

# LESSON 13

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## CHOOSING A TIME SIGNATURE

Although some time signatures can be interchangeable from a purely mathematical perspective, composers make time signature choices based on a variety of (sometimes subtle) factors.

### 1. Musical Feel and Flow

The primary objective is to communicate the desired rhythmic feel and flow of the music. This impacts the meter (eg. duple, triple, or quadruple). Next, consideration must be given to a simple time signature (one where the primary beat is subdivided into 2 equal pulses) or compound time (one where the the primary beat is subdivided into 3 equal pulses.) If neither of those options will communicate the desired musical effect, a complex time signature may be selected. In addition, tempo indications must be considered. Slow tempos will often impact the feel and flow of music.

Other factors that might influence one time signature selection over another where both are mathematically equivalent (i.e. 2/2 and 4/4) have to do with harmonic rhythm and/or melodic accents. If the music has a structure such that most chord changes happen every two beats, and it is more natural to tap your foot twice per bar rather than 4 times per bar, 2/2 may be the appropriate choice rather than 4/4. Similarly, two measures of a 3/4 could be confused with one measure of 6/8. But 3/4 is more likely to have a chord change or other emphasis on the third quarter, whereas 6/8 will rarely have a chord change on the third eighth of three. The beat in 6/8 is two to a bar, counted by the dotted quarter note.

### 2. Legibility and Impact on Performer

A time signature selection will impact musical notation. A larger bottom number (shorter note value for the beat) usually implies more complex rhythm notation. It can also imply a faster rhythm, even though we understand that tempo is a distinctly different concept than rhythm. This may impact the number of flags and/or beams that are required. This in turn affects ease of sight reading and/or performance.

### 3. Tradition

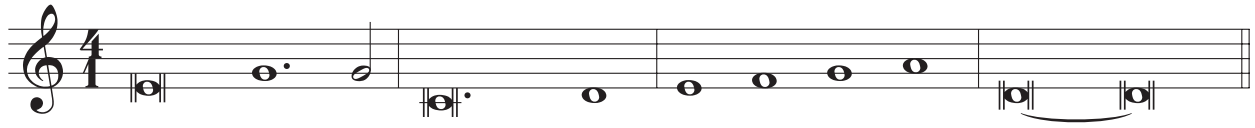
Historically, different time signatures have different connotations and traditions. The following examples illustrate the association of certain time signatures with certain traditions.

- $\frac{4}{4}$  most common time signature used for rock music
- $\frac{2}{2}$  generally used for marches and fast orchestral music
- $\frac{6}{8}$  used for jigs and also for marches

### 4. Inner Rhythmic Experience

A time signature selection and the ensuing notation can affect the way a veteran performer experiences time. This is a subtle process that develops after performing a huge array of differently notated meters.

The following examples illustrate some of the considerations that must be taken when selecting a time signature. A familiar tune has been rendered in 7 different simple quadruple time signatures. Which one do you think is the best fit for this musical selection?



The next examples illustrate the impact that changes in meter and compounding have on time signature selection.

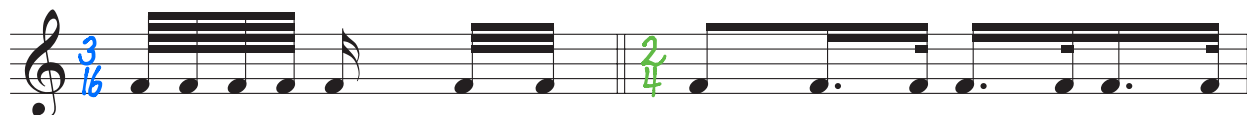


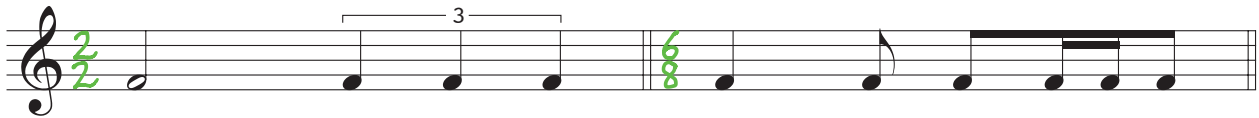
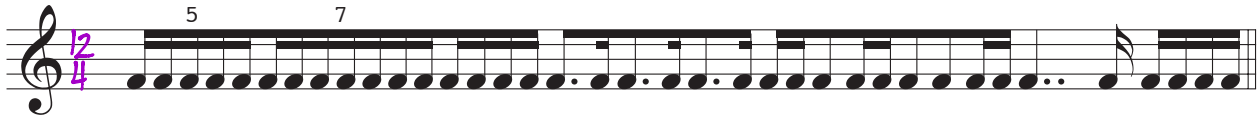
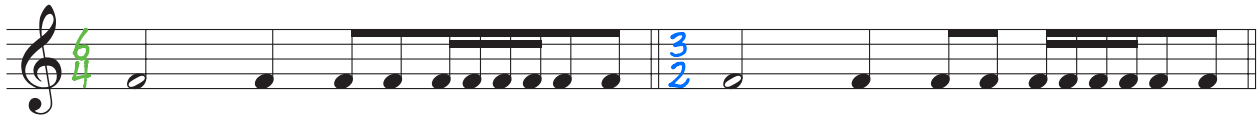
O Ca - na-da! — Our home and na-tive land. —

# PRACTICE

1. Add time signatures to the following one-bar musical excerpts. Choices will include all simple and compound meters studied in Level 3 and 4. Each time signature will only be used once. The chart below will help you organize your selections.

	Simple Time				Compound Time		
Duple Meter	$\frac{2}{2}$	$\frac{2}{4}$	$\frac{2}{8}$	$\frac{2}{16}$	$\frac{6}{4}$	$\frac{6}{8}$	$\frac{6}{16}$
Triple Meter	$\frac{3}{2}$	$\frac{3}{4}$	$\frac{3}{8}$	$\frac{3}{16}$	$\frac{9}{4}$	$\frac{9}{8}$	$\frac{9}{16}$
Quadruple Meter	$\frac{4}{2}$	$\frac{4}{4}$	$\frac{4}{8}$	$\frac{4}{16}$	$\frac{12}{4}$	$\frac{12}{8}$	$\frac{12}{16}$





2. Correct each of the following rhythm notation errors in the blank staff provided.



