How to Perform Any Polyrhythm

hand-clap any number of beats while foot-tapping any other number

Have you ever seen musicians perform crazy combinations of beats and perform them simultaneously with total perfection and effortlessness? Have you wondered how they do it? Have you wished you could do it yourself?

You can learn it! There are only 3 steps involved!

WATCH THE YOUTUBE VIDEO HERE:

Let's use H for hand and F for foot. When you play a polyrhythm with hands and feet, it's valuable because you really get the sensation of both parts of it in your own body, not just hearing one part against an external source such as a metronome. We'll notate such a rhythm as **H:F or hands:foot**, i.e. a certain number of hand-claps played over a certain other number of foot-taps. In other words:

H:F = # beats claped by **hands** over # beats tapped by **foot**

The 3 steps are:

1. **Tap F # of beats** each of which is **divided into H equal parts**

We will use 2:3 as our example, where the foot will tap 3 times while the hands clap twice. We will tap the foot in 3 beat-cycles with each beat divided into 2 parts, i.e. the limb that plays 3 is 'thinking in 2.' In the video below, this is represented similar to this, where x is where the foot taps:

```
|1 2|1 2|1 2|
```

```
 x   x   x
```

2. While tapping foot as above, **regroup** the subdivisions above **into cycles of F** and clap the beginning of each cycle H times

For 2:3, our hands will now ‘think in 3’ and clap on the 1st beat of each 3-beat cycle. In the video, the vertical bar lines represent where the hand is supposed to clap, while the foot still taps as it did in step 1.

```
|1 2 3|1 2 3|

 x   x   x
```

3. For performance accuracy, note how the original pulse falls against the new grouping

In the case above, you could look at it from the point of view of the hands, where the foot is tapping:

```
|1 & a|2 & a|

 x   x   x
```

You could count this out loud as “1_a2&_” where the foot taps on 1_a_&_ and the hand claps 1 & 2

Alternatively, you could think about it from the point of view of the foot, where the hands are clapping:

```
|1 & 2|& 3 &|

 x   x   x
```

You could count this out loud as “1_2&3_” where the foot taps on beats and the hand claps on the “1” and the “&”

Either point of view is valid, and whichever way works easiest is fine. In the video, I simply chose the perspective that I thought was easiest to get inside the feeling of each polyrhythm, without worrying about the consistency of always thinking about it from the point of view of the hands or always thinking about it from the point of view of the foot.

Good luck and go create some good polyrhythmic music for me to check out!