

In Search of a Song: Bringing the Best Music to the Blade

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Skating is the perfect union of movement and music. Choosing the right piece of music to skate to is as important as working on skating skills and elements. When selecting music, you have to consider:

- Age of the skater
- Technical ability
- Choreographic background
- Length of program
- Type of event – exhibition, competition, or test
- Competition experience

The goal is to bring out the strengths of the skater and hide their weaknesses using clever choreography teamed with suitable music. Choose music that a skater likes and connects to because this will make the choreographing job an easier one, and the skater will be able to become more emotionally involved with music they enjoy. A connection with the audience develops as well. Remember – the skater will have to listen to their music selection many times so the piece needs to be something they like.

Select music that has a strong melodic line, meaning a recognizable tune. Judges are not supposed to mark down a skater if they do not like the music; however, unpleasant music can affect the overall impression one has of the skater and mar a performance.

When choosing music, keep these musical elements in mind:

- Melody – can you recognize the main musical theme and sing along to it?
- Rhythm – time signature which will indicate type of music ex. 2/4 might be a tango, polka or march; 4/4 may be blues or rock; 3/4 - a waltz
- Tempo – music should have a mix of fast and slow sections to highlight different skating skills
- Articulation – short, fast detached notes for quick steps and footwork, or long, smooth legato sections for spirals and stroking

- Dynamics – loud or soft sections; music that crescendos (gradually builds and gets louder) or decrescendos (gradually gets softer)
- Texture – many instruments playing , a solo instrument, two instruments, or a small ensemble

Dramatic music will require strong skating skills, lyrical sections will need smooth, elegant skating with flow, and lively articulated sections will require fast footwork and quick steps.

When editing music, be sure to include strong musical highlights that a skater can hear as this will help them with program memory as well as build and move their skating sequences towards certain musical themes for effect. The choreographer will need to hear these highlights and changes in the music and plan accordingly to create an interesting program that demonstrates an understanding of the music.

What are great sources of music? Have a listen to soundtracks from films because nowadays that is where most composers find steady employment. Film scores set a mood, convey emotion, create suspense and accompany action or sudden dramatic changes. Some great film composers are:

Ennio Morricone – *The Mission, Cinema Paradiso, The Untouchables*

Gabriel Yared – *Betty Blue 37.2 Le Le Matin, Camille Claudel, A Royal Affair*

Howard Shore – *Hugo*

John Williams – *E.T. , Schindler's List, Memoirs of a Geisha*

Other film composers to explore are Elmer Bernstein, Michael Giacchino, James Horner, and Craig Armstrong. No matter what film you are viewing, make note of the composer if you like the score. A great film tends to have a great score because the two go hand in hand.

In the classical world, ballets are a great source for musical excerpts. You can often combine different scenes to create variances in tempo, texture and emotion. Excellent ballets are *Swan Lake, Don Quixote, Coppelia, Giselle, Sleeping Beauty, The Firebird, The Nutcracker, Le Corsaire, and Romeo and Juliet*. There are many to choose from.

Concertos are works for a solo instrument accompanied by an orchestra. These are wonderful pieces to skate to because concertos are usually written in 3 movements of varying tempos and key signatures so you can combine different movements for effect. Examples of concertos are Rachmaninoff Piano Concerto #2, Brahms Violin Concerto, or the Elgar Cello Concerto.

Theme and Variations is a piece of music that begins with a theme that is the main melody. The theme is followed by one or more variations of that main melody. You can choose the main theme then a few variations which will be different in tempo and melody. There are lots of examples of this type of form. Just Google “Theme and Variations” or add to it “on a theme by another composer” and there will be a huge list.

Symphonies are elaborate musical compositions for full orchestra, typically in four movements. There will be a mix of tempo changes as well as key changes from major/minor between movements which will change the mood and feel of the work. Mozart wrote 41 symphonies, Beethoven - 9, Brahms – 4, Haydn – 106. These are just a few highlights.

Overtures to operas or arias performed instrumentally without vocals are wonderful sources to skate to. Here you can find all kinds of stories from the dramatic to the comic. Popular opera composers are Verdi, Puccini, Bizet (for *Carmen*), Mozart, Rossini and Bellini. Opera without words recordings are quite easy to find.

Dance music needs an article in itself because there is so much to choose from. A few highlights would be tango, polka, waltz, samba, mambo and the list goes on. Dances will have a time signature that identifies them, such as 2/4 for tango, and an accent on a specific beat. A polonaise is in 3/4 time like a waltz but unlike a waltz that has the rhythmic emphasis on **1**, the strong beat is on the second beat of the second bar – 1, 2, 3/ 1, **2**, 3.

One of the easiest ways to listen to any of these works and genres mentioned is to go to You Tube and search by key words such as a composer’s name, genre of music (symphony), or title. Visit your public library to borrow from their vast CD library and have a listen to things. iTunes does have a huge array of music to download, but it is often lacking in the classical music department both in choice of artist, orchestra, and overall great recordings. Often you hear only the most generic renditions; this is why it is important

to listen to several different versions of a work. Soundtracks are the only genre where you will find uniformity as usually one studio orchestra releases the recording for the film.

Enjoy discovering the wide range of music that is available to skate to. Interpreting a great piece of music through both the body and the blade is one of the pleasures of watching and participating in skating.