



## Syncopating Rhythms using Rolling Count

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**Recent inquiries still center on the word and definition of SYNCOPATION.** The dictionary describes "Syncopation" as the rearrangement of the metered beat. In a conversation with George Griffin, the famous Jazz drummer who played many years at Trani's in Long Beach, he described "syncopation" the same way WE do, with a *Rolling Count*. He said that reading about *Rolling Count* in my book, he realized why the Swing dancers follow him everywhere he goes. He said that "&a1 &a2" is the *mantra* that runs through his head - whenever he plays. Those of us who have been there, know from experience that his Rolling Drum-count can **pull dancers out of their chairs - and push them onto the floor! (BEEN there - DONE that!)**

**MUSICIANS actually syncopate SOUND! The DANCER does not make sounds. Dancers syncopate "Weight Changes."** They are two different things. According to email and phone inquiries - many dancers are confused when they read articles that talk about **accenting** different beats of music - or **holding** beats of music for longer periods of time. **That description of syncopation only works if you are playing a musical instrument.** Most of the musicians I interviewed understood the word "syncopation" as rearranging the metered beat. Several were also aware of the dancers use of syncopations. The dancer simply deals with this rearrangement of the metered beat - in the form of weight changes. To clarify this approach, picture the dancer as a VISUAL *Rhythm Instrument* in the band. When a DJ plays the music - the orchestra is coming out of a little black box called a speaker. The DANCER is the only *Instrument* that onlookers get to see. As such - the dancer gets to **rearrange the metered beat** with his feet! (and his body).

**Dancers Sheet Music** looks very different from that of a piano player, but not quite as different as a drum score. Many people understand just enough about reading sheet music - that they try to relate that same process to the dance. Incidentally - I have found very few piano players who can read a drum score - and yet the sheet music for different instruments all come together when the music plays. ALL the instruments are tuned to the BEAT of the music. *Syncopation* for the DANCER rearranges the metered beat by changing the rhythm of the weight changes. How WELL those weight changes are arranged - determines the dancers level of performance.

**Play a nice slow piece of music.** Listen for the *Sets-of-8*, Counting out those *Sets-of-8* can sharpen your perception of keeping time to music - and condition your mind to hear where the *syncopations* should go. A simple maneuver like repeating "Step-touch & Step-touch" or "Side-touch & Side-touch") to a count of "&a1 &a2" will go a long way toward **feeling the thrill of matching the movement of your body to the rhythmic feel in the music:**

Lift your center on the &-Count - Step to the side on the a-Count - and touch the free heel to the weighted foot on *Count -1*. Lift your center on the next &-Count - Step to the side on the a-Count, and touch the free heel to the weighted foot on *Count-2*. Continue this *rhythmic pattern* through 8 beats of music. Repeat this basic *syncopation*, over and over, saying the *Rolling Count* out loud You will FEEL that subtle *Syncopated Rhythm*, way up in your *Center (CPB)*. **You are now one step closer to where you want to be.**

**The quality of a Syncopation is very closely connected to how well you are able to SAY and also FEEL that rhythmic Rolling Count.** Counting "& 1 & 2" is still a *syncopation*, but is only a Two Dimensional movement. ("1e&a 2e&a" makes the dancer look *too busy*, and is still a standard STRAIGHT COUNT). Counting "&a1 &a2" **turns your syncopation into a Three Dimensional performance. Rolling Count provides a separate count for lifting your CPB - independent of the weight changes. The difference in the count may seem slight - but it creates a WORLD of difference in a performance.**

Courtesy of Skippy Blair, WSDC Education Coordinator

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