

Syncopation Anxiety

Being "Off-Beat" is not a bad thing!



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We will be working off this handout – so please print it off and bring it to class!

“Rhythmic flow” proceeds in music based on a predictable pattern of pulse and meter, defined by the time signature and a predetermined grouping of stresses. Stresses fall into groups of 2’s or 3’s, and these are grouped into measures containing a particular number of the basic counting unit – a beat. Within each measure is a set pattern of stressed and weak beats: in 4/4 time beat 1 is stressed, beats 2 and 4 are weak, and beat 3 is secondarily stressed (STRONG, weak, strong, weak.) Any additional eighth notes or triplets are even weaker, and sixteenth note groups have their own internal strong-weak patterns which mirror 4/4 time.

If this comfortable, predictable flow of stresses and weak beats is disrupted, syncopation results

1) Placing stress on a normally weak beat

3) Sustaining a note across a strong beat

2) Playing a note “off the beat” either just before or after a stressed beat

4) Placing a rest where a strong beat normally would fall.

In order to sustain a feeling of syncopation, an underlying feeling of the pulse “on the beat” is usually used, either in a steady accompaniment pattern or at least partially implied. Otherwise, the “off beat” pattern will eventually feel like the “on beat” pulse. Syncopation produces a surprise in the rhythmic flow, but if repeated enough, it becomes its own predictable rhythmic pattern as well.

Look for ties and dotted notes!!

Syncopation Study

Always count the quarter notes! in X/4 time

1 2 3 4

5 6 7 8

9 10 11 12

13 Polyphony 14 15 16

17 18 19 20

21 Shared rhythm line 22 23

24 Crossing voices 25 26

Deconstructing a syncopated pattern -Light and Shine (Wissinger) (HP2467)

Note: -Eighth note beaming patterns often follow major stresses in the measure: "1" and "3"
- 8ths are usually tied across a main stress, but an offset quarter note may be used elsewhere
- Sometimes offset quarters or dotted quarters are used throughout the pattern
-Always count the quarter notes!!

The image shows three staves of music in 4/4 time, illustrating syncopated patterns. The first staff starts at measure 9 and has a blue '3' under the eighth notes of the second measure. The second staff starts at measure 11 and has blue arrows pointing to the eighth notes of the second measure and red arrows pointing to the eighth notes of the third measure. The third staff starts at measure 13 and has a blue '3' under the eighth notes of the second measure.

Mnemonics We are march- ing___, we're march- ing in___ the Light

Syncopated melody and accompaniment - People of the South Wind (Wissinger) (Prairie Suite AG36043)

Note the accompaniment pauses when the melody plays on beat 2, and the melody jumps on 3.5

The image shows two staves of music in 4/4 time, illustrating syncopated melody and accompaniment. The first staff is the melody and the second staff is the accompaniment. The melody has a red oval around the eighth notes of the second measure and a green oval around the eighth notes of the third measure. The accompaniment has a red oval around the eighth notes of the second measure and a green oval around the eighth notes of the third measure. The melody jumps on beat 3.5.

Class Repertoire:

Exuberant Joy (Paul McKlveen) (JHS9028) (8th-quarter-8th – and rests on main pulses)

Musical score for 'Exuberant Joy' in 4/4 time. The piece features a syncopated piano accompaniment with eighth notes and rests. The right hand has a melodic line with eighth notes and rests, while the left hand provides a rhythmic accompaniment. Measure numbers 4, 5, and 6 are indicated at the top.

Kum Ba Yah (arr. John Wilson) (HP1650) (note: beat 3 is invisible in accomp. - but the pattern repeats)

Musical score for 'Kum Ba Yah' in 4/4 time. The piece features a syncopated piano accompaniment with eighth notes and rests. The right hand has a melodic line with eighth notes and rests, while the left hand provides a rhythmic accompaniment. Measure numbers 25, 26, 27, and 28 are indicated at the top. The letters 'R' and 'TD' are written in the bass staff.

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (arr. Alan Lohr) (AG35146) (dotted quarters in 4/4 time – same idea as above)

Musical score for 'O Come, O Come, Emmanuel' in 4/4 time. The piece features a syncopated piano accompaniment with dotted quarter notes and eighth notes. The right hand has a melodic line with dotted quarter notes and eighth notes, while the left hand provides a rhythmic accompaniment. Measure numbers 3, 4, and 5 are indicated at the top. The letter 'R' is written in the bass staff.

Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel? (arr. Dan Edwards) (CGB464) (Swing rhythm, offset quarters & tied 8ths)

Musical score for 'Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel?' in 4/4 time. The piece features a swing rhythm with offset quarter notes and tied eighth notes. The right hand has a melodic line with offset quarter notes and tied eighth notes, while the left hand provides a rhythmic accompaniment. Measure numbers 3, 4, and 5 are indicated at the top.

Light and Shine (arr. Kathleen Wissinger) (HP2467) (tied 8ths, shifting pulse)

Musical score for 'Light and Shine' in 4/4 time. The piece features a syncopated piano accompaniment with tied eighth notes and a shifting pulse. The right hand has a melodic line with tied eighth notes and a shifting pulse, while the left hand provides a rhythmic accompaniment. Measure numbers 20 and 21 are indicated at the top.

For more detailed class notes, see "Building Blocks" series from ringTrue, Spring 2023