

READING RHYTHMS

As we continue with our column designed to help you learn to read from scratch or, alternately, to develop further your existing reading skills, bear in mind that reading, like drumming itself, is learned best by repeatedly going over the basics. Obviously, we can't devote page after page of space in the magazine to providing exercises which address all of the possible rhythmic permutations. However, what we have done is to provide a package of supplementary exercises, which coincide with each month's 'lesson', and these are available in written form, along with a cassette tape so you can hear how they should be played. All you need do is fill in and send in the attached order card (along with some money). If your card has been ripped off by another zealous reader, simply drop us a line at RHYTHM, 22024 Lassen Street, Suite 118, Chatsworth, CA 91311. Be sure to specify the issues (month of publication) desired and include price/tape for each one ordered.

Text and examples by Norman Weinberg.

READING MUSIC IS a lot like reading English. In English, letters are placed together to form words. Our eyes take in the visual picture of the words, and our mind interprets those pictures into different sounds and meanings. With music, note values are combined to form visual figures that work a lot like words. Musical figures are also interpreted by our mind and turned into rhythms. As we learn more of the common musical figures, we are increasing our 'rhythmic vocabulary'.

This month, we will be mastering several new figures that incorporate a certain amount of silence: the eighth rest, a group of four sixteenth notes, and two figures that combine one eighth note with two sixteenths. Remember that music is made up of sound and silence. Often, silence is just as effective as sound.

What does a composer do when he wants the musician to play a note on the 'and' of a count, but not on the 'number' (or downbeat)? Well, one solution is to throw away the first eighth note in a group of two eighths and replace it with an eighth rest. Since an eighth rest has the same value as an eighth note, there are still the correct number of counts in the measure. Because there is no other note on that beat, the remaining eighth note stands alone and is written with a flag instead of a beam. Composers and copyists often beam the notes together within a count (it's easier for your eye). But, with this figure, beams aren't used.

Examples 1a and 1b show the two figures that result when each of the two eighth notes in a count are replaced by an eighth rest. To perform 1a, count the number (but, don't play it), and strike the drum on the 'and' count. To perform 1b, do the opposite and only play on the number count.

Figure 1b sounds the same as the quarter note when you play it on a drum. But, keep in mind that rests really signify a certain duration of silence, and for this reason the two figures are not quite the same. If you were playing a woodwind or string instrument, then you would stop the sound

when you came to the rest. Since most drums don't have a very long duration, these figures sound pretty much the same and you don't need to worry about stopping the sound. If you want to have some fun, try playing this exercise on a crash cymbal. You can then observe the eighth rests by reaching up and grabbing the cymbal with your hand in order to muffle the vibrations and create the required silence.

NOW LET'S TAKE a look at a group of four sixteenth notes which are beamed together to form a full count. When sixteenths stand alone, they have two flags, and when they are grouped together, they have two beams replacing the flags. This way, you can read them at a glance and easily see the difference between eighth notes (which only have one beam) and sixteenth notes. A single sixteenth is exactly one-half the value of an eighth note. So, there are two sixteenths to every eighth, and because they are twice as short as eighth notes, they move at twice the speed. It follows then that there are also four sixteenth notes to every quarter note. The trick is to make sure that each sixteenth is dividing the eighth perfectly in half. How can you be sure that they are moving at the proper speed? By counting, of course!

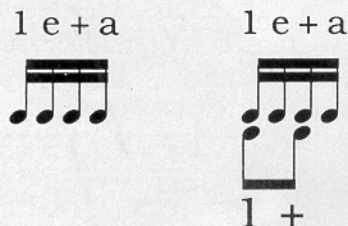
Example 2a shows the proper way to count this grouping: the number, the syllable 'e', the 'and', and the 'a'. Together, they sound like this: 'one-e-and-ah, two-e-and-ah', and so on. When you count this figure, be sure that all the number counts in the measure are moving at a steady interval. Example 2b demonstrates that the number count (downbeat) and the 'and' count fall on the first and third sixteenth notes, respectively. The 'e' and the 'a' fall in between the eighths in order to divide them accurately.

Now the fun starts! Example 3a is a figure which doesn't actually have a specific name, it's just called two sixteenths and an eighth. This figure results when only the first eighth in a count is broken into two sixteenths. When you play this figure, don't

Example #1a Example #1b



Example #2a Example #2b



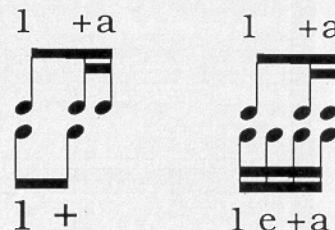
Example #3a Example #3b



Example #3c Example #4a



Example #4b Example #4c



count the 'a', but be sure that you are leaving its space. Examples 3b and 3c show this figure's relationship to a group of two eighths and to a group of four sixteenth notes.

Example 4a is a similar figure. Called an eighth and two sixteenths, it results when the second eighth note is divided. For this figure, don't count or play the 'e', but be sure to leave enough space for it. If you don't, then this figure will sound just like the one above, and it shouldn't. Examples 4b and 4c show you how an eighth and two sixteenths relates to the other figures that we already know.

In order for you to get the feeling of both of these last figures, I recommend that you begin by counting every single one

of the sixteenth note syllables out loud. Remember not to play on the sixteenth's syllable ('e' or 'a') if it follows an eighth note. Soon, as you feel more comfortable with the rhythms, begin leaving out those syllables that aren't played. This way, you won't have to say quite so many words when you are playing.

Here's another little reminder. Don't forget to breathe. As you are counting out loud, you may need to breathe at some point (unless you can hold your breath for over three minutes!). Try to take your breaths when there is a little break in the musical activity (like a quarter note or an eighth rest), or keep your counts going while you inhale. Don't stop the music or take a pause when you breathe. Keep in

mind that all the number counts, from the very first measure to the very last, must all move at the same speed. If you pause, then that count will be longer than the others.

Practice this exercise at a slow tempo at first, and repeat it several times until it becomes very comfortable. And last but not least, here are those reminders:

1. Keep your counts steady.
2. If you can't play it, you're too fast!
3. Play the exercise many times (25-50 should be enough).
4. Count out loud.
5. Keep your counts short and crisp.
6. Keep your eyes in front of your hands (read ahead).

Happy Reading!

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