



Week 12:

Rhythm
In Melody

9. NOTE DURATIONS

Goal: Identify and re-create basic rhythmic patterns with your voice to a set slow tempo, and over time a faster tempo.

Why? If the different pitches of a melody only changed exactly on every beat, it would sound very uninteresting. The melody wouldn't have a conversational or musical feel to it at all. Songwriters vary the rhythms of the melody to reflect the patterns in speech and to keep the song interesting. You need to understand how melodies vary rhythmically so you can be accurate and natural-sounding when you sing the melody.

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In order to develop a strong Singer's Instinct, you need to learn how to become playful with rhythm beyond just the basic beats of a bar. To do that, you need to understand how to break down rhythmic notation. In music, we divide time with the following notation notation:

Whole Notes

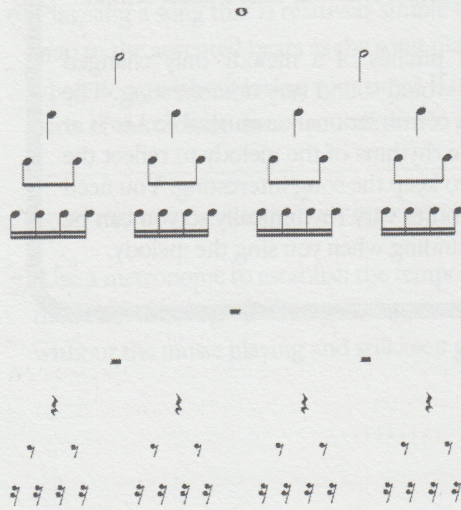
A whole note is held for the entire bar, covering the space of four quarter notes. It receives a count of four beats. It looks like an **O** in a classic font. Because a whole note has a value of four quarter notes, only a song in 4/4 time can use whole notes. A song in 3/4 time could only have three quarter notes in a bar, so a whole note couldn't be used (you would instead use a dotted half note - more on that below).

Whole Rests



If the rhythm rests for an entire bar, you won't hear anything for the duration of the bar. It's equal to four quarter beats if in 4/4 time. We call that amount of time a whole rest. In notation, it looks like an upside down hat on the staff line.

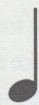
Rhythm Value Tree



In the image to the left, you can see how the value of a whole note in music breaks down into smaller values. In the image below it are the values for rests, or pauses in music. All of the combined values on every row are equal to one whole note as in the top image, or one whole rest as in the bottom. In the image above, all of the notes (except the whole note) have stems that are

“upside down” pointing downward. The notes can also have stems that are right side up, point upward, as in the examples outlined below.

Quarter-Notes



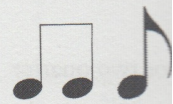
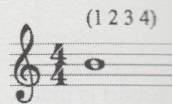
In North American music we refer to beats as "quarter notes", because every note gets a beat of a duration of one quarter of the value of the whole bar. A bar in 4/4 time for instance will have four quarter notes to every bar, while a bar of music in 3/4 will have three quarter notes to a bar. A quarter note looks like a filled-in black circle with a stem. In the notation below, each quarter notes gets a count.

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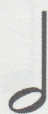
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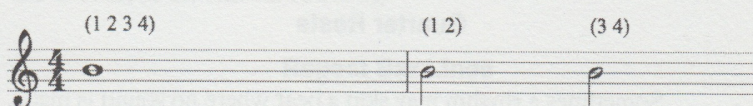
Half Notes



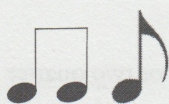
If a quarter note is held over the space of two quarter notes, the note then becomes the value of two quarter notes put together - a half note. It's held for two quarter beats. It looks like an empty dot with a stem:

Now we will examine these notes put together to form rhythm sequences in notation. Below is a musical staff, made up of five horizontal lines, also known as "staff lines", which represent both pitch (how high or low each note is) and rhythm (how quickly or slowly each note is held). Notes that show exclusively rhythm aren't usually pitch specific, but in the rhythmic examples below the notes are all written on the middle staff line.

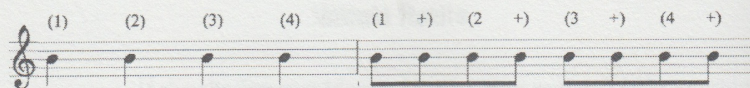
Above the notation are the counts (shown in numbers) indicating the count values that are included in each note. You could count these out loud or in your head as you tap or clap the rhythmic values in each bar. For example, the first half note would receive the count one and two, while the second half notes gets the count three and four. Tap/clap only on the first beat as you count out loud all four beats in the bar in time:



Eighth Notes



When two beats of equal duration are in the space of one quarter note, we call them eighth beats - two eighth beats are equal to one quarter note. In music notation an eighth note looks like a quarter note, but has a tail added to its stem. If there are two eighth notes together in the same beat, their tails are connected together. In the notation below, you would pronounce "and" where the + is. For example, out loud (or silently) you would count "one and two and three and four and (repeat) one and two and ...":

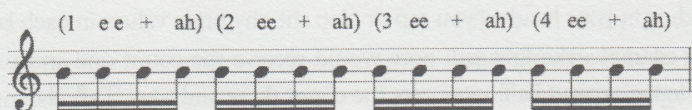


Sixteenth Notes



When two beats of equal duration occur in the space of one eighth note, we call them sixteenth notes - 2 sixteenth beats are equal to one eighth note. In music notation, a sixteenth note looks like an eighth note, but has two tails added to its stem, instead of one. If there are two sixteenth notes together in the same eighth beat, their tails are connected together:

In the notation below, because the beats are sixteenth notes, you would count the spaces between each of the eighth notes as: "one ee and ah two ee and ah three ee and ah...":



Quarter Rests



Sometimes a rhythm may skip a beat where no sound is made. To mark this "rest", there is a gap where a quarter note should be - a quarter rest. In music notation, it looks similar to a squiggly closing bracket:

Half Rests

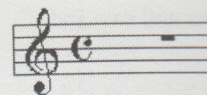


Sometimes a rhythm can skip two beats, or two quarter notes. When this happens, we call that a half rest. In music notation it looks like a hat, right side up.

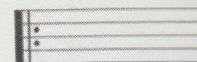


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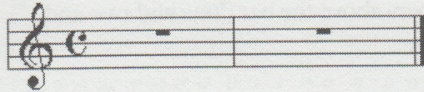
above and below.
you would play e
moving on to the
rhythm as you go

Dotted Notes



If there is a dot after a note, it indicates that the note value is the original value plus one half of the value of the note. If it's a dotted quarter note, as in the example to the right, it means the time value of that note is one quarter plus one eighth, or one and a half beats in the bar.

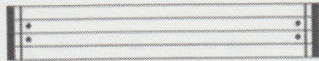
Other Common Notation Symbols



In the image to the left, the symbol on the far left side is a treble clef, notating how you would reference the letter note

values relating to note frequency (we will not examine letter note values in this book, although you are encouraged to learn more on your own). The "C" tells you that the piece is in "common time", or 4/4. Therefore, each bar has a value of four quarter notes. Both bars in the example have whole rests in each bar and the entire example is only two bars long. The last bar is marked with a double line which marks it as the last bar, or the end bar of a song.

Repeat Bar Lines



When there are two bar lines, with one noticeably thicker accompanied by two dots in the middle spaces of the staff line, it indicates that you should repeat the bars between them once (or as otherwise indicated)

before continuing. In the examples above and below, there are repeat bar lines inside every bar. This means you would play each bar twice (or more if you like for practice) before moving on to the next. This should help you get a better feel for the rhythm as you go from one rhythm sequence in one bar to the next.

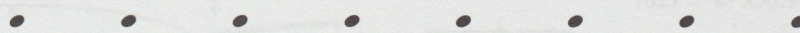
Chapter 3

Rhythm

pulse, meter, and rhythm Music takes place in time. It is in the control of time that a player and/or composer prove their mettle. Musical time is measured by pulses or beats, meter, and rhythm.

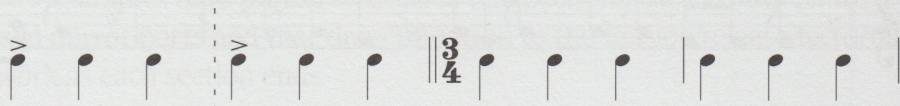
Pulse is a series of undifferentiated even beats. All pulses in a series are by definition exactly alike.

Ex. 3.1



Meter is a measurement of the number of pulses between regularly recurring accents. Meter is the grouping of pulses.

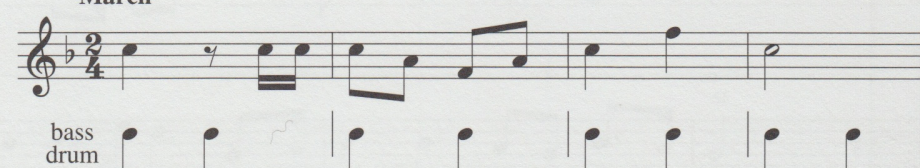
Ex. 3.2



Music that tends to emphasize body movements, such as marching and dancing, has a more pronounced meter stated or strongly implied.

Ex. 3.3

March

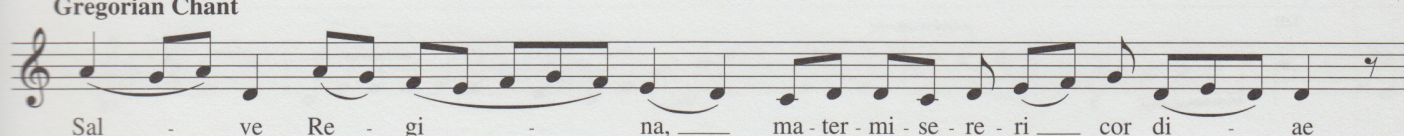


bass drum

Music that is contemplative, such as Gregorian chant, tends to de-emphasize the meter or not have meter.

Ex. 3.4

Gregorian Chant



Sal - ve Re - gi - na, _____ ma - ter - mi - se - re - ri _____ cor di - ae

Rhythm is ever changing but can be measured by its relationship to the meter.

Ex. 35

Rhythm is our most basic and important structural element. At a micro level, it controls the inner structure of each phrase and relationships between individual phrases. At a macro level, it controls the form of the entire musical composition.

In order to show you the importance of rhythm, I'll draw an analogy between rhythm and the body. Rhythm is the skeleton, controlling the basic shape; pitch is the muscle and flesh; arrangement and orchestration provide the clothes, makeup, and accessories. Without the skeleton, everything else collapses, yet few people notice or even think about it!

stress symbols

The notation of rhythm can be transcribed into stress symbols used in poetic scansion: / Primary Stress, // Secondary Stress, — Unstressed. Stress symbols demonstrate strong/weak relationships between rhythms that are not apparent with music notation.

Any group of two evenly divided rhythms forms a stress pattern of Strong / Weak —.

Ex. 36a Metric Stress

Ex. 36b Rhythmic Stress

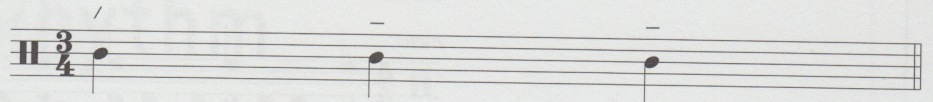
Any group of four evenly divided rhythms form a stress pattern of Strong /, Weak —, Moderately Strong //, Weak —.

Ex. 37a Metric Stress

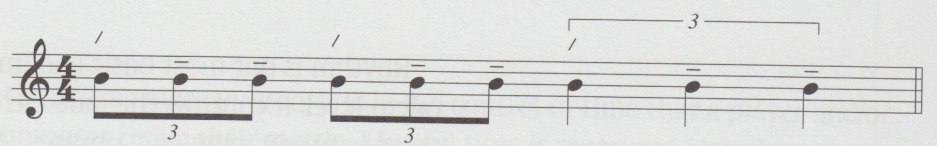
Ex. 37b Rhythmic Stress

Any group of three evenly divided rhythms form a stress pattern of Strong /, Weak —, Weak —.

Ex. 3.8a Metric Stress



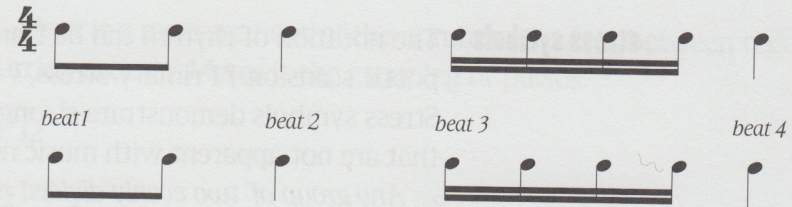
Ex. 3.8b Rhythmic Stress



summative stress

The stress pattern of a given rhythm reflects the concurrent metric stress and rhythmic stress. It also reflects the divisional or subdivisional stress pattern that has occurred in the rhythms of the previous beat. The combined result is called the *summative stress*.

Ex. 3.9 Given Rhythm



Metric

/ — // —

Rhythmic

/ — / (-) / — // — / (- // -)

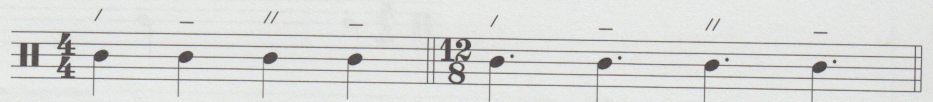
Summative

/ — // / — // — //

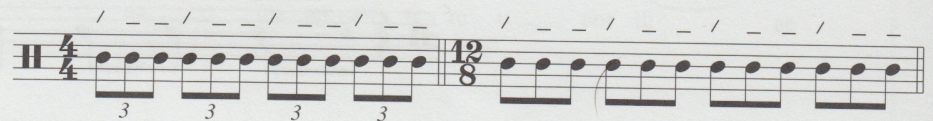
Metric stress always has a summative effect on whatever level of division or subdivision of the beat is taking place.

In compound meters or in duple meters containing triplet rhythms, the stress patterns work summatively with each other.

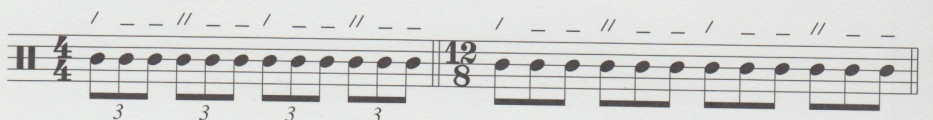
Ex. 3.10 Metric Stress



Divisional or Subdivisional Stress



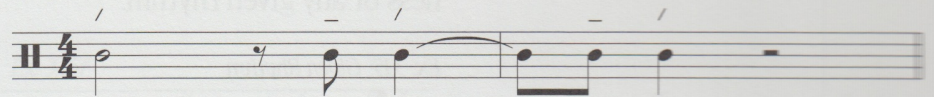
Summational Stress



additional considerations in stress

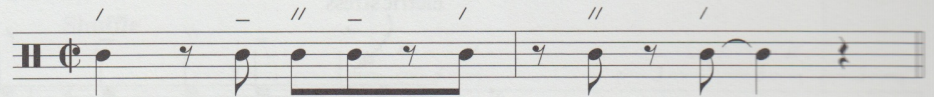
Syncopation, the accenting of a normally weak beat or part of a beat, causes the syncopated note(s) to be more heavily stressed.

Ex. 3.11



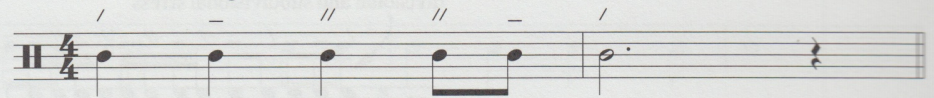
Anticipations receive the stress of the beat anticipated and an additional stress due to the syncopation.

Ex. 3.12

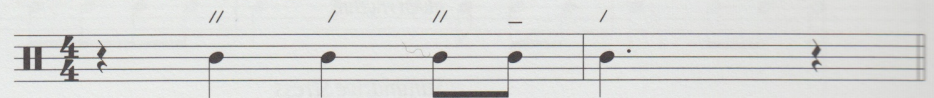


A note following a rest receives more emphasis (unless it is less than the value of the note that it follows, in which case it is simply acting as a pickup to the following beat). See beat 2 in the examples below.

Ex. 3.13a Note sounding on the first beat

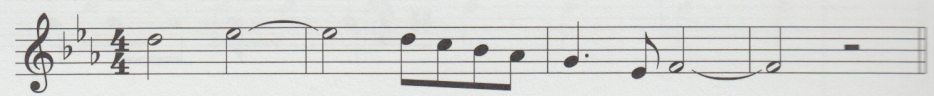


Ex. 3.13b Rest on the first beat

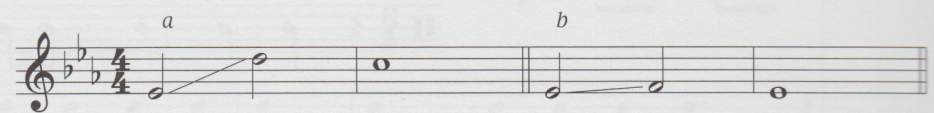


The most important factor in determining how much stress a note receives is the relationship of its rhythm to the meter and to the rhythmic divisions or subdivisions taking place within the meter. Other factors contributing to how much stress a note receives are 1) duration, 2) pitch, 3) accent and 4) dynamic level.

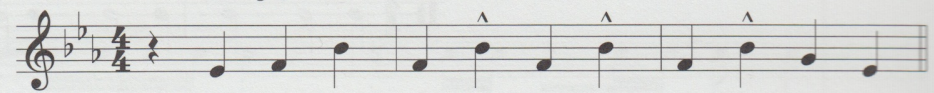
Ex. 3.14a Duration



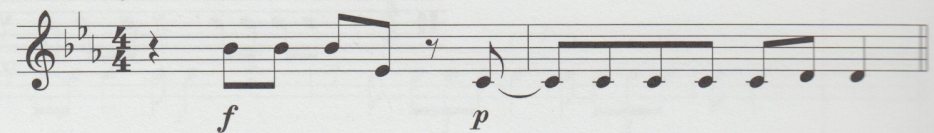
Ex. 3.14b Pitch (compare a to b)



Ex. 3.14c Accent (including syncopation and anticipation)



Ex. 3.14d Dynamics





Melodic Rhythm and Phrasing

Now that we've studied the various factors involved in choosing the pitches of a successful melody, we're going to look at what is known as the *melodic rhythm*, or placement of those pitches in time.

Throughout my years of teaching songwriting, I've found weakness in effective use of melodic rhythm to be one of the most common deficiencies of beginning songwriters. Frequently a student will play a song for me that has a solid verse and a well-written chorus, yet somehow there is no "magic." Often one of the reasons for this is that the student has failed to use *contrast* in melodic rhythm between the sections of his or her song. Virtually every hit in the last three decades, from pop to country to hard rock to R&B, whether rhythmically simple or complex, features some sort of contrast in this area.

We're now going to examine in depth the various aspects of melodic rhythm that we can use to create contrast. Our study will primarily concern itself with two areas: the qualities of the individual notes in a melody and the way those notes combine to form groups known as phrases. While a thorough knowledge of these principles

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will not guarantee you a hit song, it will certainly help you to avoid perhaps the most common pitfall in melody writing.

Rhythmic Accents

Think of the hook of the Righteous Brothers's "You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling" (co-written by Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil). Now imagine the beginning of the chorus of the Eagles' "Hotel California" (co-written by group members Don Henley, Glenn Frey, and Don Felder). Now bring to mind the hooks of Madonna's 1986 hit "Papa Don't Preach" (written by Brian Elliot with additional lyrics by Madonna) and Babyface's 1994 chart-topper "When Can I See You (Again)." Although these hits span four decades, they all have one thing in common: a distinctive and "catchy" set of rhythmic accents to the notes of the hook melody that make it virtually impossible to forget. Even if your hooks don't have memorable melodic rhythms like these, a working knowledge of the various possibilities in the realm of rhythmic accents will help you create effective contrast between sections.

The first type of rhythmic accent we're going to examine is the so-called "straight" rhythmic pattern, where all the accented and emphasized words fall *on the beats of the measure*. With this type of melodic rhythm, notes between the beats are used primarily to connect those that fall on the beat. An example occurs in the chorus of Diane Warren's "If You Asked Me To," which was a Top 10 hit for Celine Dion in 1992.

The musical notation shows a melody in 4/4 time with a key signature of one flat. The first line of music has lyrics "If you asked me to, I just might" and the second line has "change my mind and let you in my life for - ev - er." Chords F(add9) and C(add9) are indicated above the staff. The rhythm is a straight pattern where accented words fall on the beats.

The opposite of so-called "straight" rhythm is what we refer to as *syncopated* rhythm, where most of the important notes fall on off-beats or anticipations of strong beats. This type of rhythmic accent pattern occurs quite frequently in contemporary music, as in the

chorus of Toad the Wet Sprocket's "All I Want," which was a Top-Twenty hit in the same year.

C Am7
All I want is to feel this way, to be
Dm7 G
this close, to feel the same.

Notice that the notes accompanying the emphasized lyrics ("all," "want," "feel," "way," etc.) fall on anticipations of strong beats rather than right on the beat. Listen to the difference in feeling between the melody of this song and that of "If You Asked Me To" that is created by these "pushes."

It is important to remember that neither type of melodic rhythm is inherently superior to the other; only that interest is created by alternating them throughout the course of a tune. An excellent example of this variety occurs in the Burt Bacharach/Hal David classic "Walk On By," as recorded by Dionne Warwick. The verse begins with a more regular rhythm (like that of "If You Asked Me To").

Em7
If you see me walk in' down the street

The hook, however, is quite syncopated, with two of the three notes falling on the offbeats.

Em7 Dm7
Walk on by

The effective use of contrast is one of the factors that have enabled writers such as Bacharach to continue to write hit after hit through the years.

Note Durations

Another simple and effective way of creating contrast in melodic rhythm is by altering the *number* of notes per beat. Melodies that

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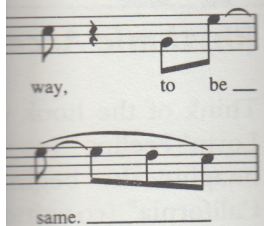
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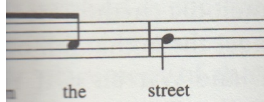
make extensive use of sixteenth notes, or even long passages of repeated eighth notes, have a completely different feeling from those built on quarter, half, and whole notes. For example, listen to the chorus of John Michael Montgomery's 1994 country hit, "Be My Baby Tonight," written by Ed Hill and Rich Fagan.

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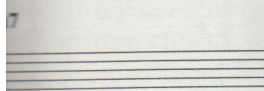


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"If You Asked Me To"

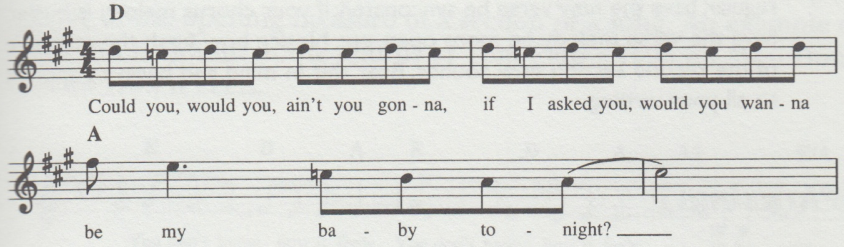
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interest is created by
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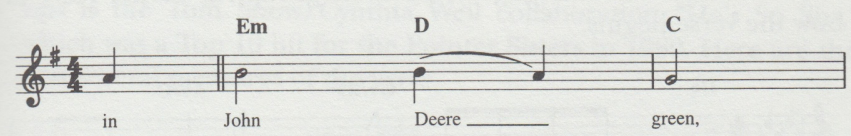
two of the three notes



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Notice that the first two measures contain sixteen notes—the maximum number of eighth notes that could possibly be squeezed into that space. Now compare it with the beginning of the chorus of another country hit of the '90s, Joe Diffie's "John Deere Green" (written by Dennis Linde), which contains only three notes (plus a slur) in the same number of bars.



As with the choice of rhythmic accents, there is no "magic" number of notes per bar that will guarantee a great melody. What is important is that the different sections of a song include notes with a variety of durations to retain the attention of the listener. A song that does this most effectively is the Michael McDonald/Kenny Loggins collaboration "What A Fool Believes," which won a Grammy for Song of the Year in 1979 as recorded by McDonald's band, the Doobie Brothers. Although the song is written in a basic eighth-note groove (see Chapter 19) and does not make use of any sixteenth notes, the melodic rhythm of the verse is still quite busy, with eighth notes outnumbering quarter notes by more than three to one, and only one pause in the entire first six and a half measures. The pre-chorus (the section that begins "She . . . had a place in his life"), on the other hand, features several whole notes and extended rests, which provide relief from the more active verse melody. This is a prime example of the effective use of contrast in note duration.