READING RHYTHMS

SIXTEENTH NOTE TRIPLETS

Text and examples by Norman Weinberg.

IN THE PAST MONTHS, we've explored eighth note triplets and quarter note triplets. As a quick review, triplets are notes that divide a particular value into three equal parts as opposed to two equal divisions. This month, Reading Rhythms dives into another type of triplet: sixteenth note triplets. If you've listened to Ravel's *Bolero* (used in the soundtrack to the movie *"10"*), (*yes, we all remember that movie for the music! – Ed*) then you've heard sixteenth note triplets.

Remember the old rule for triplets – three in the time of two? Well, three sixteenth triplets are going to be played in the same amount of time as two "regular" sixteenths. We can also approach this in another way. Since there are two "normal" sixteenths to an eighth, there will be three sixteenth triplets to each eighth note.

Take a look at Example #1. In this measure, you see a set of quarter triplets which take up the first two counts of the measure. Count three consists of a set of eighth triplets, and count four contains a grouping of sixteenth note triplets. Since there will be three sixteenth triplets for each eighth note, there are six sixteenth triplets for the entire fourth count (the value of one quarter note).

Example #2 shows one of the possible ways to count sixteenth triplets. Just as eighth note triplets can be counted with a variety of syllables (one-tuh-tuh; one-e-a; one-la-le; tri-po-let), sixteenth triplets are up for grabs too. Remember that the counting system that you use is not as important as being consistent. You can use any syllables that you feel comfortable with, as long as you use them all the time.

I like these two choices (one-tuh-tuh-and-tuh-tuh or one-e-a-and-e-a) because the player gets a strong sense of a set of triplets falling on the number portion of the count and another set of triplets falling on the "and" of the count.

The trick to playing even quarter note triplets (see January '89 issue) is to play every other eighth note triplet. So, when first learning to play sixteenth note triplets, you might try playing eighth note triplets with just one hand and then adding your other hand to double the triplet's speed. Just as there are two eighth note triplets in the value of each quarter note triplet, there are also two sixteenth triplets in the value of each eighth note triplet.

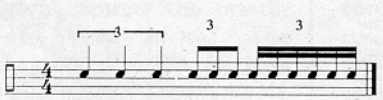
Example #3 shows the relationship between all three values of triplets that have been covered so far. Since this example is visually aligned in terms of rhythmic values, it's easy to notice that there are two eighth triplets to each quarter triplet, and that there are two sixteenth triplets to each eighth triplet. If you follow the sixteenth triplets all the way up to the top line, you can also see that there are four sixteenth note triplets to each quarter note triplet.

If these relationships seem to be obvious, don't take them for granted. Time relationships between sixteenths, eighths, and quarters are always the same, no matter what number is above a group of notes (threes, fives, sevens, thirteens, etc.). If four sixteenths equal the value of a quarter, then four sixteenth triplets equal the value of a quarter triplet. And four sixteenth notes that are inside a grouping of thirteen will equal the value of a quarter note inside a grouping of thirteen.

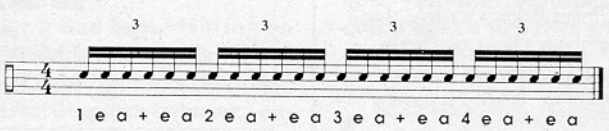
Example #4 shows two of the most common variations of the sixteenth triplet figure. For the first count of this example, only the first eighth is subdivided into the triplet. The value of the second eighth (attacking on the "and" of count one) is unaffected. In the second count of the example, the eighth note on the "and" syllable is replaced by a rest. As always, any note in any count can also be replaced by a rest. The third and fourth counts of the example show what happens when only the second eighth of the count is subdivided into the triplet. The counts under the example will show you where each number and "and" syllable occur.

Again, begin this month's exercise slowly. While you're counting of loud, see if you can feel the sixteenth triplet figures working at the level of the eighth note. After you get a feel for the exercise, try increasing the tempo little by little. Once you reach the speed where counting each individual sixteenth triplet starts to get in the way, count each eighth note and "feel" the rhythm of sixteenth triplets inside the eighths. This is one of the few times when I'll admit that counting each note may hinder instead of help you. ®

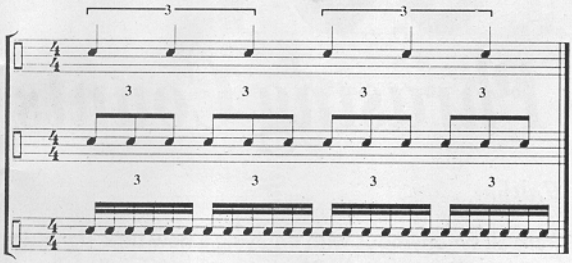
Example #1



Example #2



Example #3



Example #4