

It’s All About Time

Nutmeg Dulcimer Festival November, 2026

42-It’s All About Time - Cliff Cole (MID) Sat 11:00
We will explore different time signatures using reels, hornpipes, jigs and waltzes to explore 4/4, 6/8 and 3/4 time. These examples are all dances, so it’s important to understand how the feel of the music pertains to the dances. For instance, we will explore the different “feel” of a reel versus a hornpipe and delve into the different types of jigs.

Access Cliff’s Nutmeg 2026 Workshops from this Google Drive:
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Dhk5fAZ0bdkWHRSBYmnOiogzrAV1OVRF?usp=drive_link

Also available on Cliff’s Hammered Dulcimer page on the DayBreakfolk Website:
https://daybreakfolk.com/cliffs-hammered-dulcimer/

Exploring Time Signatures

The bottom number indicates the value for counting

The top Number indicates how many notes per bar or measure

- 4/4 – Four notes per bar, counted in quarter notes
  - Used in Reels and Hornpipes
  - Count**: one** and **two** and **three** and **four** and…
- 3/4 – Three notes per bar, counted in quarter notes
  - Waltz time Count: **one** two three **one** two three…
  - Accent the one
- 6/8 – Six notes per bar counted in eighth notes
  - Counted in “threes” or even “twos” (examples later)
- 9/8 – Nine notes per bar, counted in eighth notes
  - Used in “Slip Jigs”
- 2/2 – Two notes per bar, counted in half notes
  - “Cut Time” (Not as commonly used in traditional music)

The Timings of Notes in 4/4 time



Whole Note: “Whole measure”; 4 beats per measure



Half Note: “half” of a “whole” note; 2 per measure



Quarter Note: a “quarter” of a “whole” note; 4 per measure



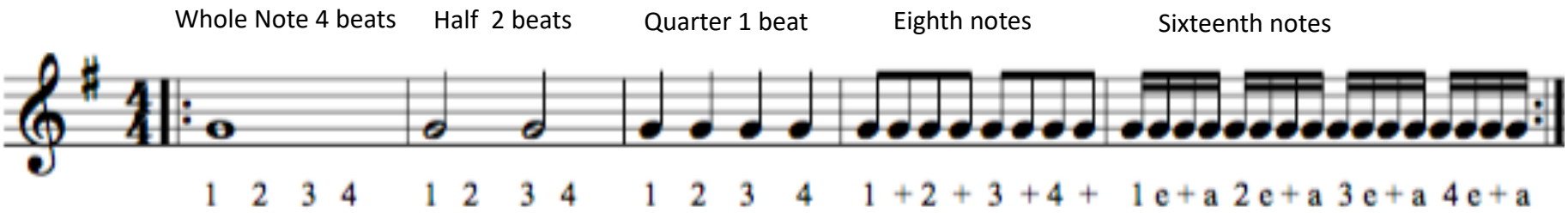
Eighth Note: An “eighth” of a “whole” note; 8 per measure



Sixteenth Note: 16 per measure



Triplets: 3 notes in a **beat**: Count: 1-trip-let, 2-trip-let…



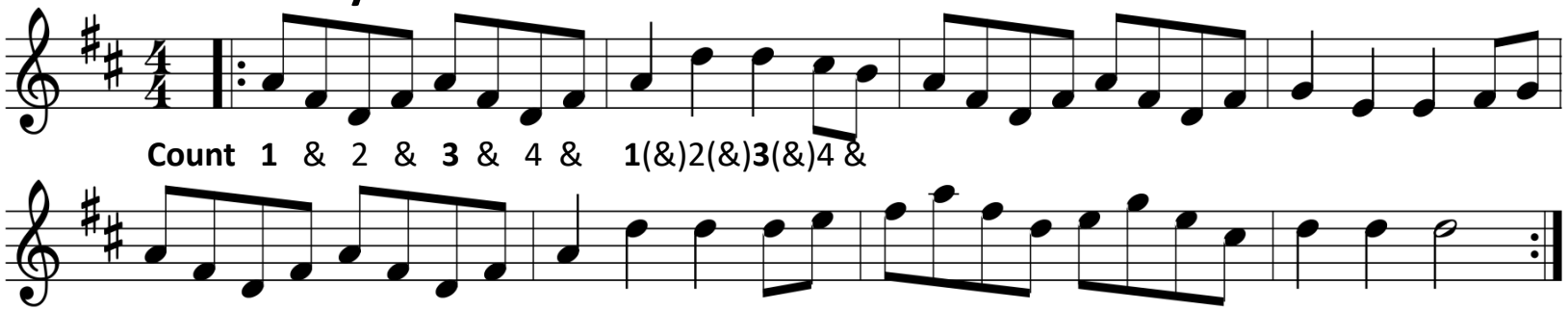
4/4 Time: Reels & Hornpipes



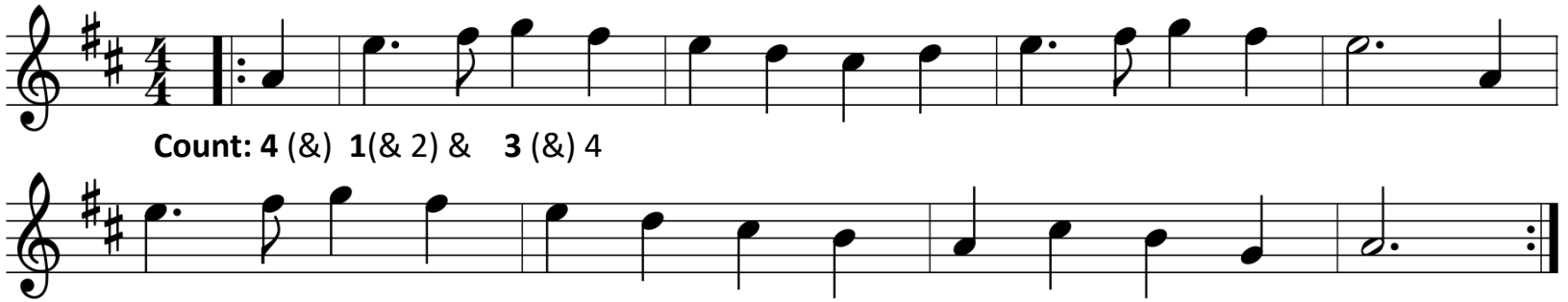
4/4 – Four notes per bar, counted in quarter notes

- **Count**: **1**-2-**3**-4 **Or: 1** and 2 and **3** and 4 and (1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &)
  - Accent the 1 and 3 (This "lilt" tends to throw of "rockers")
  - Solders Joy is a "hornpipe" but is often played more like a "reel"

Solders Joy: A-Part https://thesession.org/tunes/1356



Old Joe Clark: A-Part https://thesession.org/tunes/14474



3/4 Time: Waltz

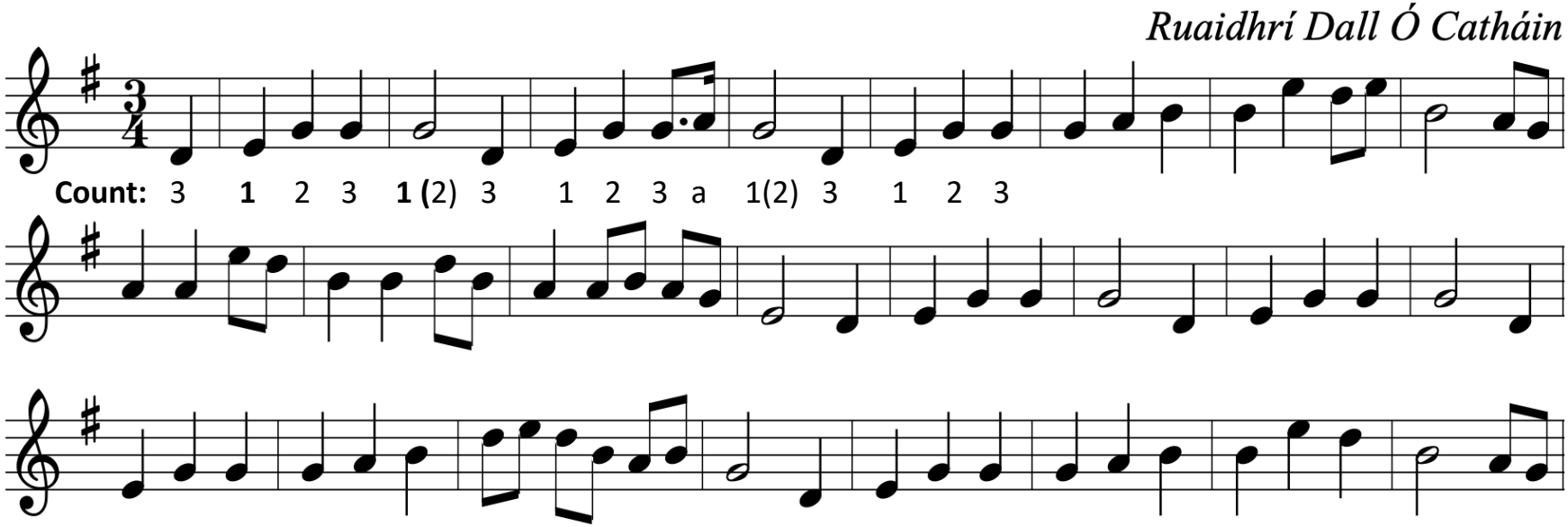


3/4 – Three notes per bar, counted in quarter notes

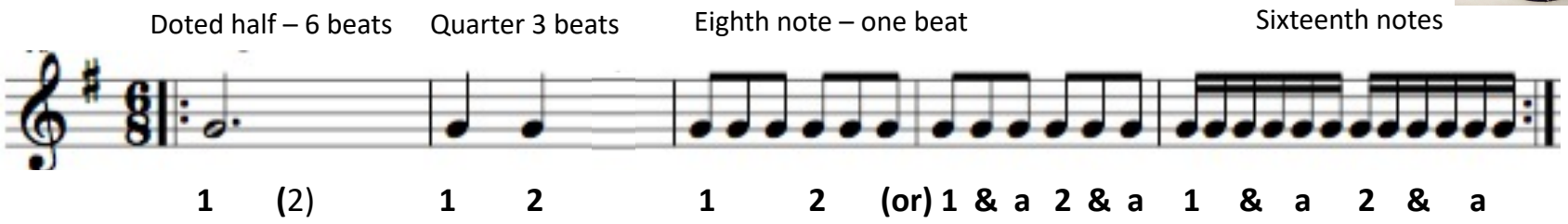
Example: Give Me Your hand (Tabhair Dom Do Lámh) By Rory Dall O'Cahan, In the Key G

- Rory Dall was a harper from the 17th century who preceded of Turlough O'Carolan

Give Me Your Hand: https://thesession.org/tunes/454



Jigs (Double Jigs)



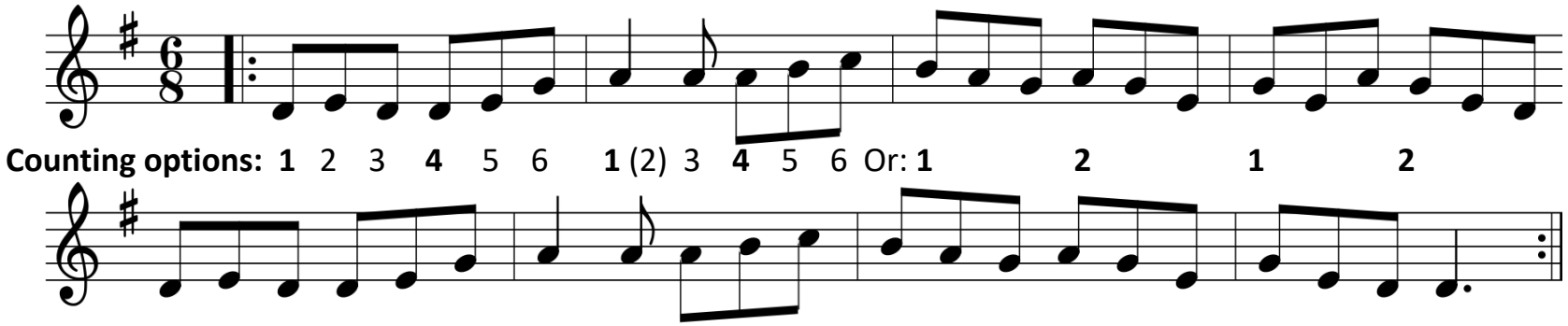
6/8 – Six notes per bar, counted in eighth notes

- Count: **1**-2-3-**4**-5-6 **Or: 1**-2-3-**1**-2-3 **Or:** one, two: Accent the 1 and 4
  - -Jiggity Jiggity
  - Accent the **1** and **4** (This "lilt" tends to throw of "rockers")
  - I tend to count jigs in "twos" 1 2 | 1 2…

Example: Blarney Pilgrim: In D Mixolydian: Major Scale with a "flatted "7th"

- They say that those who kiss the "Blarney Stone", are given the "gift of blarney" which is eloquence of speech, and persuasion… (some might say "B.S." ☺)

Blarney Pilgrim: A Part Only https://thesession.org/tunes/5



Slip Jigs

9/8 – Nine notes per bar, counted in eighth notes

- Used in ”Slip Jigs”
- Count: one two three, four **Five** Six, Seve eight nine, or 1-2-3 1-2-3 1-2-3
- Or one and ah: 1 & a 1 & a 1 & a **Example:** The Butterfly: In Em (E-Dorian: E “natural minor with a flatted sixth note)

The Butterfly by Tommy Potts

https://thesession.org/tunes/10





1 & a 2 & a 3 & a

First two measures



1-2 **3** **4**-5 **6** **7**-8-9| **1**-2 **3** **4**-5 **6** **7**-**8**-**9**

1 a 2 a 3 1 a 2 a 3 & a

Crooked Tunes

- The term “crooked” in music usually means a tune that does not conform to a time signature
  - They often will sound like a reel and start out in 4/4
  - Somewhere in the song there will be extra beats than won’t fit into the measure
  - Harder to dance to, not used in Contra Dance unless they are “evened out”
- There is not really a “reason” for the song to be that way, its just the way it was written, and is commonly played
- This is more common in “old time music”, banjos and fiddles
- They are often difficult to learn but very fun to play…

Crooked Tune Example: First Line of B-Part of “Five Miles To Town”

- **Note: 2/2 measures followed by a 3/2 measure**
  - Hard to notate, you need to “get the feel” for the tune..

Five Miles to Town: Crooked Section…
https://oldtimefiddletunes.net/tunes/FiveMilesToTown.pdf



5/8 Time: Time Out

- "5" on the top means 5 beats per measure
- "8" on the bottom means a "Eighth note" equals one "beat"
- Not very common in folk music, but is fun to mess around with
- Paul Desmond wrote the jazz classic, "Take Five"
  - Performed by the Dave Brubeck Quartet
  - "Time Out" Brubeck's quintessential album that explores timing
- Easiest to count in: 1 2 3 1 2 …



Riff from Dave Brubeck Quartet "Take Five" (by Paul Desmond)



Tuning Chart and String Gauges

James Jones - Custom Performance

3/16/18/7 Four Octave Electric Hammer Dulcimer



Treble 2		Treble 1		Bass 1		Bass 2	
4	F6	E6	A#5 (Bb) 5	D#5	6	A#3(Bb)	10
5	D#6	D6	G#5 5	C#5	6	F3	.030W
5	C#6	C6	F5 6	A#4(Bb)	7	C3	.036
		B5	E5 7	A4	7	G2	.040
		A5	D5 7	G4	8	F#2	.040
		G5	C5 7	F4	8	E2	.042
		F#5	B4 8	E4	9	D2	.042
		E5	A4 8	D4	9		
		D5	G4 8	Middle C4	9		
		C#5	F#4 9	B3	10		
		B4	E4 9	A3	10		
		A4	D4 9	G3	.028W		
		G#4	C#4 9	F#3	.030		
		F#4	B3 10	E3	.032		
		E4	A3 10	D3	.036		
		D#4	G#3 10	C#3	.038		
				B2	.038		
				A2	.040		

Flight of the Heron

https://www.jamesjonesinstruments.com/

This material and other workshops Cliff has presented are on "Cliff's Dulcimer Page"

http://daybreakfolk.com/cliffs-hammered-dulcimer/

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Also, Please Visit: **Tachyonmetry.com**



Our Latest: Album: Pile-O-Tunes