

TIME SIGNATURE

Time signature refers to two figures, one written on top of the other, used to show the number of a particular beat in each bar of a piece of music

What this implies, is that for every piece of music there is a time signature at the beginning.

Types of time signature:

- (a) Simple time signature
- (b) Compound time signature

Simple time signature comprises of three types:

Simple duple ($\frac{2}{2}$, $\frac{2}{4}$, $\frac{2}{8}$ and $\frac{2}{16}$),

Simple triple ($\frac{3}{2}$, $\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{3}{8}$ and $\frac{3}{16}$)

Simple quadruple ($\frac{4}{2}$, $\frac{4}{4}$, $\frac{4}{8}$ and $\frac{4}{16}$).

Compound time signature comprises of three types:

Compound duple ($\frac{6}{2}$, $\frac{6}{4}$, $\frac{6}{8}$ and $\frac{6}{16}$),

Compound triple ($\frac{9}{2}$, $\frac{9}{4}$, $\frac{9}{8}$ and $\frac{9}{16}$)

Compound quadruple ($\frac{12}{2}$, $\frac{12}{4}$, $\frac{12}{8}$ and $\frac{12}{16}$).

Notice that upper figure for simple duple is 2, that of simple triple is 3 while that of simple quadruple is 4. The upper figure for compound duple is 6, that of compound triple is 9 while that of compound quadruple is 12.

Interpretation of time signature

To interpret a time signature correctly, you need to know what the upper and lower figure stands for. The upper figure stands for number of beats while the lower figure stands for value of beat. The value of each lower beat is given below

LOWER FIGURE	VALUE OF BEAT
2	Minim beats
4	Crotchet beats
8	Quaver beats
16	Semiquaver beats

Knowing this, it is now easy to interpret any given time signature. All you need to do is to name the number of beats together with the value of beats in a bar. See the examples below:

TIME SIGNATURE	INTERPRETATION
$\frac{2}{4}$	Two crotchet beats in a bar
$\frac{4}{4}$	Four crotchet beats in a bar
$\frac{6}{8}$	Six quaver beats in a bar
$\frac{12}{4}$	Twelve crotchet beats in a bar

Summary

Time signature refers to two figures, one written on top of the other, used to show the number of a particular beat in each bar of a piece of music

Time signature is of two types: simple and compound time signature. Simple time signature is further divided into simple duple, triple and quadruple while compound time signature is further divided into compound duple, triple and quadruple. The upper figure represents number of beats while the lower figure represents the value of beats.

Review questions

1. What is time signature?
2. Give the two types of time signature.
3. The three types of simple time signature are _____, _____ and _____
4. The three types of compound time signature are _____, _____ and _____
5. Interpret the following time signatures
(a) 4-2 (b) $\frac{12}{16}$ (c) 3-4