

Chapter 12: Off-beat



The off-beat is a rhythmic case that we find in all kinds of music and of course also in tango, although in tango it doesn't occur so often.

In the off-beat the accents move from the first and third beat to the weak ones, the second and fourth beats, which are now the accented beats. Normally in the off-beat there aren't any notes of the melody in the first and third beats or if there are, they are not accented.

It can happen that either the absence of sound in the first and third beat is complete or that the melody doesn't have any sound on the first and third beat but the accompaniment plays the first and third beat and the melody only plays the second and fourth beats, now accented.

In the case that the first and third beats are played by the accompaniment and the second and fourth are accented by the melody, we can walk with the accompaniment and mark the melody accents with some ornament, or vice-versa, dancing both elements. We can also walk directly on the second and fourth beat only with the melody.

Off-beat:

A: We walk on the strong beats with the accompaniment and we make ornaments with the off-beat accents of the melody.



(@ = ornament)

Tango: Let's dance to the music!

B: We walk with the accents of the melody on the second and fourth beat.



It is important to dance the off-beat when the music is doing it. If you want to walk the off-beat when the music is not doing it, it is not only very difficult but also it doesn't make any sense to do it, since you are going against what the music is proposing. The idea is to recognise the parts of the tango where the music does the off-beat and to be able to dance it exactly where the music does it.

Often the off-beat is mistaken with the double-time step and with syncopation. If we compare it with the double-time step, when we walk the off-beat with the accents of the melody, we are walking on simple-time step but placing the simple-time steps on the second and fourth beat.

If the accompaniment is marking the strong beats and the melody is accenting the weak ones, and we dance representing all four beats, still the distance between each step is a simple-time step and the distance between each ornament is also a simple-time step.



In syncopation (see Chapter 10) there is a subdivision of the accented beat – first or third beat – and both parts of the subdivision are accented. In the off-beat there isn't any subdivision at all.

Also, in syncopation there isn't any accent on the second and fourth beat, but in the off-beat those are precisely the beats where the melody has the accents.

Exercises

🔊 Exercise 1: Listen to Audio 1-12, in which the melody does the off-beat, the first time with two different claves marking the off-beat and the second time without the claves.

Off-beat

👁 Exercise 2: Watch Video 1-12. The couple walks with the first and third beat that the musical accompaniment is marking, making an ornament with the accents of the melody on the second and fourth beat. Doing the same type of walking-with-ornament that the couple is doing, walk with Audio 1-12, doing the steps on the first and third beat and the ornaments with the off-beat of the melody on the second and fourth beat.

👁 Exercise 3: Watch Video 2-12. Now the couple walks with the accents of the melody on the second and fourth beat. To do this exercise, watch the video, counting as follows:

[-----on-beat-----][-----off-beat-----][-----on-beat-----][---off-beat]
1 -- 3 -- 1 -- 3 -- 1-2 -- 4 -- 2 -- 4 -1- -3- -1- -3- -1-2- -4 etc.

Notice that when you get in and out of the off-beat you do two beats together: 1-2 and 4-1.

👁 Watch the dance couple and try to do the same exercise.

🎧 Exercise 4: With Audio 1-12 do the same exercise, counting as explained.

🎧 Exercise 5: You can repeat the same exercise with Audio 2-12 and 3-12, first doing the ornament and after that walking with the off-beat. When you feel secure doing both exercises try to do them with your dance partner.

👁 Watch Video 3-12, in which the couple improvises dancing to the off-beat. Try to dance the off-beat, either doing some type of ornament with the off-beat or walking it. If you cannot place your steps with the off-beat, do the walking on time and some kind of ornament that would mark the off-beat.