

Schema 04 Switching Polkas (15/08/22)

(Based on sequences 2,7, 18, 19, 24 & 26))

Motor Rhythms. The sequences in this schema use the following underlying quaver motor rhythms. Finding reliable ways of switching between these motor rhythms is the abstract idea that generates the various concrete sequences notated. The placement of ornaments within these motor rhythms often facilitates a particular switch, or put another way, some switches pair easily with complementary ornaments. As is characteristic for polka playing in the Sliabh Luachra, Corca Dhuibhne and West Waterford styles that I am familiar with, a heavy accent usually falls on the "and" of every beat (that is, the second quaver in each group of two).

All Mercier Downstrokes. Accented downstrokes are played at the far edge of the drum, with unaccented downstrokes being played nearer the centre of the drum. The Colm Murphy 'A' pattern applied to a polka.

Alternating Mercier. Accented stroke is played with a downstroke, unaccented with an upstroke

Alternating O'Donoghue. As above, accent beats are played with the downstroke

Alternating Reverse Ó Riada. I find that this motor rhythm is best suited to polkas. I can't control it properly for jigs and reels yet.

Extended 'A' pattern. To me this creates a similar effect to Colm Murphy's 'A' pattern. It might break the category of "motor rhythm" a little, as it switches between the above two "simple" motor rhythms. However the switch is effortless and the whole sequence together feels like its own thing. To me it has a similar function to the other motor rhythms listed above: it is a secure, reliable movement sequence that I can layer ornaments over. Could call it a compound motor rhythm?

Sequence 2. Mercier Downstrokes to Alternating O'Donoghue. "v v d" switch into O'Donoghue, then an upstroke O'Donoghue roll ("pΛ v") to return to Mercier. A defining characteristic of this sequence is that the switches always place the first stroke in the new posture on an accented beat.

The sequence can be shortened and lengthened at will to generate a large variety of similar rhythmic structures of varying lengths during performance. This is the shortest the sequence can be made:

Here is an example of how the Alternating O'Donoghue side of the sequence can be lengthened (as in **sequence 19**):

It is also possible to add an extra stroke to the upstroke O'Donoghue roll: "ppΛv"

Sequence 18. Alternating Reverse Ó Riada to Alternating O'Donoghue ("Extended 'A' pattern"). Switches always land on an accented beat. The switch from Reverse Ó Riada to O'Donoghue ("y Λ d") feels very secure, as does the switch back ("d p y"). This sequence works very well with Reverse Ó Riada shuffle roll.

The sequence transitions very well to and from the Reverse Ó Riada shuffle:

Shortening and lengthening the sequence is again an easy way to generate a variety of rhythmic structures in the moment of playing. The shortest sequence is one bar long:

Here the sequence is lengthened by staying a bit longer in each grip posture:

The concept of sequence 18 can be extended further by adding Mercier Downstrokes. I call this the 'Zed' sequence because the placement of the strokes on the drum head trace the letter 'Z'. This sequence also works as an interconnector to any sequences that use motor rhythms based on Mercier Downstrokes, Alternating Reverse Ó Riada or Alternating O'Donoghue.

Sequence 24. Alternating O'Donoghue to Alternating Mercier. Switch from O'Donoghue lands on an unaccented beat: "d Δ". Switch from Mercier lands on an accented beat, and is set up by a double downstroke: "v v d".

$\frac{2}{4}$ d p d p d Δv Δv v d p d p d p d p d

The sequence can be shortened or lengthened, and the switch from O'Donoghue to Mercier can be stretched by delaying the landing 'Δ' stroke: "d Δ v" becomes "d Δv"

$\frac{2}{4}$ d p d Δv v d p d p d p d Δv v d v d

The sequence can be shortened to 6 strokes, at which point it corresponds to **Sequence 27**, a jig switch.

$\frac{6}{8}$ d p d Δ v v

This shortened sequence can then be played as a polymeter against the polka structure, and repeats after 6 bars.

$\frac{2}{4}$ d p d Δv v d p d Δv v d p d Δv v d p d Δv v d

This 6-stroke polymeter has the nice feature that the off-beat polka accent still always falls on the dominant down stroke in either grip posture, so it is easy to dip in and out of a polymeter feel without having to complete the full 6-bar cycle. I would often do something like this:

$\frac{2}{4}$ d p d p d Δv v d p d Δv v d p d p d