

READING RHYTHMS

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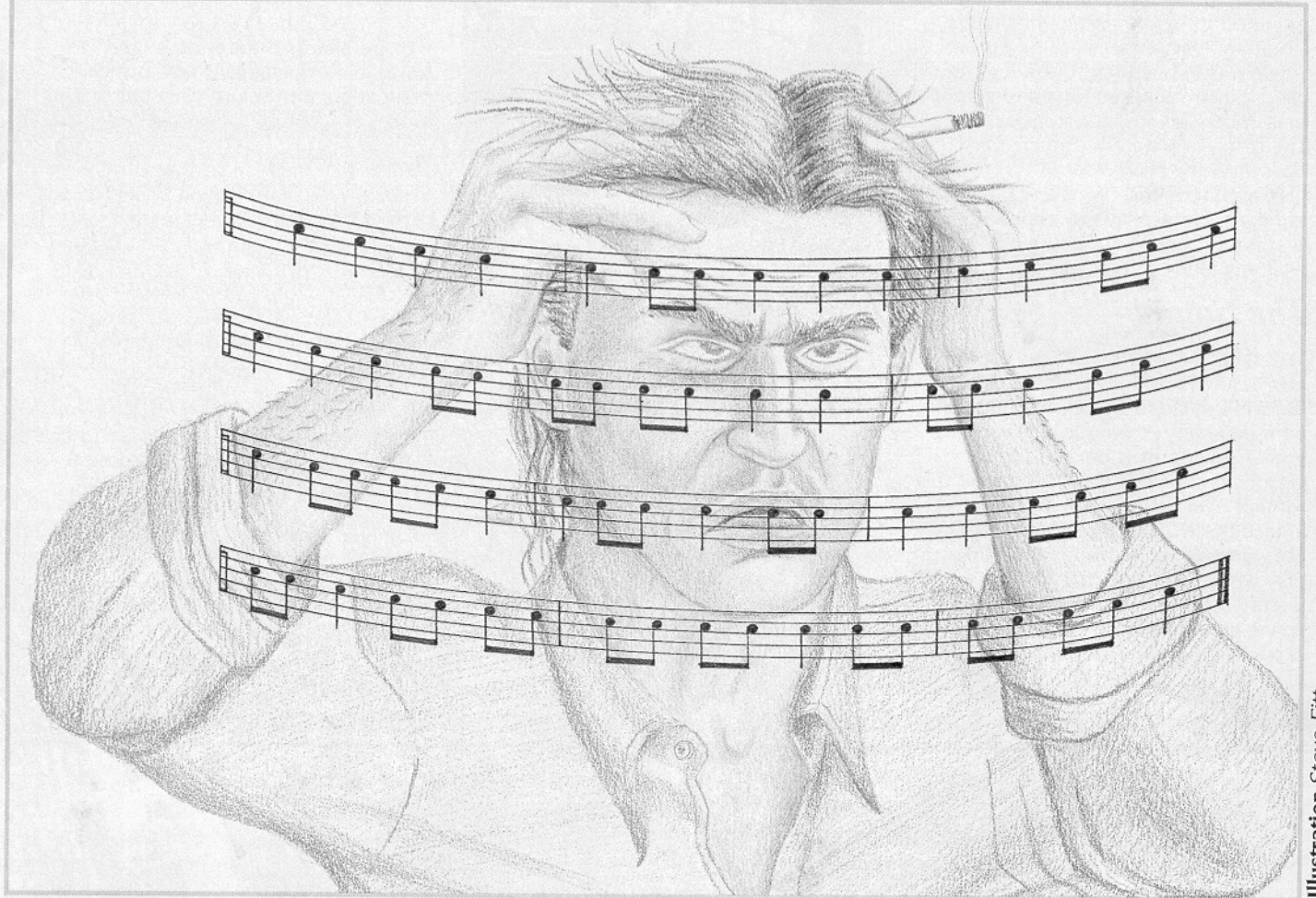


Illustration Steve Fitt

Down to the Basics

In a magazine called *Rhythm*, it seems only logical to include a column devoted to reading rhythms. If you can sight-read Frank Zappa's 'Black Page' for breakfast, you can probably skip this column (for the first few articles anyway). But bear in mind, although we're starting at the beginning to accommodate everyone, things will get heavier pretty fast. If you once knew how to read music, but have gotten a little rusty, this column can help you hone those almost forgotten skills to razor sharpness. If you've always wanted to learn to read, but perhaps 'just couldn't find the time' – then your time has come!

Text by Norman Weinberg

READING IS A wonderful tool. If you develop a sudden all-consuming interest in Hindu clothing, for example, you can run down to your local library, check out a book, and read all about it.

The same idea applies to reading music. If you suddenly get interested in Hindu music, you can run down to your local music library, check out some music, learn about it – and play it. While the topic of Hindu music may not grab you right now, how about double bass drum technique, or polyrhythms, or rudiments, or Jazz, or even the latest transcription of a Steve Gadd solo (to be found elsewhere in this very issue). In short, all the acquired knowledge of the world's most prestigious drummers

is at your fingertips . . . if you can read music, that is.

If you stop and think about it, the notational system that we use is pretty effective. In a short amount of space and with relatively few symbols, a composer can convey some very specific instructions to the performer. Musical notation is written on a five line staff, and can express the length of each note, the pitch of each note, the instrument, the tempo of the piece, and even how loud or soft to play.

At the beginning of each piece of music, there is a *time signature* which consists of one number placed on top of the other – the most common one being 4/4. The upper number (4 in this case) indicates how many counts make

up one measure (or bar) of music. A measure is the space between any two vertical lines (or bar lines). Because the upper number is four, there will be four counts in every measure. A three in this position would indicate three counts per measure, while a 17 would indicate 17 counts – anything is possible.

The lower number of the time signature is a different matter. It can only be 1, 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, 64, etc. This is a code which stands for the different note values (or durations). 1 means a whole note, 2 stands for a half note (half the value of a whole note), 4 indicates a quarter note (half the value of a half note), 8 means an eighth note (half the value of a quarter note), 16 stands for a sixteenth note (half the

value of an eighth note), and 32 means a thirty-second note (half the value of a 16th note) . . . and so on. But really, you shouldn't have to deal with anything smaller than a 32nd note too often.

Figure 1 shows how each note value looks and figure 2 shows the relation of each note to the others.

The bottom number in the time signature tells you which note value is equal to one beat in the measure. So while the top number tells you how many beats are in a measure, the bottom one tells you which note gets one beat's duration.













HERE ARE SOME examples. In 4/4 time, there are four beats per measure and the quarter note is the note value which equals one of the beats. In other words, the time value of one measure is equal to four quarter notes. In 6/8 time, on the other hand, there are six counts per measure, and the value of one of those counts is an eighth note. Therefore, each measure has a time value of six eighth notes. 5/2 time has the value of five half notes in each bar, while 3/16 time contains the value of three sixteenth notes in every measure.

If you're getting a little confused about these different meters, don't worry. I just wanted you to know the reason why there are four counts (or beats) in the exercises we'll do later, and why we use the counting system 1, 2, 3, 4 to keep track of them. Remember that each measure only has to contain the value of four quarter notes (in 4/4 time).

The metronomic marking indicates the speed (or tempo) at which the piece of music should be played. For example, a marking of *quarter note* = 60 means that there are 60 quarter notes during each minute of time, or one every second. Let's take a look at the exercise in figure 3. In the first measure, there are four quarter notes. To play this measure, count the numbers 1,2,3,4 at a steady tempo, and play a note as you say every count out loud. You should hit the drum four times, and the distance between the strikes should be exactly the same. If you are playing this at the indicated metronomic marking, the four strokes will take up four seconds of time. In the second measure, you see a quarter rest followed by three quarter notes. The quarter rest is exactly the same as the quarter note in every respect but one: the quarter note tells you to make a sound, while the quarter rest tells you to make no sound. To play this measure, count 1,2,3,4 and only play the drum on counts two, three, and four. You must still count one, just don't play a stroke.

Believe it or not, that's about all there is to it. If you see a quarter note, RHYTHM JUNE 1988

Figure 1

Note	Rest
 Whole Note - Open Note-Head.	
 Half Note - Open Note-Head and Stem.	
 Quarter Note - Closed Note-Head and Stem.	
 Eighth Note - Closed Note-Head, Stem, and Flag.	
 Sixteenth Note - Closed Note-Head, Stem, and Two Flags	
 Thirty-Second Note - Closed Note-Head, Stem, and Three Flags	

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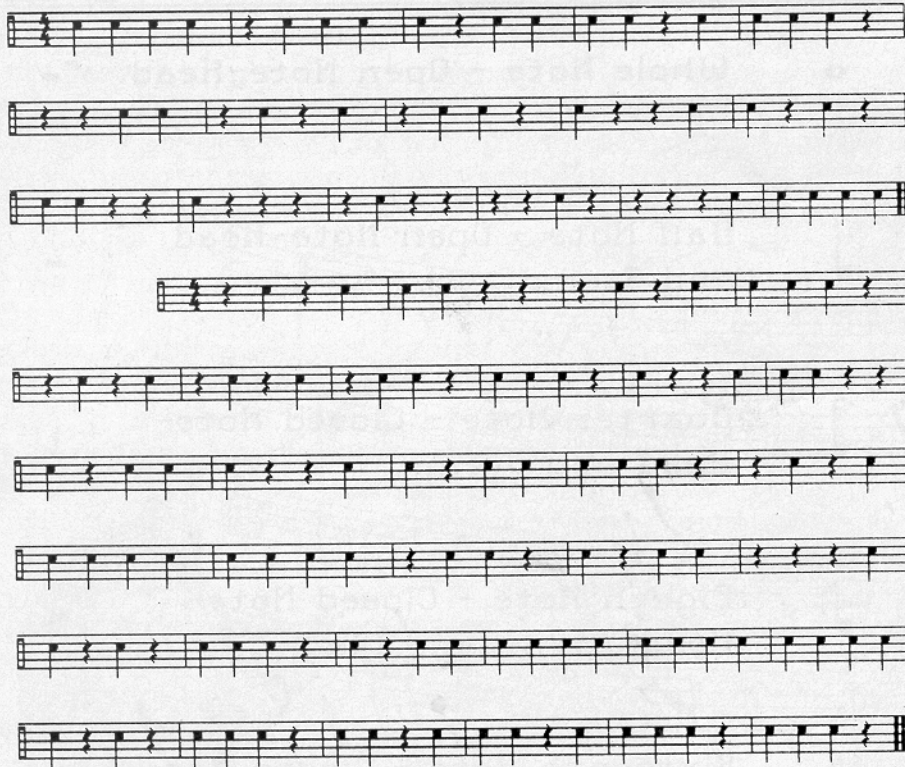
Figure 2

Relative Note Values



Figure 3

Quarter Notes and Quarter Rests



strike the drum on the proper number within the bar. If you see a quarter rest, count the number, but don't play anything.

Here are some guidelines to help you in your reading practice:

1) Be certain that the speed of your counts is steady and consistent. There should be no pause between measures and no pause between lines. This exercise has a double bar at the end of the third line. The double bar is used to indicate the end of a composition or major section. Stop at this point and start fresh at the beginning of the fourth line.

2) Go slowly at first and have a successful experience. If you're having trouble, slow down. Then, do it again – and again, and again.

3) Always count out loud. Drummers have a distinct advantage over wind players in that they can count while they play. Counting out loud will serve as some additional feedback to your ears and your eyes that everything is going along okay.

4) As you count out loud, keep your verbal counts short and crisp. This way, you will be able to hear where the sound of the drum is supposed to occur. If you draw out the verbal count, it becomes harder to synchronize the sound of the drum to the sound of the count.

5) Always try to keep your eyes in front of your hands. As you play the count, your eyes should already be looking ahead to see what you have to do for the next count. This occurs when you read English and it works for music too.

LET'S TALK ABOUT *eighth notes*. A single eighth note is exactly half the value of a quarter note. Therefore, two eighth notes will always equal one quarter note. A single eighth note is written as a note-head with a stem and a single 'flag' (see figure 1), while two or more eighth notes can be grouped together with a beam. Beams group notes together to make it easier to count them at a glance.

Since eighth notes divide quarter notes in half, and quarters are counted 1,2,3,4, we use the syllable 'and' (shown as a + sign) to indicate the second eighth note in the beat. So the eight eighth notes in a bar of 4/4 time are counted 1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and . . . at a constant tempo, of course. If you see an eighth rest, count it out loud as usual, but don't strike the drum. Figure 4 is an exercise combining quarter notes and eighth notes. Enjoy it and we'll continue next month. **R**

Figure 4

Groups of Two Eighth Notes

