

## **How to Use Metronome to Improve your Reel playing;**

While writing this piece I researched many online resources which give advice on learning and playing reels as well as drawing from my own experience. Here's what I find works best for me and I hope you can all take something away from reading it

In Scottish country dancing, the reel is one of the four traditional dances, the others being the jig, the strathspey and the waltz. A reel is in 4/4 time, but when written out, reels are most often written in a 2/2 time signature, also known as "cut common" time.

In cut time, there are two beats in a bar instead of four, which simply emphasises the beats in a different way. Reels can be two or four parted tunes, and each part is typically repeated.

When you are learning a new reel, do you often have trouble playing the correct rhythm, or have trouble staying "on the beat"? There may be several reasons for the problem if this describes you, but using a metronome as you learn a reel may be just what you need.

As I've written about in the piece "How to use a Metronome to Learn Strathspey", the metronome is a highly accurate and useful tool that can vastly improve our rhythmic accuracy and musicality. Yes, it is also an unrelenting truth detector, one that I fear we sometimes don't like to admit to. This article continues along the path of how to approach using a metronome to improve our playing, but this time with a reel.

The monotone rhythm of a reel is typically vocalised by singing "one-ee-and-a", "two-ee-and-a" for each bar. Thus, the "one" and "two" occur on each downbeat, while the "and" occurs on

each offbeat. A solid plan in learning a new reel is to use the metronome in double-time, wherein each beat and offbeat get a “click”.

Set your metronome at a reasonable tempo, say 70 bpm, so that you can play each gracenote and embellishment correctly and with dead-on rhythm. Note that a tempo of 70 bpm in double time is, in reality, a single time tempo of only 35 bpm. At first, do not attempt to play the entire line or part, but instead play only the first bar and build it up from there. Remember, always begin and end on a downbeat when you are playing snippets of a tune. Play the first bar at least five times, and correctly, before moving to the next bar. We know that we should play no faster than we are capable of playing all the notes and embellishments correctly, despite our impatient intuition to play faster! Learn it slowly and correctly to begin with then things will go well. If you learn it incorrectly at first, you’ll waste valuable time later trying to clean things up, especially for adult learners. Always always always remember slow at this learning phase is good.

After you are fairly comfortable playing the entire tune in double time and with the correct rhythm, now it’s time to go to single time. Set the metronome to 35 or 40 bpm, since now only the two downbeats in each bar get a “click”. As you continue to learn your chosen reel, gradually increase the tempo. Since most pipers, unfortunately, play ahead of the beat, be patient and wait for the “click” to play the downbeat.

Through frequent use of a metronome, you will find that your ability to play on the beat vastly improves, and along with that rhythmic accuracy will come markedly