

## READING 3

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# KEYBOARD READING 3

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## Chapter 1: Pickup Measures

Welcome to Keyboard Reading 3. We will continue our study of polyphonic reading on the keyboard, considering reading not only in terms of a single sound, but also with splits and multiple keyboard setups. We will look at pickup measures, strategies for sight-reading eighth and 16th note rhythms, lead sheet interpretation, melodic and harmonic transposition, multiple staves, and sight-reading using the volume pedal. Ultimately, our goal will be to apply this material to real world studio and live performance scenarios.

Let's begin with **pickup measures**. A pickup measure contains the note or sequence of notes which precede the downbeat in the first bar of the tune. It takes the form of an incomplete bar at the beginning of a piece of music. As a reader, your goal when confronted with a pickup measure is to come up with a strategy for counting into the tune.

For a simple example of a pickup measure, consider the following tune, "Pick Me Up at 8."

Ex. 1.1

### Pick Me Up at 8

Northern soul

Linus Lau

The musical score is for a piano piece in 4/4 time, marked 'Northern soul' and 'Linus Lau'. It begins with a pickup measure. The first system consists of four measures. The first measure is a pickup measure with a half note G4 and a half note F4. The second measure has a quarter note G4, a quarter note F4, and a quarter rest. The third measure has a quarter note G4, a quarter note F4, and a quarter note E4. The fourth measure has a quarter note G4, a quarter note F4, and a quarter note E4. The second system also consists of four measures. The first measure has a quarter note G4, a quarter note F4, and a quarter note E4. The second measure has a quarter note G4, a quarter note F4, and a quarter note E4. The third measure has a quarter note G4, a quarter note F4, and a quarter note E4. The fourth measure has a quarter note G4, a quarter note F4, and a quarter note E4. The score includes various fingerings (e.g., 1, 2, 3, 4, 5) and dynamics (e.g., *f*). The piece ends with a double bar line.

Take a look at the pickup measure. It consists of two 16th notes, equal in duration to an eighth note. A typical strategy would be to count an imaginary measure of 4/4 and the last eighth of that the pickup:

Ex. 1.2

1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

One feature of pickup measures that is somewhat unusual is that the last bar accounts for the beats missing from the pickup. In this diagram you can see that the last bar is missing its final eighth note; the pickup measure contains one eighth note, together adding up to a single 4/4 bar and preserving the correct total number of beats in the piece as a whole. Note that not every chart will observe this practice, particularly in more informal situations.

Ex 1.3

## Pick Me Up at 8

Northern soul

Linus Lau

Piano *f*

1 & 2 & 3 & 4

Let's look at a few different scenarios involving pickup measures.

Consider the tune below, "Chicken Pickup," a brief chart similar to something you might see in the studio on a jingle session. Unlike our previous example, this is an ensemble tune, with the pickup measure played only by the keyboard. In this situation, the other players in the band are depending on the keyboardist to play confidently and accurately so they can, in turn, accurately execute their downbeat! This is complicated by the syncopated nature of this particular pickup measure. Note that the pickup measure has just two beats, so to count in the tune you would count "1 & 2" and then come in on the third beat.

Ex. 1.4

## Chicken Pickup

Funky

Stephen Snyder

The musical score for "Chicken Pickup" is written in 4/4 time. It features three staves: Guitar, Clavinet, and Bass. The Clavinet and Bass parts begin with a pickup measure consisting of two beats, starting on the second beat of the first measure. The Clavinet part has a syncopated melody, while the Bass part provides a steady, rhythmic accompaniment. The Guitar part enters on the third beat of the first measure with a series of chords and a melodic line.

Since we are imagining this tune as a jingle in a studio, let's consider the possibility of a click track. A click track is an automated metronome set up by the recording engineer. It is synchronized to the ideal tempo of the project, and helps the musicians enter together and maintain that specified tempo throughout a recording.

Most often for a tune with a pickup, the recording engineer will offer to give you an extra bar of click before your entrance. This is *in addition* to the pickup measure's partial bar, as in the following diagram:

Ex. 1.5

The diagram shows a musical staff in 4/4 time. A dashed line labeled "Click" spans the first four beats of the first measure, followed by a second measure starting with a "1" on the first beat and a "2" on the second beat. The keyboard part begins with a pickup measure of two beats, starting on the second beat of the first measure. A red oval highlights the first two beats of the keyboard pickup measure, which occur during the second measure of the click track. The text "Keyboard enters" with a dashed arrow points to the beginning of the keyboard part.

Here you can see the six beats of the click (one bar up front, plus the two beats that precede the pickup notes). The keyboard entrance—which is the beginning of the chart proper—is marked in red.

Let's consider another scenario: a chart you might read at an awards ceremony gig. In this sort of situation, the band will have numerous cues to play as awards are given ("And the award goes to . . . famous actress!").  
Ex. 1.6

## You Like Me!

**Cinematic ballad**

Stephen Snyder

The musical score for "You Like Me!" is written in 4/4 time and B-flat major. It consists of three staves: Guitar, Strings, and Bass. The score begins with a pickup measure containing a 16th-note rest, followed by a full measure of music. The Guitar part features a melodic line with a pickup note and a full measure. The Strings part includes a complex arrangement of notes and rests, with a 16th-note rest at the start. The Bass part provides a rhythmic foundation with a pickup note and a full measure. The score concludes with a final measure for each instrument.

Unlike the previous example, here all three musicians enter together. The challenge then becomes making sure that everyone in the band has an extremely solid sense of the tempo, so that the pickup measure can be executed cleanly. Here, as in the previous example, the pickup measure has two beats, indicating a "1 2" count in. However, since the pickup measure begins with a 16th-note rest, it would be better to count "1 2 3" (where 3 is the beginning of the chart proper) so that the ensemble can come in strong after the initial 16th-note rest. On an actual gig of this nature, there would most likely be a conductor, making things a lot easier. In the absence of a conductor, it is up to a member of the ensemble (preferably elected beforehand!) to count the band in.



# Chapter 2: Examining a Chart

Let's now turn our attention back to our first example, "Pick Me Up at 8."

Ex. 1.7

## Pick Me Up at 8

Northern soul

Linus Lau

The musical score for "Pick Me Up at 8" is presented in a piano arrangement. It is in 4/4 time and begins with a pickup measure. The key signature is F major, with B-flat accidentals used for the notes B4 and B5. The score includes a dynamic marking of *f* (forte) and various articulations such as accents and slurs. The piece concludes with a final F major chord. The score is annotated with numerous fingering numbers (1-5) and articulation marks (accents, slurs) to guide the performer.

When given a piece of music for reading, even in a time-constrained environment like the studio, you will most likely have 30 seconds or so to examine it. As we learned in Keyboard Reading I, it is helpful to have a **checklist of things to note**. These are basic things: time signature, key signature, pickup measures, fingering (if present), repeats, rhythmic features, dynamics and articulations.

So for a tune like "Pick Me Up at 8," going through your checklist, you see that it is in 4/4 and that has a pickup measure equivalent to the value of an eighth note. It has detailed fingering and articulations (in the form of accents), as well as a great deal of eighth-note syncopations. But what key is it in?

Going by the key signature, you might think that it was in C. But the presence of all of those B-flats, coupled with the prevailing harmony and the fact that the piece clearly ends on an F major chord should lead you to conclude that it is in F major.

This is, in fact, an example of a tune in which the arranger has elected to use accidentals rather than a key signature. (You can find this sort of thing particularly in session music, where it may be assumed that the player will be sight-reading the chart one time only).



Having established the de facto key, let us turn our attention to the fingering. In a session situation, you may not see fingering that often, but when you do, it is just as important as playing the right notes! Without the right fingering, you could interrupt the performance tripping over your fingers. Make sure to get your eyes accustomed to observing the fingering as you read the notes. It is there specifically to help you play the material efficiently and comfortably.

The fingering here is detailed and a little tricky. Pay close attention to the right hand thumb jumping down between bars 1 and 2 and between bars 3 and 4. Also note the occasional finger substitutions, and the right hand thumb cross-under in bar 5. These may seem awkward, but are designed to maximize the legato quality without resorting to the sustain pedal.

Before we leave "Pick Me Up at 8," let's incorporate **reading on split patches**. Remember, splitting patches allows us to play two or more sounds on the same keyboard, a lifesaver when you need to play multiple sounds and you only have one keyboard! So, let's try playing "Pick Me Up at 8" using a split patch with acoustic piano in the left hand and a string sound in the right hand. Note that that the highest note of the left hand part is the G below middle C as in the diagram below:

Ex.1.8

## Pick Me Up at 8

Northern soul

Linus Lau

This means that you will want to split your patch at Ab or A below middle C. Below that point will be the piano patch and above it will be the string patch.

Ex. 1.9



# Chapter 3: Lead Sheet Reading

Up until now, we have been considering charts that are fully notated. For the rest of this unit, we will look at **lead sheets**. In many cases, a lead sheet contains just a melody and chord symbols, leaving it up to you to interpret the harmony and style in a way that complements the written melody.

Our first example is "Prague Rock":

Ex. 1.10

## Prague Rock

Linus Lau

The musical notation for "Prague Rock" consists of two staves. The first staff shows the melody in 3/4 time, starting with a pickup measure of two beats. The melody is written in D minor. Above the staff are chord symbols: Am, Dm, Bbm, Dm, Dm, Gm, Dm. The second staff continues the melody, with chord symbols: Gm, C, Dm, Gm, A7. The melody ends on a half note A4.

This has a distinctly Eastern European feel to it (hence "Prague" in the title). It is in the key of D minor, but note that the v chord in measure 1 is minor where one might expect major (as in the last bar). Note the substitution of Bbm where one would expect Gm in bar 1. In bar 5, the C chord seems to be a potential modulation to the relative major, but the harmony resolves back to D minor again. Finally, note that the tune ends on A7, the only dominant V in the tune.

We have been looking at pickup measures throughout this unit, and "Prague Rock" features an interesting variation. The pickup measure consists of two beats, but because the tune is in 3/4, the effect of it may initially feel awkward. Make sure to count a very strong "1" before entering!

Having looked at the skeleton of the piece, let's look at a few examples of how it could be fleshed out.

Here's an interpretation which retains a single line melody in the right hand, with chords in the left:

Ex. 1.11

The musical notation for "Prague Rock" in piano style consists of two staves. The first staff shows the melody in 3/4 time, starting with a pickup measure of two beats. The melody is written in D minor. Above the staff are chord symbols: Am, Dm, Bbm, Dm, Dm, Gm, Dm. The second staff continues the melody, with chord symbols: Gm, C, Dm, Gm, A7. The melody ends on a half note A4.