Rhythm Guide

Notated music tells the musician which note to play (pitch), when to play it (rhythm), and how to play it (dynamics and articulation). This section will explain how rhythm is interpreted at OLCHS.

Time and Meter

The beat is the pulse of the music. When you tap your foot to a song, you are tapping along with the beat. Most music is played with a steady beat. These beats are separated into groups of strong and weak beats. The way in which these beats are organized is called the meter. In pop music, the most common meter is of four beats where beats 2 and 4 are emphasized. If you have ever listened to any kind of dance music, you can anticipate when the music is going to take a breath. This is because we are so used to the meter or 4 that we can predict when things are going to happen.

Time Signature

There are many other meters besides 4 though and the way in which they are shown is through a time signature. The time signature is at the beginning of a piece of music or whenever the meter changes in a piece. The top number shows how many beats are in a measure and the bottom shows the denominator (bottom part of a fraction) of the note value that receives the beat. The numerator (top part of a fraction) for the note value that receives the beat is always one.

How many beats are in a measure

Denominator of the note value that gets the beat

A Quarter note gets the beat

Measures and barlines

A measure is a group of beats and they are separated by barlines. The end of a section of music is signified by a double barline. The counts start at 1 and go to however many beats are in the measure as dictated by the time signature. They repeat after every measure.

This example is in 4/4 time and is three measures long.