I N THE PAST MONTHS, we’ve ex-
plained eighth note triplets and quarter
note triplets. As a quick review, triplets
are notes that divide a particular value
into three equal parts as opposed to
two equal divisions. This month, Reading
Rhythms dives into another type of triplet:
sixteenth note triplets. If you’ve listened
to Ravel’s Bolero (used in the soundtrack
to the movie “10”), ‘yes, we all remember that
meme for the music. — Ed) then you’ve
heard sixteenth note triplets.

Remember the old rule for triplets —
three in the time of two! Well, three
sixteenth triplets are going to be played in
the same amount of time as two “regular”
sixteenths. We can also approach this in
another way. Since there are two “normal”
sixteenths to an eighth, there will be two
sixteenth triplets to each eight note.

Take a look at Example #1. In this
measure, you see a set of quarter triplets
which take up the first two counts of the
measure. Count three consists of a set
of eighth triplets, and count four contains
a grouping of sixteenth note triplets. Since
there will be three sixteenth triplets for
each eighth note, there are six sixteenth
triplets for the entire measure (the
value of one quarter note).

Example #2 shows one of the possible
ways to count sixteenth triplets. Just as
eighth note triplets can be counted with
a variety of syllables (one+uh-tuh; one+uh-
a+uh; one-la-le; tri-poh-le), sixteen triplets are
up for grabs too. Remember that the
counting system that you use is not as
important as being consistent. You can use
any syllables that you feel comfortable
with, as long as you use them all the
time.

I like these two choices (one+uh-tuh-
and+uh-tuh or one+uh-a+uh) because the
player gets a strong sense of a set of
triples falling on the number portion of
the count. Each set of triplets falling
on the “and” of the count.
The trick to playing even quarter note
triplets (see January ’89 issue) is to play
every other eighth note triplet. So, when
first learning to play sixteenth note triplets,
you might try playing eighth note triplets
with just one hand and then adding your
other hand to double the triplet’s speed.
Just as there are two eighth note triplets in
the value of each quarter note triplet,
there are also two sixteenth triplets in the
value of each eight note triplet.

Example #3 shows the relationship
between all three values of triplets that
have been covered so far. Since this
example is visually aligned in terms
of rhythmic values, it’s easy to notice
that there are two eighth triplets to each
quarter triplet, and that there are two
sixteenth triplets to each eighth triplet. If
you follow the sixteenth triplets all the way
up to the top line, you can also see that
there are four sixteenth note triplets to each
eight note triplet.

If these relationships seem to be
obvious, don’t take them for granted. Time
relationships between sixteenth, eighths,
and quarters are always the same, no
matter what number is above a group of
notes (shires, fives, sevens, thirteen,
etc.). If four sixteenths equal the value of
a quarter, then four sixteenth triplets equal
the value of a quarter triplet. And four
sixteenth notes that are inside a grouping
of eight will equal the value of a quarter
note inside a grouping of sixteen.

Example #4 shows two of the most
common variations of the sixteenth triplet
figure. For the first count of the example,
only the first eighth is subdivided into
the triplet. The value of the second eighth
(attacking on the “and” of count one) is
unaffected. In the second count of the
example, the eighth note on the “and”
syllable is replaced by a rest. As always,
you can replace any note in any count
by a rest. The third and fourth counts of
the example show what happens when only
the second eighth of the count is sub-
divided into the triplets. The counts under
the example will show you where each
number and “and” syllable occur.

Again, begin this month’s exercise
slowly. While you’re counting aloud, see
if you can feel the sixteenth triplet figures
working at the level of the eighth note.
After you get a feel for the exercise, try
increasing the tempo little by little. Once
you reach the speed where counting each
individual sixteenth triplet starts to get in
the way, count each eighth note and “feel”
the rhythms of sixteenth triplets inside
the eighths. This is one of the few times
when I’ll admit that counting each note may
hinder instead of help you.

Example #1

Example #2

RHYTHM MARCH 1989