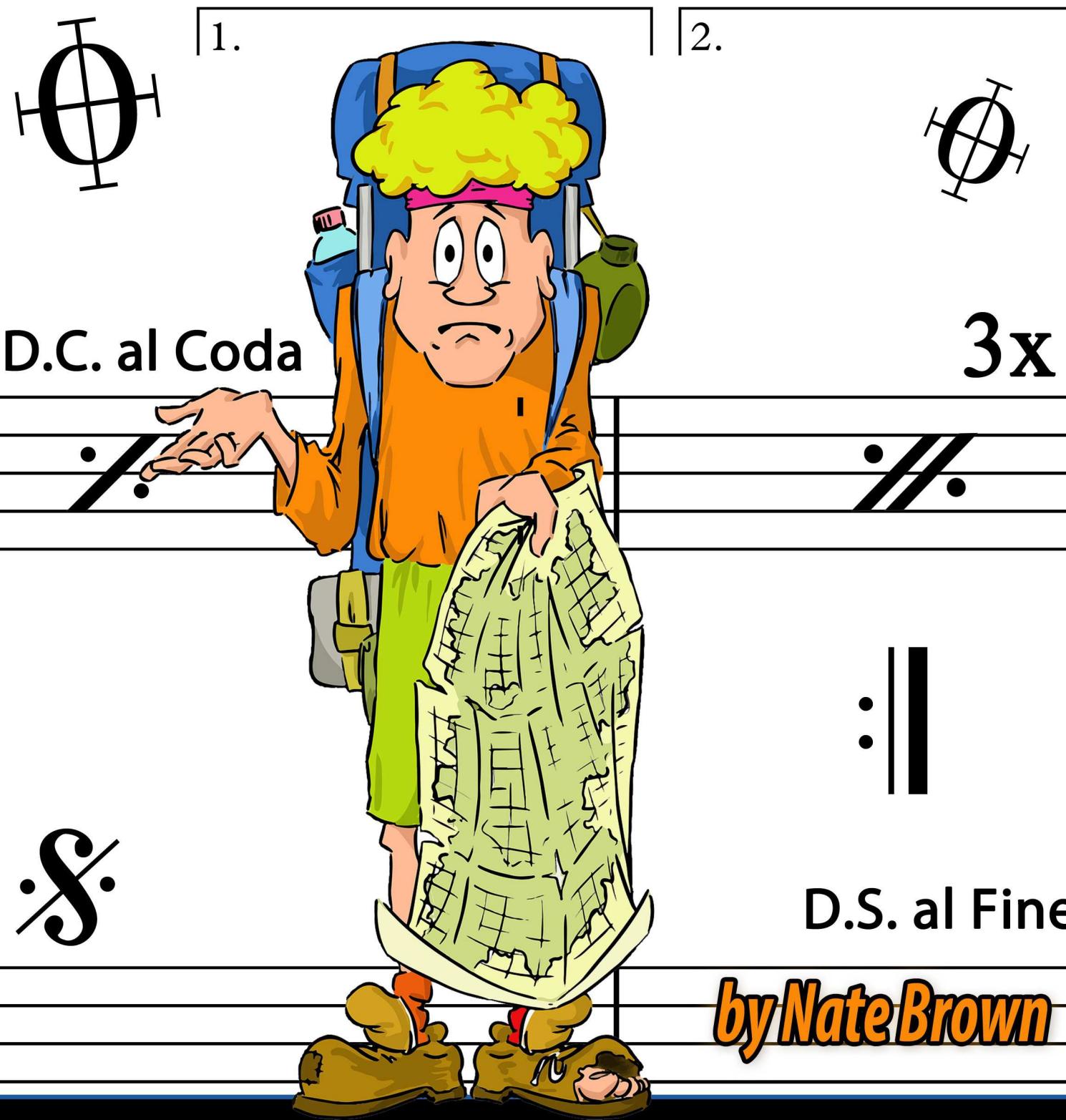


SKIP, PLAY, REPEAT

Your Personal Guide to Navigating Sheet Music



by Nate Brown

Never Get Lost In The Music Again

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction by Steve Ley

Overview

Repetition is an essential element in music. It helps to engage the listener and make a song memorable. In sheet music, navigation instructions inform the reader what portions of music should be replayed. By using these instructions, the page count of a piece is minimized, which allows it to fit more comfortably on a music stand. There are a few terms and symbols to learn, but once you are familiar with them, navigating any sheet music will be a breeze.

Metaphor: Snakes & Ladders

In the children's game Snakes and Ladders, each player's token progresses across the squares on the board sequentially. When a player lands on the head of the snake, the player must go back to the tail of the snake. When the player lands on the bottom of a ladder, they use it to climb up to the top.

Similarly, when reading a piece of music that contains navigation instructions, the player will be directed to return and replay a section of the piece. After replaying a portion of the piece, they may be instructed to skip ahead.

Layout

This ebook is intended to be used as a reference manual. You do not need to read the sections in order. Each concept is clearly described with an accompanying example and does not assume prior knowledge. At the end of the book there is a quiz to test your comprehension.

QUICK REFERENCE

D.C.

1. Play until reaching “D.C.”
2. Return to the beginning of the song

D.C. al Coda

1. Play until reaching “D.C.”
2. Return to the beginning of the song
3. Play until reaching “To Coda”
4. Skip to the *Coda*  and play to the end

D.C. al Fine

1. Play until reaching “D.C. al Fine”
2. Return to the beginning of the song
3. Play until reaching the word “Fine”
4. Song ends at “Fine”

D.S.

1. Play to *D.S.*
2. Return to *The Sign*  and play on

D.S. al Coda

1. Play to “D.S. al Coda”
2. Return to *The Sign* 
3. Play until reaching “To Coda”
4. Skip to the *Coda*  and play to the end

D.S. al Fine

1. Play until reaching “D.S. al Fine”
2. Return to *The Sign* 
3. Play until reaching the word “Fine”
4. Song ends at “Fine”

Fine

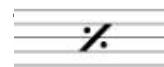
Ignore the “*Fine*” until after you have followed a *D.C. al Fine* or *D.S. al Fine* instruction.

First & Second Ending

1. Play the first ending
2. Return to the previous *start repeat**
3. Skip the first ending. Play the second.
4. If there are more endings, follow the same procedure, playing only the third ending on the third time through – only the fourth ending on the fourth time through, etc.

Measure Repeat

Repeat the previous measure



Measure Repeat: Two-Measure

Repeat the previous two measures



Repeat

1. Play to the *repeat bar line*



2. Return to the previous *start repeat**



Repeat X Times

1. Play to the *repeat bar line*



2. Return to the previous *start repeat**



3. Play the repeated section the number of times indicated in the text above the *repeat bar line*

To Coda

Ignore the “*To Coda*” until after you have followed a *D.C. al Coda* or *D.S. al Coda* instruction.

DETAILED EXAMPLES

The following pages include more detailed explanations of professional sheet music navigation terms and techniques.

D.C.

This is an abbreviation for the Italian phrase “Da Capo,” which literally means “from the head.” When you see a D.C. in the music, it means to go back to the beginning of the sheet (i.e. measure 1).

It's uncommon to see a D.C. instruction without additional instructions after it, such as “al Coda” or “al Fine.” However, to be thorough, I've included an example below.

Play to
D.C.

Return to
the beginning

EXAMPLE:

The musical score consists of three staves of music. The first staff begins at measure 2 and ends at measure 4. The second staff begins at measure 5 and ends at measure 8, with the instruction "D.C." (Da Capo) written above the staff. The third staff begins at measure 9 and ends at measure 12.

Measure order breakdown: *play measures 1-8; then 1-12*

Step-By-Step:

- 1) Play to measure 8
- 2) Return to measure 1
- 3) Play through to the end of the song

D.C. al Coda

This combines two instructions: a “D.C.” and an “al Coda.” The first instruction (D.C.) tells you to go back to the beginning of the sheet (i.e. measure 1). The second instruction (al Coda) is an Italian phrase which literally translates “to the tail.” This means that after returning to the beginning of the sheet, play until you see *To Coda*. When you reach it, skip to the end of the music (i.e. the Coda), which is marked with a coda sign like this $\textcircled{\text{O}}$.

Play to
D.C. al Coda

Return to
the beginning

Play to
To Coda

Skip to the
Coda $\textcircled{\text{O}}$

Example:

Musical score example:

Measures 1-8: Standard music.

Measure 9: Starts with a coda sign ($\textcircled{\text{O}}$). Labeled "D.C. al Coda".

Measures 10-12: Continue from measure 9.

Measure order breakdown: *play measures 1-8; then 1-4; then 9-12*

Step-By-Step:

- 1) Play to measure 8
- 2) Return to measure 1
- 3) After playing measure 4, skip to measure 9
- 4) Play through to the end of the song

D.C. al Fine

Similar to the *D.C. al Coda*, this is actually two instructions. The D.C. tells you to go back to the beginning of the song (i.e. measure 1). Al Fine is an Italian phrase meaning “to the end.” In other words, you’ll return to the beginning of the song and play until you see *Fine*, which indicates the end of the song.

Play to
D.C. al Fine

Return to
the beginning

Play to
Fine

Song ends
at **Fine**

Example:

A musical score example showing measures 2 through 12. The score consists of three staves of four measures each. Measure 2 starts with a thick bar line, followed by three thin bar lines. Measures 3 through 12 are all thin bar lines. Measure 12 concludes with a final bar line that is thick on top and thin on the bottom, with the word "Fine" written above it. Measures 1 through 11 are numbered above them, and measure 12 is labeled "D.C. al Fine".

Measure order breakdown: *play measures 1-12; then 1-4*

Step-By-Step:

- 1) Play to measure 12
- 2) Return to measure 1
- 3) The song ends after playing measure 4

NOTE: The thin/thick bar line under the word “Fine” is called a *Final Bar Line*. This is used to indicate which measure ends the song. Many times, this will be the last measure of the song, but in the case of a *Fine*, the end of the song is located before the last measure written.

D.S.

This is an abbreviation for the Italian phrase “Dal Segno,” which literally means “from the sign.” When you reach a D.S. in the music, you return to *the sign*, which looks like this , and continue playing from there.

Like the D.C. instruction, it's uncommon to see a D.S. instruction without additional instructions after it, such as "al Coda" or "al Fine." But again, with the purpose of being thorough, I've included an example graphic below.

Play to *D.S.*

Return to *The Sign*



Example:

1 2 3 4

5 **S** 6 7 8 D.S.

9 10 11 12

Measure order breakdown: *play measures 1-8; then 5-12*

Step-By-Step:

- 1) Play to measure 8
 - 2) Return to measure 5
 - 3) Play through to the end of the song

D.S. al Coda

This combines two instructions: a “D.S.” and an “al Coda.” The D.S. tells you to return to *the sign*  and play from there. The “al Coda” means that after returning to *the sign*, you play until you see *To Coda*. Once you reach *To Coda*, skip to the end of the song, which is marked with a coda sign like this .

Play to *D.S. al Coda*

Return to *The Sign* S.

Play to *To Coda*

Skip to the *Coda*

Example:

2 3 4

5 **S** 6 7 8 **To Coda**

9 10 11 12 **D.S. al Coda**

13 **O** 14 15 16

Measure order breakdown: *play measures 1-12; then 5-8; then 13-16*

Step-By-Step:

- 1) Play to measure 12
 - 2) Return to measure 5
 - 3) After playing measure 8, skip to measure 13, and play through to the end of the song

D.S. al Fine

This combines two instructions: a “D.S.” and an “al Fine.” The D.S. tells you to return to *the sign*  and continue playing from there. Al Fine is an Italian phrase meaning “to the end.” This means that after returning to *the sign*, you play until you see *Fine*, which indicates the end of the song. Stop playing at *Fine*.

Play to *D.S. al Fine*

Return to *The Sign*



Play to *Fine*

Song ends at *Fine*

Example:

Example 1

2 3 4

5 **Fine**

6 7 8

9 10 11 12 **D.S. al Fine**

Measure order breakdown: *play measures 1-12; then 5-8*

Step-By-Step:

- 1) Play to measure 12
 - 2) Return to measure 5
 - 3) After playing measure 8, the song ends

NOTE: The thin/thick bar line under the word “Fine” is called a *Final Bar Line*. This is used to indicate which measure ends the song. Many times, this will be the last measure of the song, but in the case of a *Fine*, the end of the song is located before the last measure written.

First & Second Endings

When a selection of music needs to be repeated, but the repeated section has a different ending, a *first* and *second ending* are used. The first time playing through the section, you'll play the measure/s under the first bracket (i.e. the *first ending*). There will always be a *repeat* at the end of the *first ending* (see p.16). This means to return to the previous *start repeat*, or if one isn't present, return to the beginning of the song. The second time through the selection, skip the *first ending* entirely, and play the *second ending*. Play on as usual from there.

Play the
first ending

Return to the
Previous
start repeat

Skip the
first ending

Play the
second ending

If there are more than two endings, follow the same procedure, playing only the *third ending* on the third time through, only the *fourth ending* on the fourth time through, and so on.

Example:

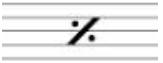
The musical score consists of three staves of music. Staff 1 (measures 2-4) shows a continuous sequence of eighth notes. Staff 2 (measures 5-6) shows a similar sequence. Staff 3 (measures 1. and 2.) shows a repeat sign followed by a bracket labeled '1.' and another bracket labeled '2.'. Staff 4 (measures 9-12) shows another continuous sequence of eighth notes. Measure numbers 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 11, and 12 are explicitly labeled above the staff. Measures 10 and 12 are indicated by dots above the staff.

Measure order breakdown: *play measures 1-7; then 5-6; then 8-12*

Step-By-Step:

- 1) Play to measure 7
- 2) Return to measure 5
- 3) After playing measure 6, skip ahead to measure 8
- 4) Play through to the end of the song

Measure Repeat

A *measure repeat* means to repeat the previous measure. It looks like this .

Measure repeats are common in drum notation because drum beats are often repeated over a number of measures. Because of this, you will often see multiple single-measure repeats in a row.

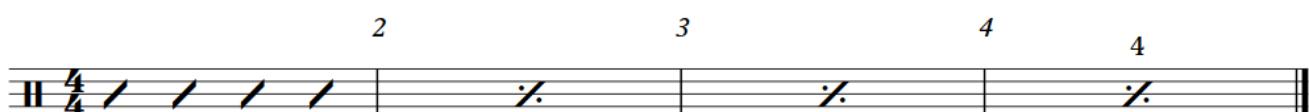
Repeat the
previous
measure

Example:

In the example below, measure 4 is a repeat of measure 3.



In the example below, the first measure is repeated on measures 2 through 4.



You might notice a number “4” above the final *measure repeat*. In professional sheet music, if a measure is repeated 3 or more times, a number should be placed above every fourth measure of the sequence. For example, if there were 8 measures, a number “4” and a number “8” would show over those measures to quickly communicate how many repeats should be played.

Measure Repeat: Two-Measure

A *two-measure repeat* is similar to a *measure repeat*, except that you repeat the previous two measures instead of only one. A *two-measure repeat* looks like this



Repeat the
previous two
measures

Example:

2 3 2

Measure order breakdown: *play measures 1-2; then 1-2*

Step-By-Step:

- 1) Play through measure 2
- 2) Repeat measures 1 and 2

NOTE:

It's important to note that the number above the *two-measure repeat* isn't necessarily important and isn't always present. The *two-measure repeat* crosses two measures and has two slashes instead of the one slash a *single-measure repeat* has.

In our sheet music, we often like to write the number of times you've played the two-measure section. This makes it easier to keep your place in the music (see below).

Play X

In order to save space, if a single measure is to be repeated a number of times in a row, a “Play X” can be written above the measure with a zig-zag line on the measure. This means to repeat the previous measure X times.

Repeat the
previous
measure the
number of times
indicated

Example:

In the example below, measure 1 is to be repeated 5 times.

A musical staff in common time (4/4) with a key signature of one sharp. Measure 1 consists of five eighth notes. Measure 2 starts with a zig-zag line and is labeled "Play 5", indicating it should be repeated five times. Measures 3 through 8 each contain two eighth notes.

Measure order breakdown: play measure 1; then 1; 1; 1; 1; 1; 7-8

Step-By-Step:

- 1) Play measure 1
- 2) Repeat measure 1 five times, and then play on

Repeat

When you reach a *repeat sign*, which looks like this  go back to the previous *start repeat* sign  , or if a *start repeat* isn't present, return to the beginning of the song.

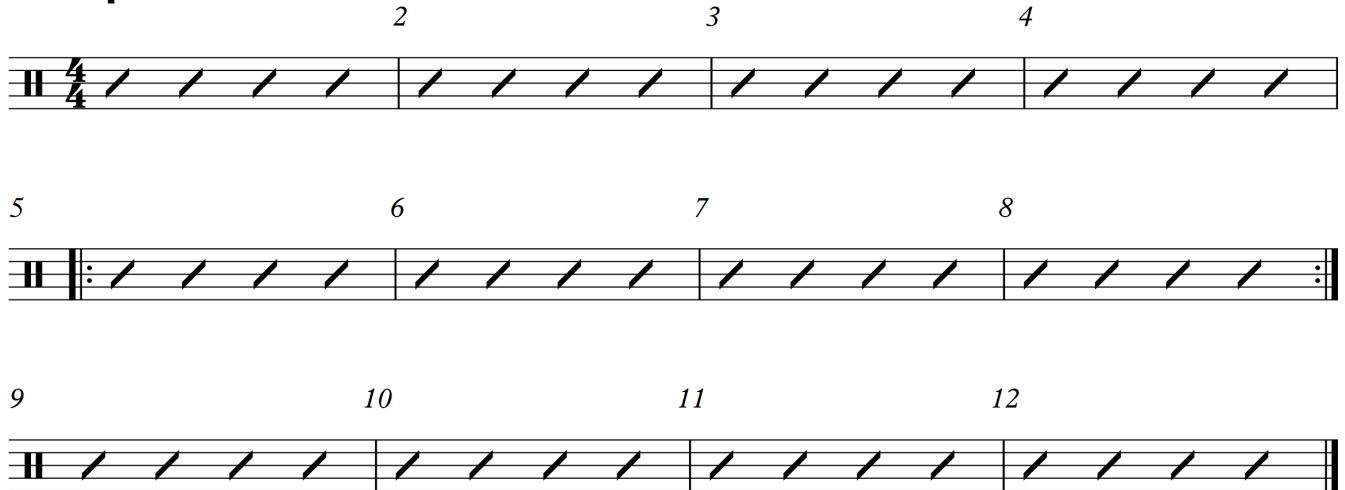
In our sheet music, we like to add wings to our repeat signs to make them stand out .

Play to
the *repeat*
bar line

Return to the
Previous
start repeat

If no
start repeat,
return to
the beginning

Example:



Measure order breakdown: play measures 1-8; then 5-12

Step-By-Step:

- 1) Play to measure 8
- 2) Return to measure 5
- 3) Play through to the end of the song

Repeat X Times

If a section of music is to be repeated more than once, a note is placed after the *repeat* sign, such as "3x," "4x," etc. That means the section of music is to be played 3 times, 4 times or whatever number is indicated.

For our sheet music, we use a boxed text to indicate that a section should be played a certain number of times (see below).

**Play to
the *repeat*
bar line**

Return to the Previous *start repeat*

**Play the
repeated section
the number of
times indicated**

Example:

2

3

4



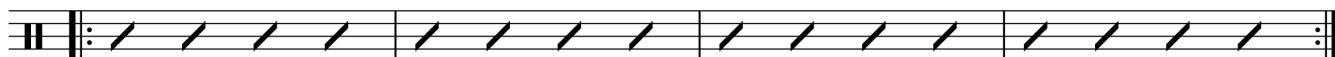
5

6

7

8

3x

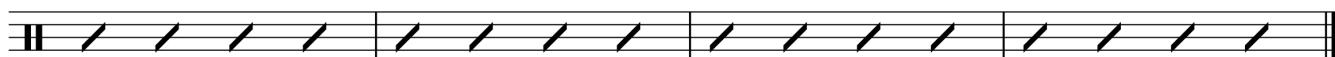


9

10

11

12



Measure order breakdown: *play measures 1-8; then 5-8; then 5-12*

Step-By-Step:

- 1) Play to measure 8
 - 2) Return to measure 5
 - 3) Play through measure 8
 - 4) Return to measure 5, and play through to the end of the song

NOTE: The question often arises as to whether you should repeat 3 times or play the section 3 times. Technically, repeating 3 times would mean that the section is played 4 times because the first time through isn't a repeat (think about it). However, this does not mean to repeat 3 times. It means to play the section a total of 3 times (or however many is indicated on the sheet).

QUIZ YOURSELF

Try to answer the following quiz questions without looking back through this book. An answer key is included at the end. If you get an answer wrong, be sure to review the corresponding section in this book.

QUIZ

Directions: Use the following sheet music sample to answer the questions below.

The sheet music consists of three staves of four measures each. Measure 1 starts with a whole rest followed by a half note. Measures 2 through 8 each contain six eighth notes per measure. Measure 9 begins with a whole note (a circle with a vertical line through it). Measures 10 through 12 each contain six eighth notes per measure. Measure 12 ends with a double bar line and a repeat sign, indicating a return to an earlier section. Above the music, numbers 2 through 12 are placed above their respective measures. To the right of the music, the text "To Coda" is positioned above measures 4 and 8, and "D.C. al Coda" is positioned above measure 8.

1) After playing measure 8, which measure should be played?

- A. Measure 1
- B. Measure 4
- C. Measure 5
- D. Measure 9

2) After playing measure 4 for the second time, which measure should be played?

- A. Measure 1
- B. Measure 5
- C. Measure 9
- D. Measure 12

3) After which measure does the song end?

- A. Measure 4
- B. Measure 8
- C. Measure 9
- D. Measure 12

QUIZ (cont.)

Directions: Use the following sheet music sample to answer the questions below.

The sheet music consists of three staves of four measures each. Measure numbers 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 are placed above their respective measures. Measure 4 ends with a double bar line and the text "Fine". Measures 9, 10, 11, and 12 end with a double bar line and the text "D.C. al Fine". The music is in common time (indicated by a "4" in the top left corner) and consists of eighth-note patterns.

4) After playing measure 4 for the first time, which measure should be played next?

- A. Measure 1
- B. Measure 5
- C. Measure 12
- D. None of the above

5) After playing measure 12, which measure should be played?

- A. Measure 1
- B. Measure 4
- C. Measure 9
- D. None of the above

6) After playing measure 4 for the second time, which measure should be played?

- A. Measure 1
- B. Measure 5
- C. Measure 12
- D. None of the above

QUIZ (cont.)

Directions: Use the following sheet music sample to answer the questions below.

The sheet music consists of four staves of music. Measure 2 starts with a repeat sign and a 4/4 time signature. Measures 3 and 4 follow. Measure 5 begins with a fermata over a eighth note followed by a sixteenth note rest. Measures 6 through 12 are a sequence of eighth notes. Measure 13 starts with a circle with a dot inside (a fermata). Measures 14 through 16 are another sequence of eighth notes. Measure 12 is labeled "D.S. al Coda". Measure 8 is labeled "To Coda".

7) After playing measure 12, which measure should be played?

- A. Measure 1
- B. Measure 5
- C. Measure 9
- D. Measure 13

8) After playing measure 8 for the first time, which measure should be played?

- A. Measure 5
- B. Measure 9
- C. Measure 13
- D. None of the above

9) After playing measure 8 for the second time, which measure should be played?

- A. Measure 5
- B. Measure 9
- C. Measure 12
- D. Measure 13

QUIZ (cont.)

Directions: Use the following sheet music sample to answer the questions below.

The sheet music consists of three staves of music. The first staff starts with a measure number 2, followed by measure 3, and measure 4. The second staff starts with measure 5, which includes a repeat sign and a double bar line, followed by measure 6, measure 7, measure 8, and the word "Fine". The third staff starts with measure 9, followed by measure 10, measure 11, measure 12, and the instruction "D.S. al Fine". Each staff has a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of common time (4/4). The music is composed of eighth-note patterns.

10) After playing measure 8 for the first time, which measure should be played next?

- A. Measure 1
- B. Measure 5
- C. Measure 9
- D. None of the above

11) After playing measure 8 for the second time, which measure should be played?

- A. Measure 1
- B. Measure 5
- C. Measure 9
- D. None of the above

12) After playing measure 12, which measure should be played?

- A. Measure 1
- B. Measure 5
- C. Measure 8
- D. None of the above

QUIZ (cont.)

Directions: Use the following sheet music sample to answer the questions below.

The sheet music consists of three staves of music. Measure 2 starts with a common time signature (indicated by a 'C') and a key signature of one sharp (F#). Measures 3 and 4 follow, also in common time and one sharp key signature. Measure 5 begins a new section with a key signature of two sharps (G major), indicated by a 'G' and a '2'. Measures 6, 7, and 8 continue in this two-sharp key signature. Measures 9, 10, 11, and 12 return to the original one-sharp key signature. Measures are numbered above the staff: 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 1., 2., 9, 10, 11, 12.

13) After playing measure 7, which measure should be played next?

- A. Measure 1
- B. Measure 5
- C. Measure 8
- D. Measure 9

14) After playing measure 6 for the second time, which measure should be played?

- A. Measure 1
- B. Measure 5
- C. Measure 7
- D. Measure 8

15) After playing measure 8, which measure should be played?

- A. Measure 1
- B. Measure 5
- C. Measure 9
- D. None of the above

QUIZ (cont.)

Directions: Use the following sheet music sample to answer the questions below.

The sheet music consists of five staves of music. Measures 2 through 4 are in common time (indicated by a '4'). Measure 2 starts with a quarter note followed by eighth notes. Measure 3 starts with a eighth note followed by eighth notes. Measure 4 starts with a eighth note followed by eighth notes. Measure 5 starts with a eighth note followed by eighth notes. Measure 6 starts with a eighth note followed by eighth notes. Measure 7 starts with a eighth note followed by eighth notes. Measure 8 starts with a eighth note followed by eighth notes. Measures 9 through 12 are in common time. Measure 9 starts with a eighth note followed by eighth notes. Measure 10 starts with a eighth note followed by eighth notes. Measure 11 starts with a eighth note followed by eighth notes. Measure 12 starts with a eighth note followed by eighth notes. Measures 13 through 16 are in common time. Measure 13 starts with a eighth note followed by eighth notes. Measure 14 starts with a eighth note followed by eighth notes. Measure 15 starts with a eighth note followed by eighth notes. Measure 16 starts with a eighth note followed by eighth notes. Measures 17 through 20 are in common time. Measure 17 starts with a eighth note followed by eighth notes. Measure 18 starts with a eighth note followed by eighth notes. Measure 19 starts with a eighth note followed by eighth notes. Measure 20 starts with a eighth note followed by eighth notes.

2 3 4 To Coda

5 6 7 8

9 10 11 12 3x

13 14 15 16 D.C. al Coda

17 18 19 20
 ∅ 2
 ♯

16) After playing measure 8 for the first time, which measure should be played?

- A. Measure 1
- B. Measure 5
- C. Measure 9
- D. None of the above

17) After playing measure 12 for the second time, which measure should be played?

- A. Measure 1
- B. Measure 9
- C. Measure 13
- D. Measure 17

Answer Key

Page 19:

- 1) A
- 2) C
- 3) D

Page 20:

- 4) B
- 5) A
- 6) D (The song ends after playing measure 4)

Page 21:

- 7) B
- 8) B
- 9) D

Page 22:

- 10) C
- 11) D (The song ends after playing measure 8)
- 12) B

Page 23:

- 13) B
- 14) D
- 15) C

Page 24:

- 16) B
- 17) B

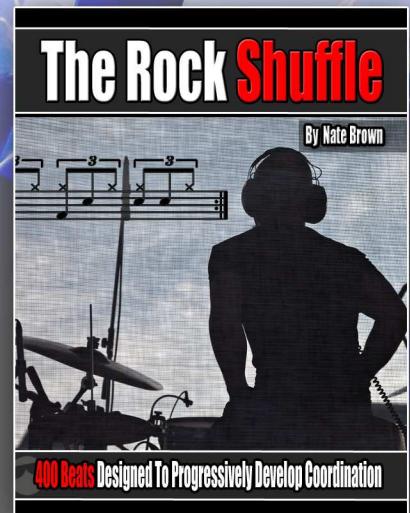
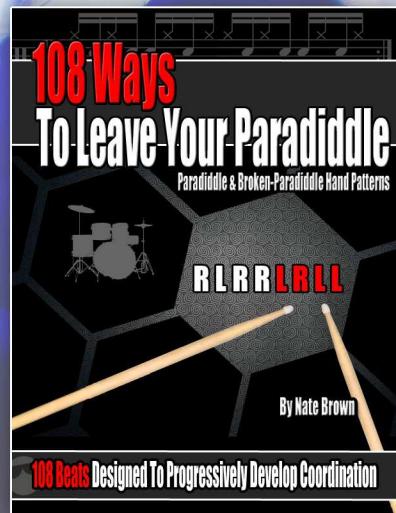
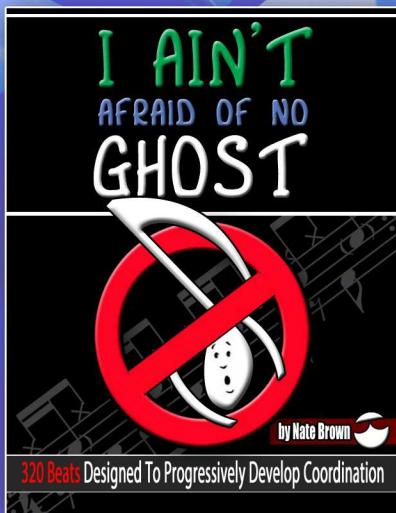
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