

# Syncopation

= a temporary displacement of the normal accent

The normal accents in 4/4 time are on the down beats and the first and third beats are usually considered to be the strong accents. When a down beat is not struck, syncopation occurs naturally. Syncopation is used in all kinds of music to add the feeling of "rhythmic surprise." The unexpected feeling that comes from syncopation makes music more exciting. When we hear something with a syncopated rhythm, it catches our attention more so than something that is just falling on the expected beats. Most of the music up to this point has had only a tiny amount of syncopation and usually in the form of the dotted quarter note followed by the single eighth note.

1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

This example contains no syncopation as the notes are falling on the down beats.

1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

A tie on to the following down beat produces syncopation. Notice that the same thing can be written in two different styles. Generally, the dotted note is better in this situation.

1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

Notice that the two tied eighth notes can be written as a quarter note between two single eighths.

1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

poorly written measure

Although the tied eighths can be written as a quarter note, the second measure in this example is rhythmically confusing.

Syncopated passages are usually written in such a manner that the reader can see the half way point in the bar. In the fourth staff (above) the first measure shows the clear division in the bar. In the next measure, the half way point in the bar is in the middle of the quarter note and it is not visible. Perhaps more accurately put is that you should be able to see the beginning of the third beat in a bar of 4/4 time.

When rhythmic problems occur it will be wise to follow these steps:

1. Tap your foot "on" the beat and count out loud. Drum the rhythm of the notes with your fingers.
2. Tap foot on the beat, count silently and drum the rhythm.
3. Tap foot on the beat, drum the rhythm and read note names out loud in rhythm.
4. Tap foot on the beat, count out loud and play the music.
5. Tap foot on the beat, count silently and play. Listen carefully to what you are playing.

Tapping the foot on the beat can be more difficult than one might imagine. When the rhythm is syncopated, the foot often taps when a note is not being played.