

## Mensural Notation

*Mensural* (measured) notation, a system that included durational values as well as pitch, developed during the thirteenth century as the single melody and free rhythm of Gregorian chant or plainsong gave way to measured music that included parts, descant, and, later, harmony and counterpoint.

Figure 1.32 Thirteenth-Century Mensural Notation



## Present Notation

Our present system of notation evolved from thirteenth-century practices. The treatise on mensural notation, *De Musica Mensurabili (Ars Cantus Mensurabilis)*, by Franco of Cologne (active 1250–1280), contains fundamental rules of modern notation. The five-line staff appeared in the thirteenth century. Present-day conventional notation is more directly related to fifteenth- and sixteenth-century mensural notation. The later use of bar lines and square- or diamond-shaped notes brought notation very close to the form found today.

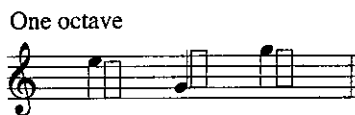
In the sixteenth century ledger lines were introduced, making it possible to extend the range of the staff. Our round notes developed when it was realized that they were easier to write and print. Although a fairly basic system has prevailed during the past three hundred years and we often think of the present system as static, notation has always been undergoing transformation.

## Applications

### Some Directions for Notation in Manuscript

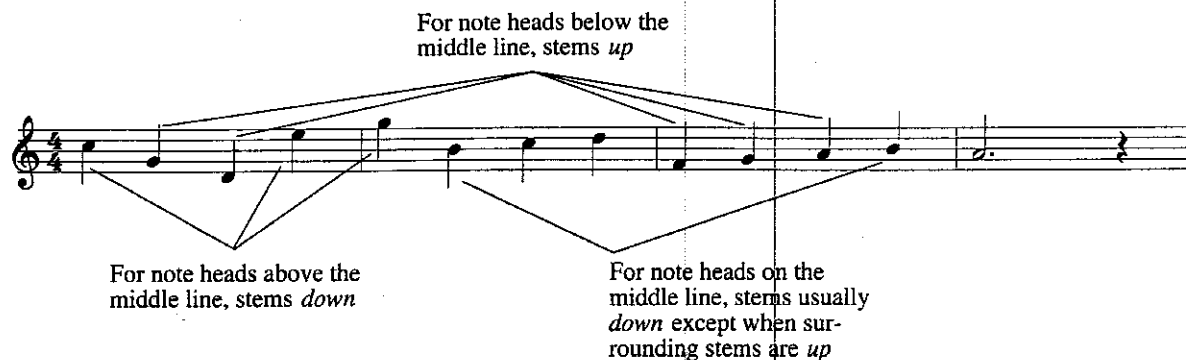
1. The stems of single notes within the staff should be about one octave in length.

Figure 1.33



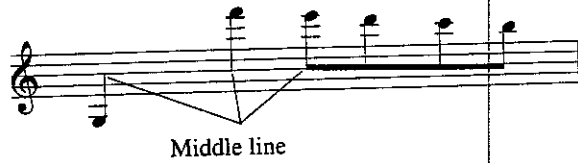
2. When a staff contains a single melody line only, stems go down on those notes above the middle line and up when the notes are below the middle line. When the note is on the middle line, the stem is usually taken down except when the stems of adjacent notes are in the opposite direction.

Figure 1.34



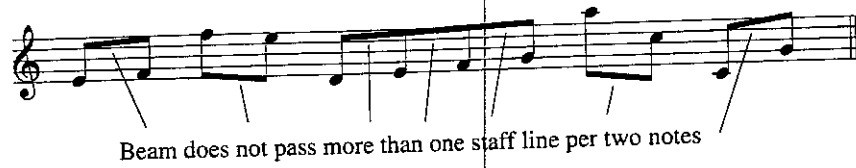
3. When stemmed notes are placed on ledger lines, the stems should extend to the middle line of the staff.

Figure 1.35



4. When connected by beams, stemmed notes should be modified so that the beams are slanted to cross no more than one line of the staff for each group of notes.

Figure 1.36



5. When two melodies occupy the same staff, the stems for one melody are up and for the other down. This makes it possible to distinguish each separate melody.

Figure 1.37



6. Beam groups of eighth notes (and smaller values) according to the beats in the measure.

Figure 1.38







7. Use flags for eighth or shorter value notes that are not grouped within a beat.

Figure 1.39



8. Avoid connecting more than six notes by beams unless all are a part of one beat.
9. Avoid mixing flagged and beamed notes except when notating vocal music. In vocal music, flagged notes have traditionally been used when the text-music relationship involves one note for each syllable. Modern practice has moved toward the use of "instrumental" notation for vocal music.

Figure 1.40

<p>Wrong</p>  <p>Traditional Vocal Notation</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Oh, I wish I had gone</p>	<p>Right</p>  <p>Modern Vocal Notation</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Oh, I wish I had gone</p>
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10. Irregular divisions of a beat or measure are indicated by showing the number of notes in the resulting group by means of an arabic number. The note values of the irregular group are notated the same as the regular group, providing the number of notes in the irregular group is less than twice that of the regular, e.g., a triplet retains the same note values as a regular duplet.

Figure 1.41

 <p>Regular group is eighth notes</p>	 <p>Irregular group is also eighth notes</p>
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When the number of notes in the irregular group is more than twice the number of the regular, then the next smaller note value is used, e.g., a quintuplet would employ the next smaller note value.

Figure 1.42

 <p>Regular group is eighth notes</p>	 <p>Irregular group is sixteenth notes. (contains more than twice the notes of the regular group)</p>
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11. In compound meter, try to show the basic pulse structure of the measure and the subdivision (of three) as clearly as possible.

Figure 1.43

12. The whole rest (—) can be used to indicate a full measure of rest in any meter.

13. Avoid half rests in 3/4 meter; use two quarter rests.

Figure 1.44

14. When notes of a chord are on an adjacent line and space, the higher of the two is always to the right, regardless of the direction of the stem.

Figure 1.45

15. When a dotted note is on a line, the dot is usually placed slightly above the line. When two separate voices are placed on a single staff, the dots are below the line on the notes with stems down.

Figure 1.46

16. Dynamic markings should be added above, between, or below staves according to the nature of the music or score:

*Instrumental Music:* The markings are usually placed beneath the staff to which they refer. Sometimes, because of inadequate space, it is necessary to place markings above the staff.

*Vocal Music:* The markings are usually placed above the staff to which they refer. This is done to avoid confusion with the words of the text.

*Piano Scores:* The markings are placed between the staves if the markings are to apply to both staves. If markings are needed for each staff individually, the markings should go just above or below the staff to which they refer.



Generally avoid placing markings directly on the staff, although some, for example the crescendo  and diminuendo  will protrude into the staff on occasion.

Figure 1.47



(Assignment 5, 6, 7, and 8, pages 30–32; Workbook/Anthology 1E–1L)