

# Notation: Meter

A FUNDAMENTAL FEATURE OF MOST PIECES OF MUSIC IS A **CONSISTENT RHYTHMIC PULSE**.

THIS PULSE IS CALLED THE **BEAT**, AND A SINGLE PULSE IS CALLED A **BEAT UNIT**.

THERE ARE **TWO** TYPES OF BEAT UNITS: THOSE CONTAINING **TWO DIVISIONS**, CALLED **SIMPLE** BEAT UNITS...



...AND THOSE CONTAINING **THREE DIVISIONS**, CALLED **COMPOUND** BEAT UNITS.

IN MUSIC, BEATS ARE ORGANIZED INTO PATTERNS OF **ACCENTED** AND **UNACCENTED** BEAT UNITS. IN FACT, IF YOU LISTEN TO A SEQUENCE OF REPEATED NOTES, YOUR BRAIN WILL PROBABLY START TO PERCEIVE THE NOTES AS GROUPS OF **TWO, THREE, OR FOUR**, EVEN IF NO ACCENTS ARE PRESENT!



THESE GROUPS ARE CALLED **MEASURES**, AND THEY ARE DELINEATED WITH **BARLINES**.

THE ORGANIZATION OF BEAT UNITS AND MEASURES IN A PIECE IS CALLED **METER**. METER IS DESCRIBED BY TWO NUMBERS PLACED AT THE BEGINNING OF THE PIECE: THE **TIME SIGNATURE**.

## SIMPLE TIME SIGNATURES ARE EASY.

3  
4

THE TOP NUMBER INDICATES THE **NUMBER OF BEATS** IN A MEASURE.

THE BOTTOM NUMBER INDICATES THE **TYPE OF NOTE** WHICH SERVES AS THE **BEAT UNIT**.



THE CODE FOR THE BOTTOM NOTE IS PRETTY EASY: **4** REFERS TO A QUARTER NOTE, **8** TO AN EIGHTH NOTE, **16** TO A SIXTEENTH NOTE, AND SO ON.

## COMPOUND TIME SIGNATURES ARE KIND OF LYING TO YOU.

6  
8

THE TOP NUMBER INDICATES THE **NUMBER OF DIVISIONS** IN A MEASURE. TO GET THE NUMBER OF BEATS, DIVIDE IT BY **THREE**.

THE BOTTOM NUMBER INDICATES THE **TYPE OF NOTE** WHICH SERVES AS THE **DIVISION**. TO GET THE **BEAT UNIT**, USE THE NOTE THAT IS EQUAL TO **THREE** OF THESE NOTES. IN A COMPOUND METER, THE BEAT UNIT IS ALWAYS A **DOTTED NOTE**!

2



IN FACT, WOULDN'T **THIS** BE AN EASIER WAY TO NOTATE **COMPOUND METERS**?



BY LOOKING AT THE **TOP NUMBER** OF THE TIME SIGNATURE, YOU CAN TELL **TWO** THINGS ABOUT THE METER: WHETHER IT'S **SIMPLE** OR **COMPOUND**, AND HOW MANY **BEATS** ARE IN A **MEASURE**.

	SIMPLE	COMPOUND
2	2	6
3	3	9
4	4	12

NOTES THAT HAVE **FLAGS** CAN BE GROUPED TOGETHER BY USING **BEAMS** IN PLACE OF FLAGS.



HOWEVER, BEAMING IS ONLY USED TO GROUP NOTES **WITHIN BEATS**. FOR THE MOST PART, YOU SHOULDN'T **BEAM** NOTES **BETWEEN BEATS**, NOR SHOULD YOU **TIE** NOTES **WITHIN BEATS**.

