



GT133

Nashville Number System

Nashville musicians have been using a unique number system to transcribe songs for years; once mastered you can transpose songs in an instant. Dario Cortese gets busy with the maths...

Although it's hard to say exactly when it was 'born', common belief is that the Nashville Number System started in the early 60's with Charlie McCoy and has been used for Nashville sessions ever since. Basically this system uses numbers (not Roman numerals) instead of note names. As with every system in music, it has its own rules and common useage, so it'll take a while to master. However if you're working on TV, sessions or in a house band, trust me it's worth it!

Key to learning, reading and using this system is an intimate knowledge of your major scales. Let's take the C major scale for instance: C, D, E, F, G, A and B. Now substitute each note with numbers and you'll get 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7. In the Nashville System, numbers assigned to each step of the major scale represent chords as well as single notes. In addition to assigning each chord a number, we must also designate if the chord is major or minor, whether it has a seventh, etc. Also, in traditional notation we use bars, whereas in the Nashville System a chord number automatically lasts one measure. Let's take the standard 12 bars blues progression in C. With the Nashville Number System it would look like this:

1	1	1	1
4	4	1	1
5	4	1	1

First question; what if you have two or more chords in one bar? When more than one chord is written within a measure, the chord numbers are underlined; these measures are called split bars. If there is an uneven number of beats per chord, a small hush or dot mark over the chord shows how many beats each chord gets.

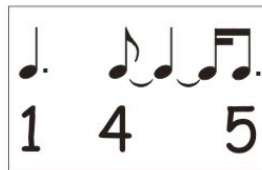


What about if a chord is pushed, let's say on the 'and' of the 3rd beat? The symbol '>' is an abbreviation for the push and goes over the chord being pushed. More complex rhythms would be written in standard notation.

Here are some examples:

1 4 1 1 1 5 4 1

1 4̣ 5̣ 1̣ 1 1 [>]5



Next question; What about if you have a single bar with a different time signature (for those prog-country cross over tracks...ed)? Just write the new time signature in parentheses before the measure that changes; then resume by inserting the original time signature in parentheses in front of the next measure. Sometimes, it's easy to insert a new time signature just by writing the number of beats as hush marks as shown in this example.

($\frac{2}{4}$) 5 ($\frac{4}{4}$) 1 $\overline{\overline{5}}$ 1

1 4 5 $\overline{\overline{\overline{4}}}$ 1

Another very common sign in the Nashville System is the 'diamond'; it signifies that the chord is held for one full measure.

Next question; what adding a modulation to a different key? No problem. Let's say that the song is in C and you have to move up to Eb. Just write 'Mod to b3'. After this sign the chord numbers will be read as in the new key.

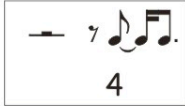

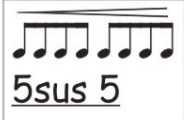


Key: C 6m 3 4 1 Mod ↗ b3

Key: Eb 4 3 6m 1

So, now let's try it in practice! You have to play lead guitar over a country tune; the backing track has already been recorded and you have to record an intro and various fills through the song. The chart is written with Nashville Number System. As with all sessions, you are being hired for your taste and sympathetic playing; don't play over the vocal but add to the track! See ya next month!

Chart:

Intro		<u>1 4</u>	<u>1 4</u>	<u>b7 4</u>	1
Verse	4	1	<u>b7 4</u>	1	
Chorus	6m	5/7	4	<u>5sus 5 1</u>	
	<u>4 5</u>	1	<u>4 5</u>	<u>6m 5</u>	
	<u>4 5</u>	1 5	4	<u>2m7</u>	
	<u>5sus 5</u>				
Breakdown	4	6m	4		
Ending	1				



Bars 1-6: For the entire intro try and work with 'question and answer' type licks. Bending the 2nd up to the major 3rd is a trademark of country music.

Bars 6-9: For the verse, make sure you leave room for the vocal. Play only when you're changing section (such as bar 9)

Bars 10-13: This is the pre-chorus. Again, play a few non-invasive fills only and try to build up for the chorus.

Bars 14-21: For the chorus, again, leave room for the voice and backing vocals (does this sound familiar...) and try to use classic country trademarks, such as 'mechanical' bends. Follow the rhythm of the chart carefully: that's the challenge!

Bars 22-27: This is the breakdown section for the song. Don't play too much and follow the band dynamics.

RECOMMENDED READING

If you are interested in the Nashville Number System check out the site www.nashvillenumbersystem.com. There's also a wonderful book named 'The Nashville Number System' that explains all you ever needed to know about the system and comes with a cd-rom that you can use to practice. Hot doggedy dog!

Chas is a friend so make sure you mention my name. I won't get any commission by you might get a special treatment. :)



♩ = 80

C G C

8^{va}

full

15 15 10 10 10 10 10 10 10

T A B

3

G C F C G

full

10 10 10 (10) 8 8 10 9 8 8 8 (8) 6 6 8 3 3 (3) 3 3 1/2 4 (4) 5 5/7

T A B

6

C G F C G Em D/F#

1/2

10 (10) 8 9 10 8 7 5/7

T A B

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12 C D(sus4) D G C D G C D

TAB: 5 7 8 7 10 10 10 10 10 10 8

full

17 Em D C D G D C Am⁷

TAB: 0 0 2 2 2/4 3 4 5 3 5 4 5 5 7 5 (5)

full

22 D(sus4) D C Em

TAB: 8 8 7 (7) 3 2 (2) 0 2 3 0 2 (2) (2) 0 0 4

full 1/2 1/2

25 C D(sus4) D G

TAB: 2 12 11 12 10 12 10 10 10 (10) 10 11 12 12 10

full