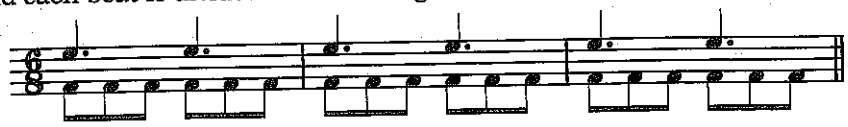
Lesson 12: Compound meter ($\frac{6}{8}$)

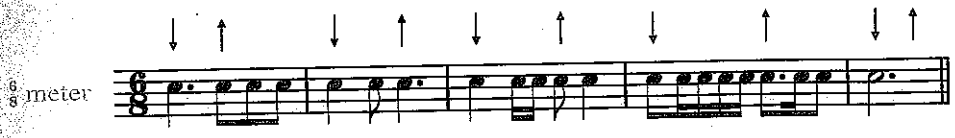
In this lesson you will learn about compound meter, $\frac{6}{8}$ meter, and its conducting pattern.

The meters we have discussed so far ($\frac{4}{4}$, $\frac{2}{4}$, $\frac{2}{2}$, and $\frac{3}{4}$) are considered *simple meters* because their beats (quarter note or half note) are divided into *two* parts (eighth notes or quarter notes) and the beat itself is a simple value. In *compound meters*, in contrast, the beat is divided into *three* parts and the beat itself is a dotted note: a dotted eighth note, dotted quarter note, or dotted half note. In $\frac{6}{8}$ meter, for example, there are two dotted quarter-note beats per measure, and each beat is divided into three eighth notes.

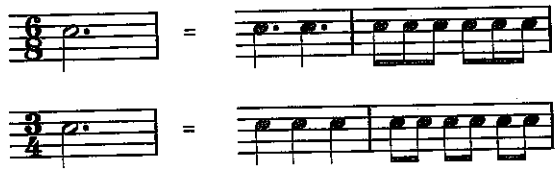


$\frac{6}{8}$ is thus duple compound meter (two beats, each divided into three parts). $\frac{9}{8}$ (triple compound meter with three dotted quarter beats) and $\frac{12}{8}$ (quadruple compound meter with four dotted quarter beats) are also compound meters, but $\frac{6}{8}$ is the most commonly used and the one we will focus on here.

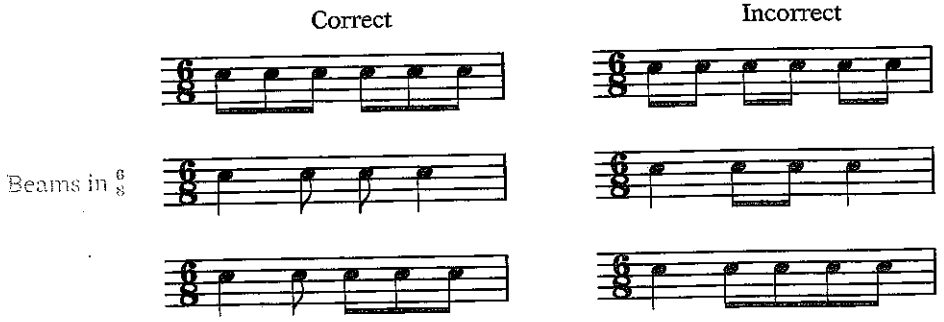
As with the other meters we have studied, many different rhythmic patterns are possible in $\frac{6}{8}$. There are two beats in the measure: the first beat is the downbeat, the second is the upbeat.



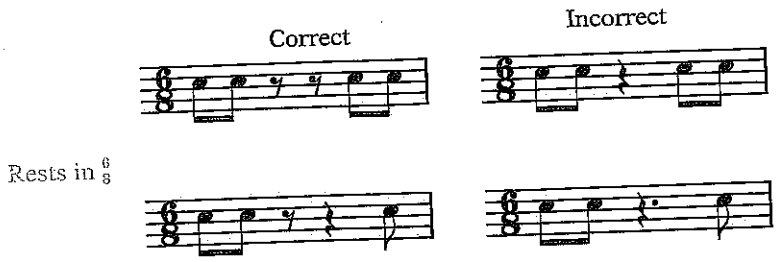
A measure of $\frac{6}{8}$ has the same duration as a measure of $\frac{3}{4}$. They are both the length of six eighth notes, but they are divided differently: a measure of $\frac{6}{8}$ consists of two beats, each a dotted quarter note long, while a measure of $\frac{3}{4}$ consists of three beats, each a quarter note long.



Note that beams are used to define the beat: they never span across the division between beat 1 and beat 2.



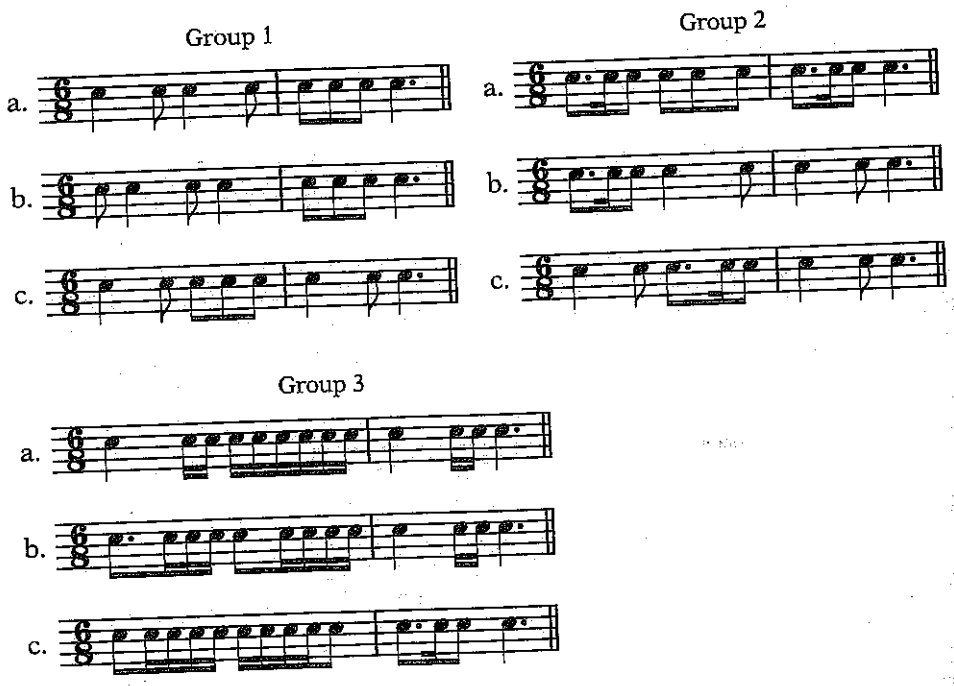
As with beams, rests should be used to clarify the beats; a rest should not span across the division between beat 1 and beat 2.



The conducting pattern for $\frac{6}{8}$ is the same as for the other duple meters, $\frac{2}{4}$ and $\frac{2}{2}$ (see Lesson 10).

Lesson 12: In-class activities

1. Dictation. Within each group, the instructor will perform the three rhythms in a random order. Identify the rhythm you hear and tap it back.



2. Solo. Suggestions for performance: (1) another member of the class claps the beats (or just the downbeat of each measure) while you clap or tap the given rhythm; (2) stamp your foot on each downbeat while clapping the rhythm, or tapping it, or chanting it using the syllable "ta"; (3) tap the two beats of the measure with your hand while chanting the rhythm using the syllable "ta"; (4) say the beats of the measure (1-2) while tapping the rhythm with your hand; (5) tap the beats with one hand while tapping the rhythm with the other; (6) conduct the beats with your right hand while chanting the rhythm using the syllable "ta." It is a good idea to tap two preparatory beats, or count 1-2, or conduct one preparatory measure before beginning each exercise in order to establish the tempo.