

**DEVELOPING RHYTHMIC ACCURACY  
AND AWARENESS IN YOUR ENSEMBLE:  
TECHNIQUES AND STRATEGIES**

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Hilton Albany Downtown  
Albany, New York**

## I. PURPOSE AND STRUCTURE OF THE CLINIC

The purpose of this clinic is to provide techniques and strategies for developing rhythmic accuracy and awareness. All of the exercises can be done by individuals or in groups (ensemble). It is hoped that these exercises and techniques will provide a jumping off point for self-discovery and for the development of other interesting exercises. The handout covers far more material than can be presented in a one-hour clinic.

## II. SOME (HOPEFULLY) THOUGHT-PROVOKING QUESTIONS

1. What does being rhythmically "accurate and aware" mean?
2. Why is steady time and a highly-refined sense of pulse difficult to attain?
3. Is there a window of time in a musician's development after which trying to develop rhythmic accuracy and awareness is futile?
4. If subdividing is so easy to do then why do so many not do it?
5. How can it be that some students can play in time while marching out of time?
6. If we accept the premise that poor pulse is the single most destructive force in our rehearsals, then why do we as directors typically spend the least amount of time refining it?

## III. COUNTING SYSTEMS

Each director should develop a counting system within his/her program. Even more ideal would be if an entire district would adapt a similar system. There are many equally valid counting systems in existence. One possible counting system is outlined below. Of course, you should choose and use a system that works well for your situation.

In this system the first written number refers to the number of evenly spaced notes in the beat, so 2=eighth notes when the quarter is the pulse, or sixteenths when the eighth note has the pulse, etc. The "#" refers to the pulse in the measure (i.e. in 4/4 time, if you are speaking the first beat of the bar, the # would be a 1, the 2<sup>nd</sup> beat of the bar, it would be a 2, etc.). Initially, this system may seem difficult to use and implement.

- 1=#
- 2=#&
- 3=#-o-let (or #-trip-let)
- 4=#-e-&-a
- 5=#-ta-te-ta-ta (or #-2-3-4-5)
- 6=#-o-let&-o-let
- 7=#-ta-te-ta-te-ta-ta (or #-2-3-4-5-6-7)
- 8=#-e-&-a-&-e-&-a
- 9=#-o-let&-o-let&-o-let

### Counting Example 1. Standard manner of counting.

The image shows a musical staff with four measures. The notes are: Measure 1: quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter; Measure 2: quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter; Measure 3: quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter; Measure 4: quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter. Below the staff, the counting syllables are: 1 2 - o - let 3 - o - let - & - o - let 4 - & 5 - ta - te - ta - ta. Above the staff, the numbers 2, 3, 4, and 5 are placed above the first notes of measures 2, 3, 4, and 5 respectively.

## IV. RHYTHMIC ACCURACY AND AWARENESS EXERCISES FOR INDIVIDUALS AND ENSEMBLES

### 1. Metronome Adjustment Exercises

#### Metronome Adjustment Exercise # 1.

$J = 120; \dot{J} = 80; \ddot{J} = 60; \overset{\circ}{J} = 40$

Here are just a few of the many ways to use a metronome for this exercise:

- Metronome on quarter notes
- Metronome on dotted half notes sounding beat 1 of each measure
- Metronome on dotted half notes sounding beat 2 of each measure
- Metronome on dotted half notes sounding beat 3 of each measure
- Metronome on dotted half notes sounding the end of beat 1 of each measure
- Metronome on half notes giving beat 1, then 3, then 2, repeating
- Metronome on half notes giving the end of 1, then end of 3, then end of 2, repeating
- Metronome on dotted quarter notes sounding 1 and the end of 2 of each measure
- Metronome on dotted quarter notes sounding the end of 1 and 3 of each measure

#### Metronome Adjustment Exercise # 2.

$J = 120; \dot{J} = 80; \ddot{J} = 60; \overset{\circ}{J} = 40; \circ = 30$

## 2. Metronome Mixed Meter Exercises

### Metronome Mixed Meter Exercise # 1

$\text{♩} = 80$

Voice

Mel

6

11

### Metronome Mixed Meter Exercise # 2

$\text{♩} = 160$

Voice

Mel @ 80

Mel @ 40

7

12





4. Ambrose/Linklater Full body exercises. All excerpts based on *London Bridge*. These exercises engage the entire body in the rhythmic accuracy and awareness development process. They are flexible in that any number of lines can be performed. For example, with young musicians you may ask them to sing and conduct only. More advanced musicians may put all four parts together. In general, the addition of the "Feet" part provides the greatest challenge. These exercises can be done with or without the aid of a metronome.

Full Body Exercise #1a. 4/4 time. Everything on the beat.

Full Body Exercise #1b. 4/4 time. LH on offbeats.



Full Body Exercise #2a. Mixed meter (3+2). LH on offbeats.

Voice (singing) (3+2)  
 so la so fa mi fa so re mi fa mi fa so  
 (conducting) RH  
 1 2 3 4 1 2 1 2 1 2  
 (tapping) LH  
 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7  
 Feet (marching)  
 L R L R L R L R L R L R  
 Voice (singing) (2+3)  
 5  
 so la so fa mi fa so re mi fa so

Full Body Exercise #2b. Mixed meter (3+2). LH on straight quarters.

Voice (singing) (3+2)  
 so la so fa mi fa so re mi fa mi fa so  
 (conducting) RH  
 1 2 3 4 1 2 1 2 1 2  
 (tapping) LH  
 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7  
 Feet (marching)  
 L R L R L R L R L R L R  
 Voice (singing) (2+3)  
 5  
 so la so fa mi fa so re mi fa so

Full Body Exercise #2c. Mixed meter (3+2). Feet on straight quarters.

5

5

(3+2)

(2+3)

Full Body Exercise #2d. Mixed meter (3+2). LH and Feet on straight quarters.

5

5

(3+2)

(2+3)

Full Body Exercise #3a. Mixed meter (2+3). LH on offbeats.

5

Voice (singing) (2+3)  
so la so fa mi fa so re mi fa mi fa so

RH (conducting)  
1 2 3 4 1 2 1 2 1 2

LH (tapping)  
1 2 3 4 1 2 1 2 1 2

Feet (marching)  
L R L R L R L R L R L R

Voice (singing)  
so la so fa mi fa so re mi fa mi fa so

Full Body Exercise #3b. Mixed meter (2+3). LH on straight quarters.

5

Voice (singing) (2+3)  
so la so fa mi fa so re mi fa mi fa so

RH (conducting)  
1 2 3 4 1 2 1 2 1 2

LH (tapping)  
1 2 3 4 1 2 1 2 1 2

Feet (marching)  
L R L R L R L R L R L R

Voice (singing)  
so la so fa mi fa so re mi fa mi fa so

Full Body Exercise #3c. Mixed meter (2+3). LH on offbeats. Feet on straight quarters.

(2+3)

Voice (singing)  
 RH (conducting)  
 LH (tapping)  
 Feet (marching)  
 Feet (marching)

Full Body Exercise #3d. Mixed meter (2+3). LH and Feet on straight quarters.

(2+3)

Voice (singing)  
 RH (conducting)  
 LH (tapping)  
 Feet (marching)  
 Feet (marching)

## V. FURTHER THOUGHTS ABOUT RHYTHMIC ACCURACY AND AWARENESS DEVELOPMENT WITH ENSEMBLES

1. The more that students are involved in something "rattle" while practicing rhythm, the better. Possible techniques are tapping, fingering the instrument, moving or dancing.
2. Teach your students to conduct basic rhythmic patterns and have them use these patterns often while working on their rhythmic accuracy and awareness.
3. Students will develop long term skills in rhythm reading and rhythmic perception when they avoid learning a piece by a recording or by rote. The "self-discovery" process is critical.
4. Bad rhythm and pulse are more destructive to the ensemble rehearsal than any other musical weakness (tone, balance, pitch). It is one of the few musical issues that often results in having to stop the group completely. Yet experience shows that most directors spend the least amount of time (if any) developing their ensemble's rhythmic accuracy and awareness. Next time you are in rehearsal make a mental note of how much time you spend addressing pulse or rhythm.
5. Over-reliance on a metronome can do more harm than good. Having a metronome thump down beats through a loud speaker in ensemble has a limited positive effect on pulse and often forces the players to overblow and play with poor tone quality. We have found that when the metronome is removed, the students often immediately go back to playing out of time. Perhaps try one of the following alternate solutions:
  - a. Holding up a metronome from the podium and have the ensemble "perform" their part silently.
  - b. Have half of the ensemble play and the other half tap quarter notes (or another pulse) on their shoulders.
  - c. Set the metronome on offbeats and have the ensemble softly sing their parts
  - d. Set the metronome on offbeats. Have the ensemble tap quarters with their feet and tap the rhythm of their part on their thighs.
6. Musician placement can have a dramatic impact on the overall pulse of the ensemble. Musicians hear better front to back than they do side to side. If you are used to rehearsing in 3 very long or wide rows, try putting the group into 4 rows. Or, let the musicians choose their own seats with the rule that they must sit in a different row than usual and they may not sit next to someone who plays the same instrument that they do. Play a bit and ask them how they are hearing differently. Then have them switch again.
7. Players often have no idea or simply don't believe you when you tell them they are rhythmically inaccurate. Consider recording and playing back passages during a rehearsal. You'll be amazed at the "ah ha" moment it creates in the players. Also encourage the musicians to record themselves individually.
8. As with any skill development, the less that the young musicians have to think about, the more success they will have. Therefore, working on rhythmic accuracy and awareness in warm-ups and "outside" of the actual music is desirable. Try these suggestions:
  - a. Incorporate movement into warm-up exercises. Use these to work on internal pulse, but also consistent subdivision.
  - b. Have the ensemble play scales with the metronome providing offbeats. For a greater challenge, have the metronome pulse the third beat of a triplet. The goal is to encourage subdivision.





### 3. Dotted 8<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> (or faster) rhythms

Example: Frank Ticheli, *Joy Revisited*, mm. 10 - 13. Clarinet 2.

Lively ( $\text{♩} = \text{c.}152$ )



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Errors:

1. Gesture is almost always rushed; worse so if slurred than tongued.
2. Gesture is played like triplets; worse in gestures where the rhythm is repeated over and over.

Solutions:

1. Subdivide 8<sup>th</sup> notes. It is very difficult to play the gesture incorrectly if doing so.
2. Think of “snapping” the rhythm.
3. Think of the second note as attaching to the subsequent beat.

### 4. Faster moving notes after slower moving ones in compound meter

Example: Traditional, *Greensleeves*

$\text{♩} = 60$  (in 1)



Error: Faster moving notes will rush

Solutions:

1. Subdivide throughout.
2. Substitute eighth or quarter notes on the long notes.
3. Have students tap their foot on off beats.

### 5. Moving notes following a long note, especially when the long note is tied to an 8<sup>th</sup> note and/or when the tempo is fast

Example: John Mackey, *Harvest Concerto for Trombone*, mm. 124 - 125. Clarinet 2.

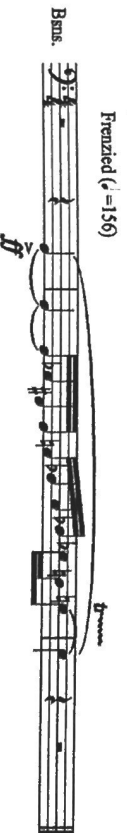
$\text{♩} = 190$



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Steven Bryant, *Axis Mundi*, mvrt2, mm. 109 - 111. Bassoons.

Frenzied ( $\text{♩} = 156$ )



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Error: Moving notes will be late

Solutions:

1. If the passage is not completely slurred, substituting a rest for the tied 8<sup>th</sup> may work.
2. Subdivide through the slower moving notes.
3. Confirm that the player is not resetting her embouchure before the fast notes.

## 6. Moving notes beginning off the beat and following rests

Example: Frank Ticheli, Nitro, mm 72 - 73. Horns.

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Error: Eighth notes will be late.

Solutions: 1. Make sure musicians do not breath or reset their embouchure on the 8<sup>th</sup> rest.

2. Play on the rest whichever note follows the rest. Once comfortable with that, ghost the added note, then remove it completely.

## 7. Quick moving notes followed by a rest on the downbeat

Example: Jonathan Newman, Avenue X, mm. 17 - 18. Low Reeds and Brass

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Error: Gesture is almost always rushed.

Solution: Play the last eighth note on the subsequent downbeat, then remove.

## 8. Repeated offbeat figures, especially without underlying downbeats

Example: John Mackey, Concerto for Soprano Sax and Wind Ensemble, mvt 4, mm 41 - 42. Bassoon 1.

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Error: Almost always dragged.

Solution: Feel steady eighth notes.

## 9. Heavily syncopated rhythms

Example: Frank Ticheli, Nitro, mm. 84 - 87. Upper Woodwinds.

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Error: Gesture almost always drags.

Solution: Modify the pattern to be consistent eighth notes.

## 10. Syncopated ostinato patterns

Example: Jennifer Higdon, *Rhythm Stand*, mm. 1 - 9. Pencils and Bass Drum.

Quickly ( $\text{♩} = 120-142$ )

The score consists of three staves. The top staff is labeled 'Pencil (tapped)' and contains a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with accents, starting with a '5' above the first measure. The middle staff is labeled 'Bass Drum' and contains a similar rhythmic pattern. The bottom staff is labeled 'B. D.' and contains a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with accents. The tempo is marked 'Quickly (♩ = 120-142)'. The dynamic is marked 'mf'.

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Error: Gesture will rush.

Solutions:

1. "Find the metronome in the music."
2. Subdivide eighth notes throughout.
3. Replace eighth rests with eighth notes.

## 11. Hocket gestures

Examples: Norman Dello Joio, *Scenes from the Loware*, mvt 2, mm. 17 - 18.

The score consists of five staves. The top staff is labeled 'Fl 1/ ASx 1' and contains a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with accents, starting with a '♩ = c. 110' above the first measure. The second staff is labeled 'Ob/TSx/ Hm 1' and contains a similar rhythmic pattern. The third staff is labeled 'Cl 1/ASx2/ Hm 1' and contains a similar rhythmic pattern. The fourth staff is labeled 'Cl2+3/ BSx' and contains a similar rhythmic pattern. The dynamic is marked 'mf'.

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Error: Each subsequent entrance will likely be late.

Solutions:

1. Feel eighth notes on the rests.
2. Depending on setup, connect with conductor rather than listening around.

## 12. 8<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> note rests inside of beamed note groupings

Example: Frank Ticheli, *Wild Nights!*, mm. 28 - 29.

The score consists of one staff labeled 'Clx' and contains a rhythmic pattern of beamed eighth notes with accents. The tempo is marked '♩ = c. 144'. The dynamic is marked 'fp'.

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Error: Usually the rests are too long.

Solutions: Mark eighth note pulses with a pencil.

13. Music in base 2 (i.e. 2/2, 3/2, 4/2, 5/2, 6/2)

Example: Ralph Vaughan Williams, *Rhosymedre*, mm. 1 - 4.

*Andantino*

Cl. 1

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Error: Gestures usually drag.

Solution: Feel the piece in quarter note pulses.

14. The figure of four dotted 8<sup>th</sup> notes in 3/4 time

Example: Frank Ticheli, *Wild Nights!*, mm. 152 - 153.

*J = c. 144*

Upper  
WWS

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Errors: Almost always played too slowly.

Solution: Teach the ensemble to conduct a 3/4 pattern and have them speak "1, 2, 3, 4" over the three conducted beats.

15. Long beats in mixed meter passages (i.e. the third beat grouping in a 7/8 bar that is grouped 2+2+3)

Example: Jonathan Newman, *Avenue X*, mm. 18 - 19. Clarinets and Trumpets.

*Quick and Heavy (♩ = 160)*

Cl. &  
Tpts.

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Errors: Almost always too fast

Solutions: 1. Mixed meter exercises from above.

2. Fill in the rests with pulses of some kind.

VII. RECOMMENDED WIND BAND REPERTOIRE FOR  
TEACHING/ENCOURAGING RHYTHMIC ACCURACY AND AWARENESS

Mixed Meter

|                   |                                   |                 |          |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|----------|
| Steven Paulus     | Mosaic                            | Boosey          | Grade 3  |
| Derek Bourgeois   | Serenade op 22c                   | R Smith         | Grade 4  |
| Robert Jager      | Third Suite                       | Belwin          | Grade 4  |
| John Mackey       | Undertow                          | Ostinusic       | Grade 4  |
| Frank Ticheli     | Cajun Folk Songs (mvt 2)          | Manhattan Beach | Grade 4  |
| Roger Cichy       | Divertimento                      | Daehn           | Grade 5  |
| Andreas Makris    | Aegean Festival Overture          | Galaxy          | Grade 5  |
| Jonathan Newman   | Avenue X                          | OK Feel Good    | Grade 5  |
| Leonard Bernstein | "Profanation" from Symphony No. 1 | Boosey          | Grade 6  |
| Percy Grainger    | Hill Song No. 1                   | Southern        | Grade 6+ |

Subdivision at Slow Tempo

|                  |                                |               |         |
|------------------|--------------------------------|---------------|---------|
| Bach/Reed        | Come Sweet Death               | Barnhouse     | Grade 3 |
| Steven Bryant    | Dusk                           | Gorilla Salad | Grade 3 |
| Percy Grainger   | Sussex Mimmers Christmas Carol | Galaxy        | Grade 3 |
| Morten Lauridsen | Contre Qui Rose                | Peer Music    | Grade 4 |
| Warren Benson    | The Leaves are Falling         | Carl Fischer  | Grade 6 |

Counting and Resting

|                  |                       |              |         |
|------------------|-----------------------|--------------|---------|
| Michael Colgrass | The Beethoven Machine | Carl Fisher  | Grade 4 |
| Michael Colgrass | Bali                  | Carl Fischer | Grade 5 |

Tempo Changes/Metric Modulation

|                   |                                |                  |         |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|------------------|---------|
| Jan Van der Roost | Pasyta                         | De Haske         | Grade 4 |
| Charles Ives      | Variations on America          | Presser          | Grade 5 |
| Eric Moe          | Time: A Maniac Scattering Dust | Contact composer | Grade 5 |
| Ron Nelson        | Lauds: Praise High Day         | Ludwig           | Grade 5 |

Hocket

|                   |                              |              |         |
|-------------------|------------------------------|--------------|---------|
| Jennifer Higdon   | Rhythm Stand                 | ACF          | Grade 2 |
| Samuel Adler      | A Little Night and Day Music | Carl Fischer | Grade 3 |
| Guy Woolfenden    | Illyrian Dances              | Ariel        | Grade 5 |
| Kathryn Salfelder | Cathedrals                   | Boosey       | Grade 5 |

Dotted Rhythms

|                        |                         |             |         |
|------------------------|-------------------------|-------------|---------|
| Chen Yi                | Spring Festival         | ACF         | Grade 3 |
| Alfred Reed            | The Hounds of Spring    | Piedmont    | Grade 4 |
| Ralph Vaughan Williams | English Folk Song Suite | Boosey      | Grade 4 |
| Samuel Barber          | Comandante March        | G. Schirmer | Grade 5 |
| Aaron Copland          | An Outdoor Overture     | Boosey      | Grade 5 |

Triple and Compound Meter

|                         |                          |                    |         |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|---------|
| Percy Grainger/Daehn    | Themes from Green Bushes | Daehn Publications | Grade 3 |
| Andrew Boysen, Jr       | Kirkpatrick Fanfare      | Kjos               | Grade 4 |
| Percy Grainger          | Children's March         | Southern Music     | Grade 4 |
| Daniel Kallman          | The Jig is Up            | Boosey             | Grade 4 |
| Carolyn Bremer          | Early Light              | Carl Fisher        | Grade 5 |
| David Maslanka          | Mother Earth: A Fanfare  | Carl Fischer       | Grade 5 |
| Charles Rochester Young | Tempered Steel           | Southern           | Grade 5 |
| John Philip Sousa       | Any 6/8 march            |                    |         |

### Rhythmically Intricate

|                        |                              |                       |           |
|------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|
| Warren Benson          | Ginger Marmalade             | Carl Fischer          | Grade 3   |
| Michael Daugherty      | Alligator Alley              | ACF                   | Grade 3   |
| Jennifer Higdon        | Rhythm Stand                 | ACF                   | Grade 3   |
| Vincent Persichetti    | Bagatelles for Band          | Elkan-Vogel           | Grade 4   |
| Dana Wilson            | Shortcut Home                | Boosey                | Grade 4   |
| Robert Russell Bennett | Suite of Old American Dances | Hal Leonard           | Grade 5   |
| Robert Russell Bennett | Symphonic Songs for Band     | Hal Leonard           | Grade 5   |
| Warren Benson          | The Solitary Dancer          | Carl Fischer          | Grade 5   |
| Steven Bryant          | Chester Leaps In             | Gorilla Salad         | Grade 5   |
| Richard Danielpour     | Vox populi                   | Associated Publishers | Grade 5   |
| Donald Grantham        | Banon Cimetiere's Mambo      | Piquant Press         | Grade 5   |
| Shafer Mahoney         | Sparkle                      | Boosey                | Grade 5   |
| Jack Stamp             | Divertimento in "F"          | Kjos                  | Grade 5   |
| Frank Ticheli          | Nitro                        | Manhattan Beach       | Grade 5   |
| John Adams             | Short Ride in a Fast Machine | Boosey                | Grade 6   |
| Charles Ives           | Country Band March           | Merrion/Presser       | Grade 6   |
| John Mackey            | Redline Tango                | Ostri Music           | Grade 6   |
| Nicholas Maw           | American Games               | Faber                 | Grade 6   |
| Dana Wilson            | Shakata                      | Ludwig                | Grade 6   |
| David Rakowski         | Ten of a Kind                | Peters                | Grade 6++ |

### VIII. RECOMMENDED LITERATURE

- Bell, Jack and Howard Ryerson Davis. *Developing Rhythmic Sensitivity, A Study For All Musicians*. Lithonia, Georgia: Jack Bell, 1989
- Hindemith, Paul. *Elementary Training for Musicians*. Mainz: Schott, 1946.
- Starer, Robert. *Rhythmic Training*. Milwaukee: MCA Music Publishing, 1969.
- Wilder, Bill. *Comprehensive Rhythm Development for All Musicians*. Mountain City, GA: William Ray Wilder, 1987.