

MIAMI MUSIC PROJECT

DANCING CLASSICAL MUSIC

Dance music is music composed and played specifically for social dancing. Music plays an important role in dance, and every dance is dependent upon the availability of the appropriate music.

In principle, dance music includes a huge variety of music, from waltzes to rock and roll and country music or tangos. As of the late 1970s, however the term *dance music* has come to more specifically refer to electronic music offshoots of rock and roll such as disco, house, techno and trance.

The dance music covered in this packet is of older time periods, but that still have relevance today.

Waltz
Polka
Tango
Hungarian dances
Romanian dances

Waltz

*The waltz never quite goes out of fashion;
it is always just around the corner;
every now and then it returns with a bang...
It is sneaking, insidious, disarming, lovely...
The waltz, in fact, is magnificently improper.
- H.L. Menken (an American journalist)*

Often when people think of the waltz they think of men and women of high society wearing colorful flowing gowns and luxurious tuxedos, twirling around in a palace ballroom. And of course beautiful music!

But it was not always this way, in fact, it was just the opposite. In the 16th century, the waltz started off in the suburbs and surrounding villages of Vienna, danced by the people in the lower working class and peasants.

Thus, it took a long time before the waltz was popularly accepted by high society. There was so much opposition, especially from dance masters and religious leaders. The dance masters thought the waltz was below their skill level because to them it was not challenging enough, it was too easy to learn, meaning that they would not be able to show off their superior dance skills. Religious leaders almost unanimously regarded the waltz as vulgar and sinful because of the close hold position and the rapid turning movements. Morally, it was not right for people to dance, held so close, in public.



It wasn't until the 17th century that waltzes were played in the ballrooms of the Hapsburg court, the ruling monarchy. As with today, the more opposition there was to the dance, the more fashionable and popular it became.

The popularity of the waltz was given a boost in the 1800s by two great Austrian composers. Franz Lanner and Johann Strauss II, known as the Waltz King. They set the standard for the Viennese Waltz (a very fast version of the waltz).

Many of the familiar waltz tunes can be traced back to simple peasant yodeling melodies. But it is the rhythm of the music that lets the listeners and dancers know that it is a waltz. *Hm, ta, ta, Hm, ta, ta...* the music is set in $\frac{3}{4}$ time, with the strong accent (*Hm*) played on the first beat, most likely by a bass instrument. Instruments with a higher pitch, like violins, tend to play the two softer beats (*ta, ta*).

Written by Strauss in 1868, *Tales from the Vienna Woods* is the perfect example of the standard Viennese waltz rhythm and sound. In the music could be heard a nostalgia for resting in a quiet place. It is a beautiful piece that could work very well for weddings!

The *Arabian Waltz* (1995), by Rabih Abbu Khalil, that the Miami Music Project String Quartet plays, is much different from the Viennese waltz style. The thing to remember about music in general is that it's always influenced by culture. In the case of the Arabian Waltz, Khalil actually played around with the $\frac{3}{4}$ time signature and changed it to different time signatures throughout the piece to highlight the cultural sound, but dancers could remain in the same close hold position.

Polka

It was an instant hit! In 1835, the dance was introduced to Prague ballrooms, and to Paris ballrooms in 1840. French dancers took to polka immediately, and it soon grew very popular. Polka eventually reached England and the United States by the late 1840s. Regardless of it being danced in ballrooms, the *polka* kept its down to earth image, in providing enjoyment and relaxation after long days of hard, physical labor. It gained popularity because everyone danced it; it was seen as a recreational activity for amateur dancers who relished the polka's lively tempo and the strenuous exercise it provided.



Polka originated in Bohemia, currently the Czech Republic, around 1830 as a peasant round-dance and comes from the word *půlka*—literally, *little half*—a reference to the short half-steps featuring in the dance. (Folklore has it that a peasant girl named Anna Slezak invented the steps one day for her own amusement.)

Polka dancers perform in pairs or couples, either in the face-to-face waltz position or while standing side by side, with the man's arm around the woman's waist and her hand on his shoulder. The basic movement is of lightly stepping from one foot to the other. One characteristic of dancing the polka is the half-step, or hop, that precedes the first step. Some dancers omit the hop entirely, while others simply reduce it to a quick rise and fall of the weighted foot before beginning the first step. Polka dancers are free to move across the floor in all directions while dancing, and not in any strict line or formation.

In the 19th century respected ballroom music composers, like Johann Strauss, composed polkas. The polka masterpieces are still being performed today, keeping the link between folk and classical music alive.

Live music remains an integral part to any polka dance. Many modern polka songs are about loss, love and even food. The song is also structured around four verses and a chorus, which is sung after each verse or after every two verses. The 2/4 rhythm of the basic polka has a very bouncy, upbeat sound - great for dancing!



Today, polka is one of the few dances that originated during the nineteenth century that is still popular worldwide.

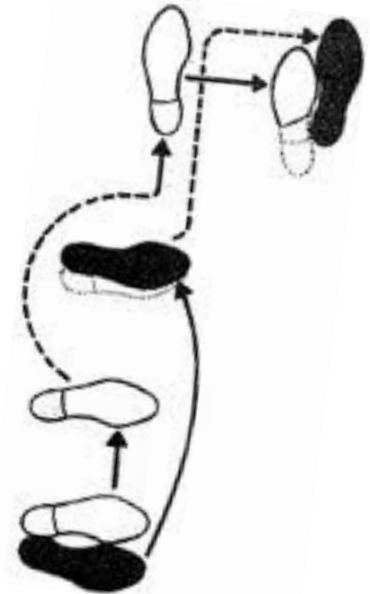
Shostakovich's *Polka, from the ballet The Golden Age*, is a really fun polka because it seems as if every instrument takes on a character of its own. A story is being told, as the instruments "talk" amongst themselves, of political figures having a meeting in which they agree and disagree. In the end, it comes together as great polka music.

Polka Pizzicato written by Strauss is unique because it highlights the light way the dancers hop on their feet by reflecting this in the way the instruments are played. Pizzicato for string instruments (violin, viola, cello, bass, etc.) means to pluck the strings with the fingers rather than using the bow to produce sound. The result is a very lively and light sound.



Tango

Folklore of how the tango dance form evolved is that it started off with the cowboys of Argentina. They wore chaps that had hardened from the foam and sweat of the horses' body. So they had to walk with their knees flexed. They would go to the crowded nightclubs and ask the local girls to dance. Since the cowboy hadn't showered, the lady would dance in the crook of the man's right arm, holding her head back, so as not to be close to his armpit. Her right hand was held low on his left hip, close to his pocket, looking for a payment for dancing with him. The man danced in a curving fashion because the dance floor was small with round tables, so he danced with the girl around and between the tables, creating the tango dance step.



Tango originated around 1880, in urban areas. Remember that at the time, just to dance in front of each other, the right arm of the man touching the back of the lady was a little too much. Now there is a dance with a close embrace, cheek to cheek, chests together, the legs invading each other's space, and flirtatious looks.

Phrasing is an important part of tango music. Tango music is like a story, it contains paragraphs (major phrases); sentences (minor phrases); and the period at the end of the sentence is the tango close. For exhibition dancing, a tango dancer must develop a strong connection with the music, the dance, and the

audience so that the story can be understood. The audience can only feel this connection if the performer feels and projects this feeling. Thus, you can always notice the beat in a tango piece, sometimes urgent, sometimes more relaxed, but it is always strong.



Carlos Gardel is often referred to as the King of Tango. His popular 1935 tango *Por Una Cabeza*, which in Spanish means "by the head [of a horse]." It is a story of a man who loves horses very much. It is also interesting to note that Gardel borrowed a phrase from Mozart's *Rondo for Violin and Orchestra in C* and used it as a recurrent theme in his tango.

Astor Piazzolla composed a very passionate tango, *Libertango* (1973). The strong beat in the piece has an almost attacking intensity. He was in Italy at the time and European audiences enjoyed listening to the piece during its debut. When he wrote *Libertango* it was indeed intended for commercial success, in it he blended a contemporary music sound with that of the traditional tango. Because the beat of the music was influenced by rock and jazz music, making it faster, dancers found it challenging to actually dance to the piece.

Hungarian & Romanian Dances

The origin of the *csárdás* can be traced back to the 18th century as a traditional Hungarian folk dance used by vernunkos, or recruiters, as a recruiting dance by the Hungarian army. Roma music bands in Hungary and neighboring lands also helped to popularize the *csárdás*.

The Hungarian *csárdás* is characterized by a variation in tempo; it starts out slowly and ends in a very fast temp. The time signature of the music is in 2/4 or 4/4 time. Dancers are both male and female, with the women dressed in traditional wide skirts, usually colored red, which form a distinctive shape when they whirl.

Johannes Brahms was a German composer who was very popular during the Romantic period. In addition to being a composer, Brahms was one of the first ethnomusicologists. An ethnomusicologist is a person who studies the social and cultural aspects of music and dance in local and global contexts. During his time,

Brahm, had to travel from town to town in order to hear different styles of music because there was no internet or radio.



Brahms wrote *Hungarian Dances*, which was a large factor in his success. His *Hungarian Dance #5 in G minor*, played by the Miami Music Project String Quartet, is just one out of a set of 21 dance tunes based on Hungarian

themes that Brahms collected during his travels. Each piece lasts from one to four minutes. Only #11, #14, and #16 are entirely original compositions by Brahms. But one could say that Brahms made a mistake when he composed #5, because while he thought it was based on a traditional Hungarian folk song, it really turned out

to be based on a popular csárdás written by Kéler Béla, a Hungarian composer of the time. Brahms completed all 21 *Hungarian Dances* in 1869

Bella Bartok was born in Transylvania, present-day Romania, but he was Hungarian. Just like Johannes Brahms, Bartok was an ethnomusicologist. He collected folk songs from different towns in Hungary and Romania to make a collection of short pieces. So, he composed a series of masterpieces, the ***Romanian Dances***. He collected songs across Eastern Europe and used them in his music. His music influenced later composers of the region.

There are six different dances within Bartok's work. Below are a few examples of the dances that were included in Bartok's *Romanian Dances*:

Jocul cu bâta, means "dance with stick" or "stick game," and the jocul cu bâta is just that, to dance using a stick. It is an energetic and merry dance from Transylvania, Romania. The music that accompanies is played in a lively tempo. Bartok used this as his first dance.

The third dance Bartok composed music for was the *Poarga Românească*. Similar to the Polka, except that it is Romanian style. Everything else is pretty much the same, time signature (2/4) and it is quick and lively.

The *Mărunțel* is such a quick dance that dancers must use very small steps and movements to keep up with the music! It's a great way to end a dance party, and it is exactly how Bartok ended his *Romanian Dances*.

