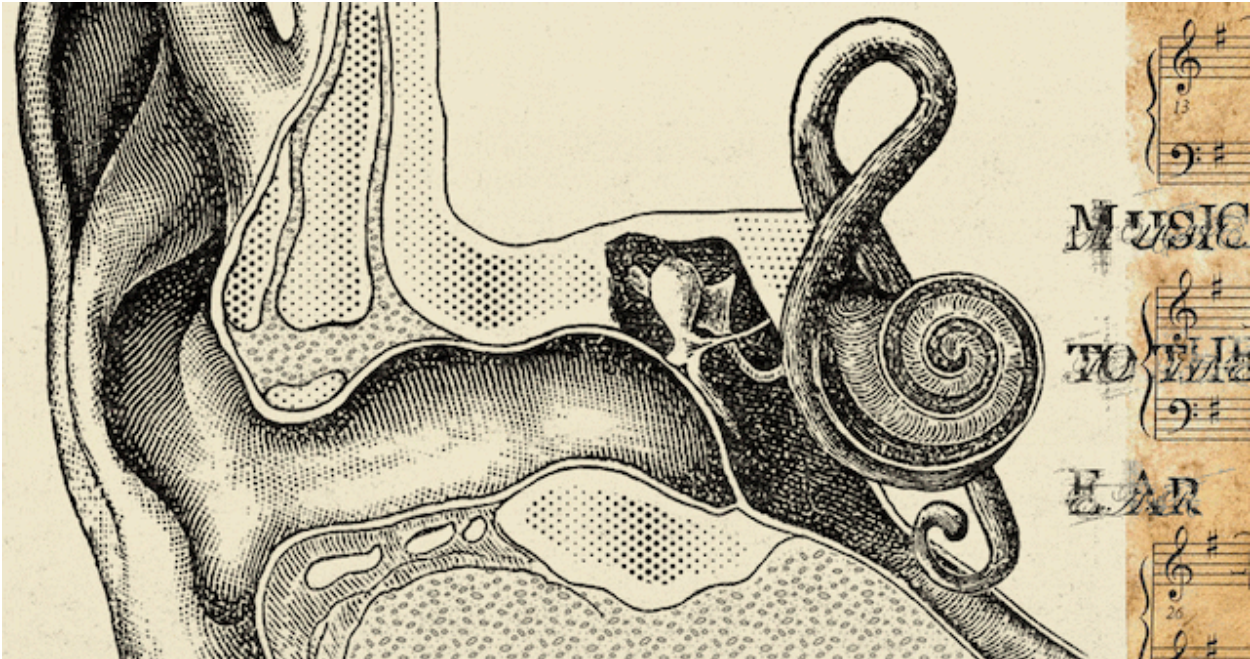


Musicality! “People hear what they see”



Musicality: • awareness of music and rhythm, esp. in dance: the audition panel was looking for coordination, musicality, and flexibility.

Consider that musicality is an overall sensation or perception. The above definition implies the connection-coordination of something visual as one is experiencing sound. Actions produced with specific rhythms hopefully make a pleasing audio-visual experience for the audience, participant or observer.

The definition of musicality is an interesting subject especially regarding Ballroom Dance. So many venues to discuss and talk about. If you look at the old MGM musicals they are unbeatable. Of course they had amazing performance artists Fred and Ginger, Gene Kelly and the rest. But those super stars were also in a controlled environment. Those dancers knew each beat of music way before any performance as well as being supplied with character costumes, lighting, camera angles and of course as many takes as it took to get it right. One really couldn't go wrong. It is pretty much the same with the current DWTS's TV show. Remember Michael Jackson's "Thriller" for a Paso -Doble? Is this choice of music authentic? Perhaps not, BUT very marketable and camped up enough for the desired effect. They might not get as many takes to get it right but because of numerous rehearsals to pre-chosen music they have a great opportunity of producing their specialized routine. And last but not least let me share the memories of dancing the Cha-Cha at Blackpool to the infamous song "Talk to the animals". I saw extremely talented dancers in that venue actually make me believe that was an authentic Cha-Cha. Talk about "cheeky"! A memory that will live with me forever. "People hear what they see"

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I recently attended the Broadway musical Kinky Boots. It was AMAZING!!! The full package! Tremendous audience connection-participation and top quality performance artists on all levels. Producing a beautiful message of learning to love and accept one another as the end product. I am still smiling from the experience. The perfect musical coordination of past, present and the future of where many performance artists are heading. Encompassing Spirit, Mind and Body!

But let's get back to musicality in a competition venue. I have heard many wonderful lectures on how Ballroom Dancing has to be more authentic and connected to its “roots.” Dream on! Moving forward in today's society we have very few meeting places or venues to go out dancing to big band-orchestra's that produced those beautiful Ballroom Dancing sounds. Never mind the disappearance of the authentic Latin Clubs to visit and dance to artists like the late Tito Puente etc...One can go to practice nights at the local dance studio but they seem to be geared more toward the competition rounds and wins. Not wrong but that seems to be where the current music has led and influenced today's dancer. And of course today's house music-hip hop etc influences EVERYTHING! Who knows what those excellent musical directors or D.J's will play on that day? History and authenticity are important principles. Good to share, to teach and pass on but sometimes not always realistic in today's competitive world.

From what I have observed due to the influence of the sport like energy in the ballroom field today's dancer has very little chance of connecting to any kind of musicality unless they rehearse (aka: re-hear) to a wide range of songs before a competition or dance a solo where they can hit accents and highlights for all to enjoy. Time wise not always an option. Especially with so many dances to learn, competitions to attend and so many coaches to please.

This lack of connection to the music sadly in my opinion does not really encourage the dancers, especially the up and coming youth to develop their own personalities. That is what is so pleasing to the eye and ear to experience. To watch those personalities develop. Those young dancers are doing what they are told and imitating what they see and hear. Who can blame them? “People hear what they see”

But I have witnessed some terrific performances by dancers of all ages who are so well rehearsed and tuned into each other that they seem to be dancing in their special bubble and actually connecting with the music on the day. I take my hat off to them. In the gladiator like arena of the competitive ballroom dance world musicality seems to be the last thing on most peoples mind. I am sure they are dealing with many factors: Partnering, technique, floor craft, costume malfunctions, etc..very little time to make it around the room to be seen. A lot of stress and very little time to produce their hearts desire.

I have no exact answer to help these young performance and dance artists in the ring, on the way up or trying to hold a slot. All I can say is if you are true to yourself at all times, have the intention of producing organic movements, rhythms or actions that you can relate to you might just might make an impact next time around.

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I will close by sharing a story from my mentor the late great Bob Medeiros who literally followed all the latin bands around the country like a groupie because he was “obsessed” with the rhythms and sounds they produced.

After dancing for the first time in England he came off the dance floor and complained to his then coach the brilliant Mr. Walter Laird that the bands were not playing correct or authentic rhythms for him to dance to. Mr. Laird's response to him was “ Boy make up your own”. So when he went out for the next round of the Samba he would cluck his tongue and sing the rhythms out loud to his partner who at that time was the sensational Sheryn Hawkins. From that point on they always sang or communicated rhythms to each other as they danced so they had a common sound between them. They put in what they wanted to hear in the music so people could see what they heard. Once again kudos to Mr. Laird, and a much more satisfying experience Bob assured me many a time.

Can competitive couples do that today? I am sure many can. Maybe this will encourage dancers having difficulties hearing, feeling or producing rhythms and actions in their bodies. If one is enjoying the connection to the music and relating to a partner as they dance there is a very strong possibility someone in the audience or on the judging panel will enjoy it with them. And that is a good thing. Walking away from someone's performance connecting with their interpretation of a Waltz, Bolero, MGM musical or the coordination of a Broadway show. Hearing, seeing and feeling what they felt and smiling because you shared it with them. That is musicality. That is worth the price of admission! “People hear what they see.” Open your ears and see it.

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