choice of music and how you have put it all together can be related to *Suppleness* in the *Scales of Training*. Aim to produce a programme of music where the music flows with seamless (supple) transitions between the tracks and carries the judge and you along in a harmonious and smooth manor.

NOTE: There is a time limit on how long you take to actually enter the arena. You must enter the arena within 20 seconds of your music starting so keep this in mind when planning your entry to halt stage.

Each timed section of your test will almost certainly be too short for you to use a complete musical piece, so you will have to pick out what you think is a suitable section of the piece of music you have chosen that fits the section of your test it will accompany. If you find you cannot find an exact timing match for the section without having to chop it short in an unnatural place, be flexible and creative but always make sure each piece of music make musical sense in its own right.

The section should start at the beginning of a verse, chorus, refrain etc and finish in an equally sensible place. If you start or finish your section of music in the middle of a musical line it will irritate everyone – you, the judge, spectators and interestingly even your horse.

When using pre-recorded music, using as many of the natural starts, breaks tricky job of editing your music down to a minimum. Also, by using the actual ending of the last piece of music you will use for your final centre line to halt, you will perform a professional and polished finish to your test.

Despite the fact that everyone will have different equipment to play your music on, there is enough common ground for some editing and recording guidelines to be worthwhile mentioning at this point.

Sound Quality – it is in your interest to make the best possible job of your recording because the judge can take poor sound reproduction into account. It would be a great pity if you performed the best test of your life only to lose marks for the sound quality of your music.

Volume - record your music as loud as your equipment will allow without distortion, your music may be played on low poor equipment or the speakers may be at the downwind end of your arena so the sound is being carried away from you. If you can hear your music you cannot ride your test accurately. If your horse cannot hear the music it cannot pick up on the rhythm (and believe me they do!) and if the judge cannot hear the music – well, they can't judge you!

Method of Recording – your final copy should be burnt to a cd. The quality of the sound will be infinitely better plus today the cassette tape is rapidly becoming an antique. Always check with the competition organiser if it's not stated in the schedule what they are expecting to receive from competitors just in case, but these days you are nearly always asked for a cd of your music.

For the actual editing of the music and piecing the tracks together there is some very easy to use computer software that makes life so much easier. You can download a free trial of an excellent Audio Editing package called WavePad from the internet www.nch.com.au/wavepad which might just about give you long enough on the trial period to get your music done for one test. WavePad also allows you to adjust the speed of a track which may come in handy if the piece of music you have chosen is just slightly too fast or too slow!

Once you have chosen your music, identified the sections you are going to use, put them all together, edited where necessary and checked the running time is correct, record it to a cd several times over with short breaks in between each recording so that you can ride it over and over without having to stop to reset the music each time. You can also record it to your iPod so that you can listen to it away from your horse, though I recommend you play it out loud when riding as your horse will get to know their music too.

Once you have finalised your music record it onto a CD-R disc rather than a CD-RW disc, the latter of which can be so easily recorded over. Imagine all those hours of hard work destroyed when your CD is accidentally recorded over!

British Dressage Music Licence So, you've designed your test, choreographed it to your chosen music but if you want to compete in Freestyle to Music competitions, whether affiliated or unaffiliated competitions, you need to get a music licence.

Now before you start to panic:

- a) It's not complicated
- b) It doesn't cost a fortune

However, if you want to do things properly and legally you must get a licence!!

The copyright protection act makes it illegal to play music in public without a licence. Dressage competitions count as 'in public'.

The music each competitor plays is seen as their own music, so each competitor has to have a licence for it to be played 'in public'!

NOTE: *If you are already a **Full British Dressage (BD)** member you are already covered to compete under BD's "bulk" deal with the music licensing authority. You won't have to become a **Music Member** of BD, but will you still have to complete a 'Music Sub-Licence Agreement'.*

If you are not a full British Dressage member, all is not lost. You too will need to complete a 'Music Sub-Licence Agreement' **PLUS** you will need to join British Dressage as a **Music Member**. You can download a British Dressage Music Membership form from our website or go to the British Dressage website www.britishdressage.co.uk/competitions/how_to_go_free_styleo.uk where you can download more information and the necessary forms. Currently (2009) it will cost you £26 per year to join BD as a Music Members or if you are a Riding Club Member you save £10 and it will only cost you £16 for the year – you just have to fill in your riding club membership number on the form.

Which ever membership you have you will need to meet the requirements of BD's "bulk" deal with the licensing authority.

You will need to complete a '**Music Licence Record Form**' and a '**Sub Licence Agreement**'. Copies of both forms can be downloaded from this website, or you can go to the British Dressage website listed above and download them there.

Before you go to your competition you will need to complete your '**Music Licence Record Form**' and '**Sub Licence Agreement**' forms.

To fulfil the terms of the 'bulk' deal licence BD holds, your music has to be specifically identified and this is what the '**Music Licence Record Form**' is for. It notes the title of the track, the recording artist and how much of each track is used on your recording. BD will send

Once you have filled out both forms, return them to the British Dressage office who will then send you stickers to put on your master CD or CD case to show that British Dressage and you have both done what the licence deal calls for.

SOME IMPORTANT ADMIN DETAILS

Always check your cd plays on a number of different players – car, home, portable, laptop etc. Don't wait until you get to the competition to find your cd has been recorded in the wrong format and won't play on the equipment supplied!

Always take two copies of your music with you to a competition. Always have a spare copy with you – it has not been unknown for a horse or helper to stand on a tape or cd and break it, and without your music you can't compete and all your hours of planning will have been wasted.

Label your music clearly

On your cd you should have at least the **name of the rider and horse** to avoid the wrong cd being played and also that you can claim it back at the end of the competition!!

If there is room on the cd label add the following information but if not on the cd itself it should most definitely be clearly marked on the cd jewel case:

Music Licence Sticker from British Dressage and Instructions of when to hit 'play'. For example, 'Press play when I raise my hand' or 'Press play as I enter the arena'. This is vital information for the person responsible for playing the music at a competition so they can get the timing right for you. Make your instructions as clear as possible to avoid misunderstandings as you will suffer the consequences if they get it wrong!

Don't forget the poor person operating the PA system will probably have 10 or 20 cd's beside him and your instructions need to be easy to understand and follow!!

It's also quite a good idea to have a fully briefed helper armed with a spare copy of your music close to where the music is being played from just in case of any problems with instructions or music.

.....AND FINALLY

Practice, practice, practice. There really is no substitute. Don't only ride to your music but listen to it daily – in the car, at home, on the train, anywhere you can. You need to know your music inside out, every beat, every note, every phrase, every change of music etc – every little detail so that you can visualise yourself riding your test to it. I cannot stress this enough as it can carry you through a minor disaster in the arena on the day.

By the point you get to ride your test on the day of the competition, you and your horse will have heard your music dozens of times and will now every note. You will recognise if you are a bit in front of the music or a getting a bit behind, and will be able to adjust your test accordingly either by slightly cutting a corner or starting your canter a little before reaching 'A'. If it looks like you are really behind the music by the end of your test, you can always turn on to the centre line a little sooner than planned or make your halt a D or X instead of G. It is after all a freestyle test and only you know where the movement was supposed to take place – just try and end up facing the judge at the end!

This last paragraph for me is the *Collection* reference to the *Scales of Training* when related to Dressage to Music – you've practiced, visualised yourself doing the test and from the moment you raise your hand to start your music to your final salute you feel 'collected' in your thoughts which will reflect in your performance.

ENJOY YOURSELF!

Don't forget to enjoy your ride and if you can't because those nerves are just too much, at least try to look as though you are enjoying yourself whilst riding your test – your pleasure will be infectious and will rub off on the judge and who knows might just earn you that extra mark that makes all the difference to your final placing.

I hope you have found this guide helpful and it only remains for me to wish you a lot of fun putting your test and music together, and good luck on the day of your competition.

Pippa Doran
Just-So Equestrian Events

