



Review of Daniel Kazez, *Rhythm Reading: Elementary Through Advanced Training*, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997).

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ABSTRACT: The second edition of *Rhythm Reading* is a thorough revision that improves upon its predecessor throughout. The book contains a variety of exercises and musical examples, and the author addresses several important notational topics that are neglected in competitive texts. However, shortcomings in the pedagogy, and a failure to address several issues of rhythmic performance found in the standard music literature, limit the usefulness of this text beyond the introductory stages.

[1] The ability to translate rhythmic notation into sound, and conversely, to translate sound into notation, is an essential skill that all musicians must master. The study of rhythm is a significant component of many music theory and musicianship programs. Pedagogical materials designed to help students to internalize rhythmic gestures and make immediate connections to notation take a variety of forms. Many sight-singing manuals, such as those by Robert Ottman, Samuel Adler, Arnold Fish and Norman Lloyd, and Paul Hindemith, contain graduated rhythmic exercises interspersed with melodic materials.⁽¹⁾ Other texts, notably those by Anne Hall, Robert Starer, and the text in question, are devoted exclusively to rhythmic pedagogy.⁽²⁾ By isolating rhythmic issues, these authors approach the topic more rigorously, and address a variety of musical issues that are neglected in those texts that address rhythm as one component among many.

[2] Readers familiar with the original edition of *Rhythm Reading*, published in 1989 by Mayfield Publishing Company, will find the new version superior in every way. The second edition offers a thorough revision, featuring improved pedagogy, a better sequence of exercises, more material for practice and in-class use, and more strategies for the student to achieve success in performing the exercises. In addition, the production value of this book is outstanding. The errors of musical typesetting that plague many musical textbooks are kept to a minimum in this volume, and the attractive page layout is very easy to read.⁽³⁾ The attractive typography and layout are far superior to the earlier edition, and to the Starer or Hall texts.

[3] *Rhythm Reading* is organized in four large sections. Unit I, Fundamental Rhythm Patterns, comprises roughly one half of the text, and presents “patterns that occur most frequently in Western music.” Unit II, Irregular Division of the Beat, presents “simple-meter exercises that use triplets and sextuplets and compound-meter exercises that use duplets and quadruplets. Quintuplets and septuplets are introduced in both meters.” Unit III addresses issues of syncopation, and Unit

IV presents excerpts from the literature.

[4] Of the three texts devoted exclusively to rhythm, *Rhythm Reading* is alone in its inclusion of excerpts from musical literature. These examples represent a wide range of musical styles, including folk songs from several cultures, passages from European classical music ranging from the fourteenth century to the present, and several compositions by north and south American composers. This direct connection with music as students experience it is one of the great strengths of *Rhythm Reading*. Students are encouraged to recognize rhythm as one musical component among many, and to place rhythm in a larger context of performance or aesthetic judgment. Further, the excerpts engage the visual problem of reading rhythmic patterns as they appear on a five-line staff, in the context that they deal with most often. Unfortunately, the relegation of these examples to the final chapters of the text compromises the usefulness of the excerpts. The excerpts, many of which are superb examples of the rhythmic procedures introduced in earlier sections of the text, would serve their purpose far better if they were integrated with the body of exercises in the first 180 pages.

[5] The entire section of musical excerpts could be supplemented effectively with several longer excerpts from the literature, both single lines and duets or larger ensembles. These excerpts can be used for a variety of purposes: to develop ensemble precision, to reinforce conducting issues, to point out various compositional devices, and to show how pitch considerations can influence rhythm in a compositional contexts. Further, longer excerpts are necessary to discuss issues of phrase rhythm and hypermeter, topics introduced by the author in Chapter 5. Instructors who use longer examples as supplementary material should also strive to find different editions and publishing styles, as these can present different visual challenges to the students. As a single example, one need only consider the visual problems of reading various editions that utilize the “backwards eighth rest” to represent a quarter rest. A diversity of genres and historical styles can also provide material for discussion of rhythmic performance issues that are dependent on stylistic considerations (Baroque overdotting, ornamentation in a variety of styles, “swing” eighth notes, etc.).

[6] The author’s composed exercises, which comprise the bulk of material in the text, appear in a variety of tempi, and include single-line exercises, two-part exercises designed for one performer, and two- and three-part exercises designed for class ensemble performance. Tempi are indicated by standard Italian terminology (Starer’s exercises do not indicate tempo; Hall combines terminology with suggested metronome markings). Most of the exercises also include a expression and dynamic indications, requiring the students to perform the exercises musically. I believe that the exercises could include even more expression markings, such as a greater variety of tempo markings in a different languages, as well as tempo modifications and fermati. A creative instructor could introduce such markings into some of the exercises, or one student could conduct another’s performance and “cue” various tempo modifications and dynamic changes. The ensemble exercises are particularly interesting and well conceived, introducing a variety of compositional procedures such as augmentation/diminution canon, variation techniques, and hocket.

[7] The exercises are organized within each section from simple to more complex performance problems, and a spiral learning approach based on individual rhythmic cells is espoused. The consistent use of rhythmic cells and the clearly ordered presentation will appeal to many instructors, and the variety of suggestions for performance in the introductory sections can be used to create an interesting classroom approach to the material. Further, new cells are derived from earlier ones in a way that makes visual and aural sense to the student. The author is particularly successful in treating “homonym” rhythms (cells that look different but sound the same). Hall and Starer are much less successful on this topic—both tend to rely on a single favored notation rather than showing a variety of correct possibilities.

[8] *Rhythm Reading* presents a wealth of information about musical notation, offering advice on correct choices between rhythms that look different but sound the same, and warning the student about potential errors of notation as new material is introduced. A number of notational signs that appear regularly in music, but infrequently in textbooks, such as those for repeating the contents of a measure, multi-measure rests, or measured and unmeasured tremolo, are presented clearly within the text and the exercises. The pedagogical suggestions typically refer to actual pieces, and they often point out fascinating issues that are neglected by most of the other texts available. A student working through this text chronologically with the guidance of a teacher should be able to negotiate most of the exercises successfully. The material is ordered very carefully, and each exercise is prepared by what has come before.

[9] In the preface, the author states that the text is “a comprehensive study of the rhythm patterns students are likely to encounter when playing, singing, conducting, teaching, composing, or studying music.” He also presents his pedagogical approach in this preface, demonstrating a variety of methods by which the text can be used. The use of rhythmic cells is presented as the primary pedagogical tool of *Rhythm Reading*, and these cells are presented in table format in Appendix B.

[10] According to the author, “Students learn to read rhythm not as individual notes but as groups of notes, which are presented in the text as “rhythm cells” (page xvii). This observation provides one of the great strengths of the book, but the reliance on cells as the exclusive tool for presenting a pedagogy of rhythm creates severe limitations. By placing emphasis on individual patterns, it is easy for the student and teacher to lose sight of larger issues of phrasing, or the motion of rhythmic patterns in time. In addition, the flexibility of accent and phrasing that is characteristic of musical interpretation and performance at a high level cannot be achieved through this approach. For much of the text, Kazez places a strong emphasis on accent that supports the notated meter signature, putting off all discussion of syncopation until the third unit. This late presentation of syncopation creates an artificial atmosphere that is separated from the world of music that students find in their lessons, ensemble experiences, and lives.

[11] The other pedagogical tool espoused in this text is the use of speech cues to learn new rhythmic cells (i.e., the student says “Beethoven” in a triplet rhythm). The success of this approach would probably vary considerably depending on the commitment of the individual instructor and the character of the class. Of greater concern is the inherent limitation of speech cues: they lock the cell into a particular accent pattern, thus rendering cross-rhythms more difficult to perform. I recommend, along with Kazez, that speech cues be used only to introduce a new pattern, and that they be dispensed with as soon as possible.

[12] The pedagogy is less successful in the later sections of the book. A close examination of Chapter 9, on irregular divisions in simple meter, reveals that the instructor using this text will need to provide large amounts of supplementary material to insure that the students will be able to perform the exercises successfully. The chapter begins with a clear discussion of irregular divisions of the beat in simple meter, and a chart of various beat divisions in simple duple time is presented on page 111. Kazez further presents some short examples from Ravel and Stravinsky to indicate the variety of notations a student will encounter for these rhythms, even within the same work. He advises the student of the need for flexibility in approaching irregular divisions, due to the inconsistency of approach taken by composers and publishers. He then states that “In the exercises below, the single most common and correct notation is used.” This limitation completely undoes the excellent preceding discussion. While I do not advocate presenting *incorrectly* notated exercises for the student’s frustration, it seems that students need to recognize a variety of correct notations. To limit the text to one of several correct notations does not meet the stated goals of the text, to present a “comprehensive” approach to the rhythmic patterns students encounter in music.

[13] The one-part exercises in this section proceed in the order triplet, quintuplet, sextuplet, and septuplet. This ordering is somewhat puzzling, as sextuplets are clearly related both to triplets and to traditional duple division of the beat, while quintuplets and septuplets present a far higher level of complexity and performance difficulty. Unlike earlier sections of the book, there are minimal suggestions for successful performance of these new rhythms, and their derivations, when relevant, are not built into the preparatory exercises. For example, the introduction of triplets here provides a clear opportunity to introduce changes of meter from simple to compound in which the beat value stays constant. In addition, while Kazez tells the student that triplets in simple meter are “borrowed” from compound meter, he does not show how sextuplet sixteenth notes can act as the bridge between duple and triplet eighths at this stage, and when he does make the connection two pages later, he limits the accentuation of the sextuplet to the non-syncopated version. This is understandable, given that the ordering of the text addresses syncopation of all types in Unit III, but the issue is not returned to at that point.

[14] None of the exercises in Unit II presents any further elaboration of the irregular subdivisions (for instance, rests within a tuplet figure, or unequal values within the tuplet figure). For examples of how this could be done, I recommend that the reader examine Hall’s *Studying Rhythm*, chapters 12 and 26, or, for a more rigorous presentation, Starer’s *Rhythmic Training*, chapters 5ff. Many of these more complicated tuplet figures appear in the musical examples found later in Kazez’s text (see, for instance, Exercises 422, 425, 428, 431, and 435). Students who have completed all of the exercises in the first three Units

of the text are not prepared when confronted with these patterns. Had the examples been integrated into the body of the text, as suggested above, it seems more likely that these pedagogical shortcomings would have been noticed and addressed.

[15] *Rhythm Reading* attempts to introduce students to larger issues of metric organization from the earliest sections of the text. Students are taught to conduct fast exercises “in one,” and hypermeter is introduced on page 74. These often neglected topics are crucial to a musician’s understanding of musical phrasing, and the author is to be applauded for including them in his text. Classroom instructors should expand on these introductions to the topics by bringing in supplementary materials and relating the concepts to those presented in harmony and analysis courses. Since hypermeter and phrase rhythm are defined in terms of specific features of harmonic analysis and the rate of harmonic change,⁽⁴⁾ it is impossible for this text to do more than introduce the ideas of larger rhythmic organization, and longer, more interesting examples of the flexibility of hypermeter and phrase rhythm would require lengthy digressions into pitch-related topics. I firmly believe that these digressions should be undertaken by the classroom instructor. As it stands, the introduction to the concept is sufficient within the scope of this text, although Kazez’s examples of hypermetric organization need to be longer for the concept to make sense to the student aurally: a four-measure passage is not enough music to represent four-bar hypermeter, any more than a single measure in common time is enough to represent the meaning of common time.

[16] In sum, the attractive layout, generally clear presentation, and wealth of material unavailable in competitive texts makes *Rhythm Reading* worthy of consideration for training musicians in the basics of rhythmic performance and notation. However, the inconsistencies of approach and organization in the later portions of the book will require significant supplementary work by the instructor who adopts this text for a complete sequence of rhythmic training.

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Footnotes

1. Robert W. Ottman, *Music For Sight Singing*, 4th ed. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1996); Samuel Adler, *Sight Singing: Pitch, Interval, Rhythm*, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997); Arnold Fish and Norman Lloyd, *Fundamentals of Sight Singing and Ear Training* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964); Paul Hindemith, *Elementary Training for Musicians* (London: Schott & Co., 1946).

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2. Anne Carothers Hall, *Studying Rhythm* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1989); Robert Starer, *Rhythmic Training*, (New York: MCA Music, 1969).

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3. I located the following small errors: page 37, “We Three Kings” is in c minor, not C major; page 82, Exercise 161 is the same as exercise 163—the wrong example seems to have been inserted here; page 187, the metronome marking for exercise 404 is incorrect—it should be dotted quarter = 60; page 195, an error of tempo change in exercise 423—the rhythmic values are reversed.

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4. William Rothstein, *Rhythm and the Theory of Structural Levels* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, 1981), and *Phrase Rhythm in Tonal Music* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1989); Carl Schachter, “Rhythm and Linear Analysis: Aspects of Meter,” in *The Music Forum* 6 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

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