Understanding Music

Seventh Edition

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1:13	Handel saves his most brilliant idea for the last section of the piece. All along, as we have seen, every phrase has been played first by the trumpets and then echoed by the horns. Now the composer *combines* the trumpets and horns to get the fullest possible sound. He also brings back the accompanying descending runs from the very beginning of the piece. The melody is played in longer notes that gradually descend. Since every phrase in the whole piece so far has been repeated, this time Handel also repeats this phrase; but just to get a little variety and final intensity, he divides each of the longer notes into two (*de-de de-de* ***daa*** instead of *da da* ***daa***).
1:30	Four short chords end the whole piece.

This is wonderful music. No wonder the king wanted to hear it three times! Later in this chapter we'll analyze it again. Here, we have seen how the music can be analyzed in terms of melodic motion, how it is divided very clearly into phrases, and how these phrases give the piece its form. We have also heard differences in pitch and noticed some intervals. We can hear that the music is almost entirely consonant throughout. We should also note that the dynamics are mostly *forte* (loud) with occasional crescendos to *fortissimo* (very loud). Remember, the sound had to carry across water!

Rhythm

When we analyzed simple melodies ("Happy Birthday," "America," and "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star") and when we listened to Handel's *Water Music*, I had to sneak in an occasional reference to the second main organizing principle of music: rhythm. Rhythm is a fundamental component of all music.

If a melody is sung without its rhythm, it immediately loses much of its essence. Rhythm is as fundamental to music as pitch, possibly even more so. Rhythm is built into our bodies: there is rhythm in the beating of our hearts and in the motion of our limbs when we walk. Rhythm is one of the most important distinguishing features in music.

Beat If you are listening to music and find yourself tapping your finger on the table or your foot on the floor, then you are following the **beat**. You are responding to the *regular pulse* of the music. If you tap a steady, even rhythm while singing "Happy Birthday," the rhythm that you tap is the beat. Try it a couple of times.

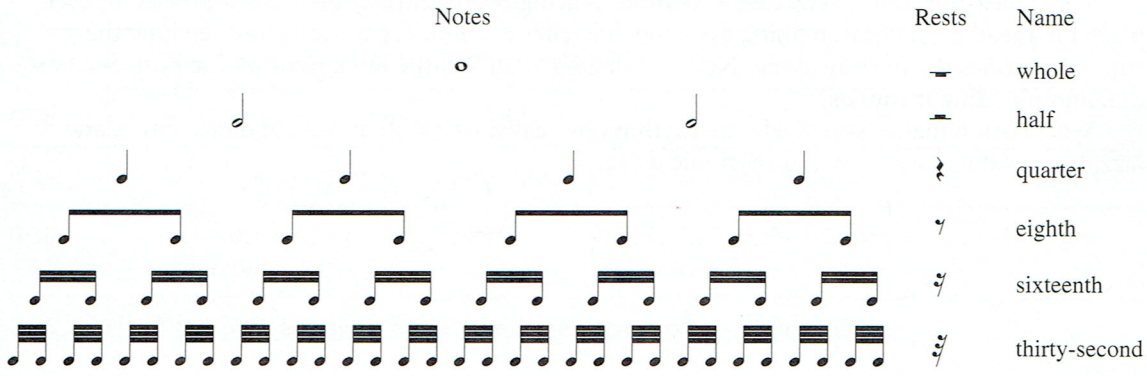
MusicNote 5

You will notice that on the syllable "-py" of "happy," you are singing a note, but there is no accompanying beat. This is because the two notes of "happy" are contained in the same beat. On the other hand, when you sing "you," the note is held for two beats. All the other syllables receive one beat each.

In the case of "Happy Birthday," the beat corresponds to one **quarter note**. It's called a quarter note because *usually* there are four of them in a unit, and the unit is called a whole note. We'll get into this more in a minute. In a lot of music, the quarter note is the basic "unit" for measuring the beat.

If a quarter note equals one "beat," then a half note equals "two beats," and a whole note "four beats." Moving down in value, an eighth note (written like a quarter note with a single flag on the stem) is a half-beat; a sixteenth note (two flags) is a quarter-beat; and a thirty-second note (three flags) is an eighth-beat. Corresponding to all these note values are **rests**, which indicate units of pause or silence.

When the beat is steady, each row of this chart will take the same amount of time to play. You can see just how fast thirty-second notes might be!



Measure and Meter When musicians say that a certain melody or theme is in two-four or six-eight "time," they are referring to the number of beats in a **measure.** A measure is a grouping of beats. In most music, every measure in the piece has the same number of beats. The measures are marked off by **bar lines** (small vertical lines). **Meter** describes the *number* and the *length* of the beats in each measure. The **time signature,** one number placed above another, is a symbol that gives the player this information. The upper number tells the number of beats in the measure, the lower note the value of each beat (**see accompanying chart**).

MusicNote 6

For example, if the measures each contain three quarter-note beats, then we say that the meter is $\frac{3}{4}$. The upper number (3) indicates that there are three beats in a measure; the lower number (4) indicates that the value of each beat is a quarter note.

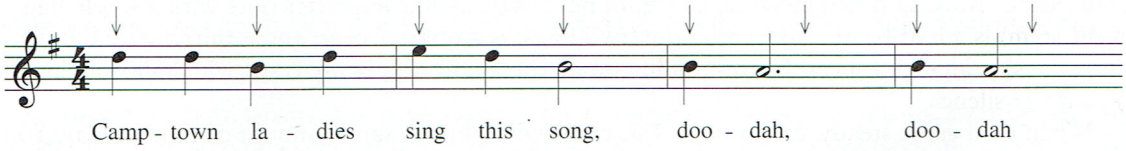
TIME SIGNATURE	EXPLANATION	EXAMPLE
Duple Meters		
$\frac{2}{4}$	Two beats per measure; quarter note = one beat	"Yankee Doodle"
$\frac{4}{4}$	Four beats per measure; quarter note = one beat	"When the Saints Go Marching In"
Triple Meters		
$\frac{3}{8}$	Three beats per measure, eighth note = one beat	"I Feel Pretty"
$\frac{3}{4}$	Three beats per measure, quarter note = one beat	"Happy Birthday to You"

Duple meters are those whose upper number (the number of beats) is divisible by two. Duple meters sound firm and solid. Marches, for example, are always in duple meter. **Triple** meters tend to be graceful or flowing. Waltzes are in $\frac{3}{4}$ meter.

There is one other meter you are likely to come across fairly frequently, and that is $\frac{6}{8}$ (six eighth notes to a measure). The eighth notes are divided into two groups of three, and here each *group* gets the beat. $\frac{6}{8}$ meter has a very special feel to it. Melodies in $\frac{6}{8}$, such as "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" and "Greensleeves," often have a gentle, lilting, slightly swinging quality. Other well-known melodies in $\frac{6}{8}$ include the lullaby "Rock-A-Bye Baby" and "Take Me Out to the Ball Game."

Syncopation Sometimes a melody contains notes that seem to come ahead of the beat. When this happens, the rhythm is said to be **syncopated.** Tap your foot or your finger lightly as you sing through the first lines of Stephen Foster's "Camptown Races," paying special attention to the rhythm on the words "doo-dah, doo-dah."

MusicNote 7



These measures are syncopated. Instead of placing "dah" directly on the beat, the composer placed it ahead of the beat, making for a much livelier rhythm. Try it again, and see how the syncopation pushes the melody along. Now try singing "dah" a little later, right on the beat. See how dull and plodding it sounds?

Syncopation makes you "feel" the rhythm physically, so it's often used in dance music and jazz. It gives the music a special rhythmic drive.

Tempo

A composer usually indicates the speed, or **tempo**, at which a piece should be played. This can be done in two different ways. Sometimes composers use both methods in the same piece.

The first way is to use a general indication in words at the beginning of a piece. These indications often appear in Italian; the most common are listed here. You'll notice that some of them indicate the character or *spirit* in which the piece is to be played, as well as the speed.

Largo	Broad
Adagio	Easy
Andante	At a walking pace
Moderato	Moderate
Allegro	Fast
Vivace	Lively
Presto	Very fast

The second way to indicate tempo is by means of a **metronome marking**. A metronome is a machine that can be set to click regularly at a specified tempo. The composer might indicate, for example, ♩ = 60 or ♩ = 96. This means that the quarter notes should be played at the rate of 60 per minute (one every second) or 96 per minute. Performers often check their metronomes before practicing a piece, to get a clearer idea of what tempo the composer intended.

Musicians realize, however, that music is a living, breathing thing and not a machine. A metronome speed is rarely maintained exactly throughout a piece. It is usually used only as a guide.

LISTENING GUIDE

Listen on MySearchLab

GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL (1685–1759)

From the Water Music

Date of composition: 1717
Orchestration: two trumpets, two horns, oboes, bassoons, and strings
Tempo: *Allegro*
Meter: $\frac{4}{4}$
Key: D major
Duration: 1:58

CD I, 4

Let's listen again to Handel's *Water Music* and think of it this time in terms of its rhythm. We will consider the **beat**, **measures and meter**, **syncopation**, and **tempo**.

Time	Listen for
0:00	In this section, the **beat** is firmly established. It's the beat that you tap your foot to. You'll find yourself tapping to the first chord and to the three repeated notes of each trumpet phrase. These are all **quarter notes**. The **tempo** is quite fast (*Allegro*).
0:09	Keep tapping your foot as the horns play.
0:18	In this section each note is on the beat.
0:22	Two notes to a beat here (*de-de, de-de...*). These are **eighth notes**.
0:30	This is the military, bouncy, fanfare-like rhythm. The accompaniment, however, has even eighth notes.
0:45	Short phrases staying around the same pitch, mostly eighth notes.