

# Feeling Polyrhythms

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These are some exercises to help with:

- A) Internalising the feel of polyrhythms.
- B) Developing left/right hand independence.

There are probably many other exercises out there that address this issue but I couldn't find one that did exactly what I wanted, so I gradually developed this out of necessity.

NOTES:

- I think these exercise works best on the piano but you can do it just as easily with no instrument at all using your fingers or hands on a drum or table or your legs when you are sitting on a train etc...
- All the notes + chords are superfluous. Put them through all keys or adapt them any way that works. I used various pentatonic based patterns & chords here because I like the sound.
- The exercises in this PDF concentrates on divisions of QUARTER notes only i.e. quarter note divided by 3, quarter note divided by 5 and quarter note divide by 7. Once you can feel the basic polyrhythm try adapting it to different durations.
- Although most people are familiar with the feel of a quarter note triplet, it's included here because it's a good way to understand how the exercise works and can help steady up the triplet feel as well.
- These exercises was adapted from a page in Gary Chaffee's excellent book "rhythm and meter patterns" which is highly recommended if you want to get deeper into the subject. Also influential in the development was NY based jazz drummer Christian Coleman who invented syllables that flow off the tongue naturally for extended tuplets. Go see him play.

## HOW TO PRACTICE THE EXCERCISES?

1. Set your metronome on a slow tempo, 40 BPM is a good start.
  2. Each excercise is divided into 3 sections. **a)** Start by verbalizing the subdivision until you get a solid feel happening. **b)** play the relevant subdivision in the left hand and play the polyrhythm in the right. **c)** swap hands.
  3. Do this for **a long time**. (i.e. hours,days, weeks or months). After you get comfortable gradually increase the tempo.
  4. When you reach a certain tempo you will no longer be able to *say* the subdivision, so **just play them**.
  5. The **final step** (when you are really feeling the tuplet internally) is to stop playing the 5 or 7 subdivision and *instead* play only the quarter note (as a chord works well).
- When you can acheive step 5 comfortably you will have internalised the feel of 4 against 7 or 5 against 3 etc and also increased independence. This can open up alot of opportunities in improvising and composition. Enjoy!

### EX. I: 3 against 4

I.a

Musical notation for exercise I.a. The right hand (treble clef) plays a sequence of quarter notes: 1, a, 2, a, 3, a, 4, a. The left hand (bass clef) plays a sequence of chords: 1, 2, 3, 4. The syllables '1', '2', '3', '4' are in red, and 'a' is in black. Brackets group the syllables in pairs: (1 a), (2 a), (3 a), (4 a).

I.b

Musical notation for exercise I.b. The right hand (treble clef) plays a sequence of chords: 1, a, 2, a, 3, a, 4, a. The left hand (bass clef) plays a sequence of quarter notes: 1, a, 2, a, 3, a, 4, a. The syllables '1', '2', '3', '4' are in red, and 'a' is in black. Brackets group the syllables in pairs: (1 a), (2 a), (3 a), (4 a).

I.c

Musical notation for exercise I.c. The right hand (treble clef) plays a sequence of quarter notes: 1, a, 2, a, 3, a, 4, a. The left hand (bass clef) plays a sequence of chords: 1, 2, 3, 4. The syllables '1', '2', '3', '4' are in red, and 'a' is in black. Brackets group the syllables in pairs: (1 a), (2 a), (3 a), (4 a).

2 EX. II: 5 against 4

II.a

1 e + a pa 2 e + a pa 3 e + a pa 4 e + a pa

II.b

1 e + a pa 2 e + a pa 3 e + a pa 4 e + a pa

Once the triplet is internalised only play quarter notes instead of subdivision (play a chord, not single note)

II.c

1 e + a pa 2 e + a pa 3 e + a pa 4 e + a pa

EX. III: 5 against 3

III.a

1 e + a pa 2 e + a pa 3 e + a pa

III.b

1 e + a pa 2 e + a pa 3 e + a pa

III.c

1 e + a pa 2 e + a pa 3 e + a pa

EX. IV: 7 against 4

IV.a

1 e + a pa ka da 2 e + a pa ka da 3 e + a pa ka da 4 e + a pa ka da

IV.b

1 e + a pa ka da 2 e + a pa ka da 3 e + a pa ka da 4 e + a pa ka da

IV.c

1 e + a pa ka da 2 e + a pa ka da 3 e + a pa ka da 4 e + a pa ka da

EX. V: 7 against 3

V.a

1 e + a pa ka da 2 e + a pa ka da 3 e + a pa ka da

V.b

1 e + a pa ka da 2 e + a pa ka da 3 e + a pa ka da

V.c

1 e + a pa ka da 2 e + a pa ka da 3 e + a pa ka da