

Understanding Music

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Part I

Week 1

LECTURE

1

RHYTHM

Rhythm is the movement of music within time. Includes,

- Pulse (beat)
- Tempo
- Rhythmic Deviations
- Meter
- Syncopation
- Accents

1.1 Pulse

Direct pulse refers to a beat you can hear, often the drums. Indirect pulse means the beat is felt or sensed, not directly heard.

Examples,

- Direct pulse - Poinciana - Ahmad Jamal (drums)
- Indirect pulse - It Never Entered My Mind - Stacey Kent (Saxophone)

1.2 Tempo

Tempo is the rate of speed of a piece of music. Western music uses Italian terms. Slower tempos are Largo, Lento, Adagio. Moderate tempos are andante and moderato. Faster tempos: allegro, vivace, presto. Know which of the terms generally correspond to the tempos.

1.3 Rhythmic Deviations

Refers to a change in the pulse or tempo. Most common are accelerando, ritardando and rubato.

- Accelerando - gradual increase in tempo
- Ritardando - gradual decrease in tempo
- Rubato - "stolen time" subtle manipulations of tempo, small increase with a small decrease

1.4 Meter

Meter is the regular grouping of beats (in much Western music, meter is often thought of as the time signature). A few basic categories of meter are simple, compound, and asymmetric meters.

1.4.1 Simple Meter

- Simple Duple meter - groupings of 2 beats (1-2)
- Simple Triple meter - groupings of 3 beats (1-2-3)
- Simple Quadruple meter - groupings of 4 beats (1-2-3-4)

1.4.2 Compound Meter

Meters with regular groupings of sets of three beats.

- Compound Duple, two groups of three (6/8)
- Compound Triple, three groups of three (9/4 or 9/8)
- Compound Quadruple, four groups of three (12/4 or 12/8)

1.4.3 Asymmetric Meter

Sometimes called additive meter, asymmetric meter includes irregular time signatures like 5/4 and 7/4, etc. They are often felt and counted as a combination of smaller beat groupings.

1.4.4 Non-Metrical Music

Music that is non-metrical does not have a specific meter. One example is Gregorian Chants.

1.5 Accents

Accented notes or beats are emphasized in some way to stand out from the surrounding notes or beats. This can be by playing a note louder, or adding a lower or higher pitched note.

1.6 Syncopation

Accented notes or beats that happen in unexpected places. For example, on a "weaker" beat or on an off-beat. Offbeat is a syncopation pattern in which the accented notes/beats occur in between the main beats.

1.7 Ostinato

An ostinato is a short, constantly recurring melodic or rhythmic pattern. Most music with a consistent drumbeat has a rhythmic ostinato.