

Chapter 2

Elements of Musical Time

Chapter Summary

Dancers should be able to distinguish between beat and rhythm. Dancers also need to know about meter—whether to count in 2s, 3s, 4s, 5s, 6s, 7s, or 8s, or any number of numeric configurations (composite meters, mixed meters, fractional meters). Additionally, tempo distinctions and how to count music are critical to a dancer's ability to perform to complex music or to a choreographer's ability to understand and create movement for complex music. Additionally, as teachers create class movement exercises, do they follow the music's beat, or do they move with or in contrast to the rhythm that occurs as an additional temporal layer of the music? (The word *temporal* is another way of referring to time.) Do they follow their internal rhythms using no music? Dancers, choreographers, and teachers need to know these distinctions in order to dance or create movement for performances or classes. Dancers' knowledge of pulse, beat, time signatures, note subdivision, rhythm, syncopation, and polyrhythms will greatly contribute to their success.

Glossary Terms With Definitions

asymmetrical meter—Also referred to as uneven meter or composite meter. The beats within a measure can be grouped in twos, threes, or fours, such as in the time signature 5/4, in which the beats can be organized conventionally as 1-2, 3-4-5 or 1-2-3, 4-5. Less conventionally, the beats could be grouped as 1, 2-3, 4-5. Meters such as 7/8 and 11/8 are also examples of asymmetrical meter.

beaming—The musical practice of connecting notes into groups designated by beams.

beams—Thick horizontal lines that connect repeated eighth, sixteenth, thirty-second notes, and so on. For groups of notes of the same value, beams serve the same time denotation as flags. For example, one beam is used for eighth notes, two beams for sixteenth notes, and so on.

beats—The number of pulses between regularly occurring accents. They divide time into specific durations.

composite meter—See *asymmetrical meter*.

compound meter—A time signature in which the beat unit divides into three equal parts. The bottom number will be the same as in simple meter, usually 2, 4, or 8 representing those note values which divide by two.

1 From N. Nolen Holland, 2013, *Music fundamentals for dance web resource* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics).

dot—Lengthens the value of a note or rest by half of the note's or rest's value.

meter—A series of pulses receiving a regularly occurring accent on count 1, which then designates them as beats.

meter signature—See *time signature*.

metrical accent—Placing an accent on the first beat of a group of beats.

metronome—A device or application that provides a regular beat and may also designate the first beat of a measure.

mixed meters—Measures or groupings of measures in different time signatures.

musical time—The organization of music through pulse, meter, and rhythm.

polymeter—The simultaneous occurrence of two or more meters.

pulse—A regularly occurring beat with no organizing accents.

rhythm—A combination of short and long sounds created by combining or dividing beats. It may be melodic (created on an instrument or by a voice) or percussive (as played on drums or other percussion instruments).

simple meter—A time signature in which the top number is always two, three, or four and the beat unit can be divided into two equal parts.

stress—An extra emphasis occurring on any beat.

subdivide—To divide notes or beats according to the music's time signature.

tempo—An Italian term that describes the rate of speed of the music or a dance. It indicates how quickly the beats of the music progress.

tie—A curved line connecting two notes of the same pitch, but it does not touch the two notes. It indicates that a pitch should be held for the combined value of the two notes. A tie may link notes within the same measure so that the notes' values are combined within the measure. It may also extend the duration of a note into the following measure.

time signature—Tells musicians how many beats are in a measure and what type of note receives one beat.

uneven meter—See *asymmetrical meter* and *composite meter*.

Glossary Terms Without Definitions

asymmetrical meter—

beaming—

beams—

beats—

composite meter—

compound meter—

dot—

meter—

meter signature—

metrical accent—

metronome—

mixed meters—

musical time—

polymeter—

pulse—

rhythm—

simple meter—

stress—

subdivide—

tempo—

tie—

time signature—

uneven meter—

Web Links: General

- Dolmetsch Online provides in-depth explanations for chapter 2 content. It has a music dictionary, explains music theory, and contains manuscript paper. www.dolmetsch.com
- How Music Works (music theory). www.howmusicworks.org

- Library of Congress Performing Arts Reading Room contains information on composers and their works. www.loc.gov/rr/perform/div-intro.html

Web Links: YouTube

- Jimi Hendrix's "Purple Haze"
- Tammy Wynette's "Stand by Your Man"
- Greek folk music: Search for dimotiko, nissioriko, or rembetika styles
- Bulgarian folk music and dance
- Sting's "Love Is Stronger Than Justice"
- "America" from Leonard Bernstein's *West Side Story*
- Joan Osborne's "Right Hand Man"
- Fred Astaire singing and dancing Cole Porter's "Night and Day"

Extended Learning Activities

1. **Meter and notes:** Either by yourself or in class, count and clap the examples on worksheet 2.1. It may be helpful to write the counts below each note before you try to clap them.
2. **Rhythm notation:** For homework, try to notate your own short rhythmic compositions that you created for exercise 3 in the textbook and bring your notations to class. Use the notation paper in worksheet 2.2. Then give your notation to a classmate to see if the classmate can reproduce the rhythm as you intended and if you notated the rhythm correctly.
3. **Dotted notes:** Is there a dotted half note in the music example in handout 2.3? Above each dotted note, write how long each will last (how many counts). How long (how many counts) are the rests? Count and clap these examples.
4. **Time signatures:** Look at time signatures in pieces of music or on the Internet. Determine whether the time signature is duple, triple, quadruple, simple, compound, mixed, decimal, fractional, or polymeter. Look for whether it is a newer (20th- or 21st-century) way of writing a meter. In the same music, look for tempo indication terms and metronome markings. Finally, look for ties, dots, and triplets or other rhythmic notations.
5. **Syncopation:** In the examples in worksheet 2.4, change the notes in each measure by inserting rests, ties, dotted notes, accents, and dynamic signs in order to create syncopation. Work with a measure at a time. Create several examples based on each measure. Be sure to analyze your work by writing the counts under each note. Make sure the number of counts and subdivided counts add up to the correct number of beats per measure. Then clap the syncopated rhythm you have created. Next, create movement that follows the syncopation. Finally, create movement that contrasts the syncopation.
6. Complete the Understanding Asymmetrical Meters Worksheet 2.5.

Forms, Worksheets, and Other Materials for Student Work

- Worksheet 2.1
- Worksheet 2.1 Answer Key
- Worksheet 2.2
- Worksheet 2.3
- Worksheet 2.3 Answer Key
- Worksheet 2.4
- Worksheet 2.4 Answer Key
- Worksheet 2.5