

# Why is Common Time Common? HC 209H

JUNE 1

Authored by: Jon Laus



# A Rewrite of C Jam Blues

## C Jam But Funky



In the image above, I have included the rewrite of C Jam Blues into 7/8 time. When listening to this example, my first reaction was the thought of a mistake, the music sounds almost right. It appears the band had had too much to drink and then tried to continue with their performance. However, this example is played by a computer and therefore cannot be inebriated. As a Jazz musician, this music still strikes me as somewhat aesthetically pleasing, however, when I had showed it to my family, their reactions were not pleased.

Why is it that although the music has kept its form, by removing one eighth note from each bar has created an unaesthetically pleasing product?

In the research I conducted, I read an article called, *The Tonal-Metric Hierarchy: A Corpus Analysis*<sup>1</sup>. In this work, the researchers conducted an experiment on classical music to analyze the placement of different pitches, both diatonic and non-diatonic, based on their rhythmic placements. Their conclusion was that a 'pleasing tone' or diatonic tone was likely to be placed on strong beats or "stable metric temporal positions". This relates to C Jam Blues because it is such a simple song both harmonically and rhythmically. Its only written pitches are the root and the fifth of the chord, both strong diatonics. Furthermore, their placements temporally are on the strong beats with little syncopation. This allows for ease of manipulation for testing the qualities of aesthetics in music.

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Listening to the result of my rewrite it becomes clear that there was more than mere

coincidence in the findings of *The Tonal-Metric Hierarchy: A Corpus Analysis*, it shows that the aesthetics of music are tied to its placement of tones in coordination with their rhythms. Additionally, there lies another finding within this experiment, it shows that no matter how simple a pattern may seem, whether it be simplicity in rhythm or harmony, as long as a piece abides by the standards put forth by the western music tradition it will sound aesthetically pleasing. Take a first-year jazz studies major. Ask them to improvise a solo using only the root of a chord while a rhythm section comps. It will sound, although a tad boring, aesthetically pleasing if they do not deviate from that diatonic note. Again, ask them to solo using only quarter notes using whatever tones they please and again you'll find an aesthetically pleasing solo. How could this be? Again, as long as one doesn't violate the ingrained standards of western music their product will appear as aesthetically pleasing. The reason that common time is so common is due to the human ability to recognize and repeat patterns. An evolutionary trait that allowed us to determine whether or not an event would take place, or a

group of individuals to be friendly has transcended the savannah and taken root in our

### C Jam Reharm

Swing  
♩ = 214

The score is in 4/4 time with a tempo of 214. The first system shows the Piano part with a treble and bass clef. The bass line is an acoustic bass. Chords C7 and F7 are indicated. The second system starts at measure 7 and includes chords Dmin7, Db7b5, and C7. The piano part has a treble and bass clef, and the bass part is a standard bass line.

musical tastes. We find simple 4/4 time signatures to be so pleasing because it is an easy pattern to follow. Something like 7/8 time is hard to tap one's foot to, or dance with. It is due to the ease of access to rhythmic syncing between body and sound that common time signatures were able to propagate musical history. By reworking C Jam Blues into an 'irregular' time signature, we feel the off putting nature, the lack of connection to the downbeat. While still somewhat aesthetically pleasing, in this new form, C Jam doesn't appeal to the same simple aesthetic principles. Oscar Peterson's display of mastery highlights and confirms the results from *The Tonal-Metric Hierarchy*. As we dislike hearing uncertainty in our music, we would find music that is uncertain to be 'ugly'. Moreover, C Jam Blues allows for a practical application of aesthetic qualifiers in music.

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Beyond manipulating the rhythmic basis of this song, what would happen to the aesthetical nature if we changed the harmony? In another rewrite, I took C Jam Blues and added in additional chords to the progression to demonstrate how more complex patterns may be palatable solely for students of Jazz.

Included in this rewrite is a tritone substitution. A tritone is exactly halfway between an octave and is the 'grossest' interval. However, when we utilize it in the contest of chord embellishment it can transform an ordinary ii-V-I into an adventure into dissonance. The mathematical backing here is interesting. A mathematical based approach would assume that exactly  $\frac{1}{2}$  the distance between an octave would sound great as it is a simple fraction and our ears perceive simple fractions as consonant right? No. The frequency division between a fundamental and its tritone is the square root of two.

Finally, although C Jam Blues is a simple melody involving simple harmonics and rhythm, its simplicity allows for a manipulation to express the qualifiers that make music 'aesthetically pleasing'. So long as one doesn't place a dissonant note on a strong beat, their musical career should flourish just fine.