

# Metric Modulation Between 3/4, 5/4 and 7/4: A Practical Approach

I was first exposed to this concept by listening to Ari Hoenig's CD "The Painter". I haven't heard anyone since who is more fluent in using these modulations and I definitely would defer to him as the authority on this subject. As far as I know Ari is the originator of these specific modulations. If anyone has a definitive answer to this please let me know.

The connection between the modulations is as simple as the connection between triplets, quintuplets, and septuplets. I recommend combining the triplet, quintuplet and septuplet rhythms in various sequences at a comfortable tempo and then SLOWING THEM DOWN to a speed where each grouping could represent a plausible quarter note tempo. This should be used as an exercise to develop a firm understanding of alternating between asymmetrical rhythms. However, trying to control the modulations in a real time music environment using this approach will be exceeding difficult. What I am presenting is a practical approach to vacillate between these meters with fluidity.

First let's clarify what it means to perform a metric modulation. A metric modulation exists within the confines of one measure. The harmonic rhythm is unaltered and only the dominant rhythmic pulse is subject to alteration. Also, the timed length of one measure remains the the same from meter to meter.

I'd like to introduce and define a term which will serve as the basis for the approach to the modulations. "Rhythmic Cognates" as I define them, are 3 different rhythms (one per meter 3, 5 and 7) which when played simultaneously sound in relative unison. The difference in the parts is minute enough that playing a cognate in one meter sounds recognizable as a rhythm in another meter and vice versa. The cognates are listed here:

Drum Set

1

2

3

When listed in this fashion the vertical alignment of the rhythms is very similar. When the cognates are subdivided we can see the exact difference between each rhythm and simultaneously appreciate their similarity .

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The image shows a musical score for a single melodic line. It is divided into three measures, each with a different time signature: 3/4, 5/4, and 7/4. The first measure is in 3/4 time and contains four eighth notes. The second measure is in 5/4 time and contains six eighth notes. The third measure is in 7/4 time and contains eight eighth notes. The notes are grouped into three sets of four, with brackets underneath each set labeled '5' and '7' respectively, indicating the number of eighth notes in each group. The first set of four notes is in 3/4 time, the second set of four notes is in 5/4 time, and the third set of four notes is in 7/4 time. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a common time signature of 3/4 at the beginning of the first measure.

The cognates can be viewed functioning in any meter. I chose 3/4 as it is the simplest meter to represent.

To begin practicing these modulations slow down your metronome to its lowest possible bpm setting. Most metronomes bottom out at 40 bpm, however the one I'm using in the demonstration video is at 35 bpm. The subdivision of the metronome represents one measure worth of time. Now pick two meters you would like to alternate between and practice the cognates aligning it with your metronome. Once you're confident in your timing begin trying to modulate from meter to meter 8 measures at a time. Once you're comfortable with this try playing simple accompaniment and solo ideas while performing the modulations. In the demonstration video I'm modulating every 4 measures when practicing the cognates and every 8 when comping.

Lastly, I am only offering one specific cognate. There are many others which work as well as the one I demonstrated. I hope you found this information accessible and enjoy the implementation of these ideas in your playing.