# READING 3

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#### **MI Curriculum Series**

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# unit one

### **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

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



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



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

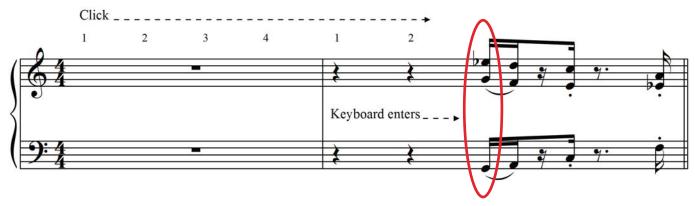
Consider the tune below, "Chicken Pickup," a brief chart similar to something you might see in the studio on a jingle session. Unlike our previous example, this is an ensemble tune, with the pickup measure played only by the keyboard. In this situation, the other players in the band are depending on 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

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



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



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 "12 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



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.

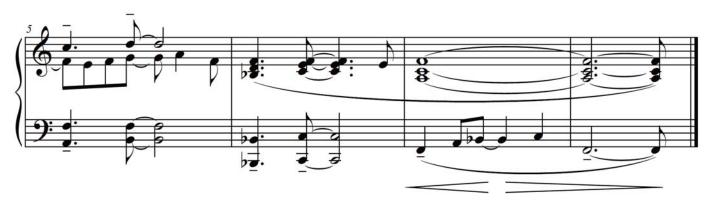
This is, in fact, an example of a tune in which the arranger has elected to use accidentals rather than a key signature. (You can find this sort of thing particularly in session music, where it may be assumed that the player will be sight-reading the chart one time only).

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.

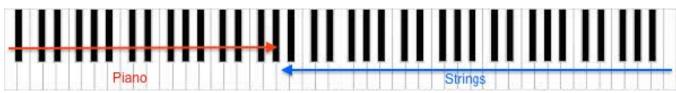
Before we leave "Pick Me Up at 8," let's incorporate **reading on split patches**. Remember, splitting patches allows us to play two or more sounds on the same keyboard, a lifesaver when you need to play multiple sounds and you only have one keyboard! So, let's try playing "Pick Me Up at 8" using a split patch with acoustic piano in the left hand and a string sound in the right hand. Note that the highest note of the left hand part is the G below middle C as in the diagram below: Ex.1.8





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

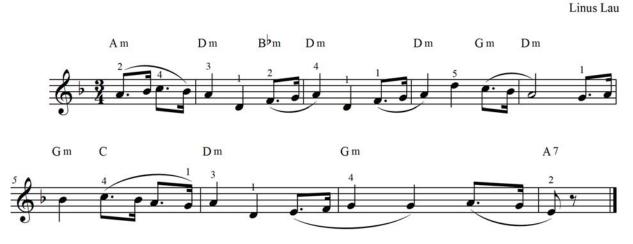


#### **Chapter 3: Lead Sheet Reading**

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



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:

