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Approaching Music Notation

Music notation is a language and, as such, it must be communicable. The closer the notation adheres to common rules and guidelines, the more successfully the music will be performed. The rules and guidelines presented here will make the notation easier to read and will help to make the musical intent clear. Although these rules are not inflexible, they should not be ignored.

For music notation, the first priority is always clarity. Choices need to be made that are solely dependent on the situation; a rule may not provide the most desirable answer to a problem. (It would be an endless task to list every musical exception to a rule.) Problems are usually solved by deciding which rule is more flexible (least important to clarity).

Although meticulous adjustment can only clarify and beautify the notation, sometimes such attention to detail is not practical. All decisions must depend on a wide variety of situations. An understanding of the rules allows these choices to be made wisely—the notation can only be as good as the knowledge at hand.

About This Book

The *Essential Dictionary of Music Notation* is in an easy-to-use format, which includes cross referencing. At the top of each page, running heads show exactly which topic is being treated on that page. Bold treatments of text highlight important points for clarity and quick reference.

Text is accompanied by numerous examples directly related to the topic being discussed. These examples are kept as simple and complete as possible, with an emphasis on presenting correct and current notation practices. Obsolete rules are mentioned only when necessary.

The focus of this book has been narrowed, avoiding the discussion of orchestration or music theory, in order to present as much information as possible that is directly related to the actual *notation* of music. The serious musician is encouraged to seek out other sources that more thoroughly address the subjects of orchestration and music theory.

Whether you are using a pencil or a computer, all principles within this book are applicable. No computer software or specific tool is referenced, in order to make this a useful guide for any musician.

An *Index of Topics* is provided on the last page.

A *cappella*

Vocal music that is to be sung **without accompaniment** (a *cappella*) often has a piano part for rehearsal only.

The piano part may be full size or cue size (see *Cue notes*). If cue size, the staff should be cue size also. (Cue-size notes on a full-size staff are not as easy to read.)

The indication ***for rehearsal only*** should be clearly placed above the piano part.

A *due* (a2)

See *Sharing a staff*

A *tempo*

Place above the staff (sometimes within the grand staff) to indicate a return to the normal tempo. Used after tempo alterations such as ***ritardando***, ***accelerando***, ***più lento*** or ***ad libitum***. (See *Tempo marks*)

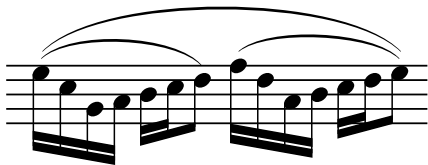
Accents

See *Articulations*

Notes within a **legato slur** are usually grouped under one bow-stroke. The bowing can change direction with the next slur.



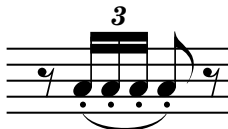
If two slurs are indicated, both may be phrasing slurs, or a combination of phrasing and bowing.



If a particular bowing is desired, [▣] or [∨] should be used.

If a particular technique is wanted, it is best to indicate it above the staff.

saltando



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