“Ok., it’s a standard 12 bar in 'G' but add a 2 on the bridge ...kick it off from the 5 ... hit the 4 on the way down and then into the 1 ... watch me for the 2...” What the Hey......!!

For many years, musicians in Nashville have used a system of numbers, rather than standard musical notation when playing gig’s or at recording sessions. Neil Matthews, Jr., one of the original members of Elvis Presley's back-up vocal quartet The Jordanaires, invented the system.

The Nashville Number System is a shorthand method of writing musical arrangements that was further developed by Nashville studio musicians like Charlie McCoy. Based on the degrees of the scale (do, re, me, fa, sol, la, ti ...). It is a powerful tool in the written communication of music. It’s similar to the version of the Roman Numeral Analysis that we have been studying.

- This system uses Arabic Numbers (1 2 3 etc..) or sometimes Roman Numerals instead of chord letters. This is because people do not always play the same song in the same key. Also, some will use a capo, while others will not. This system prevents the musician from having to rewrite chord charts to reflect his/her own key preference.

- All numbers are relative to the key you decide to play it in. For example, the "3rd" in a C chord is an E; using the root (C) as the number one, and counting up the scale; C = 1, D = 2, E = 3, F = 4, etc.

With the Nashville Numbering System, we can then base these Arabic Numbers by Key to find what they are.

It’s a Diatonic System:

- The numbers represent the “Diatonic” chords of the scale in order. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C major</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Dm</td>
<td>Em</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Am</td>
<td>B⁰</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C minor</td>
<td>Cm</td>
<td>D⁰</td>
<td>Eb</td>
<td>Fm</td>
<td>Gm</td>
<td>Ab</td>
<td>Bb</td>
<td>Cm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If a chord is written without an alteration, it is assumed to be the “natural” or diatonic quality.

So a “1 6 2 5 1” Progression in the "Key of C" is:

C Am Dm G C

“1 6 2 5 1” in the “Key of C minor” is:

Cm Ab D0 Gm Cm

The charts below will help you understand it better and help you to figure out the chords.

**COMMON GUITAR KEYS - MAJOR**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roman Numerals</td>
<td>I ii- iii- IV V vi- vii0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key</td>
<td>C C Dm Em F G Am B0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D D Em F#m G A Bm C#0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eb Eb Fm Gm Ab Bb Cm D0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E E F#m G#m A B C#m D#0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F F Gm Am Bb C Dm E0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>G G Am Bm C D Em F#0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A A Bm C#m D E F#m G#0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bb Bb Cm Dm Eb F Gm A0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B B C#m D#m E F# G#m A#0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**COMMON GUITAR KEYS - MINOR**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roman Numerals</td>
<td>i- ii0 III iv- v- VI VII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key</td>
<td>Cm Cm D0 Eb Fm Gm Ab Bb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dm Dm E F Gm Am Bb C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ebm Ebm F# Gb Abm Bbm Cb Db</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Em Em F#m G Am Bm C D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fm Fm G# Ab Bbm Cm Db Eb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gm Gm A# Bb Cm Dm Eb F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Am Am B# C Dm Em F G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bbm Bbm C# Db Ebm Fm Gb Ab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bm Bm C#0 D Em F#m G A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Adding Chord Extensions:**

Adding Extensions to the chords is similar to the other notation systems. You just write in the chord tensions using numbers or symbols.

The progression CM7 Am9 Dm9 G13 CM7 can be written:
Altered Chords:

Just like the Roman Numeral system, you can "alter" chords. In a major key, the 2 chord is naturally minor. But we can make it major by writing 2M or 2Ma, etc. *There is not an exact standard way the chords are written in the number system.*

**X** is used to denote dominant quality. So C7 in the key of C would be: 1X7 or C9 would be 1X9.

- Note: not necessary to use X on the 57 chord since it is already dominant, unless you’re in a minor key. (What about Harmonic Minor?)

Again, if a chord is written without an alteration, it is assumed to be the "natural" quality. So if you see this progression:

```
1 2 3 6
```

In the Key of C, that will be; C major D minor E minor A minor

If you see: 1 2M 3M 6 In the Key of C that will be; C Major D Major E Major A minor.

Non-Diatonic, Modal Interchange and Passing chords:

**Use #’s and b’s for non diatonic, modal interchange and passing chords.**

Going from C to Bb7 to Ebmaj7 in the key of C would be:

1, bVII7, bIII7 in Roman Numeral.

1, b7X7, b3 in NNS.

Going from C to C#dim to Dmin to Ab7 to G7 in the key of C would be:

1, #I0, II-, bVI7, V7 in RN.

1, #I0, 2, b6X7, 57 in NNS

**In Roman Numeral analysis, using capitals without a minor identifier (min, or m, or - ) means that the chord is major. So, I II III IV in the Key of C is; C major, D major, E major and F major. If you want minor, you must identify it. ie. I II- III- IV or I IImin IIIm IV, etc.... Also, lower case Roman Numerals represent minor. (I recommend using a minor symbol with lower case Roman Numerals anyway…ie; ii- or iii- to insure that there is no confusion, but it is not necessary.)**
Example Chart in Nashville Notation:

Let's look at an actual example. Here is a country song old people like me are familiar with - "Blue Eyes Crying In the Rain," recorded by Willie Nelson. It is in 4/4 time. Chords are placed on the first beat of each measure. Notice how the lyrics line up with the down beats of each measure.

Here it is with letter names for the Key of C:

C      C                   C              C       G7          G7              C          C
In the twilight glow I see her,                 Blue eyes crying in the rain

C      C                   C              C       G7          G7              C          C
When we kissed goodbye and parted,           I knew we'd never meet again

F        F                F         F     C      C              G7       G7
Love is like a dying ember,          only memories remain

C               C            C          C     G7          G7              C         C
Through the ages I'll remember,        blue eyes crying in the rain.

Here is the same thing with the Nashville Number System:

1       1                    1 1 57 57 1 1
In the twilight glow I see her,                 Blue eyes crying in the rain

1       1                    1 1 57 57 1 1
When we kissed goodbye she farted,  I knew I'd never be the same

4          4                4         4     1 1                 57 57
Love is like a dying ember,          only memories remain

1       1                    1 1 57 57 1 1
Through the ages I'll remember,        blue eyes crying in the rain.

Now, since each measure of the song is indicated with a chord in these examples, we can also show the chord progression separately from the lyrics by showing each measure like this:

1       1                    1 1 57 57 1 1

1       1                    1 1 57 57 1 1

4          4                4         4     1 1                 57 57

1       1                    1 1 57 57 1 1

*Can you identify the song form?*
**Using the Nashville number chart system, each number represents not only a chord, but also a measure.**

Changing chords within the measure:

Some songs have chord changes within a measure. This is commonly done by placing parentheses around the measure, like this:

```
1    (1   1/7)  4   4   (This is 4 bars long)
```

Other ways to change chords within a measure, if the change is even (changing on beat number three in 4/4 time) you can simply underline both chords or put them in a box. The first line of "Jingle Bells" would read:

```
1   1
1   1
1   4
1   4
```

The one and four chords would fall on the words, "Jingle - all the" with two beats for the 1 and two beats for the 4.

To express quarter notes, you can put dots under or over the numbers to be counted as beats:

```
1   (1 .5 .4 .1) (.4 .54) 1   1
```

(one beat of 1, one beat of 5, one beat of 4, one beat of 1) (two beats of 4, one beat of 5, one beat of 4)

More complex rhythms can be expressed using standard Music notation.

**Inversions and Polychords:**

You will also find inversions notated in the NNS. If you want to use the common 5 chord over the 1 bass note you will see something like this:

```
1 5/1 4/1 5/1  in the key of C this would be; C G/C F/C G/C
```

The "/" is used to indicate a different bass note from the root of the chord. A few common progressions are:

```
1 1/3 4 4/6    in the Key of C: C C/E F F/A
```

```
5 5/7 1 5  in the Key of E: B B/D# E B
```

A difference here from Roman Numeral analysis is that the bass note is related to the Key center scale tone - **not** the chord tones.

In Nashville Notation, the 5/7 in the key of C would be G/B (G triad over a B bass – 1st inversion). In Roman Numeral notation V/7 would be G/F (G triad over an F bass – G7 3rd inversion). V/3 would be the same as 5/7.