



## 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, 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.

You may wish to use the Information Record Sheet that can be downloaded from the Dressage to Music page of the Just So Equestrian Events website: [www.justsoequestrianevents.co.uk](http://www.justsoequestrianevents.co.uk)

If you stick with it, you'll find it to be a captivating and enjoyable new aspect to dressage I'm sure.

### **TIMING YOUR HORSES PACES**

Your starting point before listening to any music is to time and write down the speed of your horses paces at walk, trot and canter – beats per minute or BPM. You can then use this information to help you choose a piece of music that *fits your horses paces* rather than trying to fit your horses paces to a piece of music you happen to like. Doing the latter will compromise your horses paces by rushing or restricting them. The artistic marks on a freestyle to music score sheet for 'rhythm, energy and elasticity' relate closely to the paces and impulsion mark in a standard test and this is still a dressage test with marks for your horses way of going!

The **RHYTHM, ENERGY AND ELASTICITY** marks that focus on the gymnastic ability of the horse and corresponds with the two first collective marks from regular tests - the **Paces** (freedom and regularity), and the **Impulsion** (desire to move forward, elasticity of steps, suppleness of the back and engagement of the hind legs).

The mark reflects:-

- The consistency of the rhythm and absolute regularity in all three paces
- The correctness of the tempo of every pace
- Freedom of the paces
- Elasticity and cadence of the paces
- Liveliness of the impulsion, activity and engagement of the hind legs
- Suppleness and the swinging back
- Fluency of the movements

***Start by making sure your horse is properly warmed up and going correctly before timing the BPM for each pace so that you get an accurate 'working' timing.***

Grab your trusty helper and explain to them what you need them to do – measure your horses paces in walk, trot and canter. It should be said at this point that this exercise can be done using a video of your horse, thus dispensing with the need to find a helper, however I am of the belief that measuring the paces as you see them in real time is always better.

By far the best way to time your horse's paces is by using a metronome as it will be accurate and can then be used again to find your music.

If you have musicians in your family or amongst your friends they may well have a traditional metronome they could lend you, however these days you can download a metronome app, such as *Mobile Metronome*, to your smart phone.

You should find that generally speaking most horses/ponies paces fall into the following range of beats per minute:

Trot	45 - 55 BPM
Walk & Canter	65 – 75 BPM

Make sure you time it several times and use the average of the recorded times. Don't forget to ask your helper to write the BPM down for each pace.

## **PLANNING YOUR TEST**

Next you need to think about what your test will look like. Although this is a *freestyle* test. You must show all the required movements described in the British Dressage Freestyle test sheet for the level you are riding (Intro, Prelim, Novice, Elementary etc), however you can put the movements together in any order and in any place in the arena. Most tests these days are held in a 60m arena though some unaffiliated competitions are held in a 40m arena.

I recommend you start with planning a 60m arena test as it is much easier to revise your test to fit in a 40m arena than the other way round.

***Always check at the time of entering a competition whether your chosen class will be run in a 40mx20m or 60mx20m to avoid any embarrassment and stress on the day of your competition!***

**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 be sure it is performed in an obvious place so that the judge knows what you are showing.  
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.

In tests under BD rules, if you deliberately 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 and the scores for choreography and degree of difficulty should not be more than 5

If a compulsory movement is omitted a mark of 0 is given and this will also be reflected in the choreography and degree of difficulty marks which cannot be higher than 5.5 if only one compulsory movement is omitted and 5 if more than one is omitted.

For further guidance, a list of **Non-compulsory permitted movements** and **Non-compulsory movements** can be found on the BD website Dressage to Music page for guidance - *Guidelines for judging dressage to music* download  
[http://www.britishdressage.co.uk/competitions/dressage\\_to\\_music](http://www.britishdressage.co.uk/competitions/dressage_to_music)

**Length of Test** – the time allowed for your test is shown on the BD test sheet. Unlike standard dressage tests, there is a *minimum* and *maximum* time allowed – for a Novice test it is a minimum of 4 minutes and a maximum of 5 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 somewhere between the min and max 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.*

**Floor Plan or Choreography of Test – Remember, everything you do in your test is about impressing the judge!**

This is one of the true artistic marks of the test and is less dependent on the technical performance although these still need to be strong for a winning test and resistances and mistakes will reduce the marks.

The choreography of a freestyle can be innovative and surprising but it must be in accordance with classical training and also the level of the training of the horse

Key points to take into account for higher marks:-

- Use of the whole arena.
- Symmetrical nature of the movements.
- Originality and creativity.
- A flowing pattern.
- A limited number of changes of pace.
- Are all the movements easily recognizable?
- Clearly recognizable and harmonious changes within the paces.
- Well combined exercises.
- Movements are not shown excessively but provide highlights.
- A good balance between straight lines and curves, extensions and collections., highlights and quieter moments.
- The choreography should be designed and focused to the short side at C with movements away from C on the diagonal or down the long sides.
- Are there dramatic moments combined with quieter phases and an impressive finish!

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 and pay particular attention to showing your free walk and lengthened strides in trot so that the judge knows that is what you are performing. 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 your judge does not have a list of what movements are performed where as it is a freestyle test so don't keep the poor judge guessing, 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 it doesn't happen when planned you are not marked down as the judge doesn't have a sheet that says 'A 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. With a movement such as lengthened/medium trot strides, performing them twice gives you two bites at the apple and the judge will initially give a score for each and then an average of the two marks as your final score. Overall, try to give your test a 'balanced' feel as it makes your test far more comfortable for the judge to watch.

*Use the opportunity to show off what your horse does best and limit the things they are not so good at to the bare minimum to maximise your marks*

Experiment with different floor plans before deciding on your final one and of course **time it from the initial move off to the final halt to ensure it is within the time allowed.** Ride your final test through several 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!*

**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, this is when your test in writing will come in very handy.

The website Dressage Diagrams - [www.dressagediagrams.org](http://www.dressagediagrams.org) – has a function where you can create a freestyle test sheet that you can save and print off.

Once you are happy with the floorplan/chorography of your test, ride it 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.

### **Time to call on your trusty helper again!**

Ride each section and ask your helper to time, *with a stopwatch*, how long each section takes. Again you can use your stopwatch on your smart phone as they all have one.

Ride each section a couple of times and get your helper to time and note the time from the start to the end of the section before recording a final time. When all the sections are added up they should match the time recorded for riding the whole test from start to finish. 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. This is important information that you will need when it comes to choosing and recording your music.

*You should now have in your possession all the information you need to select your music. You can now 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!*

### **FINDING YOUR MUSIC**

**British Dressage's guidance says the music you choose 'should enhance and compliment the performance of your horse'.** Do try and be original in your choice of music and not just select music you have seen others perform to.

It's important that you like your music. 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!

The personal musical taste of the judge is not relevant. It is not for the judge to comment on, or be influenced by, the style and genre of the music chosen by the competitor. The judge should only assess the suitability of the music for the horse and rider and whether it enhances or distracts from the performance. That said, 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!

The musical style used should not over power the horse and rider and but should definitely not be too much in the background either otherwise it just becomes 'elevator' music and doesn't have any impact. The music should give the impression of being a complete performance in itself and have a clear beginning, middle and end

It is your responsibility to choose the right balance of music for your horse and its way of going and the judge will comment if this is not the case and reflect this in their final score for the **MUSIC AND INTERPRETATION OF THE MUSIC** marks

*Your music should fit your horse's paces.* It's no good trying to rush your horse or slow their paces down to fit a piece of music you like. You will end up losing valuable marks and you will see comments such as 'rushed', 'loss of balance, or 'lacking impulsion' as a result. Remember it is still a dressage test and your horse's paces and way of going will be marked accordingly.

**It is the tempo of the music that defines if it is synchronised with the horse.**

The tempo is simply the speed of the beat and or rhythm of the music.

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 good to take a structured approach to your music. If you have created a theme, or chosen a particular musical style that runs throughout your test, this should be positively recognised by the judge in their score Music and Interpretation of the Music score compared to other tests that have used disparate pieces and mixed genres of music.

Perhaps think of a theme – military music, music from the movies, TV programme theme music or perhaps a favourite classical composer or artist– 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 your horses character and type as this all serves to *'enhance and compliment'* your horses performance. Military band music may lend itself to a big bold horse or a solid cob, whereas The Nutcracker Suite would suit far better a dainty thoroughbred. Music from children's films or TV programmes would work well for a junior on a pony. Humorous music could work well if your horse tends to be a bit cheeky.

### **The use of vocals within the music**

There is no specific rule that prohibits the use of vocals within the music. However, it is considered unacceptable if the music used is basically a song.

Vocals should be considered to be sung words (in any language). A musical piece that uses vocals as an instrument, i.e. not specific words, but harmonic vocal sounds, or a piece of music only has vocals during the chorus, or only on certain key phrases can be used but it will be at the judge's discretion to determine if this is acceptable. A simple guide would be to ask yourself if the vocal aspect actually enhances or brings anything additional to the overall performance of your test and to recognise using music with vocals will always have an element of risk as you may get a judge who really doesn't like vocals being used.

If you are really keen to use a particular song because the rhythm and tempo is right it is worth having a search on the internet for an instrumental version of it – you'll be surprised how many instrumental versions there are of well known chart songs!

### **Sourcing your music**

Music can be sourced from so many places, your own music collection, your friends and family and their friends and families and of course the internet now provides a rich source of downloadable music of all genres, many of which can be purchased as individual tracks.

I also find the local 'bargain' racks and baskets in my local supermarket or the bargains page of such websites as Amazon an excellent source of cheap and unusual music.

Spotify - <https://www.spotify.com/uk> - is an excellent free resource to research and listen to music before committing to buying a track or album

Of course if you are lucky enough to know someone who is proficient on a keyboard, 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 3 time music is a waltz rhythm which is usually too slow, however canter music doesn't have to be 3 time. The music should always have a clear beat or rhythm and a synchronous tempo and focussing on the tempo of the music is the only true way to judge the synchronisation to be correct or not. ***Ask yourself, are the horse's hooves hitting the ground in time with the of the music?***

Once you find something you like and you think will work, test it by playing it and setting your metronome against it to see if the BPM is right for the pace you want to use it for. 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.

### **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 to use for your test.

Most music contains highs and lows, or phrasing within the same piece. You will have done very well indeed if you find you are able to match your floor pattern to match the different emphases within the music – eg when you change from working trot to medium trot. This is not an easy task and if you manage this it should be recognised and reflected by the judge in the final score in the marks they give you for the choreography and musical interpretation as true musical choreography.

The timing of your test starts after you move off after your first Halt & Salute, 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. You can have up to 20 seconds of intro music to get you in the arena and halted – don't waste that opportunity, try and find a section of music that really announces your arrival in the arena!*

### **Transitions and changes of music**

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. **Your transitions must be well timed with the change in your music.** If you find you cannot find an exact timing match for the music with the transition without having to chop it short in an unnatural place, be flexible and creative and ready to revisit your floor pattern to amend it slightly rather than have a clunky and abrupt end to that piece of music. Each piece of music must 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, use as many of the natural starts, breaks etc to make what is already a tricky job a little easier. 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.

### **Editing and recording your music**

These days there are a number of music editing software packages available for your computer and with a bit of practice this is by far the best way to edit and mix your music. They range from professional software that can be very complicated and expensive to relatively cheap downloadable software. Some software can be downloaded for a limited trial period for free and is worth taking advantage of as you may only need to do this once. If you really get in to your dressage to music and will be recording a number of different programs, you don't have to spend a fortune on software. Take a look around on the internet, read reviews on how easy it is to use and make your choice from there and if you haven't got very good IT skills yourself, you may be really fortunate and have a friend or family member who has who can help you or for a fee there are people out there who will do this for you. Despite the fact that every venue 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.

### **Are the musical transitions natural and smooth?**

The transitions between different musical pieces should be smooth, in musical time and pleasing to the ear. At the very least the music should be edited to fade smoothly between one piece and into the next. Silent gaps or abrupt harsh changes between two different pieces of music will be highlighted as being sub-standard and this will be reflected in your marks for the scoring of the music and interpretation of the music

**Quality** – it is in your interest to make the best possible job of your recording because the judge is quite within their rights to 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 quality or poor PA equipment or the speakers may be at the downwind end of your arena so the sound is being carried away from you. If you cannot 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 music should always be recorded to a good quality cd. *It's a good idea not to use a cd that can be re-recorded on to save wiping out your music program by accident!*

## **WHAT NEXT?**

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 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 always recommend you play it out loud on a ghetto blaster or iPod speakers when riding through it as your horse will get to know their music too!

Always check your final 'competition' cd's will play on any player – play it in the car, on your home system, a portable device, someone else's device! On very rare occasions, the settings on the editing software may need changing to ensure the cd can be played on any device and it's no good finding this out once you are at a competition and your cd won't play!

***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 cd and break it, and without your music you can't compete and all your hours of planning will have been wasted.

Your music should be labelled as follows:

- On the cd - Riders name and horses name
- On the cd case - Riders name, horses name + your BD Music Licence sticker (see *Admin Details*)

***PLUS and VERY IMPORTANTLY*** instructions for whoever is operating the PA system at the competition 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!

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.

## **ADMIN DETAILS**

To play copied music in public, you must have a music licence. You can arrange this by completing and returning both a *Music Sub-licence Agreement* and a *Music Licence Record* form to British Dressage. Both forms can be downloaded from the BD website Dressage to Music page

Once received, British Dressage will send you stickers, which you need to put on your CDs to fulfill the license agreement.

There is no charge for this service if you are a BD member. If you are not a member, you can become a BD music member for £36 per year or £25 if you are a riding club member.

### **DON'T FORGET TO ENJOY YOURSELF!**

Dressage to music is fun but if 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.

### **.....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 know 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's 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!

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.

If you require any help with putting together any aspect or all of your Freestyle to Music program, please see our Dressage to Music page on [www.justsoequestrianevents.co.uk](http://www.justsoequestrianevents.co.uk) where you will find a range of costed services

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