

MUSIC THEORY.aargh©

The Quarter Triplet in Simple Meter (Session 9)

By Dr. Ona Pinsonneault

February's Anthornis event will be arriving very soon along with Michael Glasgow. We have played his *Anthornis*, but this time he is bringing a new composition, *Healing Spirit*, (Choristers Guild #CGB754.) There is a rhythmic subdivision that is very often not performed properly, that is, in a simple meter, the two beat quarter triplet against single quarter notes. This pattern is found in measures 24, 30, 63, and 69. It is a great irregularity of rhythm and one that all ensembles need to perform accurately for the best interpretative results.

♩ = 60

Simple Meters, like the one in *Healing Spirit*, are those whose meter signatures have upper numbers of 2, 3, or 4. The beat is subdivided regularly into groups of two (counted: one-and-two-and), then into groups of four (counted: one-e-and-a, two-e-and-a). In **simple meter** there is no regular division of the beat into three equal parts. When an irregular division into three equal parts is used, the composer needs to add the symbol "3" to that irregular division, called triplets.

To further complicate matters, *Healing Spirit* irregularly divides not one beat but two beats into three equal parts. (Normal division of two beats would be 2 + 2 = 4 equal parts.) This is a sound when learned accurately will stun your listeners and amaze your choir! I suggest this kind of practice in order to master the irregular subdivision.

1. Establish a slow beat: *Healing Spirit* sets a tempo of quarter equals 60.
2. Tap quarter notes.
3. Subdivide each beat into triplets. (Eighth note triplets.)
4. Tie each of two adjacent eighth notes. (It is important to keep the eighth note triplets in your memory.) Actual notation is seen in the last measure of the first line, as shown above. Feel the irregular accent.

5. Divide the choir into two parts. The first part continues with quarter triplets, then begins again as in the first line. The second part performs half notes and quarter notes.
6. If the tapping begins to sound like syncopation, **stop and restart**. (Syncopation = eighth-quarter-eighth.) Very often the last of the quarter triplet is too short in length; listen for its duration.

By the way, *Crosswind* by Sondra Tucker has Changing Meters (see Session 7). In this composition the eighth note is constant throughout. Both *Anthornis* by Michael Glasgow and *The Passion Prophecy* by Cathy Moglebust are in **Simple Quadruple Meter** (four beats per measure with the beat subdivided into two and four parts.) Look over these scores to see the **regular** division of the beat into eighth notes and sixteenth notes. See Session 3 for a discussion of *Celtic Praise* by Kevin McChesney.

I hope to see you at Anthornis, February 8-9, 2013!

Until next time,

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