

Master List

Improvisation and Step Creation Tools

Improvisation

When playing with improvisation or using it in 'battefile conditions' as Kathy would say, I also use it to create steps and to practice steps. In class and video lessons I often guide you through one concept at a time. This is to help you focus and explore this idea or explore one step. As you bring improvisation into your practice you can dance any or all of these ideas in the same practice or set of tunes. They can become like steps that are in your repertoire and you can dance them the same as you would dance a step.

Direction

Dancing in different directions. Dancing in place, sideways, circle around self, circle around stage, zig zag, forward and back, angle. Dance on your box or board and use the full space. When you are first learning a step it might be easier to learn it in place, but once you have the step down try dancing it moving. This helps with fluidity and grace. It also creates interest and can make steps appear and look different based on which direction you are dancing them.

Guided Practice:

1. Limit yourself to one step and dance it in all directions. Dance a whole tune or a whole practice session with just this one step. See what you discover. You might find that you start to get bored eventually dancing one step and other patterings start to come out of your feet. Explore that.

Echo

echoing the tune, phrases, space or rhythmic patterns. This is a great way to learn a tune in your feet as well as a way to dance a tune.

Call and response

dancing call in response with another dancer or with the music or the tune.

Stealing or copying

Stealing or copying refers to borrowing moves or sounds from other dancers or musicians and playing back and forth with each other. If you don't have dancers, musicians, or a teacher to collaborate with, get creative and use YouTube. You can find videos of dancers or musicians and practice at home. This method will help you learn and dance up to tempo, while also developing your own style.

This copying or stealing doesn't need to be exact. In fact, it's better if you end up with your own version of what they're doing. Chances are, you'll come up with your unique way to dance to a rhythm you hear or a movement you see. This will be your natural way to interpret those sounds and movements, which is highly encouraged.

Dancing the rhythm or clapping the rhythm - tapping out a rhythm with your heels or hands and then building it into a step. This works great for learning a tune and deciding what you want to dance to that tune.

Phrasing or Space - Pause or leave beats out, breath - musicians will do this - flute players. Great place to use your arms as well.

Extra beats - adding extra beats to any step to create more rhythm. Also eliminating extra beats for the same reason. Eliminating beats to learn a step as well as to dance it at faster tempos. I started doing this with my accordion playing in sessions when I found that the tune was too fast for me but I could play every other note or the first note of a phrase and keep up.

Length of Phrases or movements - 8 bars / 4 bars / 2 bars / 1 bars. Could also dance across bars with crooked lengths.

Emphasis - Emphasis one movement over the other. Our natural step dancing emphasis comes when we use our full weight on a step. You can move this to different parts of the tune and step.

Shifting the Beat - Start 1 beat over, Add a beat and remove a beat, Add a beat and keep keep a beat. Remove a beat. Swinging the beat and moving into different parts of the music.

Dynamics - soft to aggressive. Playing with the tune and musicians.

Pitch or Tone - Dancing steps on your toes or heels, high, low or deep sounds.

Rearrange Step - Move the parts of the step around to create a new pattern.

Rearrange the rhythm - rearrange the step to create a different rhythm.

Weight - keep weight the same with hop or tap and transfer step to the other foot.

One sided only - dance movements only on one side right only, then left only. Double shuffling with one foot.

Dancing the Tune - crafting steps for a particular tune.

Insert a movement - insert a movement or a pattern into the original step. You might have to remove an equal amount of bars to make the step square or you can choose to leave them in and have a step that goes across the bars of music or something that you square off eventually.

The dancer - Dancing off of another dancer and 'stealing' steps. Trading ideas and playing off each other. You can do this in person you can also do this online with a video and dance along with the dancer playing.

The Player - knowing the playing of a particular player.

The Instrument

What each instrument is capable of and what is interesting to you about each one.

Watch the player and dance off of them. You can do this on youtube if you don't have a player nearby.

The Breath of flute player, whistle player, singer

Dancing to the bow of a fiddler.

the bellows of an accordion player.

the regulators of a piper.

A Band

dancing to multiple instruments and rangements.

Time Signature

changing the time signature of a step to create a new step.

Tempo

Tempo of a particular tune, dance or style is played at. What sounds good?

Reels 110-120, Slides 130-140

Context

session, stage, personal enjoyment, party piece, classroom

Direction - in place, sideways, circle around self, circle around stage, zig zag, forward and back, angle

Phrasing or Space - Pause or leave beats out, breath - musicians will do this - flute players.

Length of Phrases or movements - 8bars/4bars/2bars/1bars

Emphasis - Emphasis one movement over the other. Swinging the beat and moving into different parts of the music.

Shifting the Beat - Start 1 beat over, Add a beat and remove a beat, Add a beat and keep keep a beat, Remove a beat

Dynamics - soft to aggressive

Pitch or Tone - Dancing steps on your toes or heels, high, low or deep sounds.

Rearrange Step / Rhythmic variation - Moving the Stamp, Step or heel to different parts of the step and music.

Weight -keep weight the same with hop or tap and transfer step to the other foot.

One sided only -dance movements only on one side right only, then left only

Dancing the Tune - crafting steps for a particular tune

The Player -knowing the playing of a particular player

The Instrument

A Band

Time Signature - changing the time signature of a step

Tempo

Context - session, stage, personal enjoyment, party piece