

READING RHYTHMS

Dots And Ties *Text and examples by Norman Weinberg.*

LET'S TALK ABOUT dots and ties. No, this isn't a fashion article, but dotted and tied notes can be used to write rhythms you already know how to play in new ways. Music notation is seldom cut and dried; there are frequently variations that composers and copyists can use to write the same rhythm. Last month, we talked about combining a sixteenth note followed by a sixteenth rest into a single eighth note. Combining values is one way that rhythms may change in their appearance – the use of dots and ties are two more.

Since dots are a little easier to work with, let's cover them first. A dot (yes, it's nothing more than a little dot that follows a note or a rest) extends the normal value of a note by half. Or you could say a dot after a note makes it equal to three of the next smaller note value. A dotted quarter, for example, is equal in duration to $1\frac{1}{2}$ quarter notes, or three eighth notes since eighths are the next smaller note value below quarters. Likewise, a dotted eighth note equals the duration of $1\frac{1}{2}$ eighth notes or three sixteenth notes. Again, sixteenths are the next smaller duration after eighths. A dotted half note is equal to the same duration as $1\frac{1}{2}$ half notes or three quarter notes. "Okay, okay – we get the picture, already!" Oh . . . sorry.

Dots can be applied to rests as well as notes. Dotted rests have the same duration as dotted notes, and you simply observe the entire duration of silence. One thing must be made clear at this point: the dot itself is not played. A dotted eighth note still has only one attack. It's only the note's duration which has been affected by the dot. Dots are always placed in a space on the staff, never on a line. If the note

head is in a space, then the dot is placed right after it. If the note head is on a line, the dot is placed in the space above the line.

Taking a look at Example Number One, you see a dotted quarter as the first symbol in the first measure. Since this dotted quarter equals the same value as three eighth notes, play the note on count 'one', and continue counting '+' 'two', but don't play the latter two syllables. The single eighth note that follows occurs on the '+' count of the second beat. At the beginning of the third beat, you see a dotted eighth note. This note falls on the beginning of the third beat, and has the same value as three sixteenths. The sixteenth that follows comes on the 'a' count of beat three. Of course, the quarter note that ends the measure falls on count four.

Most often, dotted notes will be combined with the single note value that will complete a count. In other words, a dotted quarter is most often followed by an eighth note (this completes two full counts), and a sixteenth note will usually follow a dotted eighth note (completing one full count). Don't forget that either of these two notes (the dotted one or the single one) can be replaced with a rest of the same value.

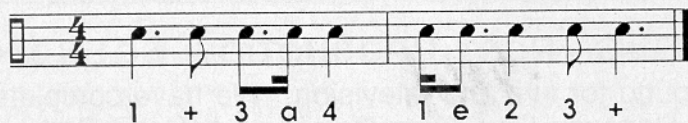
The second measure of this example has the dotted note following the single note value (those tricky guys!). The first count of this measure is sometimes called the 'Scotch Snap', because it is used often in Scottish folk music. To perform this figure, play on the 'l' and the 'e' syllable only, as the dotted eighth gets the value of the last three sixteenth notes in the count. The third and fourth beats of the measure should be pretty easy to figure out. The

eighth note falls on count three and the dotted quarter is struck on the '+' of the third count and takes up the remainder of the measure.

Now, let's check out the tie. Ties are little curved lines that connect two or more notes. As their name implies, they 'tie' notes so that the first note has an extended duration. Let's make believe that we're dealing with pieces of string instead of notes. If you lay two strings end to end, you have two distinct starting points and ending points. If you tie them together (and each string is two feet long), you would create a single string which is four feet in length. Because the string is now a single piece, there is only one beginning and one ending point. The string is longer, but now there are only two ends instead of four.

When two notes are tied together, you attack the first note at its normal position within the measure. The duration of the first note continues until the end of the second note. The second note is not attacked separately (it has magically become part of the first). In percussion music, where we seldom deal with duration, you can follow a simple rule: play the first note of a tie, and leave out the second. The end result is the same as if the second note were a rest. Keep in mind however, that if you are playing a wind instrument (like a trumpet or clarinet), there is a big difference between notes that are tied together and notes followed by rests. (When interpreting drum charts, you would use longer duration sounds to try and approximate the length of a dotted or tied note. For example, you might use a cymbal together with the kick drum to interpret a dotted quarter or longer

Example #1



Example #2



duration.) Rests indicate silence, and the tie actually increases the duration of a note. One more thing about ties, they are never used to connect notes and rests together.

In Example Number Two, the first and second measures would sound the same on a snare drum (they would not be the same if played by a violin or flute). Because of the tie, the eighth note that falls on count two has become part of the quarter note, so it isn't played with a fresh attack. The third beat of the measure begins with an eighth tied to a sixteenth note. Now, the eighth note is extended to include the value of the sixteenth. If you take a closer look, you'll see that this first measure and the measure in Example Number One are exactly the same in every respect.

Even though a dotted quarter followed by an eighth is the same as a quarter tied to an eighth, don't get confused. Ties and dots are not the same thing. Ties can be used to hook notes of any value together. It is possible to tie two quarter notes together, two sixteenth notes together, or even to tie a half note to a sixteenth. Dots, on the

other hand, extend a particular note by a certain duration which cannot be altered.

It is also possible to tie more than two notes together. When this is the case, all the symbols following the first note of the tie continue to extend its duration. For example, a quarter tied to a quarter tied to an eighth, has the value of two and one-half counts. Tie three quarter notes together, and you have the value of three full counts. Always keep in mind that a grouping of tied notes will only have one attack point, and therefore, only one stroke.

Remember when you practice this exercise to try to keep everything sounding relaxed and smooth. It's not just enough to play the proper note at the proper time. You always want the music you are reading to sound just as pure and natural as when you are improvising. I'm sure that you have heard a young reader trying to connect words into sentences. Each word is followed by a short pause and everything is stilted, dry, and without feeling. The natural rise and fall of the voice during speech is replaced by a voice that

could be coming from a computer. Yet, when this same person speaks 'off the top of his head', everything sounds just fine. When you're reading music, listen to yourself and be certain that you are playing with relaxation and expression. ®

*Don't forget that you can order a package of supplemental exercises that coincide with each month's 'reading lesson'. What you get are the exercises in written form along with a cassette tape so you can hear how they should be played. All you need do is fill out and send in the attached order form. If your form 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 \$5.00/tape plus \$1.50 shipping and handling for each order (not each tape in the order). California residents add 6% sales tax (6.5% for L.A.), and those residing out of the country, add \$6.00/order.*