READING RHYTHMS

Text and examples by Norman Weinberg

Let's have some real fun this month! (Ok, Norman, hit me with it. – Ed) Back when we covered compound meters (you know, the ones that have an "8" as the bottom number in the time signature), we kept things pretty simple. This month, we've got a few challenges in store . . .

As a quick review, compound meters use eighth notes instead of quarters as the basic unit of the count. In 6/8 time, each measure has the value of six eighth notes, and each of those eighths receives one count. From the November '88 column, you'll remember the trick to reading passages in meters of this type. Since eighth notes are going to get the value of a count, sixteenth notes divide each count into two parts (not four parts as they do in 3/4 or 4/4 time).

So, the question is: What type of triplets are used to divide a single count into three equal parts? Sixteenth triplets, of course. The triplet rule of "three in the time of two" still applies in compound meters. This means that three sixteenth triplets are going to take up the same amount of time as two normal sixteenth notes – one full count.

Take a gander at **Example 1**. These seven measures are the most common triplet patterns or groupings that you're likely to run across when reading music in compound meters. Notice that there are no rests in this example, but it's possible to use an eighth rest in place of any eighth note, or a sixteenth rest to take the place of one of the sixteenth notes. You might want to make up a few of your own patterns that incorporate rests.

Performing the rhythms in the first example is a snap. During the first measure, play a set of triplets on the first and fourth count of the bar. Remember that it doesn't matter which counting system you prefer for triplets, as long as you're consistent. Using the syllables "one-tuh-tuh", "one-+-a," or "tri-po-let" all work fine.

Example 2 poses another problem. These two measures make use of eighth note triplets. Since we're working in a meter which gives the eighth the value of one count, each eighth triplet grouping takes up the time of two full counts rather than one count. You might compare them to quarter note triplets in 6/4 time. **Example 3** does just that. If you play Example 3 and then follow it with Example 2, you'll find that they're counted and performed exactly the same.

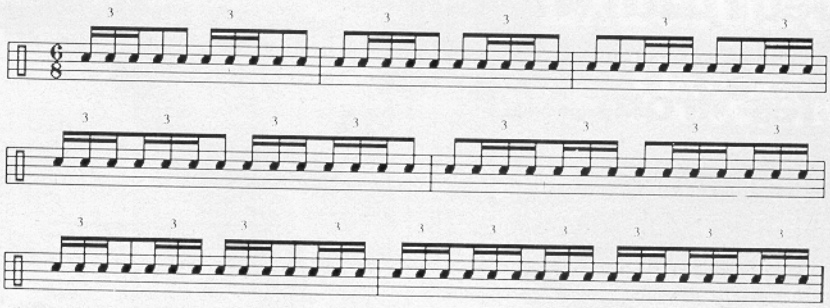
When playing the eighth triplets in Example 2, use the same counting system that you would normally use for sixteenth triplets, and attack every other syllable. In other words, if you count "one-tuh-tuh, two-tuh-tuh" for the sixteenth triplets, strike the drum on syllables "one," the second "tuh" of count one, and also on the first "tuh" of count two.

Ok, are you ready for some meat and potatoes? (I don't know, I was thinking more of a salad, Norm . . .) Sneak a peek at **Example 4** and see if you can crack the notation's code. The quarter note triplets that occur in these measures take the same amount of time to perform as two regular quarters. In the first measure, the triplet begins on count one and is finished by count five (counts five and six are where the last two eighths in the measure are attacked). Fine. Now you know where the triplet begins, but where do the other two quarter notes go? Let's slip off for a second and review a basic, yet critical concept.

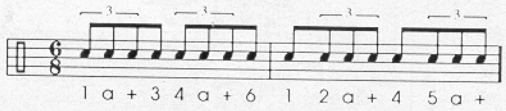
The concept of "two eighths always equal a quarter," can't be repeated too many times. No matter what the time signature, no matter what the musical style, no matter what numbers are above the notes (3, 5, 7, 13, or even 147 for that matter), two eighths *always* equal a quarter. This will become more and more critical as *Reading Rhythms* digs even deeper into the world of rhythmic notation. So how does this rule apply to the example? Just as you played a set of eighth note triplets by playing every other sixteenth triplet, you can perform a set of quarter note triplets by playing every other eighth triplet.

Diagram 1 shows the relationship between these three different triplet values graphically. The upper notes (on the third space of the staff) are obviously sixteenth triplets. Notice that the notes on the second space fall with every other sixteenth. The lowest voice (on the first space) shows where quarter note triplets fall. You can also relate each triplet value to the counts below the diagram. ►

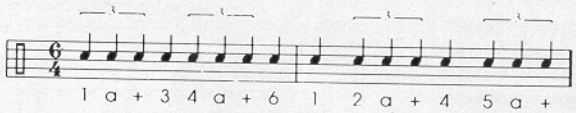
Example No. 1.



Example No. 2.



Example No. 3.



Example No. 4.

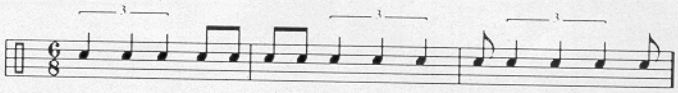
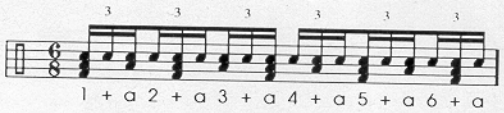
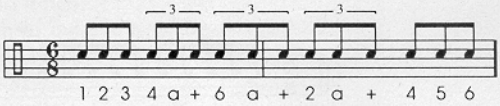


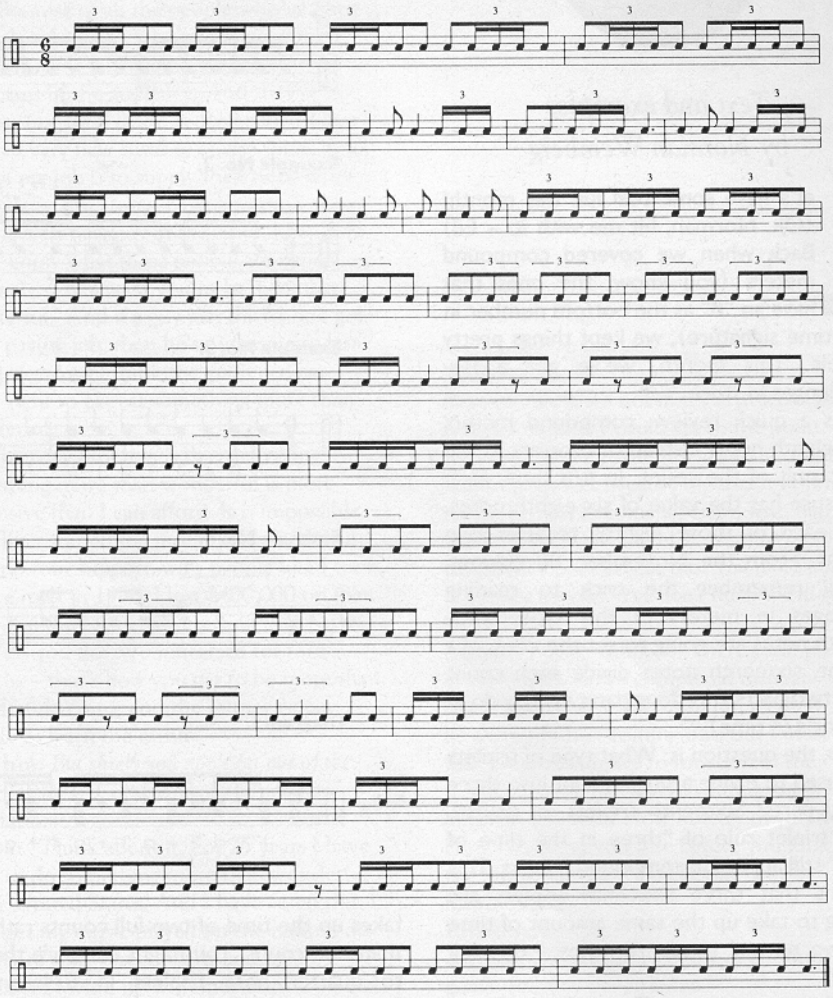
Diagram 1.



Example No. 5.



Composite Exercise.



► Back to Example 4. In the first measure, the quarter note triplets begin on count one. The second measure places the triplet on count three, and in the third measure the triplet begins on count two. Notice how odd the third measure looks. That's because the eighth that begins the measure can't be beamed to the triplet.

Now for the *coup de grace*. **Example 5** introduces a brand new animal. This is an example of *over-the-barline* beaming. Over-the-bar beaming is an easy concept to understand. It simply means that the composer or copyist has chosen to connect the beams across the usual barline barrier. There are two reasons why this might be done. As it's being used in Example 5, the triplet which begins on count six of the first measure isn't complete until count two of the second measure and by connecting the beam over the bar, the figure looks more like a triplet and is easier to see. If you think that this example looks confusing, imagine how it would appear if the first note in the second measure was an eighth with a flag. It might be mistaken for a normal eighth instead of being part of the triplet. To perform these measures, continue counting sixteenth triplets from count four of the first bar until count four of the second bar. You already know what to do next . . . play every other syllable.

A short personal note. I've switched to a new music engraving program. It's called Finale and is published by Coda Music Software. During the next few months, you should be able to see an improvement in the legibility of the examples and exercises in this column. Until next time, happy reading! ®

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All examples in this column were produced using Finale, courtesy of Coda Software.