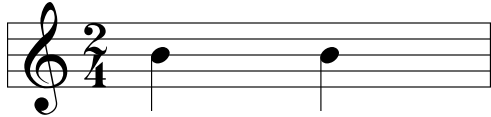


Unit 14 ~ Time Signatures, Part 2

In unit 13 we discussed simple and compound time signatures. In this unit, we'll take a look at hybrid time signatures (also known as 'complex time signatures').

In simple and compound times, we have a certain number of beats in the bar (the top number) and each beat is the same length. For example, in 2/4 we have two beats in the bar, and each beat is a quarter note long:

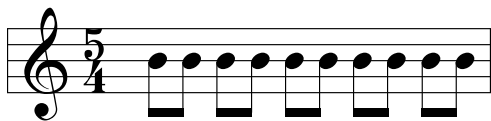


In hybrid times, we still have a certain number of beats in the bar (e.g. 2), but they aren't always the same length. For example, we could have a hybrid bar with two beats, but the first beat might be 2 quarter notes long, and the 2nd beat might be 3 quarter notes long. The result would be a bar of 5/4:



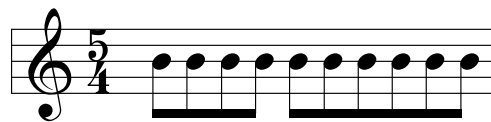
Generally hybrid time signatures are built from combinations of groups of 2, 3, or 4. The above example is a group of 2 beats plus a group of 3 (or 3+2, depending on where you place the accent).

When beaming in hybrid times, there are some general guidelines but also a certain amount of flexibility in some cases. For example, if the above 5/4 measure were subdivided into eighth notes, we could beam them like this:



Here, the first beat is beamed just like a measure of 2/4, and the 2nd beat is beamed like a measure of 3/4

Or we could beam the eighth notes 'by the beat', like this:



If the music really has a 2+3 feel, then this is a good way to beam, since it shows clearly the two beat groups.

There are MANY possible combinations and therefore many possible time signatures. However, hybrid time signatures will often have 5, 7, or 10 as the top number, and, as with simple and compound times, you can often think of them as being duple, triple or quadruple.

When 5 is the top number, this is generally a 2+3 or 3+2 pattern, as in the examples on the first page. This would be a duple hybrid time as there are two main beat groups in the bar.

When the top number is 7, this could be 2 beats in the bar (e.g a group of 4 and a group of 3):



or 3 beats in the bar (e.g 3+2+2, or 2+3+2, etc). This would be a triple hybrid time:



In a sense, these time signatures can be thought of as amalgamations of beats of simple time and beats of compound time. For example, in the example above, the first beat can be thought of as a beat from a bar of 2/4 or 4/4, and the 2nd beat can be thought of as a beat from a bar of 6/8.

10 can also be a top number; to construct such a bar, you might use 3+2+3+2. This would be quadruple hybrid:



Examples from real music:

The theme from the TV show/movie series *Mission Impossible* is in a time signature with 10 as the top number, grouped 3+3+2+2 (and played very fast).

The first movement of Leonard Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms* is in 7/4.

For more details and examples, search "time signatures" in Wikipedia.