How to Read Time Signatures

MONACO VIOLIN STUDIO

The two numbers do different jobs.

START HERE

TOP how many beats in a measure

BOTTOM which note value gets one beat

4 = quarter · 8 = eighth · 2 = half

SIMPLE METERS — THE BEAT SPLITS IN TWO

4/4

SIMPLE QUADRUPLE

4 beats per measure. The quarter note gets the beat.

3/4

SIMPLE TRIPLE

3 beats per measure. The quarter note gets the beat.

2/4

SIMPLE DUPLE

2 beats per measure. The quarter note gets the beat.

2/2

CUT TIME

2 beats per measure. The half note gets the beat.

The same amount of music as a 4/4 measure — counted in two broad beats, not four.

COMPOUND METERS — THE BEAT SPLITS IN THREE

Here the bottom number names the DIVISION, not the beat.

Three eighth notes make one beat — and three eighths is a dotted quarter.

6/8

COMPOUND DUPLE

2 beats per measure. The dotted quarter gets the beat.

Not six beats. Two beats, each splitting into three eighth notes.

9/8

COMPOUND TRIPLE

3 beats per measure. The dotted quarter gets the beat.

12/8

COMPOUND QUADRUPLE

4 beats per measure. The dotted quarter gets the beat.

WATCH OUT

3/8 is NOT compound — it is simple triple.

Three eighth-note beats, each splitting in two. For compound, the top number must be 6, 9 or 12.