

## Rhythmic Diminution and Rhythmic Augmentation

*By Lee Evans*

Composers frequently vary their musical materials in order to generate greater listener interest. For example, the compositional device of sequence, ordinarily defined as repetition but starting on a different first note than the first note of a musical motive, may be presented instead in altered rhythms, such as *rhythmic diminution* and *rhythmic augmentation*.

*Rhythmic diminution* means making durational note values smaller. Here, the melody stays the same but in reduced note values. For example, I ask my Fundamentals of Music college classes to take a given musical motive and then reduce each note value by half. Thus, as an example, four half notes in 4/4 meter, encompassing two bars, becomes four quarter notes, in 4/4 meter, encompassing only one bar.

*Rhythmic augmentation* means making durational note values larger. Here the melody stays the same, but in increased note values. For example, I direct my students to take a given musical motive and then increase each note value by one beat. This device of course results in a greater number of bars than the original motive encompasses, and this is also an effective way to reinforce the teaching of ties and dotted notes, as may be seen in the musical examples below.

**Motive:**



In this example of rhythmic diminution, durational note values are reduced by half of the durational value of pitches of the above motive:



In this example of rhythmic augmentation, durational note values are

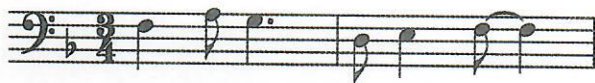
increased by one beat, of each of the motive's pitches:



**New Motive:**



In this example of rhythmic diminution, durational note values are reduced by half of the durational value of pitches of the above motive:



In this example of rhythmic augmentation, durational note values are increased by one beat, of each of the motive's pitches:



Other ways in which composers vary their musical materials, for greater listener interest, include such compositional devices as intervallic diminution and intervallic augmentation, in which the rhythms of a motive remain the same, but the intervals between the pitches of a motive are, respectively, decreased or increased...which will be the subject of a follow-up article to this one.

*(Lee Evans, Ed.D., is a professor of music at NYC's Pace University School of Performing Arts. The above article is based on page 9 of his and Dr. Martha Baker's book Composing At The Piano (Hal Leonard, pub.). Dr. Evans' most recent published music books may be seen and heard in the NEWS section of his website: [www.leeevansjazz.com](http://www.leeevansjazz.com)).*

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