

Dance tunes are built up from patterns of sounds. Each type of tune has its own feel and its own distinct rhythm. The pattern for a polka is different to that of a hornpipe and this is what gives each type of tune and its associated dance, their own distinctive character.

The examples below are templates on which you can build your own composition. There are a few things you have to remember to get a good result from this exercise:-

Firstly – all music is made up from patterns of sound and patterns involve some form of repetition. Look for places in the rhythm patterns where you can use repetition.

Secondly – you don't have to make something brilliant first time around. Try to make a good, but simple tune; then try to make it better. A good tune develops over a long period of trial and error.

Example 1 – Polka (ish)

Tasks :-

1. Choose a pattern and then get to understand the rhythm. Don't be afraid to use the 'words' from the earlier worksheet 'Absolute Beginners – Rhythm'. When you've got the rhythm take the first two bars and see how many ways you can find to play the rhythm. When you've got something that sounds ok, try it again. If you can remember it then it should work. Write it down. Now try the next two bars.

Proceed in this way through the whole pattern. Now try playing it in time from beginning to end. Now go and replace the bits you don't like with new ideas.

The process used above can work equally well in any time signature. Here are two compound time tune templates.

Remember that there are still only two beats in a bar in 6/8 time but that there are three beats in a bar in 9/8. The Slip Jig pattern has a different overall shape to the jig with twelve bars instead of 16.

## Example 2 – Jig

The musical notation for 'Example 2 – Jig' is presented in four staves, each starting with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a time signature of 8/8. The first staff begins with a 5-measure rest, followed by four measures of music. The second staff starts at measure 5 and ends with a double bar line and repeat dots. The third staff starts at measure 9 and ends with a double bar line and repeat dots. The fourth staff starts at measure 13 and ends with a double bar line and repeat dots. The melody consists of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some measures containing beamed eighth notes.

- To recap –
- Write out your chosen pattern in pencil
  - Get to know the rhythm
  - Start to experiment by improvising the first two bars
  - Write down your best idea
  - Build up the rest of the tune in two bar blocks using repeats to give it a shape.
  - Play the whole thing
  - Go back and refine it to make it better.

### Note to Teachers :-

The process of all creative work has been investigated in ‘The Intelligence of Feeling’ Robert Witkin. His assertion that the creative mind follows an objective and predictable course of actions is at the basis of this exercise. Here we have what Witkin refers to as a ‘holding form’. From this the artist moves through ‘successive approximations’ towards a ‘realised form’. It is the series of approximations which pupils find difficult to grasp. Most young people expect their first attempt to be either good or bad. It is a mature mind that can distinguish the subtle degrees of difference which lie between these polarities. For this reason the exercise above relies heavily on teacher intervention and the unit of two bars as the success target.