



“Even in dance, there’s a lot of power in melody and words that get into a person’s heart.”

— GORDON POGODA

How to Write a Dance Song

SLY & THE FAMILY STONE sang “Dance to the Music” in the ’60s, while Chic grooved discos to “Dance, Dance, Dance” in the ’70s. During the next decade, it was David Bowie beckoning “Let’s Dance.” Then it was the Spice Girls cautioning “If U Can’t Dance” before Lee Ann Womack offered “I Hope You Dance.” More recently, Lady Gaga insisted “Just Dance.” She has a point. Because no matter the artist or the decade, pop music has always believed in the beat.

Gordon Pogoda, a Los Angeles-based BMG Music songwriter and producer, has crafted hits crossing genres and continents, with a particular gift for uptempo pop. Last year, he scored a No. 1 UK club single with “Dancing in the Driver’s Seat” performed by Sonia; wrote the comeback hit “On Your Marks, Get Set, Go Away” for global dance act Nicki French; and co-wrote/remixed “Beautiful Battlefield” for Steps, one of Britain’s longstanding dance-pop acts. He has also had his music featured extensively on soundtracks, from Oscar-winning film *Little Miss Sunshine* to such TV hits as *Will and Grace*. One might think that it’s about production first and foremost when creating a dance song, but Pogoda takes a different approach.

“These days, many dance records start with DJs/producers creating a rhythm track, then the tune is written on top by dedicated songwriters known as topliners,” Pogoda explains. “I come from the songwriting world, so it’s still almost always melody and chords first, then lyrics. Afterward, I think about beats and how to produce the song. What are the best sounds to bring it to life? What’s the emotion within the song telling me? What’s the right tempo?”

Melody and message are Pogoda’s prime concerns even for a song aimed at the dance floor. “That’s the difference between a dance song that’s remembered after 40 years and one that’s forgotten after four months,” he insists. “It’s why a disco hit like ‘I Will Survive’ is still alive. It’s the message that Gloria Gaynor sings, and she sings it with such passion you believe every word.” Appealing to the hips doesn’t rule out reaching elsewhere, he says: “There’s always a lot of power in words and melodies that get into a person’s heart.”

With “Beautiful Battlefield,” the song started as a chorus melody Pogoda wrote with hit pop-rock ballads in mind by the likes of OneRepublic and Rachel Platten. He brought co-writers Gloria Sklerov and Dave

Chamberlin into the mix to flesh things out and create a demo, which enticed Steps to record the song in its own style.

Later, for a Steps boxed set featuring alternative versions of its hits, Pogoda transformed “Beautiful Battlefield” from a midtempo 100 beats-per-minute to a more driven 120 BPM—“pure European pop, such a different sound and feel than American pop,” he says. “The song went through a lot of stylistic changes, but as a writer, you never know what path your song might take.”

Over the decades, the subgenre of “dance music” has been used to describe everything from swinging big-band jazz to pounding, digitally produced EDM. Midtempo pop songs generally range from 90 to 110 BPM, while pure dance tracks tend to be 120-150 BPM or more; that said, numerous tropical-house/EDM songs range from 82-130 BPM. Rather than strict beat-count, the danceable difference lies in a holistic sense of rhythm, Pogoda says: “It’s how the track feels and where the kick drums appear, like every quarter note, or every other one.”

Pogoda offers advice for songwriters who want to make people dance, as well as sing along: “It’s important to write what you love, not what’s necessarily the most popular sound in the country where you live. In the U.S., what we consider ‘dance music’ is simply pop music across Europe. That vibe is part of their musical culture.” The dance-pop feel of Britney Spears, ’N Sync, Backstreet Boys and Christina Aguilera “never went away overseas,” he notes. “The sounds evolved, of course, but the market for dance pop remains alive and well—especially when you have the whole world to market your songs to.”

GLOBAL POGODA HITS

“On Your Marks, Get Set, Go Away,” Nicki French

“Beautiful Battlefield (Gordon Pogoda Dance Remix),” Steps

“Have Some Fun (Ultimax Remix),” Tereza Kerndlova

“Could It Be The Moon,” Hi-5

“Just Because You Walk Away/ Daje Esli Ti Uidesh (HarDrum Remix),” Sergey Lazarev