

Figure 18-15. A true eighth-note triplet is played in the same amount of time as two normal eighth notes, but fundamentally alters the subdivision of the beat.

A true triplet, as shown in Figure 18-15 above, changes the subdivision of the beat from duple to triple, something that, if used in most Irish tunes, would completely disrupt the rhythmic flow of the tune. Figure 18-16 on the previous page shows what Irish musicians mistakenly call a triplet.

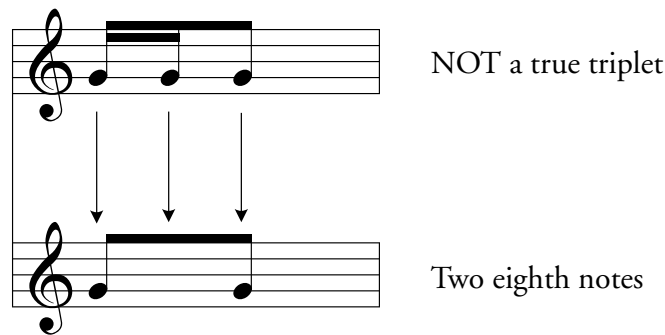


Figure 18-16. An Irish “triplet,” shown on the top staff above, is not a true triplet but simply two sixteenth notes followed by an eighth note. This ornament preserves the normal subdivision of the beat.

Many players think of the rhythm shown in Figure 18-16 as simply three fast notes, not noticing that the third note is twice as long as either of the first two.

One can see how the misnomer came about. It was simply convenient to borrow the term *triplet* from classical music without regard to its precise meaning. To someone from outside of the Irish music world or new to it, who uses the word “triplet” as most musicians do, the Irish musician’s use of the term can be very confusing and lead to wrong playing.

Sadly, every Irish flute or whistle book I have thus far seen reinforces and prolongs this confusion. Some of them, clearly written by people who have a solid background in classical music, specifically use the triplet notation to notate rhythms that are clearly not triplets. One has to wonder why they do so.

The term *triplet* is so widely used by Irish musicians that it is probably impossible to turn the tide. Nevertheless, I would suggest using the alternate name of *treble*, or adopting the word *triple* in the place of *triplet*.