

Florida Music Educators Association – Tampa, Florida - Peter & Mary Alice Amidon

Evening Community Dance - sponsored by West Music

Tampa Convention Center, Room 14 • Thursday, January 11, 2018 • 8:00 – 9:30 pm

For post-workshop online notes (which will be up by Saturday night, January 13) please go to:

www.amidonmusic.com

We never know ahead of time what dances we'll be doing at an evening dance at a Music Teacher Conference; that depends on the numbers of people, the space, and the mood of the room. I will publish a list of the dances we are doing tonight, along with a few notes about each dance, in *Post-workshop online notes* described above.

This was originally published in last summer's edition of the Orff Echo.

Peter Amidon's Almost Completely Random List of Dance Tips

Here are some abbreviations I'll be using:

New England Dancing Masters - **NEDM**

NEDM Dance collections

Chimes of Dunkirk – **C**

Listen to the Mockingbird – **L**

Sashay the Donut – **S**

NEDM Music for Dance CDs

Any Jig or Reel - **A**

Other Side of the Tracks – **O**

I occasionally use “gents” and “ladies” language for clarity. Whether or not you do gent (boy)/lady (girl) partner dancing is up to you; this is a subject for another article. I will just say that I like alternating between: random chosen gender free partners; random chosen gents/lady partners; they choose their own partners gender free; and they choose their own partners gents/ladies. For our purposes in this article gent simply means the partner on the left, and lady means the partner on the right. See the dance tip below about assigning alternate names to the partner on the left and the partner on the right.

*** THE TIPS ***

* **Laugh** a lot.

* **Teaching taking hands**: standing in a circle with your students you say: “Show me your mittens: fingers together and thumb out, the front of your mitten, the back of your mitten. I am going to take the front of Frank's (frank to my right) mitten with the front of my mitten, thumb lightly on the back. Try that on both sides.

* **“shake and take”**: Great expression for teaching getting into the crossed hands (right in right, left in left) promenade hand hold.

* **To identify right hand**: “Everyone say, ‘Hello, right hand’”.

* **“Open like a book”**: Great expression for moving from facing partner holding two hands to letting go of one of the hands both of you turning to face in the same direction while hanging on to the other held hand.

* **“Handy hand”** – means, as you stand side by side with your partner, take hands with each other with the hands between you and your partner (gent's right, lady's left).

* **La Bastringue (C) for K/1:** Start as usual – Circle of partners. Take hands in a circle. Forward and back twice, circle left, circle right (or just one long circle left). Then dancers do two hand turn (with uncrossed hands – right in left, left in right) with partner. Then “open like a book” (see above) facing into the center of the circle, then turn as a couple to the right and start a “handy-hand” (see above) promenade (gent’s right hand still hanging on to lady’s left hand). To make a circle again, continue holding on to partner’s hand while you stop promenading, face center of the circle, and, with free hands (gent’s left and lady’s right) take hands with neighbors.

* **Adapting the Circle Waltz Mixer (S) for 2nd graders:** When young children do the two hand turn figure at the end of the Circle Waltz Mixer it is likely they will end up on the wrong side. Replace the two hand turn at the end of each figure with a sloooow bow to partner. I say, one “down” for every three beat measure: “Down, down, down, down,” then, “Back up, open like a book and get ready to start again.” I use this version also for a Community Dance where adults are dancing with children.

* **When first teaching a circle mixer** like La Bastringue (C), Blydon Races (C), and Larry’s Mixer (L): consider teaching the dance without changing partners. Add the partner progression later in that session, or maybe wait for a week before you introduce the partner progression.

* **Whenever doing a circle mixer** start by having dancers promenade and define the inside and outside person. Traditionally the gent is on the left/inside and the lady is on the right/outside. Some language possibilities for inside/outside, gent/lady are: peanut butter/jelly, moon/star, spider/fly, or, of course, gent/lady or inside/outside. In the Circle Waltz Mixer (S) I have the inside/left person be a “Rock” and the outside/right person be a “Twirler”.

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* **Know your students are going to love dancing.** Children are very sensitive to your attitude; it can be infectious.

* **Making a circle from a promenade** (and making sure dancers end up, in the circle, on the correct side of their partner), teach them these four steps: “Hang on to your partner, and stop walking. Hang on to your partner and face the center. Drop your hands. Take hands.”

* **Once you have done the above** a couple of times, have the children practice going from a promenade to a circle quickly. “Promenade, now make a circle! One, two, three, wow, only three seconds, but it was too slow. Try it again. Promenade . . . now Make a circle! One, two . . . Great! Only two seconds, but it was still too slow . . .”

* **Use the word “tiptoe”** when you first teach the forward and back to young children, to help them avoid the stampeding into the center they are inclined to do.

* **Teaching Heel & Toe Polka (C) with young children:** to help them know which is the inside foot for the “heel & toe” figure: toss a pen (or anything) into the center of the circle and say “with your inside foot, the foot closer to the pen...”

* **Another Heel & Toe Polka (C) teaching tip with young children:** Do the version where, after the clapping, they pass right shoulders (omitting the right hand or right elbow turn). The first time you walk through the dance, teach the pass-right-shoulders with one set of partners at a time, with you standing right next to them, talking them through it and making sure they go in the correct direction. The second time you walk through the dance, when you get to the pass right shoulders, announce: “And now, Ladies and Gentlemen, we are going to all pass right shoulders AT THE SAME TIME!” and then say “Raise your right hand and repeat after me: I will not turn around. I will not go back. I will walk straight forward past my partner. Now everyone look at your partner and say ‘Goodbye’”. Some of my favorite dance moments are getting Kindergarten and first grade students successfully doing this simple circle mixer.

* **Choreography** - You are helping your children dance with beautiful choreography. I don't mean changing the figures of the dances, rather executing the figures with grace, flow and musicality. Know that whenever you help them improve the choreography of the dance (for example, keeping a circle round, having the figures of the dance flow one to the next in synch with the phrasing of the music) you are increasing the joy they get from their dancing.

* **Add skipping** to make dances more dynamic. For example, have children skipping on the cast off under the arches of "Alabama Gal" (C). You demonstrate, and have the children demonstrate, relaxed rhythmic skipping.

* **When sashaying** down the middle in, say, "Alabama Gal" (C) or "Bridge of Athlone" (L) do not necessarily stop at the bottom of the set. Use all time in the musical phrase, which probably means you will go out through the bottom of the set. To help children get this when they are sashaying down the middle you can say, "down, down, down, down, down, down, down, back, back, back . . ."

* **"Wait"** – A great word for helping children dance to the phrasing of the music: "Right hand turn . . . wait, wait, wait, dosido."

* **At the same time**, teach the children to flow one figure into another. For example, teach the "La Bastringue" (C) dosido/two hand turn/promenade as one flowing figure; the dancers never stop moving.

* **Teaching "pass right shoulders"**: As the children promenade around the circle have the inside partner say "I am the Inside Person" and the outside partner say "I am the Outside Person". Once they make a circle, when you demonstrate the dosido, you say, "I am the Inside Person, so I start the dosido on the inside (of the circle), passing right shoulders. My partner is the Outside Person so she starts the dosido on the outside (of the circle) and starts with a pass right shoulders." After a while you will be able to just say "pass right shoulders" and the children will instinctively know what you mean.

* **Clockwise/Counterclockwise** - Similarly, frequently use the words "clockwise" when circling left and "counterclockwise" when circling right; after a while the children will instinctively know clockwise and counterclockwise.

* **Note: Promenading in a circle** or around a square is almost always done in a counterclockwise direction, with gents on the left/inside and ladies on the right/outside.

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* **Good posture** solves lots of dance problems and is a gift to your students. "Touch your ears with your shoulders. Now relax your shoulders, let your arms hang from your shoulders, and stand tall," or whatever language works for you. Look around for someone with good posture, walk up to them and say, "Look at Julie, head tall, shoulders relaxed, look how relaxed her arms are. We are going to call this the Julie-Third-Grade-Posture. If you forget how to stand, look at Julie."

* **Teach "Kindergarten Reel"** (L – email amidonpeter@gmail.com for an mp3 of the music) as a first longways dance to your K/1 students. It has its own music for moving up at the end of each figure. After a while put on a jig medley and add a couple of figures in the beginning: Forward & back, *one hand turn*, two hand turn, *dosido*, top couple sashay down the middle, back to the top, separate and cast off to the bottom (no one follows), all move up one place. Viola - a simple version of the Virginia Reel!

* **Put on "On the Danforth"** (S or O) while teaching "Kings and Queens" (S) – it helps get children in the mood of the dance. Teach in a calm voice and use royal language ("Lords and Ladies, forward and back"). When I teach this dance I think of Kings and Queens as meaning you are the very best person you can be. Similarly put on "In Continental" (S) while teaching "Circle Waltz Mixer" (S) or put on "Slow G" (S) while teaching "Durham Reel" (C), or put on "Golden Keyboard" (A) while teaching "Sicilian Vowel Dance" (S).

* **Dancing can be chaotic and noisy.** Know that dancing (all the children standing up and moving around) can be inherently more chaotic and noisy than other music room activities. Know that the first time you teach a dance it might not go smoothly; don't judge the dance by this first attempt. Try it a few more times before you decide whether the dance works for you and your students.

* **Giving weight:** when you teach an allemande right with partner, say: "Everyone repeat after me: hand up, elbow down, thumb around thumb, fingers over wrist, 7% arm wrestle." The last phrase is about giving weight (maybe you can find a better expression). You continue: "Yours and your partner's arms make a 'W' – always keep your elbow slightly bent, never let it get straight. Support your partner's weight as your partner supports your weight on the allemande right." Giving weight is subtle, and will take time for the students to learn, but giving weight makes the dancing much more dynamic. Dancers should give weight with that "W" between two dancers' arms also on a two hand turn and even when the whole group is circling left and right.

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* **Dance with your students.** They learn so much from this. They learn from the joy you get in your dancing, they learn the subtleties of the figures from watching you dance and from dancing with you. You are more likely to be joyful if you are dancing with your students.

* **Teach with a wireless headset microphone** system, even when teaching only a single class of students. This makes it much easier for you to teach while you are dancing with your students. You can mute and unmute your mic as needed. You can be more relaxed, and you will save your voice. You have a much bigger dynamic, and thus, emotional range to your teaching. Some dances are calm and elegant; with a wireless headset you have the opportunity to use a calm and "quiet" teaching voice. Did I mention that you will save your voice?

* **Go to your own local contra and English country dances.** You will be a better dance teacher if you are a dancer. Just Google them, they are everywhere. Go to www.thedancegypsy.com or just Google your city or state and "contra dance".

* **Community Dance** – Have an evening community dance. Hire experienced dance musicians or have the dance to recorded music. You are the caller. Use the same language as you do in the classroom but speak a little more slowly and clearly; adults are often not as skilled listeners as children. You might start out with, say, a fourth grade evening dance: all the fourth graders with their families (including siblings). Have the children choose a parent or another adult as a partner and have them do dances they know already from your classroom teaching. Keep it short: five or so dances for a 60 minute dance is fine.

* **NEDM dances on Youtube** - You can see some of the dances from our NEDM collections on Youtube: Kings & Queens (S), Grand March (S), Bridge of Athlone (L), Circle Waltz Mixer (S), Intersection Reel (S), Sasha (S), Galopede (C) and more.

* **A feast of dance tips, dances and resources** - After each of Mary Alice's and workshops we publish post-workshop notes on our website. These are filled with all kinds of dance tips, dances, resources and links – a workshop in themselves. Go to our www.amidonmusic.com website, click on the "Workshops" tab, and select "Workshop Notes" at the bottom of the drop-down of selections.

* **Your most important job is to have a wonderful time.** Choose dances you are excited about and choose music you love to dance to. This is a serious goal; it is one of the most important lessons your students learn from you: their seeing you thoroughly enjoy your singing and dancing with them.