READING RHYTHMS

"Mr Scott, I'm waiting . . . Come on Scotty, beam me up! I canna' do it, Admiral – the Dilithium crystals are drained!" *Text by Norman Weinberg.*

THIS MONTH, WE'LL be taking a look at some of the trickiest rhythmic figures there are: those that include the sixteenth rest. What makes these little buggers so tough? Figures that use sixteenth rests are not often beamed together into clear groupings of one count each. Whenever there are several sixteenth rests, the visual 'flow' of the music seems to be broken up. A figure of two eighth notes or four sixteenths can be connected with beams so that your eyes can catch them in an instant. But some figures that use sixteenth rests just can't be beamed (*"Aye, laddie. And a fine mess it is too!"*).

Another problem with these figures is that they can be written several different ways. Like the English counterpart, the homonym, (to, too, and two) a grouping of two consecutive sixteenths can be written as a single note or rest. This applies in two ways. First, two sixteenth rests can be replaced with an eighth rest. And second, a sixteenth note which is followed by a sixteenth rest can be written as an eighth note.

Let's take a look at Example #1 and rip these new figures apart to see how they work. In the example, the new rhythms are on the top space. The second space (containing groups of four sixteenths) shows you how the new figures relate to the count. The first figure is a single sixteenth rest followed by three sixteenth notes which are beamed together. This is one of the easier figures presented this month. Since the sixteenth rest has the same value as a sixteenth note (it's just not played), the three sixteenth notes must attack on counts 'e', '+', and 'a'. The second figure in Example #1 has the sixteenth rest occurring on the third sixteenth. This corresponds to the '+' count. In order to perform this figure correctly, play only on the 'I', 'e', and 'a' syllables. As mentioned above, this figure can be written a couple of different ways. Look at Example #2a and you will see three different versions of the same rhythm.

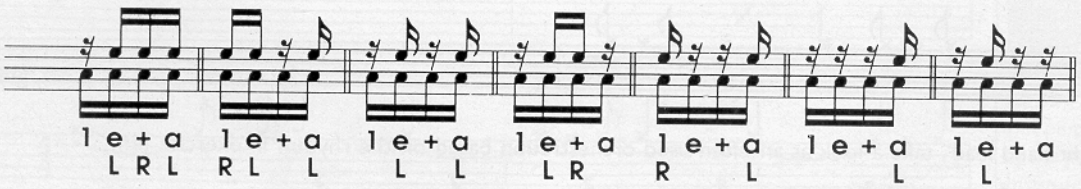
The third rhythm in Example #1 can be written three different ways. The sixteenth notes fall on counts 'e' and 'a', leaving the number count and the '+' count silent. Example #2b shows how this would look if the figure was written differently. The first two figures in example #2b are made up of the same note values, but the figure with flags looks very different than the one with beams. All four versions of this rhythm are correct. It's up to the composer to determine how he or she wants it to look.

The fourth figure in Example #1 requires you to play the strokes on counts 'e' and '+', while the counts of 'I' and 'a' are taken up by the sixteenth rests. The next figure is just the opposite; you play the 'I' and the 'a' counts without playing the other two syllables. Take a look at Example #2c to see all of the different ways that this rhythm can be written.

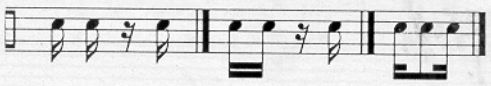
The last two figures involve a single stroke during the count. We have already learned how a composer would ask you to play on the 'I' syllable: by writing a single quarter note. If the composer wants you to play on the '+' syllable, he would write an eighth rest followed by an eighth note. Either playing on the 'a' like the sixth figure in the example, or playing on the 'e' like the last figure are the other two possible options.

I would like to take another minute to explain a sticking pattern that might save hours and hours of work. Rather than using hand to hand stickings, try a right hand or left hand lead. If you are right handed, then a right hand lead will probably work best for you. If you're left handed, reverse everything that is going to follow. In working out the right hand lead, think of a set of four sixteenth notes. You always begin with your right hand so that the counts 'I', 'e', '+', and 'a' will always fall RLRL. The idea behind the right hand lead is that you will use this same sticking pattern for any rhythmic grouping that uses sixteenths.

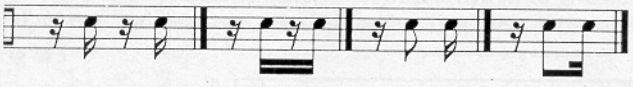
Example #1



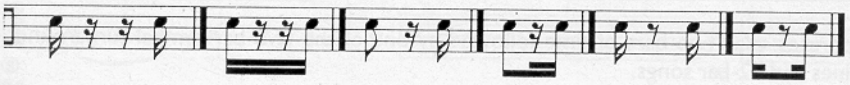
Example #2a



Example #2b



Example #2c



Let me give you a few examples of how this works. First, let's do two of the figures that we worked on last month. For the rhythm of an eighth and two sixteenths: R-RL. For the rhythm of two sixteenths and an eighth: RLR- (the '-' means that there is no stroke on that syllable). The suggested stickings for the new rhythms are included in Example #1 below the counts. The only exception to this rule would be a group of two eighth notes which should be played R-L-.

While this type of sticking pattern may give you a little trouble at first, it will soon make things a great deal easier. The main advantage is that a particular rhythmic figure, no matter what it looks like, no matter where it falls within the measure, will always have the same sticking. You won't have to worry about which hand is going to play a particular syllable, because with practice, your body will simply take care of it for you.

When you begin to work on this month's exercise, please do not get discouraged! I told you at the start that these figures are tough nuts to crack. If you can read this exercise and make it sound relaxed instead of frantic, then you are well on your way to increasing your rhythmic vocabulary. Take your time and have a successful experience.

I suggest that when you begin this exercise, say all of the syllables (even the ones that you don't play) out loud. As the exercise becomes more comfortable, count only those syllables which are played.

Remember, reading music is a lot like reading English. The whole idea is to be able to recognize words (rhythmic figures) and be able to say them (play them). There is a finite number of rhythmic figures that can be used in any one count. The possible choices are not limitless. Your vocabulary is growing every month! This reminds me of the one about the student player who, after making a mistake, looked at the conductor and said "I'm sorry. I've seen all of these notes before, just not in this order." ®