

Chapter 21

The Breve
String and Percussion Sings
Glissando and Other Signs

Using a standard single-line instrumental format, the first twenty chapters of this course have introduced you to the basic braille music signs. Now, let's look at some less common symbols.

21.1 Consulting the Music Braille Code (MBC-2015)

Whenever you need help with a musical symbol, MBC-2015 is the place to start. If you are not already familiar with the structure of the code, take the time for a personal tour now. The 36 tables of signs are followed by 43 chapters which provide examples, rules, and recommendations. The table of contents at the beginning of the book, as well as the indexes at the end, can also help you quickly locate what you need.

Even after diligent research in the code, you may still be perplexed, especially if you are transcribing for an instrument with which you are unfamiliar. Instead of worrying and guessing, feel free to seek help from a skilled teacher or performer or an expert music brailist. Online resources and printed reference books are also valuable, but are best used in conjunction with answers from a knowledgeable person.

21.2 Breve: Double Whole Note and Rest

Though usually associated with Renaissance or baroque music, the double whole note (breve) and double whole rest are sometimes used in more modern scores, too. The double whole note is listed in Table 2 of MBC-2015; the double whole rest is listed in Table 5. The tables show two possibilities for the breve and rest. The compact two-cell sign is generally preferred, but the longer form is used if the braille transcription contains finger marks or other signs that might be confused with the concluding character, dots 13, in the compact form.

The breve usually represents eight beats and will appear in time signatures such as 4/2 or 6/2 or unmeasured music. A dotted bar line is often used to visually separate a measure into sections. Use dots 13 between spaces to represent this bar line. A dot 5 music hyphen is required before this special bar line, when it occurs within a full measure. The hyphen is not needed when the music is unmeasured. (Refer to MBC-2015, Section 1.10.1).

Example 21.2.1

Musical notation in 2/4 time, treble clef. The melody consists of a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, and F5. The piece ends with a double bar line. Below the staff is the corresponding Braille transcription.

21.3 Bowing Signs for String Instruments

Down-bow		
Up-bow		

The down-bow and up-bow symbols are brailled before any ornament or mark of execution that affects the note and may be doubled. The common terms "arco" and "pizz." (pizzicato) also appear in string music and are brailled as word-sign expressions and positioned like any other word-sign expressions.

Example 21.3.1

Musical notation in 2/4 time, treble clef. The melody starts with a quarter note G4 marked with an up-bow sign (V) and a dynamic marking of *mf*. This is followed by a quarter note A4, then a half note B4 marked with an up-bow sign (V). The next two notes are quarter notes C5 and D5, marked with a *pizz.* sign. The final note is a quarter note E5 marked with an *arco* sign. The piece ends with a double bar line. Below the staff is the corresponding Braille transcription.

The bowing signs usually present no difficulty, but unless you are an experienced string player, you may be unsure about other aspects of the music, such as the Roman numerals which can represent either string numbers or hand positions (see Section 25.2 of MBC-2015). Definitely ask an expert about such numerals or any other puzzling signs in violin music.

21.4 Percussion Signs

As Section 34 of MBC-2015 explains, percussion transcriptions are challenging. The printed music may be displayed in many different ways, often including detailed instructions for the performer. The score may be intended for one player or for a team of percussionists. Furthermore, the score may show a variety of instruments, some of which may be unpitched. Sometimes the transcriber may even need to invent abbreviations or symbols for which there is no standard braille equivalent.

A typical assignment for a braille music transcriber might be to braille the percussion part for one performer. The single-line format is used for one instrument and one performer. The fourth octave C is usually used for unpitched instruments such as snare drums, bass drums, woodblocks and triangles. Dynamics and accents are transcribed following the standard rules.

Example 21.4.1

Notice the sign for the “ring-out” slur (dots 56, 14) in the last measure. As Section 13.10.2 of MBC-2015 explains, this slur is used “for an instrument that is capable of continuing its sound, fading out after it has been played.” The slur follows the affected note and any associated fingering. The slur may be followed by a rest, another note, or a double bar.

Another common percussion sign for stick or mallet instruments is the hand sign: right hand (dots 123) and left hand (dot 1). These signs are brailled after the affected note as if they were finger marks.

Example 21.4.2

21.5 Mute Signs for Wind Instruments

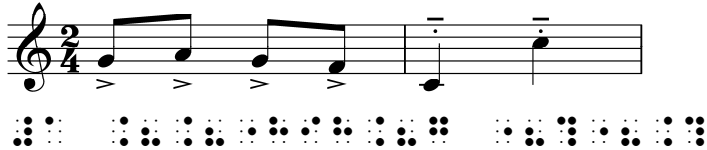
In addition to percussion signs, Table 30 of MBC-2015 lists the cross and circle signs which are printed above or below the note to indicate mute or unmute for wind instruments. The cross sign (dots 126, 12) is brailled before the note and may be doubled. The circle (dots 13) is brailled after the note.

Example 21.5.1

21.6 Mezzo-Staccato

In addition to the symbols of expression that you learned in Chapter 13, Table 22 of MBC-2015 shows a few other nuances that are brailled before the note. Especially interesting is the mezzo-staccato, which transcribers sometimes mistakenly braille as if it were two separate symbols (the staccato and the tenuto). If you encounter the mezzo-staccato, be sure to braille it as the correct two-character symbol (dots 5,236).

Example 21.6.1

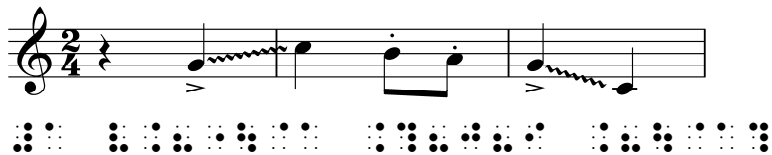


The musical notation shows a treble clef with a 2/4 time signature. It consists of a single melodic line with five notes: a quarter note on G4, an eighth note on A4, a quarter note on B4, an eighth note on C5, and a quarter rest. Each of the four notes is marked with a mezzo-staccato symbol (dots 5,236) below it. The Braille transcription below the staff consists of five groups of Braille characters, each corresponding to one note or rest in the music.

21.7 Glissando and Jazz Idioms

Familiarize yourself with the basic glissando sign (dots 4,1). The glissando will appear in print as a wavy line or straight line between two successive notes. This sign is common in modern pop and jazz instrumental music and even vocal music (discussed later). In most cases the glissando sign follows a note, like a slur, since it is performed between two notes.

Example 21.7.1



The musical notation shows a treble clef with a 2/4 time signature. It consists of a single melodic line with four notes: a quarter note on G4, an eighth note on A4, a quarter note on B4, and an eighth note on C5. A glissando sign (dots 4,1) is shown as a wavy line between the second and third notes, and between the third and fourth notes. The Braille transcription below the staff consists of four groups of Braille characters, each corresponding to one note in the music.

MBC-2015 Section 16.6 explains how the glissando can be transcribed in unusual situations, such as an unspecified time value or an empty measure.

Regarding other jazz ornaments, section 16.7 explains that because they are "not standardized," they "must be transcribed according to their appearance, rather than their intent." MBC-2015 Example 16.7-1 shows several jazz ornaments and the suggested braille transcription.

Whether baroque or classical or jazz, other ornaments may be even more challenging because they do not have an exact braille equivalent. To transcribe them, you may need to adapt an existing symbol or devise an altogether new symbol. Any uncertainty can be clarified on special symbols pages and transcriber's notes pages, which we will study in Chapter 24.

21.8 Order of Signs

Preceding the note:

- forward-repeat sign
- first or second ending sign
- reminder tie
- simple word-sign expression or abbreviation
- line of continuation sign
- opening bracket slur
- music comma
- triplet or irregular-grouping sign
- larger or smaller value sign
- up-bow or down-bow
- mute sign
- accidental(s) for ornament (upper before lower)
- ornament
- signs of expression or execution that precede a note
(staccato or staccatissimo, accent, tenuto)
- accidental
- octave mark

Following the note:

- dot
- finger mark
- unmute (open sign)
- fractioning or tremolo sign
- fermata
- single slur, opening doubled slur
- closing bracket slur
- tie
- termination sign for line of continuation or "hairpin"
- breath mark
- terminal music comma
- double bar, backward-repeat sign
- music hyphen

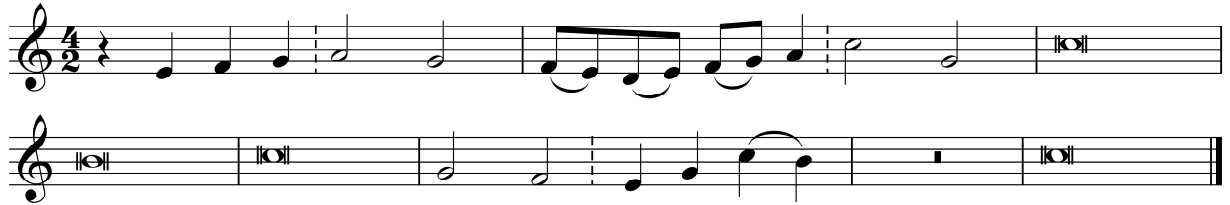
Drills for Chapter 21

(Correct transcriptions of these drills are at the end of this chapter)

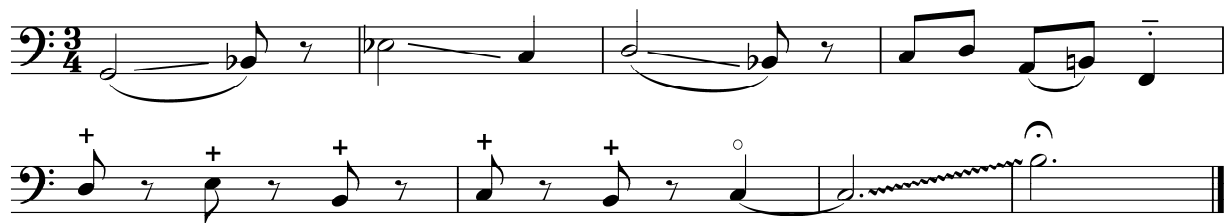
Drill 21.1



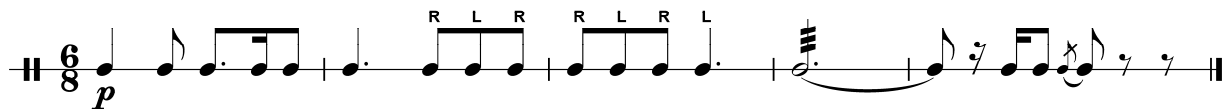
Drill 21.2



Drill 21.3



Drill 21.4



Exercises for Chapter 21

(Submit the following exercises to your instructor in BRF file format)

Exercise 21.1

Exercise 21.1 is a bass clef piece in 2/4 time. The first staff begins with a *pizz.* (pizzicato) instruction and a dynamic of *f* (forte). The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. The second staff continues the piece, featuring an *arco* (arco) instruction, a *rit.* (ritardando) section, and a dynamic range from *mf* (mezzo-forte) to *ff* (fortissimo) and *p* (piano). The piece concludes with a *pizz.* instruction and a dynamic of *f*.

Exercise 21.2

Exercise 21.2 is a common time piece. The first staff is a single-line melody starting with a dynamic of *f* (forte). It features a sequence of eighth and sixteenth notes, with fingerings indicated as *R R L R L L*. The second staff is a bass line starting with a dynamic of *ff* (fortissimo), consisting of eighth and quarter notes. The piece ends with a double bar line.

Exercise 21.3

Exercise 21.3 is a 3/4 time piece. The first staff is a melody starting with a dynamic of *f* (forte). The second staff is a bass line starting with a dynamic of *p* (piano), featuring a series of notes with '+' (accents) and 'o' (accents) above them. The third staff is a melody starting with a dynamic of *f* (forte). The piece concludes with a double bar line.

Correct transcriptions of the Drills for Chapter 21