

## Tempos (Metronome Settings) for Irish Social Dances - Set and Ceili

(These are for social set dancing. Solo dancing is a different game, and depends upon the age and competence of the dancer.)

**Reels:** Ideally about 120. A range of 116 to 124 is acceptable. If musicians are comfortable playing either fast or slow, it is better to err on the fast side than the slow side. Unless there is a good “bounce” in the music, it doesn’t work no matter how fast the musicians play. Any slower than 116 is likely to result in complaints from at least some dancers. If the music is really “bouncy” you might get away with tempos as low as 112, but I wouldn’t recommend it. It would be very hard to keep any “drive” or “momentum” in the music.

**Jigs:** Ideally about 127. Better to err on the slow side than the fast side.

**Polkas:** Ideally about 136. Better to err on the slow side than the fast side.

**Slides:** About 160, but no faster. Can be as slow as 140. Different crowds have different preferences with respect to slides.

**Hornpipes:** About 105. Depending upon the dance itself, the ideal tempo maybe anywhere from 100 to 110. The competence of the dancers is also a factor, with less accomplished dancers preferring slow tempos. But 100 is still probably the lower limit.

**Marches:** About 110, but you have only half the number of beats per bar as compared to reels. The tendency is to play too fast. The acceptable range is fairly wide – probably 100 – 120.

**Waltzes:** A metronome setting of about 126 is good. That picks up every step of the dancer, 1-2-3. For those who don’t typically play for dances, this is painfully slow, and there is a tendency to speed up. It is important to put a “swing” in the music. If it is clear that people are in general doing the “Pride of Erin” rather than conventional waltz steps, a somewhat more lively tempo can be appropriate, but not faster than 140. Some people don’t do a true waltz step, but rather simply slide from side to side, they typically want faster tempos, but it’s not really appropriate to cater to them since it makes the proper waltz steps more difficult. It is important to know that not every tune written in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time is intended to be played as a waltz. Some good ones are ‘Mrs. Kenny’s’, ‘Trip Over the Mountain’, ‘Maid of Glen Connell’, ‘Gentle Maiden’. Some 6/8 tunes like Plantxy Irwin and Fanny Powers can be played as waltzes, but it is often difficult to give them a real waltz feel.

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