Week 11:

Grooves

Groove

Musicians have long referred to groove when describing the basic feel of a song, especially when it feels right. When Duke Ellington wrote "It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)," or when that infamous dancer on *American Bandstand* said that she thought a particular song was a hit because "It's got a good beat and you can dance to it," they were talking about groove. It is absolutely essential for a songwriter to learn what gives a song the kind of groove or feel that has "hit" written all over it.

RHYTHMIC ELEMENTS

In more technical terms, you can better understand groove by examining its rhythmic elements: pulse, tempo, meter, rhythmic subdivision, syncopation, and texture.

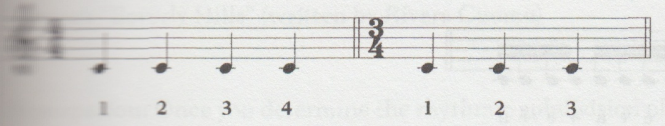
Pulse: A pulse is simply a regular, recurring beat. For instance, a march (*hup*, 2, 3, 4) is based on pulse. In pop music, an obvious example is the bass drum beat (1, 2, 3, 4) of the disco style.

Tempo: The tempo is the speed of the pulse, the number of pulses per minute. You can understand this by comparing any music pulse to your heartbeat. At rest, our hearts beat at 72–80 times a minute. But get us excited (through up-tempo dancing, aerobics, or whatever) and watch our pulse race to 150 times a minute and beyond. Here is a chart showing the relationship of various tempos to pop music function and activity:

Heartbeat = 72 beats per minute: BPM

60 BPM SLOW BALLAD	90 BPM MID-TEMPO	120 BPM UP-TEMPO DANCE	150 BPM HYPER DRIVE
"Yesterday" (The Beatles)	"Crazy for You" (Madonna)	"Smooth" (Santana, Rob Thomas)	"Livin' La Vida Loca" (Ricky Martin)
"I'll Make Love to You" (Boyz II Men)	"No Scrubs" (TLC) "Don't Lie" (The Black Eyed Peas)	"Independence Day" (Martina McBride)	"Hey Ya!" (OutKast)

Meter: Meter is the way in which pulses are grouped into measures or bars. Almost all pop music is grouped into 4/4 meter—four pulses (quarter notes) in each measure (or bar). Occasionally, one finds a 3/4 waltz meter with three pulses (quarter notes) in each measure.

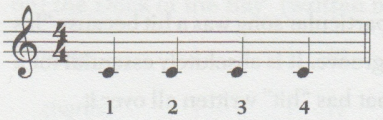


Other meters like 2/4, 6/8, 2/2, or more complicated ones like 11/16 or 7/8 exist in classical music and jazz, but are seldom used in pop.

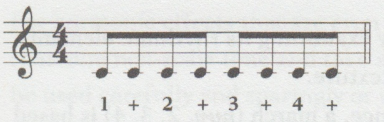
Rhythmic Subdivision: The 4/4 pulse of a pop song is the basis for 95 percent of what we hear on the radio today. What's important is to differentiate the rhythms played on rock stations, country stations,

soul stations, and easy listening stations. You may need more technical know-how to learn how rhythmic subdivisions help to define a song's style. A 4/4 measure can be subdivided into any of the following:

March, disco



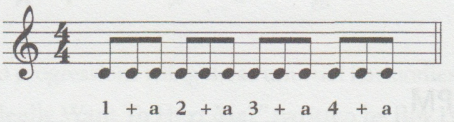
8th note groove (rock, MOR, new wave)



Santana and Rob Thomas' "Smooth"

Trace Atkins' "Honky Tonk Badonkadonk"

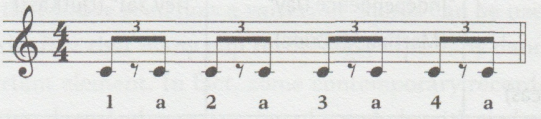
Triplet groove (1950s, blues)



Boyz II Men's "I'll Make Love To You"

Alicia Keys' "Fallin'"

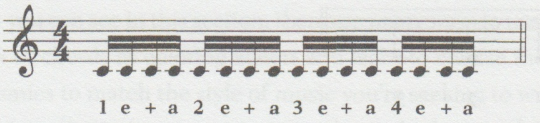
Shuffle groove (1940s, be-bop, country, blues, gospel)



The Beatles' "With a Little Help From My Friends" (written by John Lennon/Paul McCartney)

Gretchen Wilson's "All Jacked Up"

16th groove (funk, R&B, reggae, half-time rock)



Alanis Morissette's "You Learn" (written by Alanis Morissette/Glen Ballad)

Rascal Flatts' "Bless the Broken Road"

Beats Per Minute

Musical time rearranges real time to serve a musical purpose. To understand rhythm, you need to understand how music is broken up over time through the use of notes.

A beat or a note in music is a sound with a particular pitch and duration. You could think of every second on the clock as a beat of music, where each beat has a duration of 1 second. In this way, in one passing minute, you would have passed through 60 beats, each exactly the same duration.

In music you would call that pace, or that tempo of notes, 60 beats per minute: 60 bpm. Now if you slow down this pace of notes by half, so there are half as many notes in a minute, you would only have 30 beats for every minute that passes, or 30 bpm. In this kind of rhythm, you have more space between each beat - two seconds, or twice as much as 60pm. Each beat strikes every other second only.

But even at 60 bpm there is a lot of space between each beat. Unless you figure out a way to keep track of what's supposed to happen in the space in between, you might get lost! In music, you need a way to structure this time to make sense of it.

The Bar

If the second hand chimes 60 times per minute, but the sound of each passing second ticking away is the same as all the others, then none of the beats will be accented or louder than the others. Imagine instead that as each second ticks away, it chimes the first of every four beats a little louder than the others. If this happened, you would hear a kind of cycle with four beats in every cycle. You would call this cycle of four beats one measure, or one bar.

In contemporary music, you almost always hear accented beats and that's part of what gives music its pulsating rhythm.

The Downbeat

We call the note at the beginning of every bar, or the first of every four beats, the "downbeat", because that beat sets down the beginning of a new cycle of beats. Although the downbeat isn't always sounded or played louder and is often just implied, it's how musicians usually get their bearings in the rhythm of a song. Changes in the music's chord structure (the combination of notes played at the same time by the instruments are its chord; the combination of chords in a song determine its chord structure) often occur on the downbeat. For example, in the song "Hey Jude", the word "Jude" always lands on the downbeat, and the song's chord changes frequently occur on the downbeat as well.

Time Signature

A bar with four beats in a measure would be in "4/4" (pronounced "four four") time or "common" time. This means that every bar is counted in terms of four notes, or 4/4. A bar with only three beats in a measure would be in "3/4" time - meaning three beats to every bar, not four. We call 3/4 or 4/4 the "time signature" of a song. Another common time signature is 6/8 (6 eighth notes to every bar of music), but 3/4 and particularly 4/4 are the most widely used in modern music.

Locating the First Beat of Every Bar

The first beat of every bar is crucial in understanding rhythm and being able to follow the music. Often the first beat in every bar of music is slightly accented, but just as often it is not. So it may take some time to identify the first beat in every bar.

"If you could sing from your heart and keep time, that's it! That's all I know."

- RAY CHARLES

To find the first beat, locate the cycles of beats in the music. If you struggle, go to your local library or search online and find the sheet music for the song. See if you can find the downbeat in the music notation, and learn how to hear it.

certain points of the
difficult to maintain t
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consistently on time.