



Contemporary Music for Pattern Dances: The New Age of Ice Dance

Evolution of our Sport

Over the last century, our sport has faced many changes - many with great positive outcomes. One thing that has not changed is that we continue to be the envy of the skating world in service delivery by bringing innovative programs to our members. Skate Canada is pleased to introduce a new and exciting development to ice dance and evaluated tests.

This past decade, TV shows like “Dancing with the Stars” and “So You Think You Can Dance” have given the general public and the skating family greater insight to the world of dance. What makes these shows so popular and so appealing? Identifiable and relatable music with lyrics has been a key factor in the viewing public’s enjoyment of the performances and the ultimate success of these television programs. We have also been introduced to a large spectrum of different dance rhythms. Dancing has transformed itself on the ballroom floor, incorporating new music with lyrics to create exciting Foxtrots, Waltzes, and Quicksteps. So why can’t we do the same on the ice?

Ice dance first moved in this direction during the 1997-1998 season when lyrics were introduced to the Original Dance for the first time in competition. As our sport progressed and the Short Dance was introduced at the Junior and Senior competitive level, we have seen how contemporary music can also be used and adapted towards an actual Pattern Dance; the same Pattern Dances that skaters in our clubs perform daily in rinks across the country.

Through stakeholder engagement and feedback, it was proposed that the timing may be appropriate to also introduce music with lyrics in evaluated tests at all domestic levels of Ice Dance from the Dutch Waltz to the Yankee Polka.

The Contemporary Music for Pattern Dances Pilot Project

Background Philosophy and Objectives

Currently, the music being played for pattern dances is classical and traditionally orchestrated ballroom dance style, created many years ago.



Skaters taking STARSkate dance tests are limited in their opportunity to develop performance versatility and creativity. By selecting more contemporary music, it is hoped that:

- Skaters will be encouraged to develop more varied performance ability and dance ability. Skaters can more easily relate to contemporary music, which should aid them in connecting, with enthusiasm, to their pattern dance music. As a result, they should more easily find and follow the tempo and the beat.
- Skaters will be provided with experience in skating pattern dances with contemporary music so they will be more familiar with the format and feel of the Short Dance, should they wish to compete in ice dance.
- Ice dance will be revitalized as an exciting, motivating option for skaters of all levels to continue skating and participating at their clubs throughout their lifetime.

Purpose of Initial Pilot

The purpose of the initial pilot was to obtain feedback on the selection and implementation of contemporary music for pattern dances, to be used during training sessions and test days. Feedback was collected from evaluators, participants, coaches, and administrators. A final selection of musical pieces was created.

Using Contemporary Music for Dance Sessions and Test Days - How Does it Work?

Music Playlist

Skate Canada has established a playlist of music that can be used for each of the pattern dances. The pieces selected have been pre-screened to fit within the acceptable range of beats per minute, the proper tempo and feel for each dance (as much as is possible), and for their appropriateness on figure skating sessions, with choices reflecting all age categories.

Use of the music is **optional**. Skate Canada Series 8 or ISU music is still permitted. The music listed on the contemporary playlist can be used for club dance sessions and/or test days. Each year, Skate Canada plans to review the list and add new pieces that can be used, as appropriate.

Skate Canada will not furnish the music on the approved playlist. Clubs, coaches, and/or skaters will be responsible for securing the music on the approved playlist themselves. This can be done by purchasing the appropriate CD in stores or from iTunes. **NOTE: Only the song by the artist indicated on the playlist should be purchased. Remixes or covers by other artists should be avoided as these are not approved for use.**



Sometimes these remixes or covers have a different tempo or rhythm than what is required for the pattern dance. (See the *2013-2014 Skate Canada Contemporary Music for Pattern Dances Playlist*)

On-ice sessions & test days

A combination of the contemporary music, Skate Canada Series 8, or ISU music may be used on club dance sessions. Skaters should be given the choice of which music they wish to skate to in order to keep their interest high and meet their needs. Rotating music selections is encouraged to expose skaters to all the available options.

For test day warm-up periods, it is recommended only the Skate Canada Series 8 or ISU music be used unless all skaters performing the dance are using the same piece of music. This is to ensure warm-up periods are kept brief and productive during a test session. Each skater is then free to use the music of their choice. Another option is, when possible, to group the skaters using the same piece of music on one warm-up.

Skaters must indicate their music selection to the host club/test chair when submitting for the test to allow preparation time for the music player and evaluator, and to verify that the club has the music piece on file. If the club does not have the tune on file, then it is the skater's responsibility to submit to the host club in advance in the agreed-upon format (e.g. CD or MP3).

Suggested Club Process:

- The club should be encouraged to use a digital media player to allow for ease of use (i.e. switching between tracks)
- Playlist arrangement – although clubs may arrange their list whichever way they prefer, one suggestion is to place the Series 8 piece first, one ISU piece (when applicable), and then the contemporary selections (our pilot club music players now use contemporary pieces by default)

Eg. for the Fourteenstep:

Fourteenstep - Series 8

Fourteenstep - ISU

Fourteenstep - Happy Feet (High Heels mix)

- Be sure to have the music player (if applicable) announce the name of the dance when playing the contemporary piece for dance lesson requests, as it will take time for the skaters and coaches to become familiar with the new music and know which pieces are used for which dances. Also, please note that some pieces are used for more than one dance.



- For clubs without a music player, label the name of the dance along with the track for ease of selection (Rename file in iTunes e.g. 1 Dutch Waltz – “I’ll Be” (Edwin McCain)).
- Post the new music selections

Coaches and Evaluators Preparation

Coaches Preparation

Coaches may wish to review the new music pieces, especially those they are not familiar with. They may also wish to go out on the ice and try skating the dances to the new tunes themselves before using them to teach their lessons.

Evaluators’ preparation

Evaluators may need some time to adjust to the new music pieces as they are a significant change from the Series 8 and ISU selections. Although the overall tempo and beats per minute remain the same for each dance, hearing contemporary music with lyrics may take some getting used to. Additionally, the traditional ‘character’ of the current Skate Canada and ISU dance music that is familiar to the skating community (e.g. traditional tango music) may be different for the new tunes in some cases. In order to prepare in advance for test days and be comfortable with the new pieces, the following is recommended:

- The Test Chair will inform the evaluator ahead of time if contemporary music will be used during the test session and possibly which dances (i.e. one week before the test session when they are confirming the schedule and other details with the evaluator).
- Evaluators should review the Skate Canada Contemporary Music for Pattern Dances Playlist to become familiar with the titles of the tunes, and if possible, for tunes they are not familiar with, search iTunes or YouTube to listen to them in advance.
- Evaluators may go to Members Only to view video clip samples of dances being skated to the new music, or if possible observe a dance practice session at a local club that is using the new music pieces.
- Evaluators should obtain and read this information piece to have an understanding of the background of the contemporary dance music initiative.



Results and Testimonials

The Contemporary Music for Pattern Dances initial pilot project completed its second season at the Gloucester Skating Club in Ottawa. Coaches Allie Hann-McCurdy and Michael Coreno, former national and world team members in Ice Dance, have been instrumental in the implementation and testing of the pilot project with their club and skaters. Michael Coreno also introduced the concepts and conducted testing at the Dartmouth Skating Club in Nova Scotia.

There has been overwhelmingly positive feedback received on the use of contemporary music on dance sessions and test days. Skaters enjoy skating to music they know. They are increasingly interested in performing the dance and are becoming more aware of the beat/tempo.

Evaluators who participated in the test sessions noticed better timing with some dances and an increased awareness and effort by the candidates to skate to the music and required tempo. One evaluator noted that the character of some of the pieces may not completely match the traditional character of the dance (e.g. tangos and some of the Latin-rhythm dances) and that it may be an adjustment in mindset for coaches and evaluators.

Best of all, skaters are motivated by the new music and more skaters are coming back to participate in the club dance sessions.

Coaches at the two clubs that participated in the testing share the same feeling, and are very much willing to continue with the new music concept. They continue to hear positive responses and see great excitement from their skaters when they get to use the new music.

Some testimonials regarding the pilot are noted below:

“The dance session dynamic has changed here at the Gloucester Skating Club. Many of our students now practice multiple dances as well as their previously completed/passed dances because the music is recognizable, the atmosphere is fun, and the coaches are not afraid to try it. Skaters are more relaxed and not as intimidated to express themselves through dancing.”

– GSC coach

“As a parent of a skater and as the President of the Dartmouth Skating Club it is difficult to find the words to describe the transformation I witnessed this week with dance on our



sessions. Our skaters were thrilled with the music choices that Michael made available to them for dance. They enthusiastically participated in extra dance sessions and lessons. Not to mention the skaters seemed more relaxed and in time to the modern music immediately upon hearing it. It was obvious by the smiles and the atmosphere all the skaters were truly appreciating dance. Thank you to Skate Canada and to Michael for allowing DSC skaters this wonderful opportunity.”

-H. Webb, Dartmouth SC

Evaluator Comments:

“The contemporary music selections did enhance the character, emotion and overall performance of the dances in varying degrees. The preliminary skaters had a slightly improved feel of the dance through their legs, a little more tango expression with the swing rolls in the Canasta Tango, and, softer knees and longer edges in the Baby Blues. However in the higher level dances, there was a more noticeable improvement, as I saw evidence of feeling, character, interpretation and even emotion that is not often seen with the standard music.”

“The addition of the contemporary music increased the interest in the dance tests. Many skaters vocalized that they want to be able to skate to the new music. I felt that...there was a very visible and palpable increase in enjoyment to skate to the contemporary music. I feel that it will greatly improve the atmosphere of dance sessions as well as help attract more skaters to come on the sessions”

“Strong skaters can and did bring more to the dance than the traditional music allowed.”

-GSC evaluators

Conclusion, Tips and Reminders

The Contemporary Music for Pattern Dances pilot project is still in a testing phase and may require some modifications following further application in clubs.

As noted earlier, evaluators involved in the initial test sessions noted that some of the music selections may not always portray the traditional rhythm or expression. Coaches are encouraged to continue to develop appropriate expression in their skaters regardless of which music selections they choose to use, whether it be traditional or contemporary. Coaches are reminded to ensure that skaters are still meeting the required standards for each dance as stipulated in the Evaluated Dance Tests manual. Evaluators are reminded that a personal bias towards certain selections of music should not be factored into the test's evaluation. Openness to different styles of music, and the



ability to assess the desired standards (as stipulated in the Evaluated Dance Tests manual) for each component of assessment will be key.

Club Tips

- Clubs may choose if and how they wish to trial the new music pieces, either one test level at a time or all at once – this will need to be discussed among the club and coaches, and will depend on the resources available. If the club purchases from iTunes, or CDs, someone will need to be assigned the task of downloading /copying the music selections.
- Depending on the number of skaters in dance sessions, clubs may have to determine a system of which music pieces will be played each day (either Series 8, ISJ, or new music) for practices and for lessons.
- To allow skaters to become familiar with the new music titles, post the playlist the club will be using with the affiliated dances on the boards or somewhere visible so skaters can become familiar with which tune is used for which dance.

Using the contemporary dance music will be a change, will take some time to get used to and may be a little more work and organization on the part of the club, coaches, the test chair and the evaluators. The benefits, however, for skaters and clubs will be innumerable – skaters enjoying ice dance, developing their skills faster, having more fun, as well as revitalizing ice dancing at the club level and possibly having more skaters come back to skate at clubs across the country. The advantages and possibilities are huge and very encouraging. We hope you will try it - let's dance!

Should you have questions, wish further information or have feedback on the Contemporary Music for Pattern Dances pilot initiative we would like to hear from you. Please contact the Coaching and Skating Programs department at coaching&programs@skatecanada.ca or call 1.888.747.2372