

Simple and Compound Time

The Basics

Every piece of music begins with a time signature. A time signature sets the pulse of the music.

Music which has beats divisible by 2 is in Simple Time. Music which has beats divisible by 3 is in Compound Time.

Examples of beats divisible by 2 are:



1 crotchet = 2 quavers



1 minim = 2 crotchets



1 quaver = 2 semi-quavers

Comparing two time signatures:

$\frac{3}{4}$ is simple time = 3 crotchets per bar = 6 quavers per bar

$\frac{6}{8}$ is compound time = 6 quavers per bar

So if both time signatures have 6 quavers per bar - why bother having 2 different time signatures?

Remember, simple time has beats divisible by 2 and compound time has beats divisible by 3.

So let's fill the bars with quavers:



Notice how the 3/4 bar has quavers grouped in 2s and the 6/8 bar has quavers grouped in 3s. Both phrases end with a dotted minim (worth 3 crotchets or 6 quavers).



To help understand how the two time signatures 'feel', let's add some words.



Don't forget to eat your peas!



Why don't you try eating ham?

Try out saying the words to the rhythms yourself and see if you can feel the difference. It might help to clap along - for the 3/4 bar clap every other quaver and for the 6/8 bar clap every three quavers.

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