

## **Notes from a Tempo Workshop - 11/5/92**

**Organized by Don Beck with callers Shawn Cuddy, John Hendron, Everett Mackin and Jim Mayo**

3 1/2 squares of dancers were invited ranging in age from the early 30's to past 75 and in dancing experience from 3 years to more than 30. The dance material used was standard PLUS which was comfortable for all those in attendance.

We started by asking each caller to call a segment (less than 1/2 a record) using a familiar record set at whatever speed (RPM) felt comfortable. The range of tempos went from 118 to 132. The dancers reported noticeable differences in "speed". Further discussion suggested that these differences could be attributed to the "style of delivery" which means how many filler words were used and very minute differences in timing.

We then asked the dancers to execute a series of long calls (square thru and relay the deuce) without music. The tempo that they settled on was about 120 and it increased slightly as they moved through the movements.

We then asked the dancers to form a circle and promenade to a tape, recorded with segments ranging from 115 bpm to 135 bpm. They reported the 115 as feeling slow and the 135 as too fast but from 120 bpm to 130 bpm was agreed to be comfortable.

Next we set a record that all callers found comfortable (JoPat Sunshine) at 124 bpm and let each caller call a segment. Again the dancers found noticeable differences in the sensation of speed. Discussion determined that these had to do with the use of filler words vs essentially "prompting" delivery. One observation that began to surface in this part of the program was that callers using more words also tended to use slightly tighter timing. The timing differences were agreed by the observing callers to be less than 1 beat (1/2 second).

One of the callers then tried using the same tempo to call first with a prompt style and then with added filler words. This did increase the sense of speed but also the dancers and observing callers agreed that the timing was tightened slightly when the extra words were added.

Another caller then tried calling first at 128 bpm and then at 132 bpm. The dancer consensus was that 128 bpm was comfortable but that 132 was noticeably less comfortable. Further discussion suggested that the caller was less comfortable at 132 bpm and that this affected the calling making it less smooth (well timed.) The dancers reported that at 132 bpm they "had to wait more."

An additional experiment involved using less familiar arrangements and formations at 124 bpm and this produced noticeably more ragged dancing even though the material was well within the capability of these dancers. In both this situation and when the tempo was above 130 bpm with standard choreography the observers noted that the dancing began to look "ragged." The dancers did not move "as a unit" as well as they did at slower tempos. Some dancers who had been stepping on every beat started walking "off the beat" when the tempo got too fast for them personally at tempos above 128 bpm.

Additional discussion revealed that the dancers experience differences in "speed" during the course of an evening with a caller who is using the same tempo for all music. There was substantial agreement with the statement that timing is much more important than tempo in determining the dancers sensation of speed. The dancers also agreed that they were comfortable dancing at tempos anywhere in the range from 118 bpm to 128 bpm. At tempos faster than 128 bpm there were many who found the dancing too fast and many agreed that even 128 bpm would be too fast for the whole night although they would enjoy it for a tip or two early in the dance.