



Chapter 4: Magic and Music: Designing a Kite Ballet

Kite ballet allows you to give your kite a great deal of “personality”. When you design a ballet, your challenge is to use music and maneuvers that develop and demonstrate that personality. You can even use you own personality as a model!

Some people think that planning and flying a kite ballet is hard. It isn't. What could be more natural, more fun, more relaxing than flying your favorite kite while listening to your favorite music?

Doing it in public or bringing home trophies - well - that's just an added bonus.

Ballet Basics

To create a good, polished ballet, you need to carefully choose your music, and plan out your routine. Planning is important. You don't want your music to end before you finish your performance. Let's begin our examination of sport kite choreography by looking at the different components of a musical routine.

Musical Selection. It's important to fly to music you like. After all, the first person you need to please is yourself. And besides, if you decide to fly your ballet regularly, you're going to hear that piece of music a lot.

But the music you like best, may not be the best for ballet flying. In addition to your personal taste, you have to consider what the music "does" for your ballet.

Does the music have good composition and flow? Does it create a mood? Does it provide for flying transitions and "springboards" for new maneuvers? Does it complement your flying style?

Choose your selection carefully. A piece without good flow can easily result in a disorganized or unstructured routine that is hard for others to follow. A piece that is quick and choppy may not work with slower kites or on light wind days. A piece that is too repetitive can produce a routine with no transitions or variety.

In other words, if your music is weak, your performance may be weak too. Choose well. Look for music that provides the opportunity for a broad range of different moves.

Select music that is long enough to showcase your skills, but short enough to hold people's interest. The only thing worse than a poor routine is a long, poor routine.

Start your performance when the music begins. Don't sit on the ground through a long introduction. Do something. Otherwise, people will lose interest or think things have gone wrong.

If you are interested in competition, the rule book allows for a minimum of two minutes and a maximum of four. That's a good length for most ballets - even if you aren't competing.

Composition. You want your performance to have structure. That means a beginning, a middle, and an end. Make your maneuvers clear enough that people watching can follow what you are doing. Plan for variety, but also enough repetition that you create an actual routine with continuity instead of a jumble of disorganized turns.

Transitions. The key to a good performance is moving cleanly from one strong maneuver to another. Axles, stalls, and tip stabs aren't enough. The flying between these maneuvers must have some substance too.

Transition flying is not just moving from one trick to another. Like every other part of the routine, it needs to capture some of the essence or mood of the music.

Musical Interpretation. Do the movements of the kite fit the music? Do you take advantage of the opportunities the music provides? Are you moving to the beat or flow of the music?

This is choreography. Flying to the music is the most important thing you can do. Your performance needs to reflect - or contrast - the mood and tempo that the music provides. Otherwise, you are just flying with some interesting background noise.

Execution. Finally, a good ballet needs to be flown well. Corners need to be square, circles round, and lines straight. Crashes don't add to the flow of the performance. That's why planning a complete routine is important. It allows you to practice specific moves, polish them, and perfect your timing.

Your First Ballet - *California Girls*

All this analysis still makes it sound like ballet is hard. But it isn't. Remember all those practice assignments we made you do back in Chapter 1? Did you really fly them? If so, you already have a ballet ready to go. Let's see what they look like when we fly them to music.

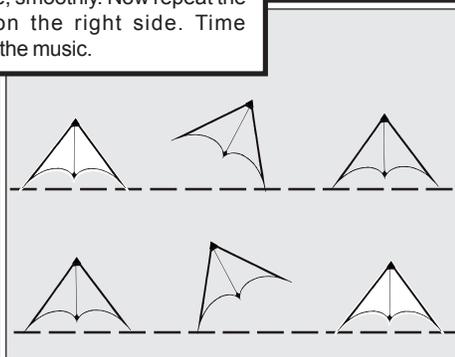
This first practice routine will be flown to "*California Girls*", by the Beach Boys.

Panel 1: Set up on the far right side of the window.

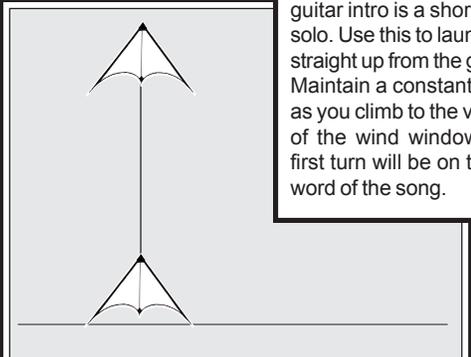
There are five distinct guitar sections at the beginning of the song. We'll use them to demonstrate ground control. Start with the kite standing up. When the music starts, slowly lay it back down. Now, stand it up quickly on the first note of the next section. Repeat the maneuver, making your "lower" slow and smooth and your "stand" sharp and quick. Do this for each of the first three music sections.

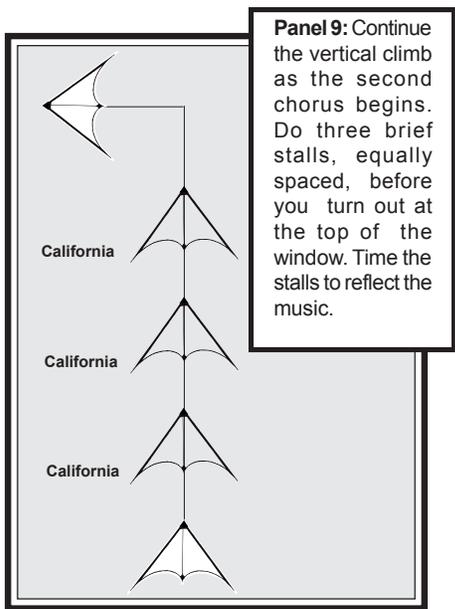


Panel 2: Do wingtip lifts on each of the two remaining guitar sections. This will keep things from getting boring. The kite is already standing on the ground. Lift and hold the left wingtip up off the ground. Lower the kite, smoothly. Now repeat the maneuver on the right side. Time everything to the music.



Panel 3: Following the guitar intro is a short organ solo. Use this to launch. Fly straight up from the ground. Maintain a constant speed as you climb to the very top of the wind window. Your first turn will be on the first word of the song.



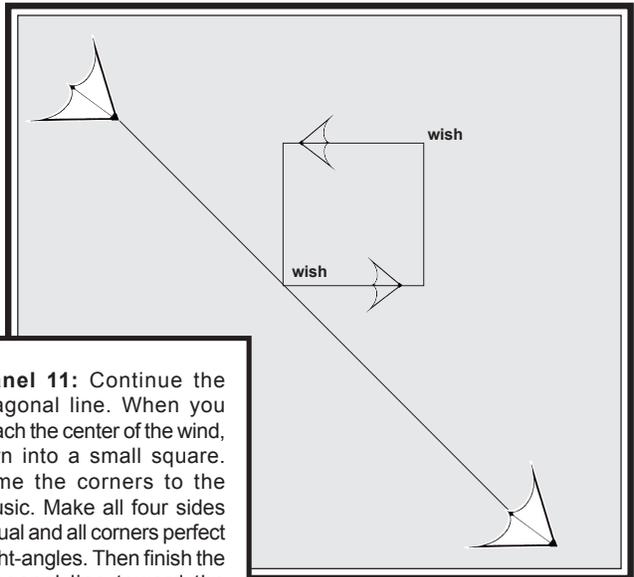
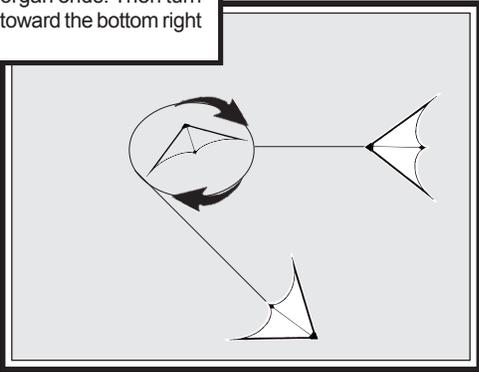


Panel 9: Continue the vertical climb as the second chorus begins. Do three brief stalls, equally spaced, before you turn out at the top of the window. Time the stalls to reflect the music.

*I wish they all could be **California**,
I wish they all could be **California**,
I wish they all could be **California** girls...*

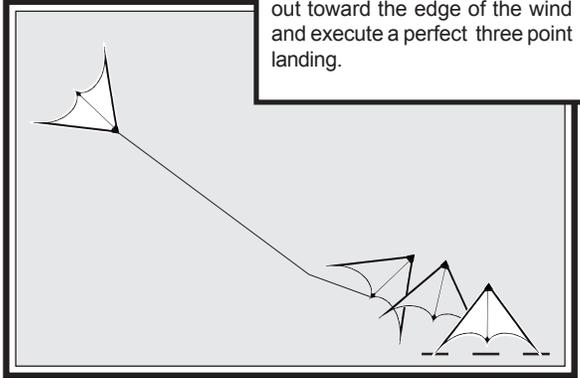
*I wish they all could be California girls...
I **wish** they all could be California girls...
I **wish** they all could be California girls...
I **wish** they all could be California girls...*

Panel 10: Wait for the organ solo that follows the chorus. As the organ begins, stall the kite and fly an axle. After you complete the axle, hold the stall until the organ ends. Then turn under and fly toward the bottom right corner.



Panel 11: Continue the diagonal line. When you reach the center of the wind, turn into a small square. Time the corners to the music. Make all four sides equal and all corners perfect right-angles. Then finish the diagonal line toward the bottom right corner of the window as the chorus fades.

Panel 12: As the music fades, fly out toward the edge of the wind and execute a perfect three point landing.



Sport kite historians tend to agree that kite ballet started in Southern California. So it's only fair that we start our first ballet lesson with music from California and the Beach Boys. Besides, "California Girls" is available on about six different albums or discs, which makes it easy to find.

The California Girls ballet is designed for fun and practice. Perform it well, and you'll produce lots of smiles on the flying field. But let's not kid ourselves that this routine is going to win first place at the Grand Nationals.

Note that drawings are not to scale.

There are several things that are important to notice about “California Girls”.

The kite covers the entire wind window, from left to right and top to bottom.

You use a variety of maneuvers, including circles, angles, stalls, and ground work.

There is enough repetition for spectators to recognize the maneuvers.

Maneuvers flow from one to another with smooth transitions.

The music is upbeat and recognizable enough that spectators can anticipate moves, tricks, and transitions.

These are ballet elements that will strengthen any choreographed performance.

Fly big and slow, and make your transitions flow. By flying big, you give the spectators a chance to really see the move you are doing. Too often, fliers zip through a performance and people are left to wonder whether or not a maneuver was done well.

Use Emotion to Make Your Ballet Better

Creativity and imagination make the difference between an award winning routine, and one that is, well, routine.

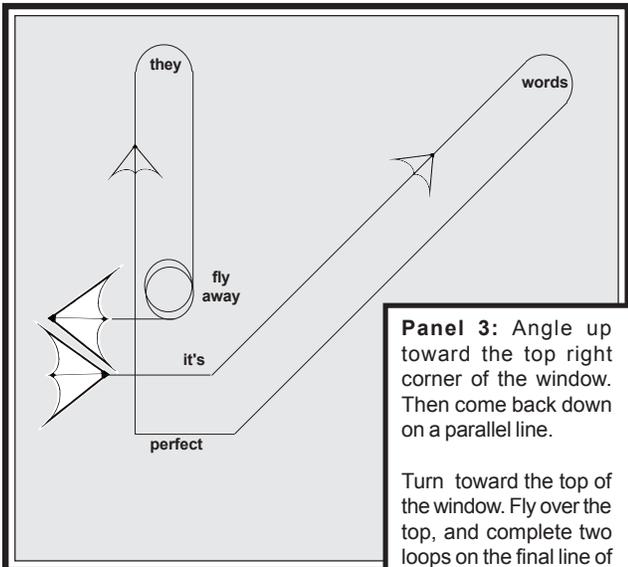
The primary objective of a ballet performance is entertainment. Use emotion to build the entertainment value of your routine. With emotion, you can excite people. You can inspire them. You can make them smile or even laugh out loud. And with the right touch, you can even use music and kites to bring tears to people's eyes. So let's talk about some of the emotional “tools” that are available and what you can do to create a ballet with feeling.

Anticipation. Music is often familiar or predictable. As the piece rises towards a climax or crescendo, people watching know that *something* is going to happen. Don't disappoint them. Use the opportunities that the musical selection provides to satisfy your audience.

Surprise. Shocking or surprising the audience is the easiest way to reach their emotions. When your kite is diving straight at the ground, and instead of crashing, it spins around and lands, people watching will be surprised. When your kite is nose-down on the ground, and then suddenly pops back up into the air, people will be surprised. When the kite is speeding through the air and suddenly stops in a stall, perfectly timed to a break in the music, another surprise. Surprised people are entertained people.

Grace. Make your performance elegant. Your kites are intended to be things of beauty in the air. A good ballet can communicate that beauty. Combine soft, flowing music and graceful turns. Fly maneuvers that are naturally attractive. Strive to communicate a sense of tranquility to the crowd.

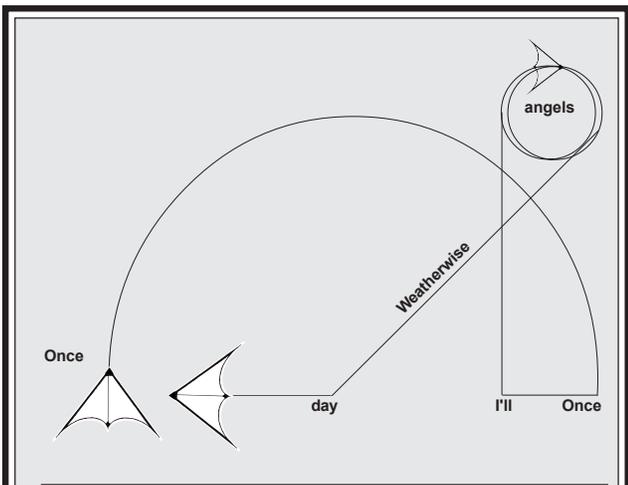
*Weatherwise, it's such a lovely day.
Just say the **words** and we'll beat the birds
down to Acapulco Bay.
It's **perfect** for a flying honeymoon **they** say.
Come fly with me, let's fly, let's fly away.*



Panel 3: Angle up toward the top right corner of the window. Then come back down on a parallel line. Turn toward the top of the window. Fly over the top, and complete two loops on the final line of the verse. Then fly out to the left.

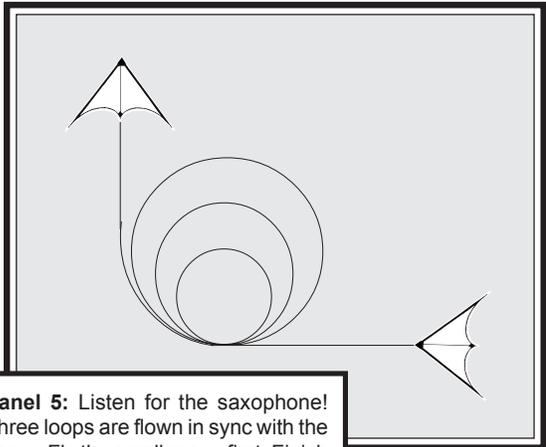
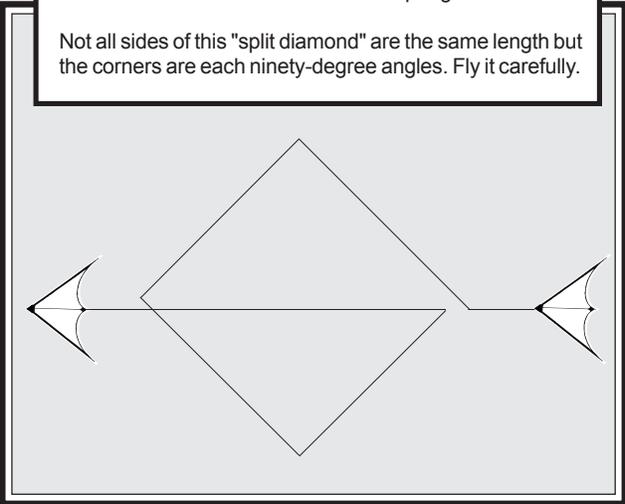
*Once I get you up there where the air is rarefied,
we'll just glide, starry eyed.
Once I get you up there, I'll be holding you so near,
you may hear, **angels** cheer 'cause we're together*

*Weatherwise, it's such a lovely day.
You just **say** the words and we'll beat **the** birds
down to Acapulco Bay.
It's **perfect** for a flying honeymoon **they** say.
Come fly with me, let's fly, let's fly.
Pack up let's fly away.*

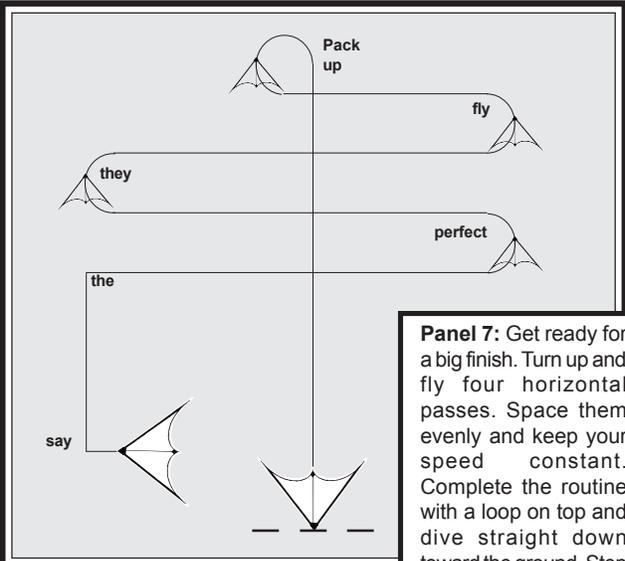


Panel 6: Fly a half-circle from side-to-side. Make it big and bold. Then turn under and back up toward the top. Do two loops while the "angels cheer". Then fly a diagonal down toward the left side.

Panel 4: The next two panels cover an instrumental section. Time the turns to match the musical "springboards". Not all sides of this "split diamond" are the same length but the corners are each ninety-degree angles. Fly it carefully.



Panel 5: Listen for the saxophone! Three loops are flown in sync with the horns. Fly the smaller one first. Finish in a vertical climb.



Panel 7: Get ready for a big finish. Turn up and fly four horizontal passes. Space them evenly and keep your speed constant. Complete the routine with a loop on top and dive straight down toward the ground. Step forward to slow the impact, and land right on your kite's nose.

Come Fly With Me is taken from the Capitol album and disc of the same name. Don't substitute the Duets II disc. The arrangement and even wording is different. Again, not all diagrams are drawn to scale. Panel notes should help you decide how big to fly the maneuvers.

This routine is quite different from the previous one. The musical style is different, and so is the flying style. The song has a theme you can work with.

Come Fly With Me is a good example of how to use humor to get people smiling. Like any joke, the effectiveness wears down if it is told too often. But the song also carries a sense of timeless finesse and grace that has made it a classic. Adapt the lessons of this routine to your own musical taste. By relying on big, flowing maneuvers, your performance can be classic too.

Advanced Design Tricks

Start strong. Most people watching will decide if they like what they see in the first thirty seconds of your ballet. Don't save all the best stuff for the ending. Use your music, and your opening moves to make an impression right at the beginning of your performance. Include some creative ground work. Make sure your first maneuvers are among your best. Get the crowd behind you right away.

Use maneuvers that look hard. Figures or tricks that are hard to execute but look easy don't add to your routine. You may impress the other fliers, but most spectators and even some judges won't know the difference. Your timing or execution will need to be perfect just to avoid a mistake, and flaws will be more obvious. So unless you have practiced that fancy new move enough that you know you can get it every time, leave it out. Use maneuvers that look difficult, but aren't really that hard to perform. Rely on illusion, not luck.

Look at things from the spectator's point of view. Spectators don't always understand what they are watching. And often, part of the crowd can't see the whole routine. A maneuver that looks like a crash and recovery may be interpreted as a lucky "save" instead of a brilliantly planned ground move. Turns at the bottom outside edge of the field may be beyond people's view. Use the crowd's perceptions to your advantage.

Plan your transitions. Transitions need to be more than just flying between stunts and maneuvers. They need to look like maneuvers themselves and they need to be smooth and brief enough to hold people's interest. If necessary, rearrange your routine to fix any transitional problems and make things flow.

Always act like you flew great. If you look like you were happy with your performance, people will believe it went well. If you look unhappy, spectators will wonder what went wrong. Besides, just because you know you have flown better, doesn't mean these folks have ever seen better.

Save something for a big finish. People love to see the kite land perfectly timed to the last note of the music. A crisp and creative finale makes the performance look more polished. And remember, judges will be writing down a score right after you are done. Give them something to think about that may overcome any minor problems in the middle of the routine.

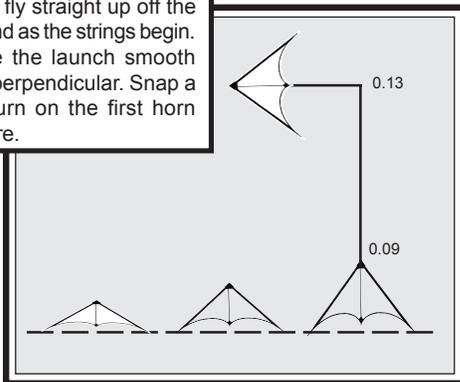
Third Ballet - *Wizards and Warriors*

All of the music we have chosen so far for our practice ballets has contained words.

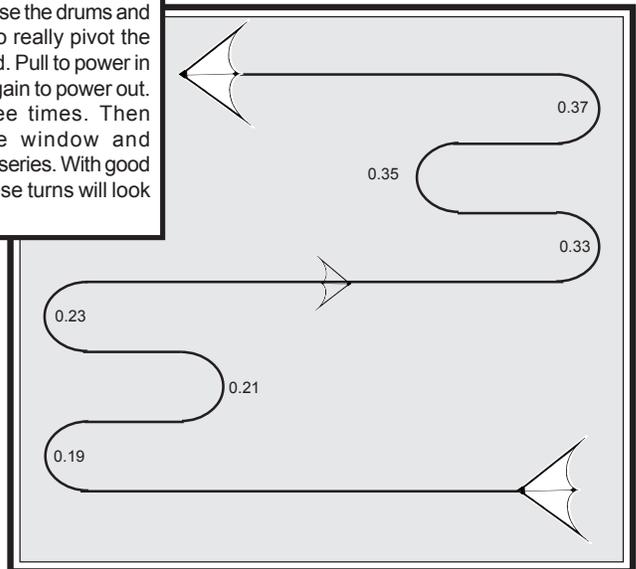
Songs with words are helpful because we can use those words to tell us when to turn. But often, lyrical music is not the best choice for ballet. The tunes can be repetitive or lack the kind of variety that allows a lot of different types of kite maneuvers. Classical music and movie soundtracks are a good alternative.

Soundtracks are designed to generate emotions and often provide interesting changes in tempo and style. And that's exactly what you're looking for in a good ballet. For our final practice ballet, we'll try the theme to an old television show called "*Wizards and Warriors*".

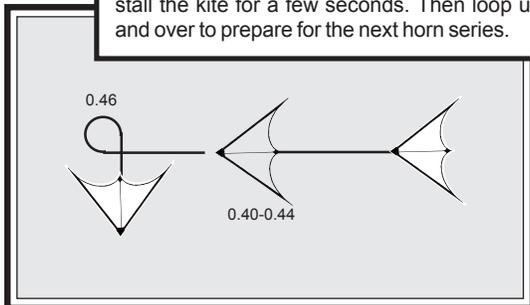
Panel 1: When you hear the music, bring your kite from a flat to a standing position. Then fly straight up off the ground as the strings begin. Make the launch smooth and perpendicular. Snap a left turn on the first horn fanfare.



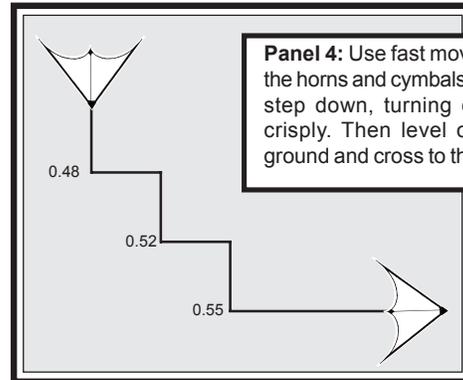
Panel 2: Use the drums and cymbals to really pivot the kite around. Pull to power in and pull again to power out. Do it three times. Then cross the window and repeat the series. With good timing, these turns will look great.



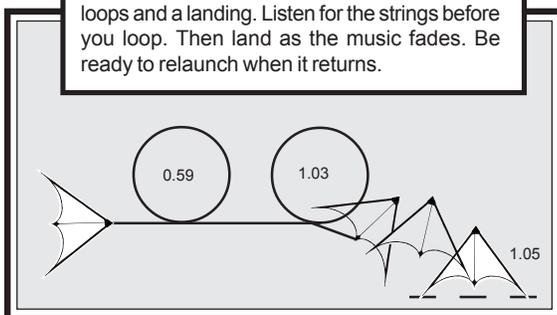
Panel 3: You can slow down now. Show a definite speed contrast. At the end of the pass, actually stall the kite for a few seconds. Then loop up and over to prepare for the next horn series.



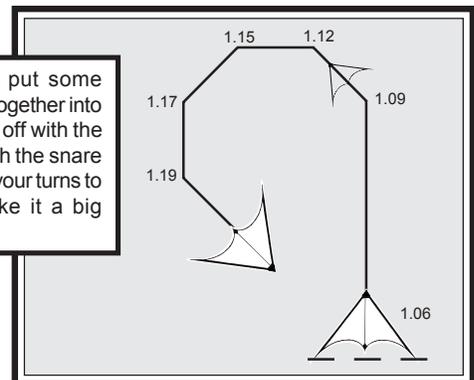
Panel 4: Use fast moves again as the horns and cymbals return. Stair step down, turning quickly and crisply. Then level off near the ground and cross to the right.



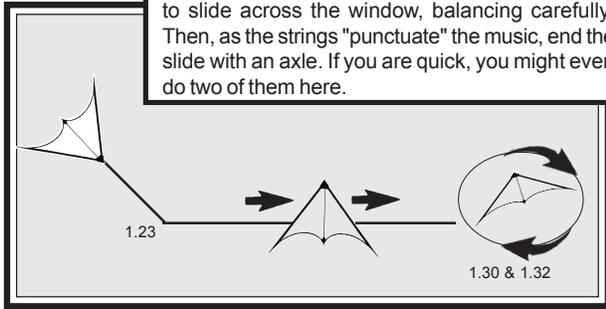
Panel 5: Conclude your horizontal pass with two loops and a landing. Listen for the strings before you loop. Then land as the music fades. Be ready to relaunch when it returns.



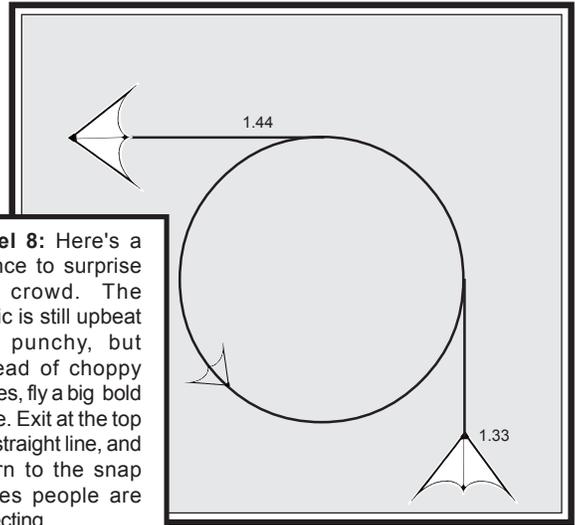
Panel 6: Now put some smaller angles together into an octagon. Lift off with the horns, climb with the snare drum, and time your turns to the horns. Make it a big maneuver.



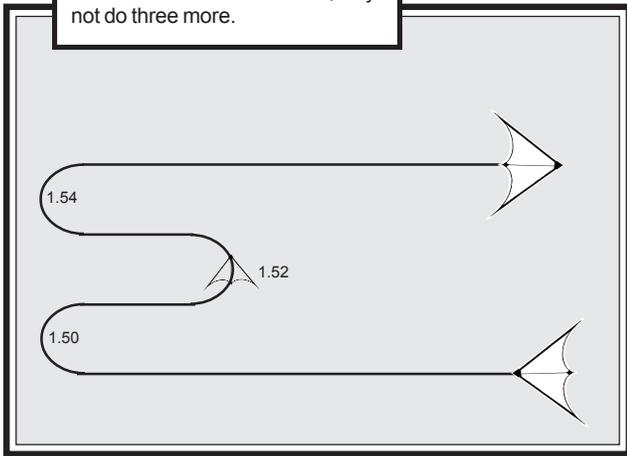
Panel 7: Now try something new. As you angle down toward the bottom of the octagon, pop the base of the kite around parallel to the ground. Continue to slide across the window, balancing carefully. Then, as the strings "punctuate" the music, end the slide with an axle. If you are quick, you might even do two of them here.



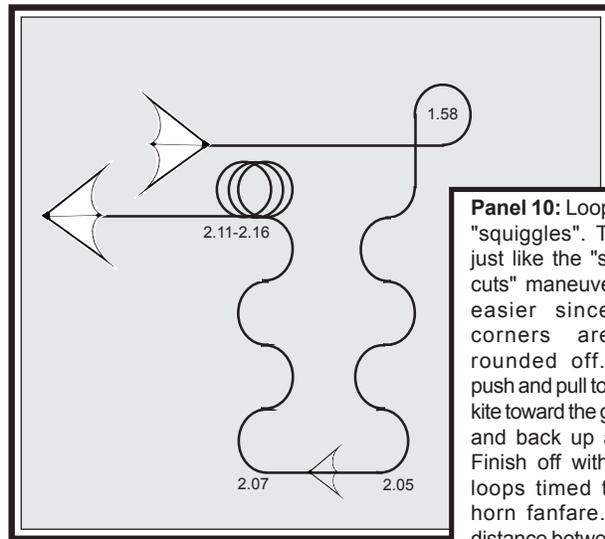
Panel 8: Here's a chance to surprise the crowd. The music is still upbeat and punchy, but instead of choppy moves, fly a big bold circle. Exit at the top in a straight line, and return to the snap moves people are expecting.



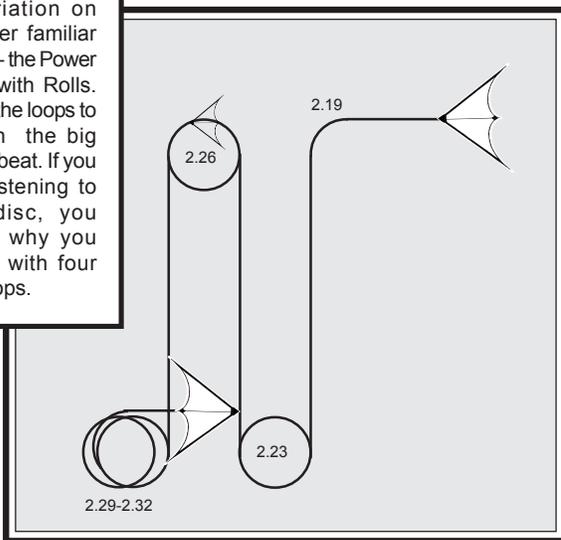
Panel 9: This series of pivots seems to fit the music so well, why not do three more.



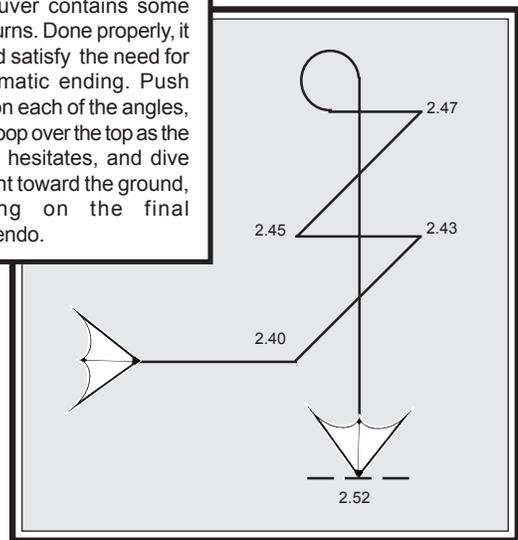
Panel 10: Loops and "squiggles". This is just like the "square cuts" maneuver, but easier since the corners are all rounded off. Just push and pull to fly the kite toward the ground and back up again. Finish off with three loops timed to the horn fanfare. (The distance between the dive and the climb will be a bit more than this illustration suggests.)



Panel 11: Here is a variation on another familiar move - the Power Dive with Rolls. Time the loops to match the big drum beat. If you are listening to the disc, you know why you finish with four full loops.



Panel 12: This final maneuver contains some tight turns. Done properly, it should satisfy the need for a dramatic ending. Push hard on each of the angles, then loop over the top as the music hesitates, and dive straight toward the ground, landing on the final crescendo.



Wizards and Warriors was a short-lived TV show that never made it to the big screen. You can find its swashbuckling theme music on "The Great Fantasy Adventure Album" (Telark CD-80342). Note that we have used CD track times to tell you when to turn.

This is a great disc for kite ballet music and features parades, processions, and attacks from twenty different shows.

When Things Go Wrong

"Performance Fever" -- That's what you get when you first step out in front of a crowd of eager spectators. You can practice for hours and be REALLY good. But try it with an audience, or worse yet, judges, and suddenly you start acting like you've never held a sport kite before. And at that point, you can do some of the dumbest things!

The best way to cure performance fever is to PERFORM. Some people never get over the stage fright - but the more you do it, the less it bothers you.

The other thing you can do to increase confidence is to practice. Don't wait for a perfect day, either. You may want optimal conditions for designing a ballet, perfecting a new maneuver, or to firm-up your skills. But the best time for a general rehearsal is in marginal weather. That way, you'll be ready when the wind drops off to nothing, or suddenly doubles in force just before your turn to fly. The weather never seems to be quite perfect when you fly in front of a crowd. Be prepared.

Of course, all the self-confidence and practice in the world won't do you a bit of good when a sudden wind lull drops your low ground pass into the dirt. You're standing there, struggling to get your kite up off the ground, and the music keeps right on going.

Or maybe you have planned a fancy ground maneuver and the kite flops over, face down with the nose pointing straight at you. A relaunch is impossible. And like we said, the music keeps right on going.

When disaster strikes, and eventually it will, the first thing to remember is to stay calm. Don't panic. There is a way out of every mess. And even if the way out is difficult, acting like you have a problem just makes things look worse.

The rulebook requires a small penalty if you crash, but a much larger one if you fail to finish a routine with the music. So unless it is completely impossible to fly, get your kite back into the air and finish what you started. Make the best of it. You'll feel better about your performance, and so will your audience.

Afterwards, give some thought to what happened and how you could have improved things. Always learn from a bad situation, because there will surely be a next time.

In competition, an unplanned ground touch results in a small penalty. If you crash in ballet, you get the same penalty whether you relaunch yourself or get help from someone else. The difference is that struggling to relaunch in a bad situation may mean dragging the kite across the field a bit. You can tangle a line and make the crash worse. You can relaunch with a tangled line or loose spar and crash again. Or worst of all, you can break something while dragging into a good position to lift off.

Plan on having some help positioned on or around the field. We call them "ground crew". And unless your crash is really easy to recover from, use your crew. They can unwrap tangled lines, insert loose spars, tie broken lines, and even make some minor on-field repairs.

When a kite goes down, everyone watching hopes for a relaunch. The sympathy of the crowd is with you. You may get louder applause for recovering from a bad crash, then for flying the maneuver you planned in the first place.

In the moment it takes for your crew to reach the kite and check it over, stop and think. Use the situation to your advantage. Are you standing in the best place for a relaunch? Should you take this opportunity to move the kite deeper in the field on light wind days? Is there a good way for you to get smoothly back into your routine?

Like we said before, the music keeps right on going. No matter how fast you fly your routine, you are never going to catch up. And while you are trying to catch up, everything you do will be out of sync with the music.

If you can't slide gracefully back into the routine, fly into position for an upcoming maneuver and wait there. Improvise. Do something that matches the music. Your unplanned moves may look better than what you planned in the first place.

When things go wrong, the person who stays calm and then reacts will come out ahead.

When you enter a formal event, you are required to perform inside the boundaries of the contest field. The size of the field may vary at different contests, but the rules are -- if you or your kite go out of bounds, you get disqualified.

It doesn't matter if the winds are light. You aren't allowed to back up off the field to stay airborne. If the winds are strong and you get pulled out -- too bad... In competition, you have to do it in the flagged-off field. Period.

Think about safety whenever you fly. Even in informal demonstrations, it's a good idea to keep the kites, and the spectators a safe distance apart.

