

Rhythm

Now that we've gotten quite familiar with what notes should work over any given chord, I'm going to tell you that unless your rhythm and phrasing is happening, your playing is not happening.

Rhythm is *at least* 50% of what goes into a great groove, bass line, fill or solo. In my experience, a player who has great time and a great feel—but a very limited harmonic concept—will sound infinitely better than a player who has all of the “right” notes but can't control his time and feel. I've come across far too many students who have a ton of potential but have neglected to do the work necessary to really control their time and/or subdivisions. The mastery of subdivisions is really what it's all about when it comes to rhythmic control.

Many blossoming musicians get very hung up on downbeats and upbeats and don't really push themselves too far beyond that until they are forced to. I remember doing a trio gig with a Latin jazz guitarist and an African percussionist. The guitar player made a little joke about trying to find the “1” during the percussion solo, and the percussionist replied, “All you Western guys are so worried about the ‘1’—nobody cares about the ‘2.’” Not only did this crack us all up, but there was a little moment of clarity for the guitarist, who immediately recognized how reliant he was on having the downbeats fed to him by the rhythm section. If we dropped the “1” and emphasized a subdivision that he didn't expect, for example, he could be thrown hopelessly off course. Even the “2,” in that example, should be as easy to feel as the “1,” let alone the third eighth-note triplet from the “1.”

Unfamiliar rhythms can throw *anybody* off, but it does also highlight the importance of **internalization**! If we can train ourselves to feel EVERY subdivision inside of us just as strongly as we can feel a downbeat of every bar, things begin to get more interesting. A whole new world of rhythmic possibilities opens up to you and your execution of those rhythms grows much more strong. Once you have begun to internalize rhythm, your playing tightens up, and you will naturally *feel* music in a more developed way. When you feel it convincingly, you will play it convincingly.

I tend to feel everything in groups of two or three, and that's how I break things down internally, whether we're speaking of non-4/4 time signatures or subdivisions of one beat. This includes groupings of four and six, as well as compound groupings.

A **compound** rhythm is comprised of multiple rhythmic groupings. For example:

- 4/4 is still a grouping of two (in my mind, it's just multiples of 2).
- 6/8 is a grouping of three.
- 5/8, however, is not a simple adding of twos *or* threes but a combination of twos *and* threes (3+2 or 2+3).

Groupings of 5, 7, 11, 13, and so on are prime numbers. As far as I can tell, all prime numbers would be compound rhythms.

NOTE: It is helpful to have a metronome that allows for compound groupings when developing your abilities with “odd” time signatures. If you can program a metronome to give you a 3+2 click or 4+3 with a downbeat for each grouping, it can really help speed up your internalization of the groupings.

With larger non-compound groupings, we can still use multiples of both two and three (eight beats could be emphasized as 3+2+3, for example). I don’t consider this a compound grouping but more like a rhythmic accentuation of a non-compound rhythm. This may or may not conflict with other texts on the subject—that’s just how I perceive it.

I honestly don’t care much if something is “right” or “wrong” as long as it leads to me making music that I perceive as “right.” If it works for me, I go with it. If you find alternate ways to conceive of ANYTHING in this book and those ways truly help you to understand the information in a functional way, go for it! Always make sure that your personal interpretation is truly functional through experimentation and exploration. Never allow yourself to take the simpler path because it is easier. Assuming that you continue on your path towards musical understanding, you may only be creating more work for yourself later on. This would be by virtue of having to break bad habits or re-learn something you misunderstood and internalized.

To the exercises:

For now, we are going to stick to subdivisions within a single beat but we’ll get to compound time signatures later. While we can, of course, divide a beat into any number of smaller subdivisions, let’s focus on the most common; triplets and 16ths. I find that if students can really control their triplets and 16th-note subdivisions, the rest comes naturally and much more easily. I’ve also noticed a trend regarding triplets. For most bassist I’ve come across in educational settings, triplets are harder to feel.

Let’s start with some 16th-note exercises, followed by some triplets, and then round it off with a mix of the two. All notes marked “x” should be muted. I find it easier to first play EVERY subdivision and mute every note except the subdivision that I am trying to play. Doing so helps you to feel every subdivision and the relationship to the note you are actually allowing to ring through. This is also a fantastic exercise for precision muting, right-hand plucking, timing, and endurance.

Once you can play an exercise well and in time using muted notes, it is time to evolve into rests and ONLY playing the subdivision that you intend to. This will likely make more sense once you see the exercises.

Sixteenth-Note Subdivision Exercises

Rhythmic only, with muted notes

1 e & a 2 e & a 3 e & a 4 e & a

1 e & a 2 e & a 3 e & a 4 e & a

1 e & a 2 e & a 3 e & a 4 e & a

1 e & a 2 e & a 3 e & a 4 e & a

Rhythmic only, with rests

1 e & a 2 e & a 3 e & a 4 e & a

1 e & a 2 e & a 3 e & a 4 e & a

1 e & a 2 e & a 3 e & a 4 e & a

1 e & a 2 e & a 3 e & a 4 e & a

Miscellaneous patterns, with muted notes

1 e & a 2 e & a 3 e & a 4 e & a

1 e & a 2 e & a 3 e & a 4 e & a

1 e & a 2 e & a 3 e & a 4 e & a

1 e & a 2 e & a 3 e & a 4 e & a

1 e & a 2 e & a 3 e & a 4 e & a

1 e & a 2 e & a 3 e & a 4 e & a

1 e & a 2 e & a 3 e & a 4 e & a

1 e & a 2 e & a 3 e & a 4 e & a

Miscellaneous patterns, with rests

1 e & a 2 e & a 3 e & a 4 e & a

1 e & a 2 e & a 3 e & a 4 e & a

1 e & a 2 e & a 3 e & a 4 e & a

1 e & a 2 e & a 3 e & a 4 e & a

1 e & a 2 e & a 3 e & a 4 e & a

1 e & a 2 e & a 3 e & a 4 e & a

1 e & a 2 e & a 3 e & a 4 e & a

1 e & a 2 e & a 3 e & a 4 e & a

Now let's look at some similar exercises utilizing triplets. I have found that most of my students have a much harder time *truly* internalizing triplet divisions. These are worth solidifying, as there is a LOT of rhythmic gold to be found through the combination of groupings of two and three.

Triplet Subdivision Exercises

Rhythmic only, with muted notes

1 3 & a 2 3 & a 3 3 & a 4 3 & a

1 3 & a 2 3 & a 3 3 & a 4 3 & a

1 3 & a 2 3 & a 3 3 & a 4 3 & a

Rhythmic only, with rests

1 3 & a 2 3 & a 3 3 & a 4 3 & a

1 3 & a 2 3 & a 3 3 & a 4 3 & a

1 3 & a 2 3 & a 3 3 & a 4 3 & a

Miscellaneous patterns, with muted notes

1 3 & a 2 3 & a 3 3 & a 4 3 & a

1 3 & a 2 3 & a 3 3 & a 4 3 & a

1 3 & a 2 3 & a 3 3 & a 4 3 & a

1 3 & a 2 3 & a 3 3 & a 4 3 & a

1 3 & a 2 3 & a 3 3 & a 4 3 & a

1 3 & a 2 3 & a 3 3 & a 4 3 & a

1 3 & a 2 3 & a 3 3 & a 4 3 & a

1 3 & a 2 3 & a 3 3 & a 4 3 & a

Miscellaneous patterns, with rests

1 3 & a 2 & a 3 & a 4 3 & a

1 & a 2 & a 3 & a 4 & a

1 & a 2 & a 3 & a 4 & a

1 & a 2 & a 3 & a 4 & a

1 & a 2 & a 3 & a 4 & a

1 3 & a 2 & a 3 & a 4 3 & a

Try a few combinations of triplets and 16ths.

Mixed Triplets and 16th-Note Subdivision Exercises

Rhythmic only, all muted notes

1 $\overset{3}{\&}$ a 2 $\overset{3}{\&}$ a 3 e $\&$ a 4 e $\&$ a

1 $\overset{3}{\&}$ a 2 e $\&$ a 3 $\overset{3}{\&}$ a 4 e $\&$ a

1 e $\&$ a 2 $\overset{3}{\&}$ a 3 $\overset{3}{\&}$ a 4 e $\&$ a

1 $\overset{3}{\&}$ a 2 e $\&$ a 3 e $\&$ a 4 $\overset{3}{\&}$ a

1 e $\&$ a 2 $\overset{3}{\&}$ a 3 e $\&$ a 4 $\overset{3}{\&}$ a

Miscellaneous patterns, miscellaneous muted notes

1 3 & a 2 3 & a 3 e & a 4 e & a

1 3 & a 2 e & a 3 3 & a 4 e & a

1 3 & a 2 e & a 3 3 & a 4 e & a

1 e & a 2 3 & a 3 3 & a 4 e & a

1 e & a 2 3 & a 3 3 & a 4 e & a

1 3 & a 2 e & a 3 e & a 4 3 & a

1 3 & a 2 e & a 3 e & a 4 3 & a

Advanced mixed rhythms, with rests

1 3 & a 2 & a 3 e & a 4 e & a

1 3 & a 2 e & a 3 & a 4 e & a

1 & a 2 e & a 3 & a 4 e & a

1 e & a 2 3 & a 2 3 & a 4 e & a

1 e & a 2 & a 2 & a 4 e & a

1 & a 2 e & a 3 e & a 4 & a

1 & a 2 e & a 3 e & a 4 & a

Rhythmic Application to Harmony

Once we've gotten fairly comfortable with the rhythms themselves, it's time to start applying our rhythmic patterns to melodic patterns. I find that applying ALL technical exercises to my various melodic patterns helps further internalize them all in an efficient way. This serves to test our limits, as well as test the depth of our internalization of both rhythm and harmony.

Every exercise we run in our quest for musical mastery is ultimately in service to making music. Thus, it is more than helpful to employ a musical context to every exercise. In the following exercises, we will use *Real Book* tunes from our previous arpeggio exercises married to some of these rhythmic exercises.

It takes little imagination to realize how we can continue to challenge ourselves for a lifetime by continuing to apply the following criteria when devising new exercises to challenge ourselves.

- Decide upon a rhythmic pattern.
- Decide upon a melodic pattern.
- Run them both simultaneously through any number of chord changes in the *Real Book*.

We'll add to this list as we continue in this book, but even just this application of rhythm and harmony should lead to some giant discoveries if practiced with intention and patience.

It is not my intention to provide you with every possibility within. A large part of your development will come from your own exploration of this material, in your own way. I encourage you to try and follow each thread to its natural conclusion and then ask yourself, "What else could I try?"


The difficulty level may jump around a bit here. As stated, I will only give you a handful of examples to get you understanding the process. The real work is up to you to follow through with further variations.

REMEMBER: These examples will use muted notes to help you keep track of the placement.

It is important that you develop the ability to abandon the muted subdivisions and *only* play the chosen subdivision. Once you can do this competently, you can be sure that you are well on your way to rhythmic internalization!

Beautiful Love (Root Position, Downbeats)

E \emptyset 7 A7(b9) D-7




G-7 C7 F Δ 7 E \emptyset 7 A7(b9)




1.
D-7 G-7 B \flat 7 A7(b9)



D-7 G7(#11) E \emptyset 7 A7(b9)



2.
D-7 G-7 B \flat 7 A7(b9)



D-7 B7 B \flat 7(#11) A7(b9) D-7



Beautiful Love (Root Position, Second 16th)

E \emptyset 7 A7(b9) D-7

1 e & a 2 e & a

G-7 C7 F Δ 7 E \emptyset 7 A7(b9)

1.
D-7 G-7 B \flat 7 A7(b9)

D-7 G7(#11) E \emptyset 7 A7(b9)

2.
D-7 G-7 B \flat 7 A7(b9)

D-7 B7 B \flat 7(#11) A7(b9) D-7

Stella by Starlight

(3 5 7 9, Shifting 16th-Note Subdivisions)

The musical score is written in bass clef, 4/4 time, and consists of eight staves of music. Each staff contains a series of 16th-note subdivisions, with some notes marked with 'x' to indicate specific rhythmic patterns. The chords are indicated above the staff lines.

Staff 1: E \emptyset 7, A7(b9), C-7, F7

Staff 2: F-7, Bb7, Eb Δ 7, Ab7

Staff 3: Bb Δ 7, E \emptyset 7, A7(b9), D-7, Bb-7, Eb7

Staff 4: F Δ 7, E \emptyset 7, Eb Δ 7(#11), D7(b9)

Staff 5: G7(b13), C-7

Staff 6: Ab7(#11), Bb Δ 7

Staff 7: E \emptyset 7, A7(b9), D \emptyset 7, G7(b9)

Staff 8: C \emptyset 7, F7(b9), Bb Δ 7

Beautiful Love

(Shifting Inversions, Shifting Triplets)

E \emptyset 7 A7(b9) D-7

1 & a 2 & a

Root position

G-7 C7 F Δ 7 E \emptyset 7 A7(b9)

1st inversion

1.

D-7 G-7 Bb7 A7(b9)

2nd inversion

D-7 G7(#11) E \emptyset 7 A7(b9)

3rd inversion

2.

D-7 G-7 Bb7 A7(b9)

Root position

D-7 B7 Bb7(#11) A7(b9) D-7

1st inversion