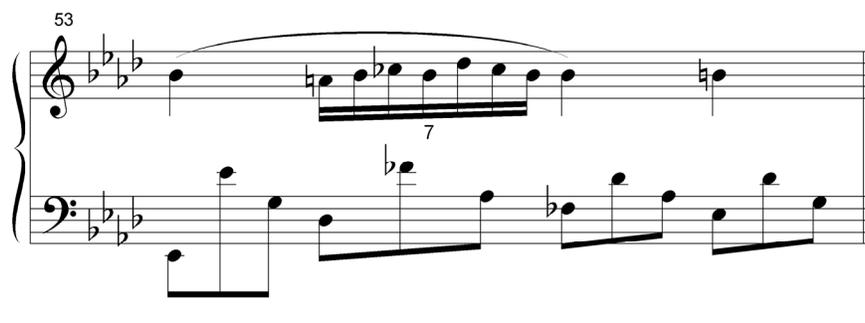


Use Simple Rhythms to Play Difficult Rhythms

Much piano music contains rhythms that go beyond basic quarter, eighth, and sixteenth notes. Often encountered are *tuplets*: quintuplets, septuplets, and more complex groupings that include various groupings of notes (typically eighth notes and sixteenth notes) distributed over one or more beats. One need only look at the Preludes and Nocturnes of Chopin, for example, to find seven and eleven eighth notes distributed over 3 beats (Nocturne in Bb Minor op. 9 no. 1), twenty-two eighth notes distributed over six beats (Nocturne in Bb Minor op. 9 no. 1), eight sixteenth notes distributed over three beats (Nocturne in Eb Major op. 9 no. 2), seven sixteenth notes and fourteen thirty-second notes distributed over three beats (Nocturne in B Major, op. 9 no. 3), and so on. Many more examples can be found throughout the literature of the piano.

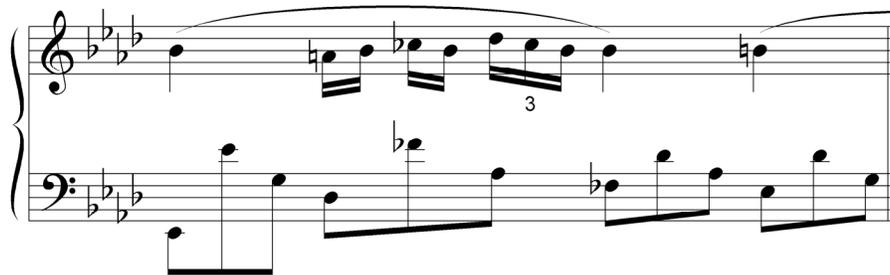
What makes tuplets challenging is not only playing them in a way that keeps them proportional (correctly distributed over the number of beats they occupy), but also coordinating them with the left hand. An approach that can make dealing with both of these challenges is to conceive of the tuplet as a simpler and more tangible rhythm. This simpler conception will make the rhythm easier to understand and play, and will "line it up" with the notes in the opposite hand. Then this more playable rhythm can gradually be adjusted and fine-tuned into the rhythm called for.

For example, in measure 53 of Chopin's Nocturne in Ab, op. 32 no. 2, the right has to play 7 sixteenth notes over the three (triplet) eighth notes in the left hand:



The image shows a musical score for measure 53 of Chopin's Nocturne in Ab, op. 32 no. 2. The score is written for piano and consists of two staves: a treble clef staff for the right hand and a bass clef staff for the left hand. The key signature is two flats (Bb and Ab). The right hand part features a septuplet of seven sixteenth notes, indicated by a bracket with the number '7' below it, spanning over a triplet of eighth notes in the left hand. The left hand part consists of a triplet of eighth notes, indicated by a bracket with the number '3' below it. The measure is marked with the number '53' at the beginning.

By reworking the right hand rhythm into two pairs of sixteenth notes and a triplet of three sixteenth notes, the rhythm is easily coordinated with the right hand and easier to play:



The image shows a musical score for measure 53 of Chopin's Nocturne in Ab, op. 32 no. 2, showing a simplified right hand rhythm. The score is written for piano and consists of two staves: a treble clef staff for the right hand and a bass clef staff for the left hand. The key signature is two flats (Bb and Ab). The right hand part features a simplified rhythm consisting of two pairs of sixteenth notes and a triplet of three sixteenth notes, indicated by a bracket with the number '3' below it, spanning over a triplet of eighth notes in the left hand. The left hand part consists of a triplet of eighth notes, indicated by a bracket with the number '3' below it. The measure is marked with the number '53' at the beginning.

Once it can be played in this simpler form, the notes in the right hand can be shifted around subtly so that the seven sixteenth notes can be played more correctly (proportionally even) over the three triplet eighths in the left hand. Some degree of feeling and experimentation will necessary; nevertheless, at this point one has acquired a foundation upon which the septuplet will be much easier to play.

In Chopin's Prelude in Db, op. 28, no. 15, the right hand plays groupings of seven in Measure 23:



Here, the septuplet can be converted into four thirty-second notes (played with the first eighth note on beat four) and three triplet sixteenth notes (on the second eighth note of beat four):



With some minor experimentation, the right hand can be adjusted so that all seven notes in the right hand can be played equally over beat four.

In a slightly more complex rhythm, a grouping of ten appears over six eighth notes in the second half of the measure:



Here the rhythm can be translated into a simpler right hand rhythm that matches up more easily with the left hand.

This technique can be used with any difficult rhythm that the right hand has to play with the left. Simple adjust the original rhythm to an easier version that avoids the unusual grouping using simpler, note values (eighths, eighth-note triplets, sixteenths, thirty-seconds, and so forth). Do so in a way that allows notes in the original rhythm of the right hand (that would normally not line up with notes in the left hand) to be played directly with notes in the left. Keep in mind that once you can play the easier version of the rhythm that you have created, you can subtly adjust it to become the more difficult one called for in the original notation.