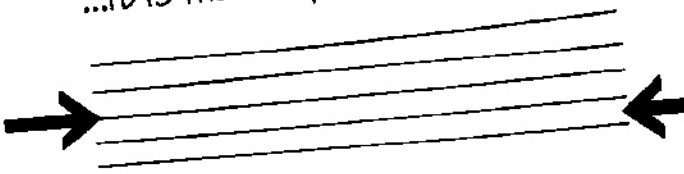
This is a STAFF...

...it is made up of LINES and SPACES.

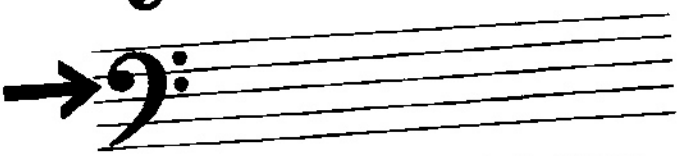
This is a LINE.  This is a SPACE.

There are THREE STAVES...

a. the TREBLE STAFF...indicated by:

the TREBLE CLEF SIGN 

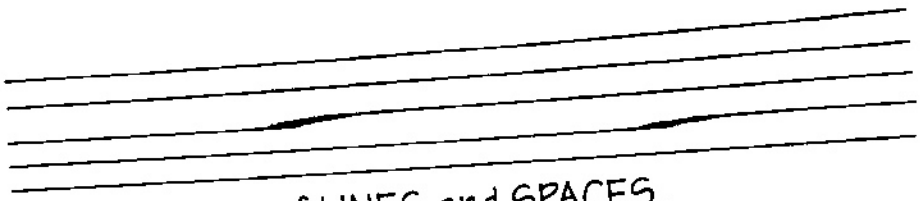
b. the BASS STAFF...indicated by:

the BASS CLEF SIGN 

c. the GREAT STAFF... a combination of the Treble AND Bass clef staves.

The two staves are joined together by a large bracket at the left side of the staff.

This is a STAFF...

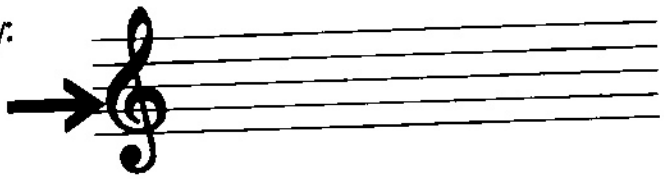


...it is made up of LINES and SPACES.

This is a LINE.  This is a SPACE.

There are THREE STAVES...

a. the TREBLE STAFF...indicated by:

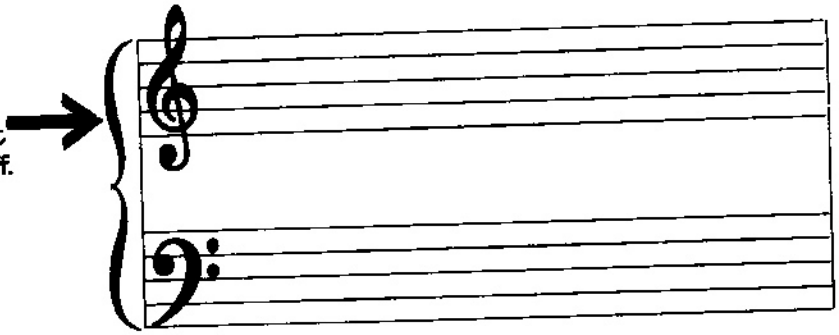
the TREBLE CLEF SIGN 

b. the BASS STAFF...indicated by:

the BASS CLEF SIGN 

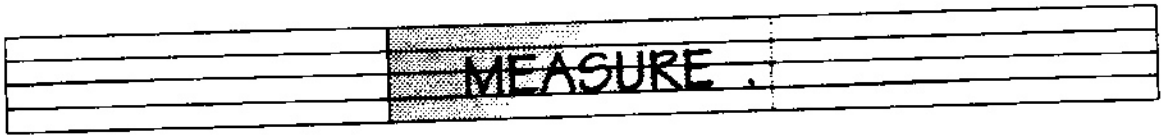
c. the GREAT STAFF... a combination of the Treble AND Bass clef staves.

The two staves are joined together by a large bracket at the left side of the staff.

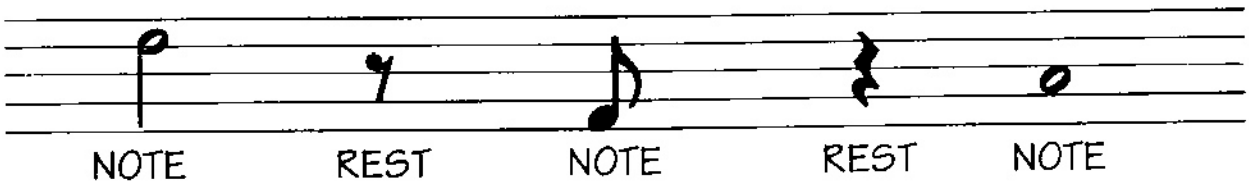


Staves are divided by vertical strokes called BAR LINES.

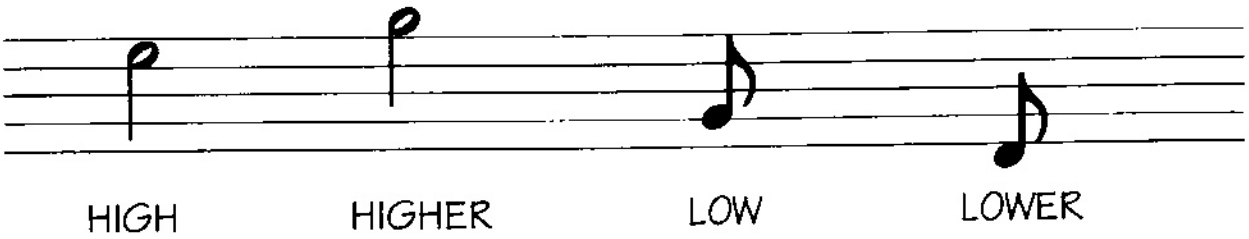
These delimited areas BETWEEN the vertical Bar Lines are called BARS or MEASURES.



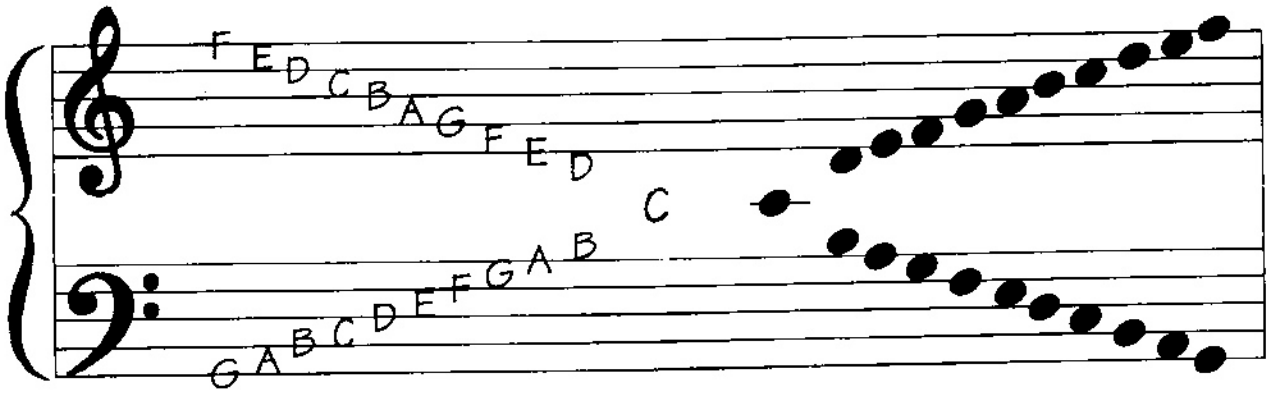
SYMBOLS are placed on these lines and spaces to indicate which SOUNDS are to be sung (or played). These SOUND SYMBOLS are called NOTES. Another set of symbols, called RESTS, is used to indicate WHEN and HOW LONG sounds are NOT sung or played. (A sort of musical YIN & YANG).



Depending on where (which LINE or SPACE), these notes are placed, a PITCH is indicated. PITCH refers to how "HIGH" or "LOW" a note sounds when produced by a voice or musical instrument. (There's a complex technical explanation for this... but you're not going to get it here. I hated physics!).

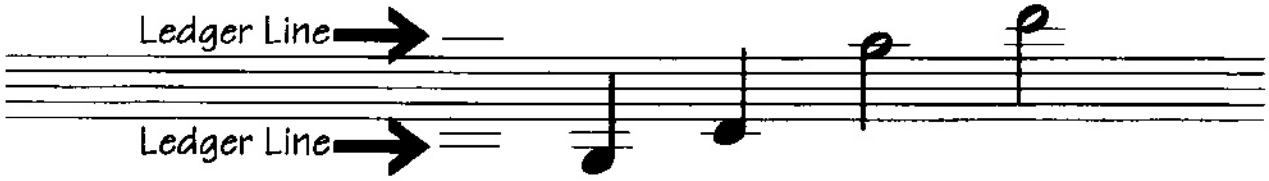


"SO," you ask inquisitively, "How does one refer to these symbol "thingumajigs"? I'm glad you asked. Some long-gone soul got tired of counting lines and spaces, so he decided to give them names. When "Alice, Ben, Carol, David, Eunice, Fiona and Grace" didn't seem to catch on, he decided to use just the INITIALS... A,B, C, D, E, F, and G. Not very catchy I'll admit... but utilitarian!



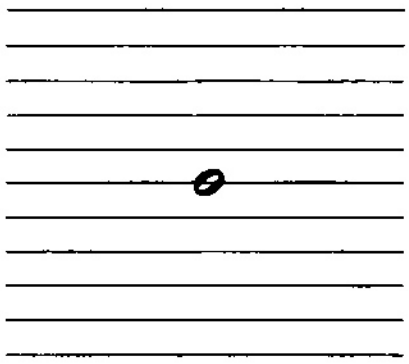
(I know, I know... he used the same names over and over again... hie thee to the next page and don't ask the unanswerable questions. It will all come together by and by!)

Notes can and do extend ABOVE the treble staff and BELOW the bass staff. These notes are written with the aid of LEDGER LINES.



The word LEDGER is from a Middle English word that meant "to put in a stationary place." The large flat stone placed on top of a tomb was known as the LEDGER stone. (The same root word also gives us: Ledge). Will these etymological wonders never cease?

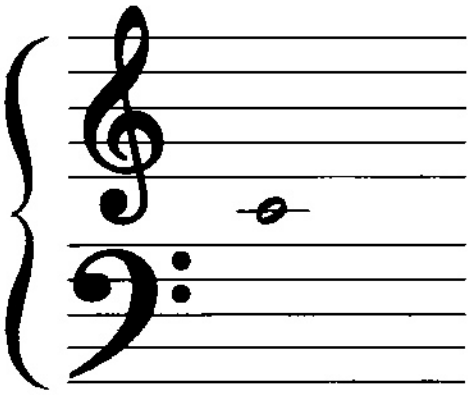
I'll bet you wonder where all this stuff came from! In the earliest days of written music the GREAT STAFF was composed of ELEVEN LINES. This proved to be very difficult to read... so the CENTER LINE (the "C" Line) was removed. Of course the "C" line was still necessary, so a short line was drawn through the body of the note to represent the line that once was. It is likewise no accident that the "C" note is also to be found in the center of the piano keyboard.



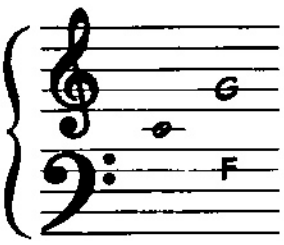
The top five lines became known as the TREBLE clef (i.e. HIGH pitched) and the bottom five lines became the BASS clef, (i.e. LOW pitched). A BRACKET was added to bind the two clefs together... and presto-chango... you have the Great Staff as we now know it!

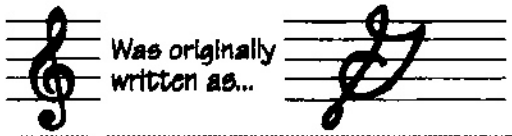
TREBLE

BASS



The word "CLEF" is a French word which literally means "KEY". This "KEY" unlocks the code that we know as musical notation. The Treble Clef is referred to as the "G-Clef." Notice how the line named "G" is encircled by the bottom curl of the Treble Clef symbol. The Bass Clef is referred to as the "F-Clef." That symbol's two dots surround the "F" line. Now isn't THAT special? Where did these CLEF SYMBOLS come from??? SEE BELOW...

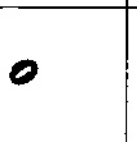
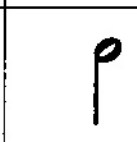
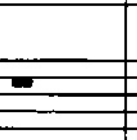
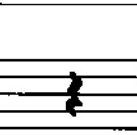
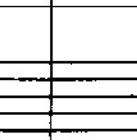
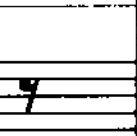




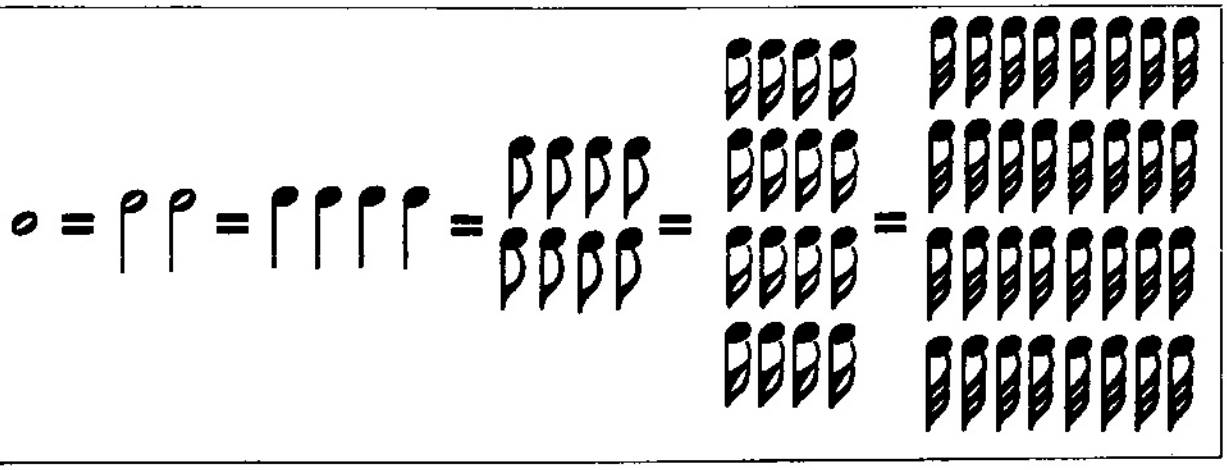
NOTES and RESTS

By its position on the staff, a note indicates WHICH PITCH is to be sung or played. The FORM of the NOTE indicates HOW LONG a pitch is to be sung or played (this length of time is referred to as the VALUE of the Rest or Note). If NO note is to be sung or played, the REST symbols are used to indicate WHEN, and HOW LONG.

Notes and Rests are referred to generically by the use of names based on their VALUE. Because 4/4 (four-four) time is the most often used TIME SIGNATURE (more about this in just a few moments) in western musical notation, the NAMES for both NOTES and RESTS are based on that note or rest's VALUE as it relates to music written in 4/4 time. The following chart contains FORMS and VALUES for notes and rests.

WHOLE	HALF	QUARTER	EIGHTH	SIXTEENTH	THIRTY-SECOND
					
					
1	1/2	1/4	1/8	1/16	1/32

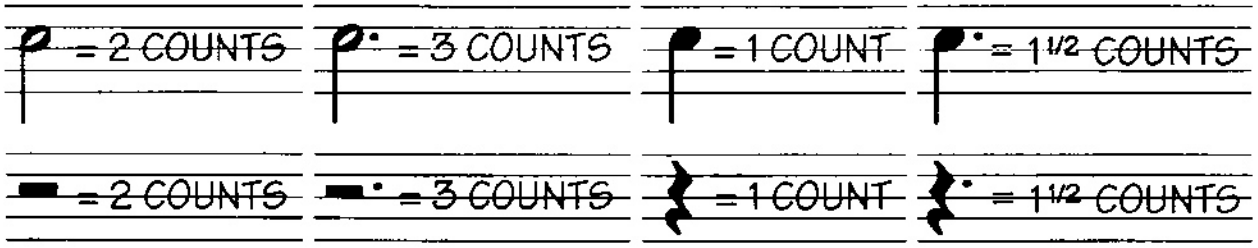
OR..looking at it another way...



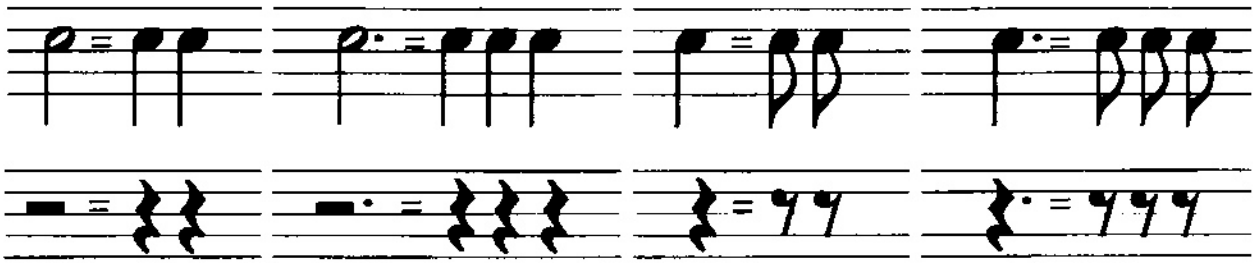
Another little bit about Note and Rest values (you KNEW there would be MORE, didn't you?)...

See this DOT? 

Placing a DOT just to the right of any Note or Rest INCREASES the VALUE of that Note or Rest by ONE-HALF of its natural value.



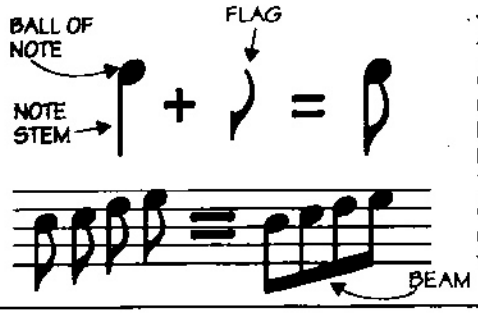
ANOTHER way of looking at the same thing...



IT IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER...

These NOTE and REST VALUES remain constant... regardless of the TIME SIGNATURE in use. It would be too unhandy to remember a different set of values for each and every time signature. EXAMPLE: In 3/4 time, a half note is still called a half note, and is still valued at TWO COUNTS. (We've got enough arithmetic to remember as it is!)

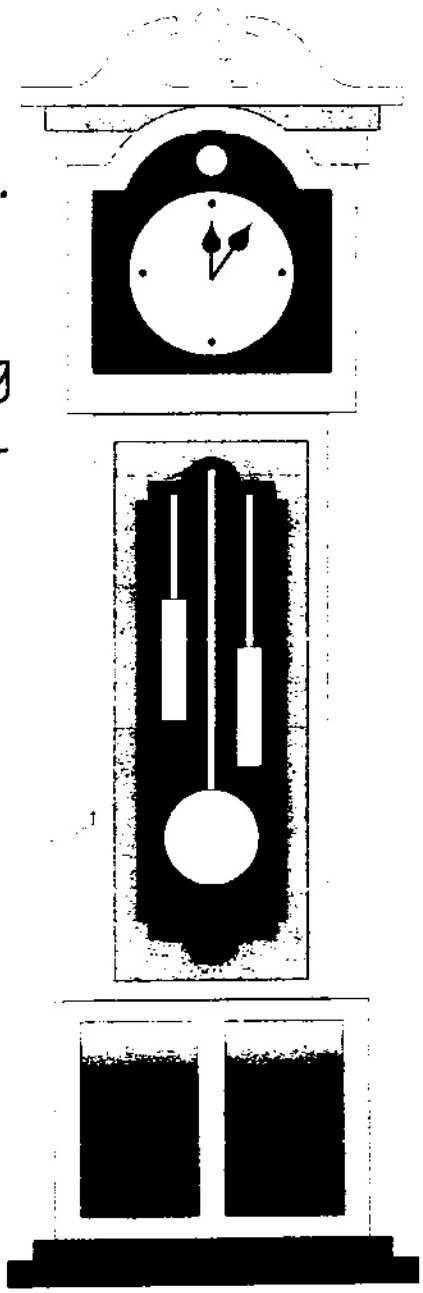
Here's yet ONE MORE thing you must know about NOTE FORMS:



You have probably already noticed that notes with a value of LESS THAN ONE (eighth, sixteenth, etc.) are indicated by attaching one or more little "flags" to the stem of the note. It is often easier to read groups of these notes if they are joined together. This is done by connecting two or more of the notes together with a single line known as a BEAM. One beam is used to connect EIGHTH NOTES, TWO beams are used for SIXTEENTH NOTES, and so forth. Usually, in vocal notation, you will not see the beam unless more than one note is sung ON THE SAME SYLLABLE. The main reason for this is to keep the individual notes associated with individual syllables.

TIME

In ANY form of collaborative music, one of the MOST IMPORTANT elements is TIME. In order for musical performers to stay together, to be cohesive, they must sing (or play) with PRECISION. ALL performers MUST have the SAME UNDERSTANDING OF TIME and NOTE VALUES if they really want to MAKE MUSIC TOGETHER.



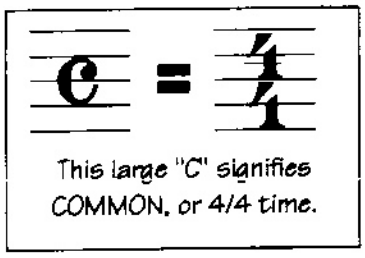
In order to know WHEN to sing a note...and for HOW LONG to sing or play it... you MUST become familiar with the following:

TIME

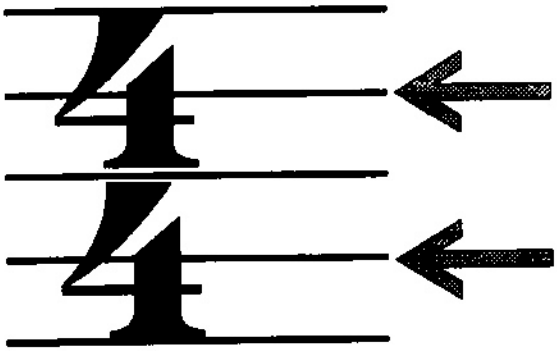
The MOST common division of TIME in music notation divides each measure into FOUR PULSES, or "BEATS" per measure. This division into equal units is indicated at the beginning of each staff by the use of a device that looks remarkably like a common fraction. If it helps you to remember it by thinking of it that way, GREAT! (Could you then be said to be mnemonically possessed?) In any case, this little fraction-looking gizmo is known as the **TIME SIGNATURE**. If we continue this look-alike analogy we can refer to a NUMERATOR and a DENOMINATOR. (Now, aren't you glad you paid attention in grammar school?) Our "Numerator" (you're right... it's the one on TOP), indicates how many PULSES, or beats, there will be per measure. The DENOMINATOR indicates the VALUE of the note assigned to the pulse.

PLEASE NOTE

The SPEED, or frequency, at which these pulses occur is called TEMPO. There are fast tempos and slow tempos and a lot of IN-BETWEEN tempos. The TIME SIGNATURE, however, HAS ABSOLUTELY NOTHING TO DO with FAST or SLOW!!!

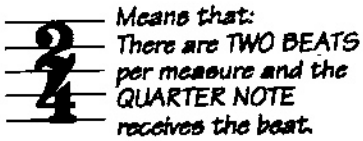


This large "C" signifies COMMON, or 4/4 time.

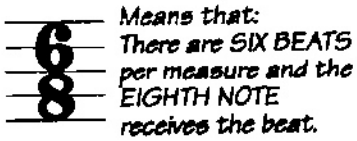


The number ON TOP means that there are FOUR PULSES or BEATS, in EACH MEASURE... until otherwise indicated by a different "numerator" in the time signature.

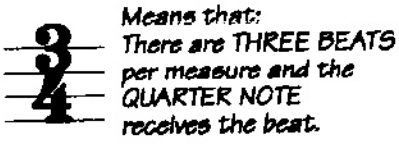
The number on the BOTTOM means that the QUARTER NOTE is used to give VALUE to the pulse. Or as it is usually expressed... "the quarter note "RECEIVES THE BEAT".



Means that: There are TWO BEATS per measure and the QUARTER NOTE receives the beat.



Means that: There are SIX BEATS per measure and the EIGHTH NOTE receives the beat.

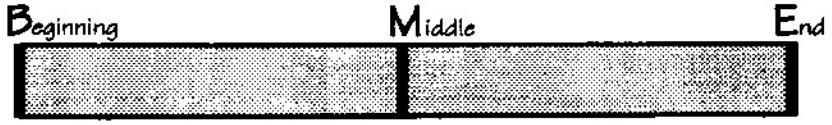


Means that: There are THREE BEATS per measure and the QUARTER NOTE receives the beat.

"But what about FAST and SLOW... how does all this RELATE to SINGING... and being TOGETHER?" he asked noteworthily. For the Beginning, middle and end of the story, continue on the next page!

To UNDERSTAND time, beat, tempo and note values I thought this little graphic device might help...

ONE "BEAT"

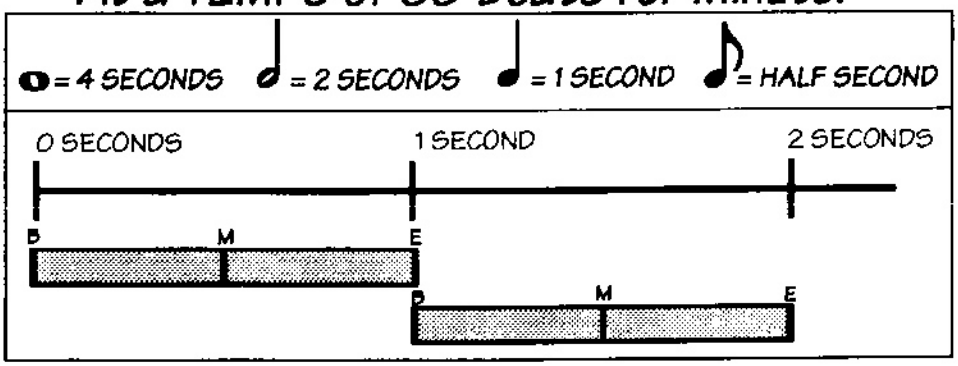


Burn into your mind's eye, if you will, this DIAGRAM of a note's VALUE. Note also, (no pun intended), that this VALUE has a Beginning, a Middle and an End. How long it takes to get from beginning to end DEPENDS ENTIRELY on TEMPO. The tempo is EXPRESSED in BEATS PER MINUTE. It stands to reason that the MORE beats per minute, the SHORTER will be the time allotted to each note... and, converseley... the FEWER the beats per minute, the LONGER the time allotted to each note.

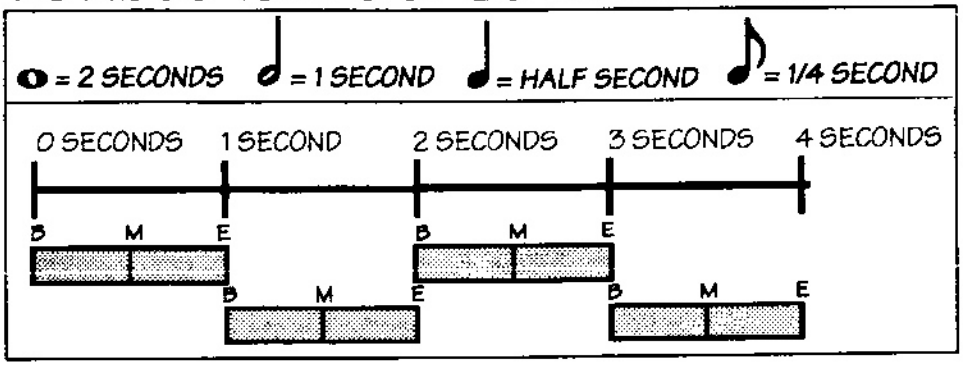
Look at it THIS WAY...

Say, for example, that the tempo was set at 60 beats per minute and the QUARTER NOTE "received the beat"... that means that each quarter note would have a VALUE (duration), of ONE SECOND.

At a TEMPO of 60 Beats Per Minute:



BUT...at a TEMPO of 120 Beats Per Minute:



WATCH your DIRECTOR! THINK TIME! FEEL TIME! Staying AWARE is the key to musical success!

Now it's time to consider how all this is used to create MUSIC. Just how DOES our 8-letter musical alphabet produce such aural wonders? Our Western music is based on a HARMONIC METHOD known as

OCTAVE EQUIVALENCE

This is most easily visualized by looking at a piano keyboard. The octave (from the Latin meaning "eight"), is made up of 7 white keys and 5 black keys, for a total of twelve parts called SEMI-TONES or HALF-STEPS. I know, I know...7+5=12, 7-5=3, 12+3=15,subtract your age, add your social security number... and then where does the 8 in OCTAVE come from? When you are singing, or counting up or down the scale by LETTER NAMES, starting on "C" for example, the next time you encounter a note named "C" is a distance of EIGHT tones! All of our scales are constructed with this same 12 semi-tone formula. (This can get very complicated, but for our "survival" purposes it is not necessary to go much further. Don't worry about it...just accept it for now! It's a lovely musical mystery to ponder on a rainy day. Besides...if and when your director feels there is a need to go into greater detail you can bet he will.)

Sounding the notes from left to right, by whole or half-steps, the pitch is raised...that is, each succeeding tone is HIGHER than the last. Raising a note by a HALF step "sharpens" that note, making it sound "higher". Similarly, lowering a note by one half step is said to "flatten" the note, or "lower" it. This is indicated on your music by these symbols:

♯=SHARP ♭= FLAT ♮= NATURAL (or CANCEL)