

Introduction to the Nashville Number System

(by Kyle O'Neal)

What is the Nashville Number System?

The Nashville Number System is a method of transcribing music so that a song can be understood and performed. Nashville chord charts substitute numbers for the chord letter symbols found in traditional music notation.

How is the Nashville Number System used in worship music?

The Nashville Number System is utilized in many ways in worship music. For example, a song may be in the key of A. One guitar player might play in the A shape while another guitar player may capo the second fret and play in the G shape. In using the Nashville Number System, you simply call out the numbers and it is the same to both guitar players. Another example would be if a musician learned a song in one key and a vocalist needed to change the key. With the Nashville Number System you can easily change the key while the numbers remain the same. You will no longer have to transpose a chord chart. The Nashville Number System is a universal system for any musician.

How does it work?

The numbers represent the scale degrees (ex. In the key of C, C=1, D=2, E=3, F=4, G=5, A=6, B=7, C=1)

There are two things you must know about every key that you play in:

- 1) The sharps and flats within the scale
 - a. Key of A (A, B, C#, D, E, F#, G#, A)
 - b. Key of B (B, C#, D#, E, F#, G#, A#, B)
 - c. Key of C (C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C)
 - d. Key of D (D, E, F#, G, A, B, C#, D)
 - e. Key of E (E, F#, G#, A, B, C#, D#, E)
 - f. Key of F (F, G, A, Bb, C, D, E, F)
 - g. Key of G (G, A, B, C, D, E, F#, G)
- 2) If the scale degree is major or minor
 - a. Major scales: Major, minor, minor, Major, Major, minor, diminished
 - i. The 2nd, 3rd, 6th, and 7th scale degrees are always minor (unless noted)
 - ii. ex. The C major scale would be: C, Dm, Em, F, G, Am, Bm, C
 - b. Minor scales: minor, diminished, Major, minor, minor, Major, Major, minor
 - i. The 3rd, 6th, and 7th, scale degrees are always Major (unless noted)
 - ii. ex. The C minor scale would be: Cm, Dm, E, Fm, Gm, A, B, Cm

There are certain notations to be familiar with:

- 1) Numbers (ex. 1,2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7) represent the scale degrees
- 2) A capitol letter "M" after the number represents a Major chord (ex. AM would be 1M)
 - a. If a capitol letter "M" is not used, it is assumed to be a Major chord
- 3) A lowercase "m" after the number represents a minor chord (ex. Am would be 1m)
 - a. A lower case m is only used if it is changed outside of the normal scale
- 4) The number preceding a "/" symbol represents the main chord (ex. 5/7; 5 is the main chord)
- 5) The number following a "/" symbol represents the bass note (ex. 5/7; 7 is the bass note)
- 6) A smaller number above the number represents the chord's extension (key of A: 1⁷ is an A⁷)

Song Application Example

Here is an example from the song “Your Grace is Enough” by Chris Tomlin. Look at how the notations are used to make the chart universal to any musician:

Your Grace is Enough

(by Chris Tomlin)

Key of A

Verse 1

A A/C# D
Great is Your faithfulness, oh God
F#m E/G# D
You wrestle with the sinner’s heart
A A/C# D
You lead us by still waters and to mercy
F#m E/G# D
And nothing can keep us apart

Pre Chorus

 Bm A/C#
So remember your people
 D E
Remember your children
 Bm A/C# D
Remember your promise, oh God

Chorus

 A E
Your grace is enough
 F#m D
Your grace is enough
 A E D
Your grace is enough for me

Your Grace is Enough

(by Chris Tomlin)

Nashville Number System

Verse 1

1 1/3 4
Great is Your faithfulness, oh God
6 5/7 4
You wrestle with the sinner’s heart
1 1/3 4
You lead us by still waters and to mercy
6 5/7 4
And nothing can keep us apart

Pre Chorus

 2 1/3
So remember your people
 4 5
Remember your children
 2 1/3 4
Remember your promise, oh God

Chorus

 1 5
Your grace is enough
 6 4
Your grace is enough
 1 5 4
Your grace is enough for me

With the chord chart only in A, you are forced to transpose if the key is changed. With the Nashville Number System, the chart remains the same no matter what key the song is played in. Once you begin to use the Nashville Number System, it becomes second nature. Don’t be afraid of it. It is an incredibly easy to learn system and one that will benefit you forever.

Cheat Sheet

(common keys for worship songs)

Key of A

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A	Bm	C#m	D	E	F#m	G#m

Key of B

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
B	C#m	D#m	E	F#	G#m	A#m

Key of C

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
C	Dm	Em	F	G	Am	Bm

Key of D

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
D	Em	F#m	G	A	Bm	C#m

Key of E

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
E	F#m	G#m	A	B	C#m	D#m

Key of G

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
G	Am	Bm	C	D	Em	F#m