

Whitepaper

Riding Musical Freestyles

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Introduction

Dressage to music becomes a dance, a dance of the horse, guided by the rider with nearly invisible aids. Together they float on the tones of the music, light and gentle in collection and expressive in the extended gaits. It seems as if the horse follows the rhythm of the music and barely touches the surface. The music tells a story and guides the spectators towards the end. A final salute of the rider, the horse is standing still and it looks as if it receives the applauding with pride.

When you've once witnessed this, you know one thing for sure: this is what dressage should be like. And riding a Musical Freestyle yourself is the most beautiful form of dressage.

You don't have to wait with riding a Musical Freestyle yourself until you've reached Grand Prix or even Advanced level. This guide explains you step by step how to create a good and beautiful Musical Freestyle at any level. It helps with the test, the rules, the choice and making of the music and eventually the actual riding of it.

Useful links give the background information that is necessary.

This guide is handy for every dressage rider who wants to ride a Musical Freestyle.

Marja Posch, february2011

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The choreography

A musical freestyle starts with the test, the so called choreography.

The rules for the tests are created by the national dressage organizations. In the UK British Dressage, in the US the USDF and for example in Australia the EFA.

www.britishdressage.co.uk

www.usdf.org

www.efanational.com

On their website you can find the levels and the lengths and obliged movements for every level.

A very common length worldwide for a musical freestyle is for example between 4.30 and 5 minutes. The intro does not count: the timing is from the moment that you go forward after the first salute until the last salute. There are rules for the length of the intro as well, but usually an intro is between 15-20 seconds in the gait that you prefer. In walk the intro is usually a bit longer and in canter a bit shorter.

There's often also the choice of making your musical freestyle for a 20x40 or 20x60 arena, depending on the level, the arena where you shall perform and the rules of your national organization.



The making of the test

When you design a choreography, you can choose where and how you ride the obliged movements. This way you can make a test as difficult as you want it to be. For example the movement shoulder in: this is more difficult when you ride it on the centerline or a quarter line, because you miss the support of the side of the arena. When you ride a beautiful straight line, you'll receive a higher mark. But when you don't ride a straight line in your shoulder in at the centerline, you'll receive a lower mark than you could have scored for it... So it's always better to make a test a not to difficult and score higher marks because the performance of the movements is correct!

You can also choose in which directions you ride the movements, for example the strong movements of your horse towards the judges (for example the extended gaits) and the weaker points in the other direction, for example the traversales or shoulder in.

Unfortunately you only have about 4 or 5 minutes to show all the obliged movements, there's not much time

for extra movements. Make sure that the walk-part in your freestyle isn't too long; it's less dynamic to watch for the judge and spectators.

Make sure that the degree of difficulty isn't higher than allowed for your level. All the rules you can find on the website of the national organizations. When you have doubts, check it before finishing designing your test.

In the design symmetry is important, this means that you ride your movements the same on the left and righthand side. This makes your freestyle logic and easier to understand for a judge.

It's best to ride not too many transitions. Every transition between gaits means a transition in music, so it's best to ride the complete trot, canter and walk in one part.

An often used structure for Musical Freestyles is: intro, trot, walk, canter, endtrot. In this endtrot usually an extended trot towards the judge is ridden. But if that's not a strong movement of your horse, it's better to choose something else, like traversales.

Choice of music

When the test is made, the choice of music is next. Important is, that the music does something for your horse. That it makes the horse seem to move better: with more power, energy and higher from the ground.

To discover this, you need to use a video of the horse. You play this together with the music that you want to use. This music is preferably instrumental (vocals are allowed, but in general not appreciated) and of course of an excellent quality.

When choosing the music, don't be guided (too much) by your own taste of music. More important are these 2 questions: Does it suit the horse? And what will the judges think of it? Or, when you ride demonstrations instead of competitions: Will the audience like it?

Freestyle dressage music does not need to be music that you play in your daily life, it's all about the combination with your horse.

Try to make the Musical Freestyle sound like one piece of music, you can achieve that by using one genre of artist for the different gaits. Make sure that you don't mix different musical styles, this is not appreciated and gives a 'messy' endresult.

It's also important to be aware of the type of horse that you have, there are a few general rules for the combination of horse and music. A fast moving, energetic, light horse, does not need music with a lot of rhythm. This would accentuate his fast rhythm, it's better to use light melodic music with this type of horse.

Happy, light music does not make a good combination with a big strong, good moving horse. Then it's better to choose music with body and rhythm in it as well. Young children and heavy, classical music usually make a bad combination, something a bit younger and more modern is often a better choice.

When you read these examples, think of what type of horse you have and what music would suit him, and keep this in mind when you're searching music for your

Freestyle. The music needs to improve his gaits and the way he moves.

In general you use three parts of music for walk, trot and canter. Usually it's beautiful when your intro and end part are part of these three pieces of music, or a matching part of music can be used for these. Using too many different parts of music gives a 'messy' end result and can make it impossible to have your musical freestyle sound like one piece of music.



Putting the music together

We have a test now and you have chosen the music. Now comes the next and most difficult part: putting the music together.

A musical freestyle is a dance, but despite what the audience might think, the music is adapted to the gaits of the horse, the horse is not dancing to the music.

The timing of the choreography is written out, and the music will be put together to this timing. In general you can say, that in the higher levels these timings are more detailed. And in the lower levels the timing is simpler, for example just the total amount of seconds per gait.

In the higher levels all the movements can be accentuated in the music, for example the traversales and extended gaits. This makes it a lot more difficult for the rider to ride exactly 'in' the timing. As soon as he's before or behind, even if it's just a few seconds, the whole effect is gone and it can even work against you.

You can put the music together yourself. For this you can use a special program like for example Moviemaker. But these programs are just the tools, with which the Freestyle Dressage Designer makes the Freestyle Music. Knowledge and feeling for music and a lot of experience with putting music together make a beautiful end product.

Putting together the music for a Musical Freestyle yourself can be a lot of fun of course, and you can spend many evenings on it.



Having the music put together for you

Of course there are another alternatives, and in every price range.

At Marvin's Music (www.marvinmusic.nl/english) you can buy a Musical Freestyle with a test for € 19,95 and you're ready to perform within a day or a few days. There's also the option to make a combination of the different music at the website or design your own test first and have the music adapted to that.

For anyone who does not have the time or knowledge to work on their own music for days, this is the perfect alternative. You can also choose to have your choreography designed for you and your music made with other music than the music from the website. This way there's a beautiful Musical Freestyle possible for literally every budget and level (from training level up to Grand Prix level).

Practicing your Musical Freestyle

The next step is getting to know the music. It's important not to practice the freestyle too many times with your horse, the performance becomes worse instead of better when you ride it over and over again. And it loses the freshness and liveliness.

To get to know the music, you have to listen to it over and over again, until you can literally dream it. This way you ride your Musical Freestyle with confidence, you'll know whether you're 'in' the music or before or behind, and you can solve that invisible for the spectators.

To find out where to stand before the music starts you can do this: When you practice with the music, halt at the spot from where you want to go forward after the first salute, but turn your horse in the opposite direction. When the intro music starts, go forward and stop at the end of the intro. You are now standing at the spot where you have to start your Freestyle.

Performing your Musical Freestyle

And then finally you are ready to perform your Musical Freestyle for an audience and judges. At the different competition calendars you can see where Musical Freestyles can be ridden. But of course these events need to be organized.

Marvin's Music stimulates the organization of Freestyle dressage competitions by sponsoring with prizes for the winners (organizing persons can contact us for that by email). Everyone can organize unofficial freestyle dressage events at every level as well, also for riders at training and first level.

This makes a nice change with the regular dressage competitions and is usually a big success and results in popular annual festivals.

Is there a Freestyle Dressage competition at your stable/ridingclub? When several riders need a freestyle for it, Marvin's Music gives a nice discount for all of them. Contact us at info@marvinsmusic.nl for more information.

And...

Realize that riding Musical Freestyles is a different discipline within the dressagesport. Riding it is more difficult than riding a normal test at the same level. Don't make it too difficult for yourself and your horse the first few times.

Again: It's better to ride a perfect Musical Freestyle with a lower degree of difficulty, then riding a more difficult Freestyle with a lot of errors in it.



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