

# Orient and Occident

## Some Asymmetrical Rhythm Patterns

Oriental music is based on rhythmic modes (sing. Turk. *usûl*; Arab. إيقاع = *īqāʿ*). These patterns (cycles) are structured by more or less heavy beats, distributed asymmetrically over a regular pulse. In this chart only eight-pulse cycles are shown. In occidental music, tunes in duple meters (2/4 etc.) are usually backed by a symmetrical accompaniment: “oom-pah oom-pah” and so on.

X = heavy beat (Turk. *düm*; Arab. دم = *dum*)

x = light beat (Turk. *tek*; Arab. تك = *tak*)

o = rest, non-beat

**X** = downbeat (“oom-”)

**x** = upbeat (“-pah”)

x = beginning of a melodic fragment

The combination of asymmetrical (oriental) and symmetrical (occidental) patterns results in rhythmic peculiarities misleadingly described as “syncopation”.

**occidental framework** (symmetrical):

**X o x o X o x o** = 8 pulses per 2/4 measure, e.g. in polka and rag accompaniments

**oriental patterns<sup>+</sup>** (asymmetrical):

X x o x X o x o	*	Turk. ( <i>ağır</i> ) <i>düyek</i> and Arab. دويك = <i>dūyek</i>
X o o x o o x o	*	برول = <i>barwal</i> and ملفوف = <i>malfūf</i>
X X o x X o x o	*	بلدي = <i>baladī</i>
X x o x x o x o		بشرف = <i>bašraf</i>
X x o x X o x o		فزاني = <i>fezzānī</i>
X x o x X o x o	*	مقسوم = <i>maqsūm</i>
X X o x X o x o	*	مصمودي صغير = <i>mašmūdī ṣaġīr</i>
X X o x X o x x	*	مصمودي كبير = <i>mašmūdī kabīr</i>
X o o x o o x o	***	نص وحدة = <i>noṣṣ waḥda</i>

**rag melodies** (“syncopated”):

x x o x x o x x	“All Coons Look Alike to Me” (1896)
x x o x x o x o	“Original Rags” (1899)
<u>x</u> x o <u>x</u> x o <u>x</u> x	“The Entertainer” (1902)
<u>x</u> x x <u>x</u> x x <u>x</u> x x <u>x</u> x x <u>x</u>	“The Memphis Blues” (1912)
<b>X o x o X o x o X o x o X o x o</b>	symmetrical accompaniment

<sup>+</sup> See Herman Rechberger, *The Rhythm in Arabian Music* (Helsinki: Fennica Gehrman, 2004).

\* Commonly used in belly-dance music.

\*\*\* “Oriental rhythm par excellence” (Rechberger, p. 51).