

# Count On It

## What to Say Before You Play

BY MEREDITH LAING VANBENSCHOTEN

Sometimes, musicians are so concerned with playing the right notes, that they put rhythmic accuracy on the backburner. Don't let that be you! Rhythm is largely responsible for giving music its energy, and in ensemble playing, it's essential to ensuring that everyone stays together.

Instead of accepting "close enough" when faced with tricky rhythms, have a plan for tackling them. First, write the counting underneath the notes. Then, clap the rhythm while counting it out loud. (Bonus points for using your metronome!) Next, play the rhythm on a single pitch on your instrument. Finally, you'll be ready to add the actual notes back in and play through the passage.

Here are some hints on how to count rhythms when they involve more than just numbers.

$\text{♩} = 120$

1 2 e + a 3 (4) + 1 (2) 3 (4) 1 + a 2 e + 3 4 1 (2) (3) 4

1 + 2 + 3 4 la li 1 + (2) + 3 (4) 1 2 3 (4) + 1 (2) (3) 4

Notes: When clapping and counting notes that are held over more than one beat, say the beat numbers out loud, but only clap when the note changes. For rests, count the beat out loud but don't clap.

### EIGHTH NOTES

You know that an eighth note is worth a half beat—but how do you count that out loud? For the first half of the beat, use the number of the beat you're on in the measure. For the second half of the beat, use the word "and" (indicated with the symbol "+").

### SIXTEENTH NOTES

Sixteenth notes divide the beat even further, into fourths, so we need new syllables to represent these additional portions of the beat. The syllables for counting sixteenth notes are "1 e + a," where the initial number represents the beat you are on in the measure.

### TRIPLETS

Triplets fit three notes into a space where two notes would normally go. For example, typically, two eighth notes add up to one beat. However, if three eighth notes are grouped as triplets, all three notes must fit into the one beat, divided evenly into thirds. Similarly, if three quarter notes are grouped as triplets, all three must fit into two beats. The syllables for counting triplet rhythms are "1 la li."

### MIXED RHYTHMS

Of course, most of the time, you'll find a mixture of rhythmic values within one measure and even within one beat. Just remember that each new beat should start with a new number, and that each smaller subdivision of the beat has its own unique syllable, as described in the paragraphs above.

