

..-...-.
. ~##/ q p \
'# _#. \-...-/
/#.-~/|~ \|__|/
||'--<|| '~'
||>--<\#\
/\>---<\#\`\
.

www.SantaresMusicPeople.Com, and the directors
of the Fort Lauderdale Sunshine Chordsmen
present this online music theory series
(Barbershop Edition - Lesson #05)
<*)>>< Andrew E. Reid, General Editor
Posted at: <http://www.barbershopchorus.com>
This message was made with recycled electrons.

Okay, more about time... Some of you may have had music classes when you were in grade school, and depending on when you went to school, there could have been various methods that your classroom music teacher might have had you study to count time. For the older farts, a common time measure would have sounded something like this: ONE, two, THree, four. When subdivided into duple subdivisions, you would have had to learn: ONE and two and THree and four and; or in triple subdivisions the mantra: ONE ee uh, two ee uh, THree ee uh, four ee uh.

You younger singers may remember an entirely different system... A whole note would be verbally denoted as "Toe-ah-ah-ah," a half note as "Toe-ah" with a dotted half note as "Toe-ah-ah" -- a quarter note as "Tah" and an eighth note as "tee" (two eighth notes as "tee-tee,") so for example, the rhythm for the beginning of "Amazing Grace" would be verbalized as thus: tah, Toe-ah, tee-tee Toe-ah, tah Toe-ah, tah Toe-ah-ah, Toe-ah, tee-tee Toe-ah tah, Toh-ah-ah-ah-ah... (I'm using capital letters to denote dynamic stress, although many music teachers don't do that; I also don't spell "tee" as "te" so as not to be confused with "teh" which really doesn't mean anything in this system.) A dotted quarter plus an eighth would be: "tah-ee tee" and if you get a string of 8 sixteenth notes it would be: Tee-kee-tee-kee tee-kee-tee-kee...)

Orchestral students would remember verbal strings of clatter like One-e-and-uh, two-e-and-uh, three-e-and-uh, four-e-and-uh, or One-tah-tay, two-tah-tay, three-tah-tay, four-tah-tay, or maybe something like: One, trip-o-let, two, three and one, two-e-and-uh three and-uh four...

Now, no matter what system you grew up with, the important thing is that you know how to count time and that you use this knowledge on a regular and consistent basis. "Duple" meter is when the music is grouped into divisions of two, so you would find songs written in two-four, four-four or six-four meter with an alternating strong and weak beats. "Triple" meter is when the music is grouped into divisions of three, so you would find songs written in three-four, six-four or nine-four with the pattern of one strong beat followed by two weaker beats.

When you run into a song which is written in five-four (in other words, five beats to the measure, with a quarter note getting one beat,) you would have to analyze the score and decide if it is in duple-triple or triple-duple, or alternating between the two. The two/three options would be: ONE two, THREE four five, ONE two, THREE four five, or ONE two three, FOUR five, ONE two three, FOUR five, or a combination of the above, as in, ONE two three, FOUR five, ONE two, THREE four five, ONE two THREE four five, ONE two three FOUR five...

A measure of "Twelve-Eight" would basically be common time (duple meter doubled) with a triple meter subdivision: Instead of ONE tah-tay, Two tah-tay, THRee tah-tay, Four tah-tay, you would think, ONE two three, FOUR five six, SEVEN eight nine, TEN eleven twelve; but the theory would be the same -- duple-triple with strong beats followed by two weaker beats.

(lesson 5 - page 2)

Now, each one of these duple or triple metered measures can be subdivided into duple or triple subdivisions which is where you can run into some interesting combinations, although since barbershop music is somewhat conservative in nature, as it is an artform that is ostensibly interested in preserving the old songs, you rarely run across asymmetrical combinations. Six-eight measures are usually duple-triple, not triple-duple meter, with the eight note beat as ONE two three FOUR five six, and not ONE two THREE four FIVE six; in other words, the duple meter strong beats would be on beats 1 and 4, with the weak beats giving the feel of a triple subdivision. Almost the same thing could be achieved compositionally by writing the music in "Two-Four" and continually using triplets for each beat. Which brings up another interesting and very important subject, and that is the use of the term, "Swing Feel" -- which basically means to take a song, or a section of song that has duple subdivisions written in, and changing the performance of the music to have it performed with triple subdivisions, elongating the first half of each beat to the time value of approximately two-thirds of a beat. The composer/arranger could of course have written it out that way, but the easy way out is to write it with regular eight notes and not have to pencil all those triplets into the score. This also is a simplifying device: those beginning music students who don't have much aptitude for jazz music will just play or sing the song in simple duple meter, i.e. in classical "pre-Gershwin" European fashion. (The infusion of African rhythms in the early Twentieth Century did much for getting stodgy musicians to sit up and take notice of the rhythm.) During the late 1800's classical composers experimented with the "hemiola" -- as in having some of the score in duple and the other part in triple -- which sounded kind of refreshing at the time, but when the listening public got a taste of swing/jazz/blues, there was just no turning back...

Remember that all this is relative, the percentage of the "Swing Feel" can be applied to the performance of the music in a slightly noticeable way, all the way up to extreme swing of the rhythm. In a chorus one must always follow the wishes of the director for things to come off smoothly, so just go with the flow until you become the song leader! If a director wants to hold quarter notes out as if they were half notes, or visa-versa, then so be it, all bets are off, and just live with it. Here is where "ear" musicians have an advantage over "paper" musicians - - those who don't read music well as opposed to those who do -- the singers who don't rely on the written score tend to follow the director better when the director is clearly not following what is written on the page. This is where muscle memory and musical acumen are more important than sight-reading ability. When in doubt, follow the director, or your instincts when directorless, and when performing in a quartet, use a lot of eye contact with the "lead" and anticipate how the rhythm is going to be interpreted. Nothing is worse than being "right" as opposed to being "wrong" when everyone else in the quartet is wrong which would then make them right! Same goes for chorus sing; accurate rhythm is essential, but a better quality is to have good musical sense and a flair for good interpretation. If your part in a quartet has a rhythm that is different from the rest of the parts, make the most of it; if you're going to sing it correctly and in rhythm, do it in a manner that shows that you have confidence and that you intended to perform it that way. There is nothing worse than being correct and whippy and having it seem that you're the one who is off. Rhythmic complexities work only when you can be convincing and pull off your part in such a way that you are telling the audience through the music that you have command of the necessary rhythmical skills!