



Triplets 1

A **TRIPLET** in musical terms is playing three notes in the timing of one note. The most common triplet takes place within the timing of a quarter note (or crotchet), as in Fig.1. You also get triplets which last for the time of an eighth note (or quaver) - Fig.2, and ones that last for a half note (or minim) - Fig.4. They should all have a little number three above or below the three notes, as in Fig.3.

You often get triplets in hornpipes and strathspeys, but they can also be used as "decoration": embellishments in addition to the notes in the tune. In fretted instrument playing, there are basically two different types of triplet. First, all three notes are the same, as in Fig.1; second when the notes are not all the same, as in Fig.3, and they can utilise different techniques.

1: The "Treble"

The triplet where all three notes are the same is sometimes known as a "treble" and is much favoured by Irish tenor banjo players. The most obvious place to use them is when the melody has a quarter note (see Fig.5). We're going to play a triplet in its place (Fig.6). I use a fast down-up-down movement and then use a downstroke on the next

note. There are other ways of achieving the same sound, but it's important to stay close to the string

note. There are other ways of achieving the same sound, but it's important to stay close to the string

2: The Rising or Falling Triplet

Often a rising triplet can be played with one strike of the plectrum, using hammer-on for the 2nd and 3rd notes of the three. There are occasions where you'll prefer to strike each note if, say, you're after a particular sound.

Sometimes the triplet is written as part of the tune, but you can also use a rising - or falling - triplet as decoration. If in a reel,

for example, if you get two eighth notes two notes of the scale apart, you can "fill in" the middle note by playing a triplet (see the example in Fig.7).

Remember that these types of decoration are never more important than the tune. If your playing them gets in the way of the melody, you'll need to step

back and rethink your approach. There's no shame in postponing decorative playing until you're more experienced and confident.