

maintains the integrity of the piece of music and vision of the composer while allowing everyone to contribute to something new.

The more complicated the composition, the tighter and more adaptable all the players must be.

In general, drummers stick to the original time signature, but an advanced drummer may—based on the harmonic and melodic rhythms—play whatever time signature she or he chooses. It must be smooth though, and all the players must have an unspoken understanding of and agreement with what's going on.

Before moving on to complicated compositions, learn to identify the time in simple ones.

4/4 Time

Listen to a classic tune such as “Hey Jude” by The Beatles. You will hear the chords change every bar. The melody uses half, quarter, and eighth notes, and the time signature is 4/4. As you listen, pat your foot and clap your hands. This is a straight-forward and somewhat elementary approach, but it works. Understanding 4/4 and how to identify the time signature in simple situations will ground you when complex musical challenges come along.

3/4 Time

The mother of odd time signatures is 3/4. An example of 3/4 time is “Little B’s Poem” by Bobby Hutcherson. Like “Hey Jude,” the tune’s melody is composed of half, quarter, and eighth notes with the chords changing every bar on beat one. The time signature is 3/4, and the style is a jazz waltz. While singing the melody, check out the third bar. It’s a dead giveaway. When singing the third measure, pat your foot, clap your hands, and it should become clear that this melody’s time signature is 3/4. Again, this is a basic approach but will be useful when tackling more complex tunes. Some **charts** are not as forgiving. The time signature may change within the piece of music. Alan taught his students to master 3/4 time because without mastery of it, creative flow is inhibited when playing the odd time signatures that follow.

5/4 Time

Listen to a standard tune such as “Take Five” by Dave Brubeck. Notice the 3+2 harmonic rhythmic phrasing. Adding this harmonic rhythmic phrase helps the drummer identify this as 5/4. As you did while listening to “Little B’s Poem,” to identify 3/4 time, pat your foot, clap your hands, and sing the melody. The harmonic phrase reoccurs after the fifth beats. We could count this as a 3/4 - 2/4 melodic/harmonic phrases or as a simple 5/4 phrase. Either way of counting is, in my mind, correct. But remember, the composer is the ultimate authority.

Identifying the Time Signature in Complex Situations

Now that you can consistently identify 4/4, 3/4, and 5/4, listen to what I played with The Dave Holland Quintet on a tune called “Prime Directive.” This is a complex situation. The