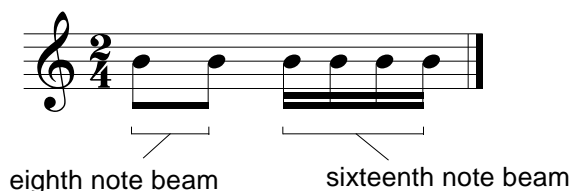


Beaming Rhythms

Beams connect notes that appear within beats in a measure:

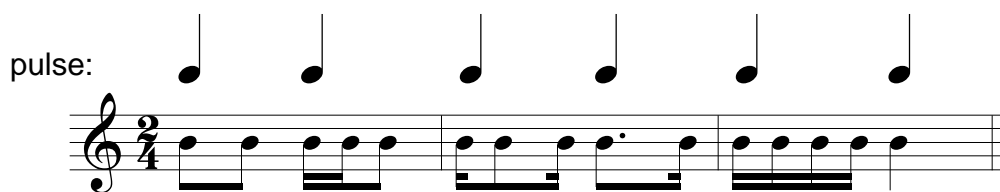


Beaming rhythmic values is crucial in making your music readable by other musicians. When music is beamed properly, the musician can easily follow the beat unit value through the measure. Rhythm is perceived as behaving in accordance to a larger metric structure. This metric structure contains pulses which, although not always present audibly, are felt. Often, these pulses are manifested in the tapping of a foot, the bobbing of your head, or the snapping of your fingers. We naturally "feel" the beat.

We constantly perceive or "feel" the beat when we play music. The rhythms that we play, we play to the beat or pulse in music. Since this pulse is so apparent, it makes sense to group the rhythms visually so we can actually SEE ON THE SCORE how they are GROUPED WITHIN EACH BEAT. Therefore, when we play the rhythms, the pulse that we "feel" synchronizes with the rhythmic groupings that we see.

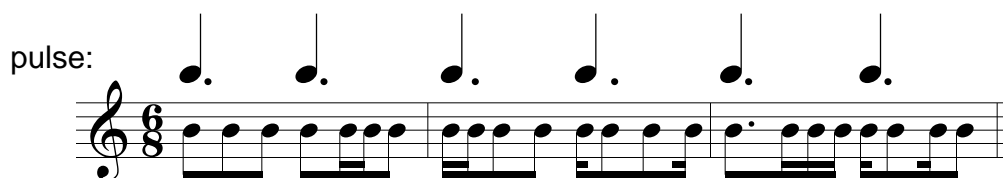
Since the meter informs us of the beat value, the manner in which rhythms are grouped depends on the meter. For example (Ex. 1), if the meter is 2/4, the beat value (the value for the pulse that we "feel") is the quarter note. Therefore, the rhythms should be grouped or beamed according to the quarter note. In Ex.1, the quarter note pulse is displayed above the score. Notice that the rhythmic beaming reflects this pulse by connecting all the notes within each pulse.

Ex. 1



In Ex. 2, the meter is 6/8. In 6/8, the dotted quarter note gets the beat. Notice again how the rhythmic groupings (beamings) reflect the dotted quarter note pulse.

Ex. 2



In grouping the rhythms by beaming as we have in the previous two examples, the beat can clearly be SEEN on the page. To demonstrate how important this is, consider the beaming in Ex. 3a:

Ex. 3a



The beaming in Ex. 3a "fights" the pulse of the music, and is therefore nonsensical. When the beaming is corrected to conform to the quarter note pulse of the 2/4 meter (Ex. 3b), the manner in which the rhythmic values are placed within each beat is clarified.

Ex. 3b



Try playing both Ex. 3a and Ex. 3b, and see which one is easier to read. You should find Ex. 3b easier.

Many times a tie is necessary to visually conform the rhythmic values to the beat pulse. For example, in Ex. 4a, the beat pulse is obscured by the eighth note. "Cleaning up" this rhythmic beaming problem requires the eighth note to be divided into two sixteenth notes that are tied together. The tying of the two sixteenth notes (Ex. 4b), retains the eighth note value and the beaming creates a visual representation of the beat. The "rule" here is to avoid allowing rhythmic values to cross over (obscure) the beat pulse.

Ex. 4a

Ex. 4b



With that said, it is many times allowable and actually preferable to allow rhythms to cross over (obscure) beats 1-2 and 3-4 in 4/4 meter **as long as simple rhythms (quarters and eighths) are used**. However, the third beat in 4/4 meter (the middle of the measure) is an important beat to visually identify. This is because it is the second most accented beat in the measure (the downbeat being the strongest accented beat). In Ex.5a, the second beat is obscured by the sustaining quarter note. However, since the third beat can be visually seen on the page, this rhythmic notation works well. An alternative notation where all the beats can be visually seen is also possible (Ex.5b). This would be achieved in this example by dividing the first quarter note into two eighth notes and tying them together. However, many times this type of re-notation will result in a lot more "ink on the page," producing a more cluttered look. It is best to seek a notation that provides, most importantly, a clarity of the beat pulse, but also represents the complexity level of the music in the best manner possible.

Ex.5a

Ex.5b

Correct!

Cluttered - Avoid

