Controlling Beams in Sibelius

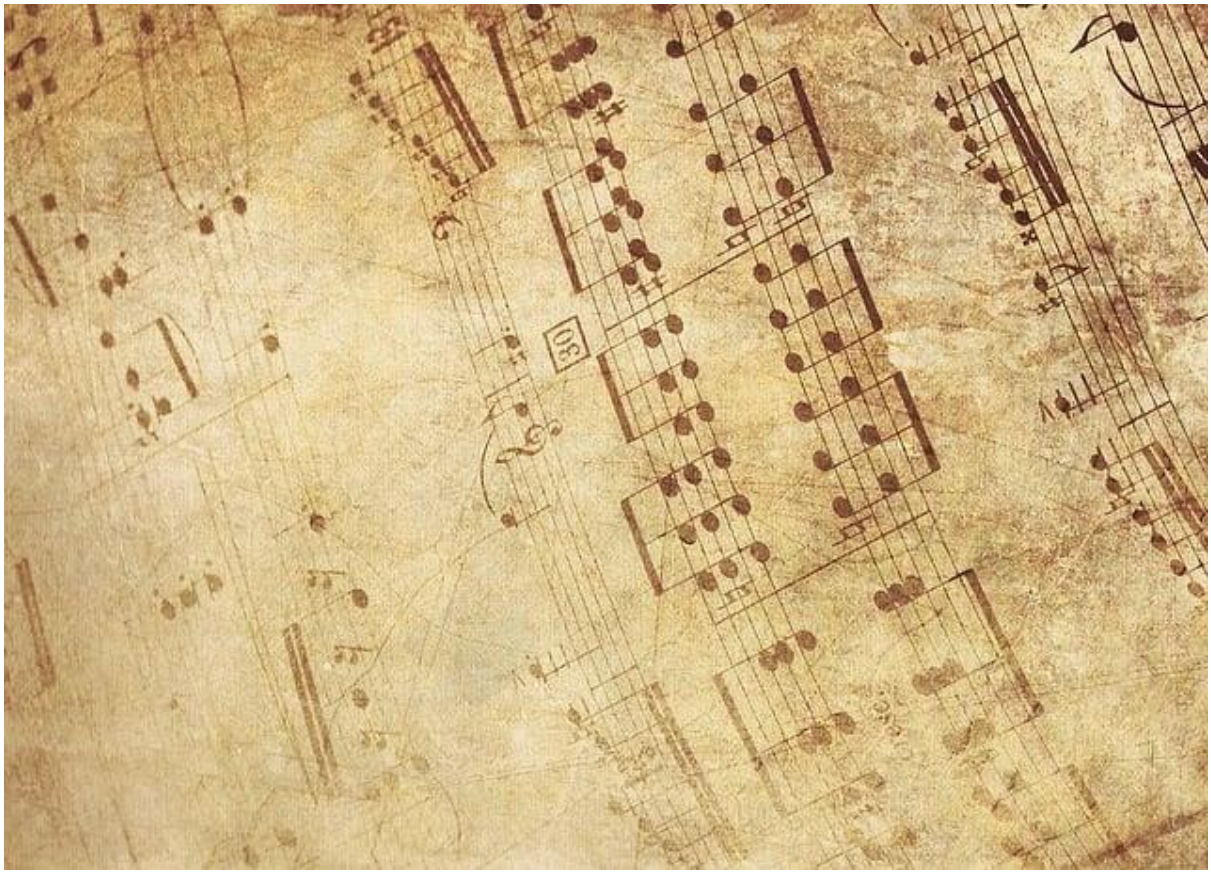


Image Credit: M.H. from Pixabay

This is the second of three blogs which will examine beams in some detail: some guidelines about how to manipulate them in Sibelius Ultimate, whether you are a beginner or more advanced.

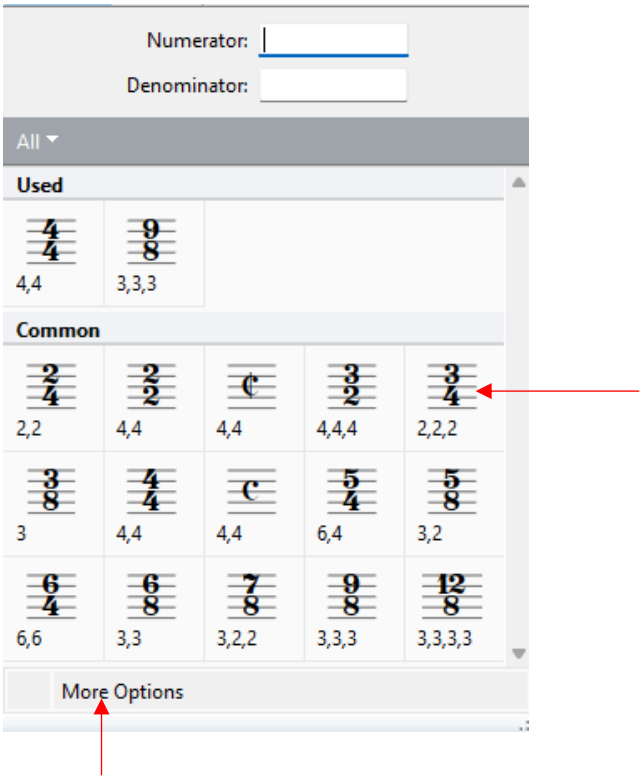
There are three main control panels in Sibelius for beams. For this blog we will be looking at the two most important:

- Time signature change: beam and rest groups
- Keypad

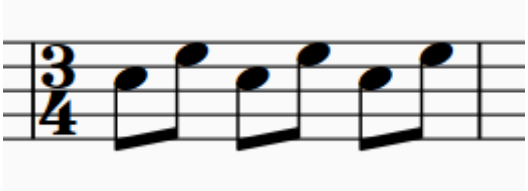
We will look at the third control panel in the next blog, which is aimed at more advanced users.

Time Signature Change

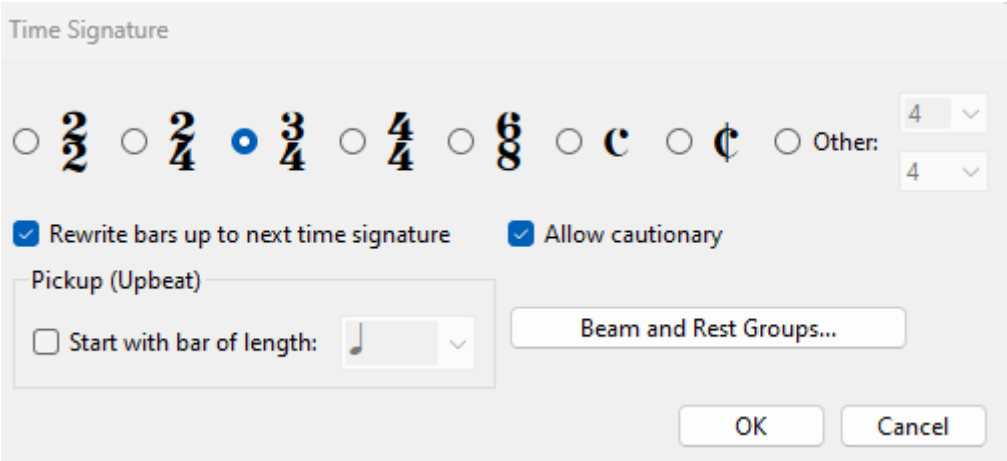
Let's look at the most immediate one, which sets up your beam patterns in advance, the time signature change (shortcut T). This is what comes up first:



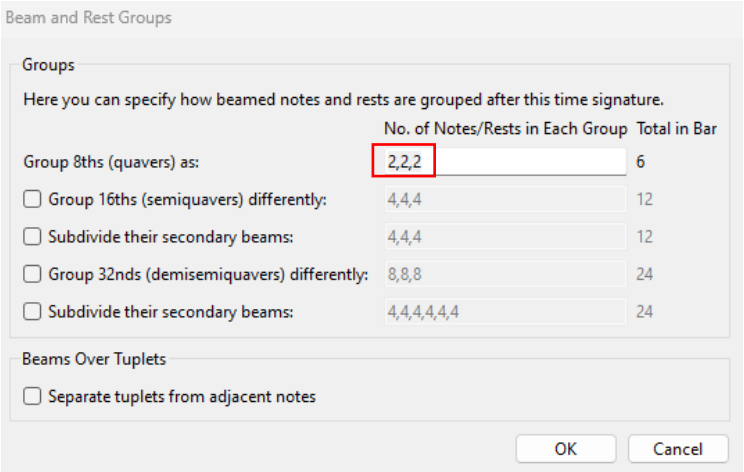
You'll see from this that a lot of time signatures appear. The numbers underneath indicate how the beams will be set up. Look at 3/4 on the right-hand column. The numbers 2,2,2 tell us that quavers will be beamed in twos consistently like this:



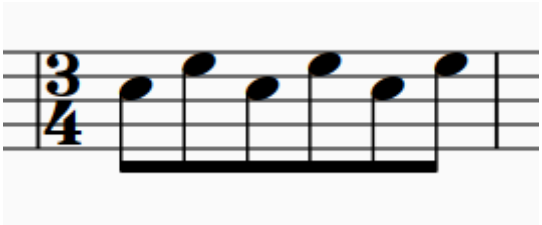
But what if you don't want that pattern? How would you set it up to do, say, a single beam for six quavers? Simple: click on the 'more options' box in the above to get to this:



Then click on Beam and Rest Groups, and this will arrive:

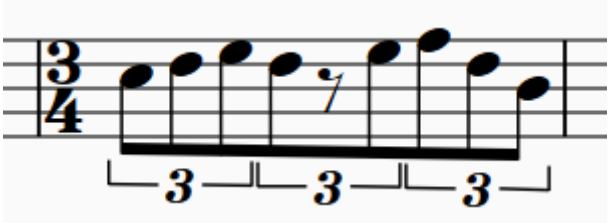


Now, change the 2,2,2 to 6, OK it, and all your quavers will come out like this:

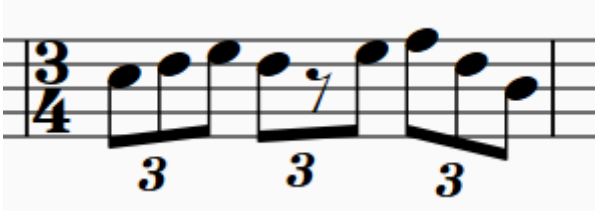


Result! And you can also set up 16th and 32nd beams as you wish, using the boxes below the one you've just changed. This function is particularly useful for re-beaming odd-numbered time signatures such as 5/4 or 7/4, if you pattern the groupings consistently as 3 + 2, or 2 + 3 etc.

If you set up 3/4 quavers like the above example, make sure you tick that box at the bottom: ‘Beams Over Tuplets – Separate tuplets from adjacent notes.’ Why? What does this gobbledygook mean? It’s easier just to show you what happens if you don’t tick the box:



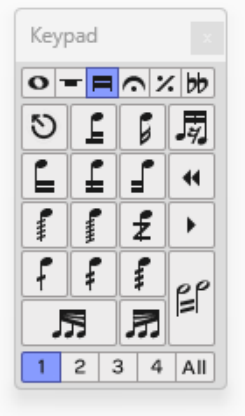
Not the clearest beaming for 3/4! And you’ve got those annoying tuplet brackets too. Ticking the box just means you can have your cake and eat it; six normal quavers beamed, but tuplet beams done correctly by the beat:



Keypad

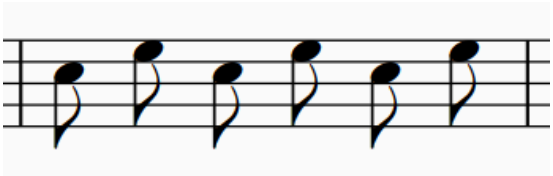
Let’s now turn to the keypad, where you can control issues like the above on a one-by-one basis (useful for inconsistent 5/4 and 7/4 groupings). Make sure your keypad is showing (View tab, Panels, Keypad box ticked):

Then click on the third box at the top with the beam-like image:



Here are all your beam controls. Let's start with the simplest ones using the 3/4 example above with the single beam. If you wanted to make those quavers 'beamless' and just with stems, click on the whole bar, then press:

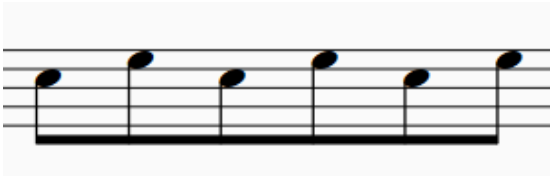
in the keypad panel to get this:



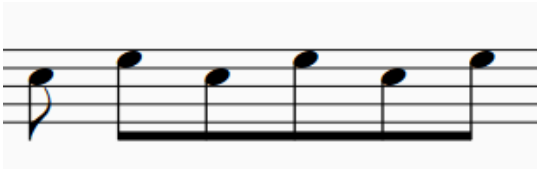
In order to beam these back (Scotty) to what we just had (without doing Control Z), you might think it would make sense to select all the quavers then press the beam icon below:

But no such luck; this is one of Sibelius's many annoying idiosyncrasies. The function of that icon is to break a beam in the middle, not start one from the beginning. (More on that in a mo.) To restore the beams here, select all the quavers, then press:

to get back to:

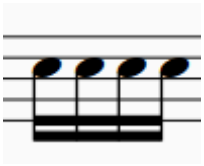


Now, if you wanted the beam to start from the second quaver, *that's* where you would use the forward-pointing beam icon above:



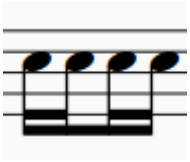
And to go back to beaming from the first note, select the second quaver then press the forward- and backward-pointing beam icon:

And finally, for this section, how to do secondary beams. Again, easier to see this than verbalise, so just watch the following; I want to break these semiquavers into two pairs with a quaver beam in the middle:

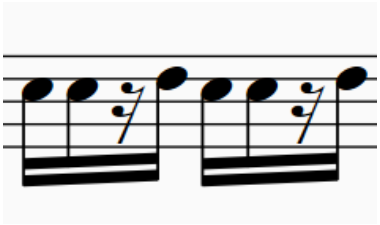


Just select the third semiquaver, then press:

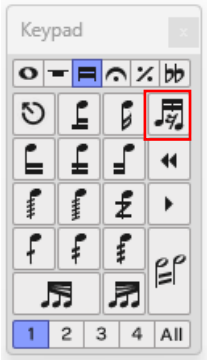
to get:



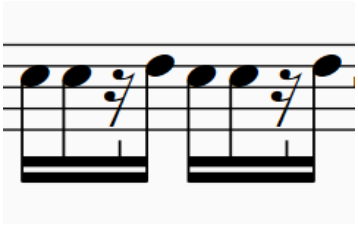
Let’s look at another couple of options for beams in the keypad. If you want to add stemlets to beams over rests, for something like this:



you just select the groups where you want that to occur and press this icon in the keypad:

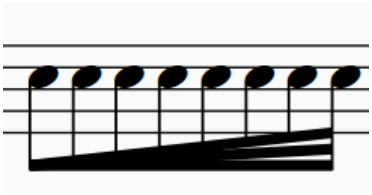


to arrive at this:

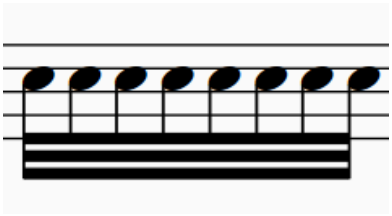


Bear in mind, this is a localised application of stemlets only; see the next blog for information on how to set them globally in a file, and how to control the way they look too.

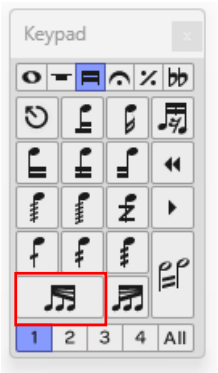
And finally, if you want to use beams to show localised accels and rits, use the feathered beams option. So, to achieve this:



first establish your fastest duration as one beamed group:



then press:



or the box next to it for the rit. version. All good to go!

Ivor McGregor, March 2025

(Written without using ChatGPT)

Ivor McGregor is a professional music proofreader, editor and typesetter. Need some help presenting your written music? Visit ivormcgregorproofreading.co.uk