

MORE Class Notes

Class 10, Monday July 2

Meter II: Subdivisions of the beat

Up until now our task in identifying meter has had two steps:

- 1) Find the beat
- 2) Decide whether it makes more sense to count the beats as “1 2 1 2” (which is duple), “1 2 3 1 2 3” (which is triple) or “1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4” (which is just a fancier version of duple.)

Now we are going to focus on what happens within each beat. Most music includes lots of faster notes that happen between each beat – you could say that we are subdividing each beat into little parts and using those. Like with the “big” pattern of meter, subdivisions tend to be duple or triple.

In order to explain this I used examples from music notation. You don’t need to remember the notation part, but it might help.

In general, whoever made up our musical terms in English seems to have decided that music “in four” is the normal order of things. The typical piece of sheet music begins with the 4/4 time signature, meaning that you will put four “quarter notes” in each measure.



This is subtly mathematical, as four “quarters” = “one whole.”

DUPLE SUBDIVISIONS

If we decide to divide each of these beats into two parts, we would use “eighth notes.”



These are duple subdivisions. I’ll give you some verbal cues to remember what this sounds like. You could simulate a string of eighth notes by saying “takka” on each beat (takka takka takka takka...)

If we decide to cut the beat into *four* parts, this makes sixteenth notes.



You could simulate the sound of sixteenth notes by saying “takedimi” or “diggadigga.” I even once taught with a textbook that recommended you say “peanutbutter” when you saw this rhythm.

So, like with the “big” patterns, subdivisions of two or four are duple. Music with duple subdivisions will tend to mix the two rhythmic values together, so you’ll get a sprinkling of eighth notes and sixteenth notes here and there.

Most music you hear (including most rock music) has duple subdivisions – it is pretty much the “normal” version of meter.

TRIPLE SUBDIVISIONS

You can also divide the beat into three parts, and this creates a much different feeling than duple subdivisions do. I like to describe it as “rolling” or “bouncy.”

Some everyday examples of tunes that use triple subdivisions are the “Mister Softee” ice cream truck music and “Pop Goes the Weasel.” Pop and rock tunes that do it are perhaps still a bit unusual (though it is easier to find rock with triple subs than it is to find rock in slow triple meter, like in the last unit.) I’ve made [YouTube](#) and [Spotify](#) playlists of some examples.

So, dividing our quarter notes into 3 parts would mathematically produce “twelfth notes,” but nobody says that. Instead we tend to call them “triplets.”



Verbal cues you can use to create this sound would be “tri-puh-let,” “taketa,” or “diddily.”

Say that on each beat and you will be rolling with triple subdivisions!

(You musicians out there may also be aware that there is another common way to notate triplet subdivisions, with the 6/8, 9/8, and 12/8 time signatures. This can be super-annoying to talk about, even when you are a professional, since there is often confusion over which part is a beat. For the purposes of this class we will just avoid talking about these so-called “compound” time signatures.)

So, we will practice detecting whether sound clips feature duple subdivisions or triple subdivisions. There is a [“free practice” exercise on our website](#) to help you study.

My general recommendations would be

Before you even play any music, practice saying our nonsense cues like “takka,” “diddily,” “takedimi” to a beat, at different speeds.

Then, the procedure is similar to our old meter exercise

- 1) Find the beat (tap along!)
- 2) Test whether the music seems based on “takka,” “diddily,” or “takedimi” subdivisions. See which word pattern seems to fit with the music, say the verbal cue along with the track, maybe drum along with your hands. That will tell you the answer.