

THE RHYTHM BOOK

2nd edition

RICHARD HOFFMAN

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(SAMPLE PAGES)

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for Benjamin and Caleb



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❖ On studying rhythm — Notes for students and teachers

Music is sometimes defined as “sound organized in time.” A large part of the temporal or “time” element of music is what we commonly call rhythm. I should be clear from the beginning that what we are really studying is for the most part “Western tonal rhythm” the rhythm that developed along with Western tonal music. Western tonal music refers to music derived from the art music and to some extent the folk music of western Europe over the last 400 years or so. Tonality, the organization around a focal pitch we call “tonic,” is the most distinctive feature of this music. It is so pervasive in European-American culture that we often take it for granted. The rhythm of tonal music is also distinctive, and very different from the rhythm of music that is not tonal or music from other parts of the world. How these musical traditions are different is not terribly important right now, but we should acknowledge that the kind of rhythm we are studying is the kind found in Western tonal music.

Using this book will help you learn to read and understand tonal rhythm, and perform it accurately and confidently. Don’t rush too quickly through the early, seemingly easy exercises. From the outset work carefully to build good habits, to master the conducting beat patterns, and to learn to pay attention to tempo, dynamics, and articulation markings. It is fine to perform the exercises in ways other than those specified—with other tempos or articulations—but they should never be done in a thoughtless and unmusical way.

Always perform musically. Listen for the phrases and gestures that move the music along. The idea that music has a sense of forward motion is very much a characteristic of tonal music. Don’t neglect the motion just because you are working primarily with rhythm. If an exercise begins with a pick-up, subsequent phrases are likely also to begin with a pick-up. Breathe at the phrases breaks (notated or not) and not after the first note of two of the new phrase. Never perform the exercises in a boring monotone. Use your voice to show the direction of the line, the high and low points, and cadences.

There are six types of exercises in the book.

Single parts These exercises are the most common, and are usually designed to address specific issues or introduce new material. Even on a simple, single-line exercise, always perform musically, interpreting the phrases and gestures in a way that shows you understand the musical structure.

Ensembles (duets and trios) These are intended for more than one performer. Always learn all the parts, and switch parts often in performance.

Speak and clap These are intended for a single performer to speak one part and clap the other. Typically you should speak the top line and clap the lower, but occasionally switching parts is good practice.

Layering These exercises combine repeated patterns or ostinatos in various ways. You can repeat each pattern an agreed upon number of times, or allow the performers to determine how and how often the parts are to be repeated. Occasionally ostinatos are provided for other single line exercises. You may layer these in a variety of creative ways as well. Layering patterns and ostinato rhythms in this way is more akin to certain African and East Asian styles of music.

Improvise in the blanks These exercises have blank measures in which you should improvise rhythm. Try to use rhythms that relate to the exercise. Always pay attention to the music that comes before and after, and make sure your improvised material fits.

Real music These exercises are written on a staff to give practice reading rhythm in a more familiar musical setting. Although these are still primarily rhythm exercises, use the cues of contour and phrasing to give a musical performance.

In addition to the rhythm exercises, there are both pre-notational and written exercises. Do these exercises as they occur, and use them as models to create your own supplemental exercise.

Other suggestions for practice

Echo rhythm. Speak or clap rhythms to a study partner, and have the partner respond on Takadimi syllables. This is a very effective way to learn rhythm, and should come before reading and writing with notation.

Experiment. Include the element of pitch. Singing rhythm on one repeated pitch puts strain on your voice and is not recommended. But singing on a scale or even improvising a melody is great practice and strongly encouraged. When singing scales sometimes it is easier and more sensible to change pitches with each beat or even each measure.

Be creative. Use the exercises in the book as a basis for creating your own exercises. For example you might add ostinatos or improvised clapping parts where none is given, or consider the given exercise the first phrase of a two phrase period, and improvise a subsequent phrase. There are many ways to expand on the framework given in the text. Through play is a natural way to learn new skills. Think of all you learned as a child just by playing. Find creative ways to “play” with rhythm. It will make learning fun and effective.

Multi-task. It is fine to work just on the rhythm when learning a new concept or working out a challenging pattern, but it is important to add other elements to your performance as you become more proficient. Once you have overcome the technical challenges of an exercise, always conduct, clap, sing pitches, or do something else to expand your performance. Rarely in real music do we focus solely on rhythm. Even in percussion music, performers are thinking about timbre, style, and musical expression, even when playing a single rhythmic line.

Special thanks

Special thanks are owed to Nashville composer and percussionist David Madeira. David worked with me especially on the later chapters in the book to write examples that were challenging and reflecting current musical trends.

Takadimi

Takadimi is the system of rhythmic solfege used throughout the book. It does for rhythm what “do re mi” solfege does for pitch. It gives us a way to label the parts of a rhythm and can make it easier both to understand and to perform. Takadimi is beat oriented; that is, it assigns syllables based on the position of the note within the beat. It is also pattern based. Reading rhythm with Takadimi helps you learn to recognize rhythmic patterns and see groupings of notes, not simply read note to note. Reading rhythm this way is similar to the way we read groups of letters as words and not one letter at a time. The word “takadimi” is similar to a pattern used in the complex system of chanted sounds used to learn Indian drumming. Indian music is not metric in the way tonal rhythm is, and so its use in that system is entirely different from the way we use it here.

The Takadimi system as described in this book was developed in the early 1990s by several members of the theory faculty at Ithaca College in Ithaca, New York. The article that introduced the system was co-authored by Richard Hoffman, William Pelto, and John W. White, and titled “Takadimi: A Beat-Oriented system of Rhythmic Solfege,” and published in the *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy* (1994). The article thoroughly explains the system and shows its relation to other similar system of learning rhythm.

I must thank my co-authors, Bill Pelto and John White, as well as the others who worked with us from the early stages of Takadimi, especially: John Benoit, Craig Cummings, and Timothy Nord. I must also thank the many teachers in schools across the country who have successfully used Takadimi, and in so doing have continued to add to its pedagogical value. Thanks are owed my colleagues at Belmont University who have used Takadimi and this book, especially Kris Elsberry, Deen Entsminger, Todd Kemp, Brent Gerlach, David Madeira, Caleb Weeks, and Margie Yankeelov. Their insight and skillful application in the classroom have been both an inspiration and a very practical help. Finally, I must thank the many students who have learned rhythm with Takadimi and showed us what worked and what didn't, and most of all, inspired us to keep trying.

1 ✧ Getting started with rhythm and meter

Pulse and beat

Most Western tonal music, which includes most classical music and virtually all American popular and folk music, maintains a sense of steady *pulse*. This is why you can clap to it, dance to it, or march to it. It is also why we can have a sense of speeding up or slowing down. Not all music works this way, but most does, and that is where our study begins. The easiest way to understand pulse is to experience it. Sing any familiar song and clap along at a steady rate. You are clapping a pulse. I say *a* pulse because actually there are many levels of pulse in most music. Try clapping a pulse that is faster or slower than the one you started with. Each represents a different level of pulse.

The *beat* is one specific level of the pulse. Usually what we feel as “the beat” falls within the range of about 60 – 180 beats per minute, roughly within the range of the human heart beat. Musicians might sometimes disagree about which level of the pulse is *the beat*, and some-times there is no one right answer.

Meter

Meter is the grouping of beats into patterns of strong and weak accents. In the analysis of meter, a dash indicates a strong beat and a curved line indicates a weak beat, like this:

— ∪ — ∪
strong weak strong weak

There are three common metric groupings:

duple meter (2 beats) — ∪

triple meter (3 beats) — ∪ ∪

quadruple meter (4 beats) — ∪ — ∪

Duple meter groups two beats together in the pattern: “accented — unaccented” or “strong — weak.” Speak this pattern and clap on the word “strong.” The song “Three Blind Mice” is in duple meter. Sing the song and clap on the accented beat.

— ∪ — ∪ — ∪ — ∪ — ∪ — ∪ — ∪ — ∪
Three blind mice, Three blind mice, see how they run, see how they run . . . etc.

2.16 *Adagio*

2.17 In two-part rhythms always listen for the *composite rhythm* formed from the interaction of the two parts.

2.18 The note in the last measure is called a “breve” or “double whole note.” It is equal in value to two whole notes.

Allegro

2.19 *Andante*

2.24 *Allegro*

The next three exercise are “speak and clap” exercises where one performer performs both parts. Speak one part, usually the upper line, and clap or tap the other. Practice till you can perform them comfortably. “Speak and claps” are always written in this way with one meter signature. Compare the notation to the duet above. This will help you tell them apart.

2.25

2.26

3 ✧ Pick-up notes

Pick-up notes occur when the phrase begins on a beat other than the strong first beat of the measure. The strong beat or down beat is sometimes called the *crusis*. Pick-up notes or upbeats are then called the *anacrusis*. (*Ana-* is a prefix meaning up or back.) Often subsequent phrases or sub-phrases will also begin on an anacrusis. Be aware of this tendency in the following exercises. Sometimes it is made clear with phrase markings or with rests, but sometimes it is not.

3.1

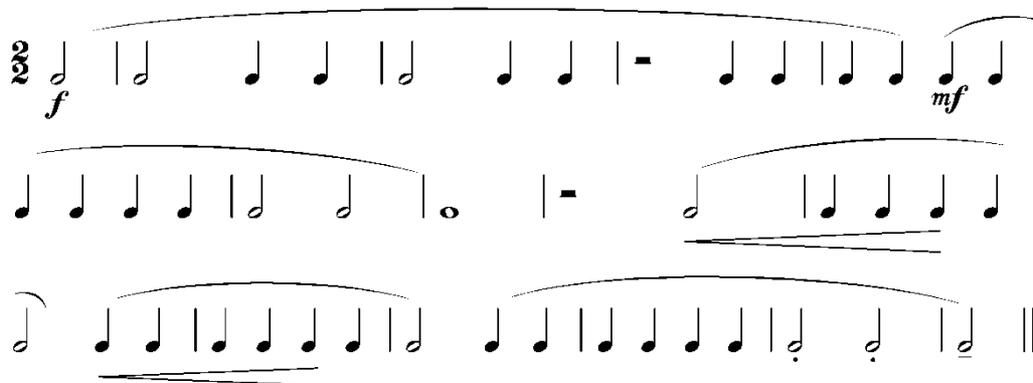


After you have learned the exercise and are comfortable beginning on the up-beat, clap or speak one or more of the following ostinatos to accompany the exercise. Start the ostinato, then begin the exercise on the correct beat. (An ostinato is a repeated pattern.)



The following exercise includes phrase marking or slurs. Sometimes slurs show actual phrases, but often they simply show notes that should be thought of and performed connected as a group.

3.2 *Moderato*



3.3 *Allegro*

3.4 Set the following texts to rhythm in simple meter. Use only the beat and first division. Include measure lines and a meter signature. Be sure to match the accents in the text with the accents in the meter.

- A. “An apple a day keeps the doctor away.” (*American proverb*)
- B. “Without a shepherd, sheep are not a flock.” (*Russian proverb*)
- C. “You can’t make an omelet without breaking eggs.” (*French proverb*)
- D. “Whoever really loves you will make you cry.” (*Spanish proverb*)

3.5 *Well marked*

4 ✧ Second division of the beat

The first division of the beat can be divided again by still shorter pulses. This next level is called the *second division* (or *subdivision*) of the beat. Sing a familiar melody in simple meter. Clap on the beat, then the division, then the second division. Have parts of the class clap each level simultaneously. (Dividing the second division produces the *third division*, and so on.)

Here are the syllables for the beat, first, and second division. Three possible beat notes are shown. Others are possible.

			
Beat	ta	ta	ta
			
First div.	ta di	ta di	ta di
			
Second div.	ta ka di mi	ta ka di mi	ta ka di mi

There are six new patterns created using the second division (shown below with the quarter note as the beat). Think carefully about how each is constructed and how it relates to the basic “ta-ka-di-mi” pattern. Think too how each would be written with other beat notes.

					
ta ka di mi	ta di mi	ta ka di	ta mi	ta ka	ta ka mi

Echo-rhythm: With your study partner or instructor, speak or clap and speak back on syllables examples using the beat, division, and second division patterns.

The following six exercises introduce the second division patterns (quarter note = beat) in context. Practice these exercises at a variety of tempi and dynamic levels. Conduct, clap the beat, or step to the beat while practicing.

4.13 *Andante*

Musical notation for exercise 4.13 in 4/4 time, marked *Andante*. The piece consists of two lines of music. The first line has four measures: a quarter note, a quarter note, a pair of eighth notes, and a pair of eighth notes. The second measure contains a sixteenth-note triplet. The second line has three measures: a quarter note, a pair of eighth notes, and a pair of eighth notes. The piece ends with a double bar line.

4.14

Musical notation for exercise 4.14 in 2/4 time. The piece consists of two lines of music. The first line has four measures: a quarter note, a pair of eighth notes, a quarter note, and a quarter note. The second measure is marked *mf*. The third measure contains a sixteenth-note triplet. The fourth measure contains two eighth notes. The second line has four measures: a pair of eighth notes, a pair of eighth notes, a quarter note, and a quarter note. The second measure is marked *mp*. The third measure contains a sixteenth-note triplet. The fourth measure contains a quarter note and a quarter rest. The piece ends with a double bar line.

4.15

Musical notation for exercise 4.15 in 4/8 time. The piece consists of two lines of music. The first line has four measures: a quarter note, a quarter note, a pair of eighth notes, and a pair of eighth notes. The second measure is marked *mf*. The third measure contains a sixteenth-note triplet. The fourth measure contains a quarter note and a quarter rest. The second line has four measures: a quarter note, a quarter note, a pair of eighth notes, and a pair of eighth notes. The second measure is marked *mp*. The third measure contains a sixteenth-note triplet. The fourth measure contains a quarter note and a quarter rest. The piece ends with a double bar line.

4.16 Learn the exercise, then clap or tap one of the ostinatos below as you perform.

Musical notation for exercise 4.16 in common time. The piece consists of two lines of music. The first line has four measures: a quarter note, a quarter note, a pair of eighth notes, and a pair of eighth notes. The second measure is marked *mf*. The third measure contains a sixteenth-note triplet. The fourth measure contains a quarter note and a quarter rest. The second line has four measures: a quarter note, a quarter note, a pair of eighth notes, and a pair of eighth notes. The second measure is marked *mp*. The third measure contains a sixteenth-note triplet. The fourth measure contains a quarter note and a quarter rest. The piece ends with a double bar line.

ostinatos

Musical notation for three ostinatos in common time. The first ostinato is a quarter note followed by a quarter rest. The second ostinato is a pair of eighth notes followed by a quarter rest. The third ostinato is a quarter note followed by a quarter rest. Each ostinato is repeated twice.

5 ✧ Dots and ties

Dots and ties are used in similar ways to extend the duration of a single note value. A dot adds half the value of the non-dotted note. A tie adds the values of the tied notes together as though they were written as one single note. Sometimes either a tie or a dot could be used to create the same duration. The choice of which is best is based on the musical context or the standards of notation.

We have already encountered the dot within the beat (e.g. the *ta – mi* pattern). New to this chapter are dotted or tied beat notes that extend the note beyond the next beat. It is important to “feel” or be aware of the beat covered by the dot or tie. As you practice, first speak the rhythm without the dot. Then replace the dot, still imagining where the missing syllable (in parentheses) should sound. Your teacher may ask you to make a light accent with your voice, or clap on the beat to show exactly where the beat occurs.

5.1

Common time (C) notation. The first line shows a sequence of notes with syllables: ta ta ta di ta | ta (ta) di ta di ta ... The second line continues the sequence with a double bar line at the end.

5.2

2/4 time notation. The notation consists of three lines of rhythmic patterns.

5.3 Repeat several times, changing the improvisation each time.

2/4 time notation. The notation shows a sequence of notes with a double bar line and repeat dots at the end.

5.20 Canon. Decide before you begin how many times you will repeat the exercise. Once your performance is secure, you might try adding an ostinato.

5.21 *Patience*, by Ariel d'Schelle

Blos - som wait-ed - and wait-ed and watched as one by one they flut - tered
down to ga - ther seed. She stared and glared then twitched just a bit.
" Oh," she thought " but for a pane of glass, to - day would be the day."
She turned her head and care - ful - ly licked her paw, then closed her pale green
eyes. " Sweet kit - ty, Blos - som."

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6 ✧ Compound meter

Up to this point we have worked only with simple meters. Simple meters have beat notes that can be divided into two parts (*ta-di*) and have beat notes that are *not* dotted.

Compound meters have beat notes that divide into three parts at the first division. The beat notes in compound meter must therefore be dotted. (Review Chapter 1 for more on the theory of compound meter and meter signatures.)

First division of the beat

Just as in simple meter, the beat in compound meter is always on *ta*. But since we now have *three* equal divisions of the beat, we need new syllables. For this we use *ta-ki-da*.

There are only a few patterns we can make with *ta*, *ki*, and *da*. They are shown below with the dotted quarter as the beat. Write the patterns for the other beat notes. Be sure your notes are properly aligned.

 =beat	 = beat	 =beat	 =beat
ta	ta	ta	ta
ta ki da	 ta ki da	ta ki da	ta ki da
ta da	 ta da	ta da	ta da
ta ki	 ta ki	ta ki	ta ki

Practice echo-rhythms with compound beats and first divisions before moving on to notation. Speak or clap short patterns and have a partner respond on syllables.

6.9

6/16

6.10 *Cantabile*

Second Division of the Beat

The compound beat can also be divided a second time.

Beat			
First div.			
Second div.			

Dividing the compound beat a second time allows many more rhythmic possibilities. Following are six of the most common rhythmic patterns used in compound meter (shown with the dotted quarter note as the beat). Repeat each pattern to help you memorize it. Improvise short rhythms, incorporating these patterns gradually into ones you already know.

ta ki di da

ta di da

ta di da ma

ta ki da ma

ta ki di da ma

ta va ki di da

Practice echo-rhythms with these patterns before moving on.

6.11 Write each rhythm above the syllables. Line up each note with the second division of the beat (*ta-va-ki-di-da-ma*) at the top of the column. The first one is done for you.

<p>ta ki di da</p>	<p>ta di da</p>	<p>ta di da ma</p>
<p>ta di da</p>	<p>ta di da</p>	<p>ta di da</p>
<p>ta di da ma</p>	<p>ta di da ma</p>	<p>ta di da ma</p>

6.12 Write a second part to accompany the given rhythm. Include some second division patterns. Make sure the parts align properly. Perform your duet with a partner.

6.13 *Animato e con brio*

6.14 *Allegro ma non troppo*

6.15 *Con mosso*

7 ✧ Ties in compound meter

Ties between beats make it especially important that you keep the beat in your head. Practice the exercises without the ties then with the ties, hearing the tied notes in your imagination. Syllables in parentheses show what you should first say, then think.

7.1

6/8

ta (ta) ki da ta di da (ta) ki da...

7.2

6/8

7.3

6/8

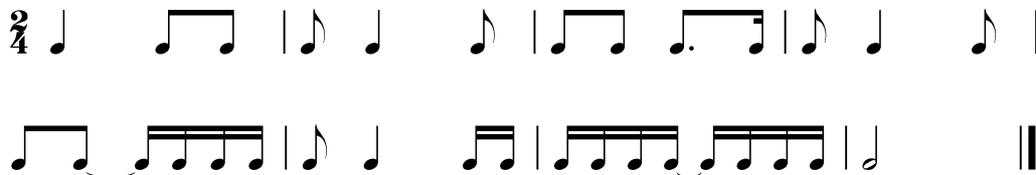
7.4

6/8

9 ✧ Syncopation and hemiola

At its most basic level, syncopation is a shifting of accent from a strong attack point—like a beat or strong beat—to another place in the measure, like an off beat or a normally weak beat. There are several ways to accomplish this shift. Accent signs, ties, or longer note values are three, and are among the techniques explored in this chapter. Other more complex techniques will be introduced later in the book.

9.1



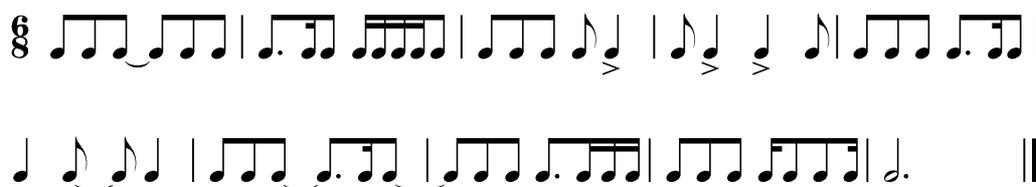
Rewrite the first 4 measures replacing the quarter notes with tied notes.



9.2



9.3 *Andante*



9.23 *Schnell*

9.24 *Cantabile*

9.25 This exercise is based on the piano accompaniment for a song by the 19th-century Austrian composer Hugo Wolf.

Langsam

9.26 This exercise is based on an excerpt from keyboard music written around 1570 by English composer Richard Farrant. Three separate lines are clear. Notice how the melodic and rhythmic patterns often seem to imply a meter other than 3/4 (mm. 2 and 3, for example). How might these groupings affect your performance?

The musical score consists of five systems, each with a treble and bass staff. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. The first system features a right hand with a complex, syncopated eighth-note pattern and a bass line with a simple, steady eighth-note accompaniment. The second system shows a more melodic right hand and a bass line with some syncopation. The third system has a busy right hand and a bass line with a prominent eighth-note pattern. The fourth system shows a right hand with a steady eighth-note accompaniment and a bass line with a simple rhythmic pattern. The fifth system concludes with a final cadence in both hands.