The Nashville Number System

What, Why and How

Presented by Fett
Cacapehon Retreat
May, 2024

Wanna Follow The Slides On Your Own Device?

www.AzaleaMusic.com/Cacapehon2024

What's a Fett…?

- Independent producer/engineer, Azalea Studios, Nashville
- Co-founder and owner of Azalea Music Group, Nashville
  - www.AzaleaMusic.com
- Former Technology Editor for *Performing Songwriter* magazine
- Creator & host of Empowering Women In Audio clinics
  - www.EmpoweringWomenInAudio.com
- Coach & mentor
  - www.AzaleaMusic.com/fetts-production-booster-program
- Author
  - *Fett's Mixing Roadmap: A Step-by-step Guide to Mixing In The Studio* (Amazon.com)
- Teacher: online video courses in recording, mixing, mastering, etc.
  - www.AzaleaMusic.com/Programs

The Nashville Number System

"The lingua franca of the *working* musician."

(*And* working songwriter, producer, engineer, etc.)

What We're Used To Seeing (less common)…

What We're Used To Seeing (more common)…

Jimmy Buffet – Margaritaville – Lyrics and Chords

```
[Intro]
D  G  A  D

[Verse]
D
   Nibblin' on sponge cake, watchin' the sun bake
                                    A
All of those tourists covered with oil
A
   Strummin' my six string, on my front porch swing
                                          D     D7
Smell those shrimp they're beginnin' to boil

[Chorus]
G           A                  D        D7   G                  A                D     D7
   Wastin' away again in Margaritaville,      searchin' for my lost shaker of salt
G              A                     D   A/C#  G           A                    D
   Some people claim that there's a woman to blame, but I know, it's nobody's fault

[Verse]
```

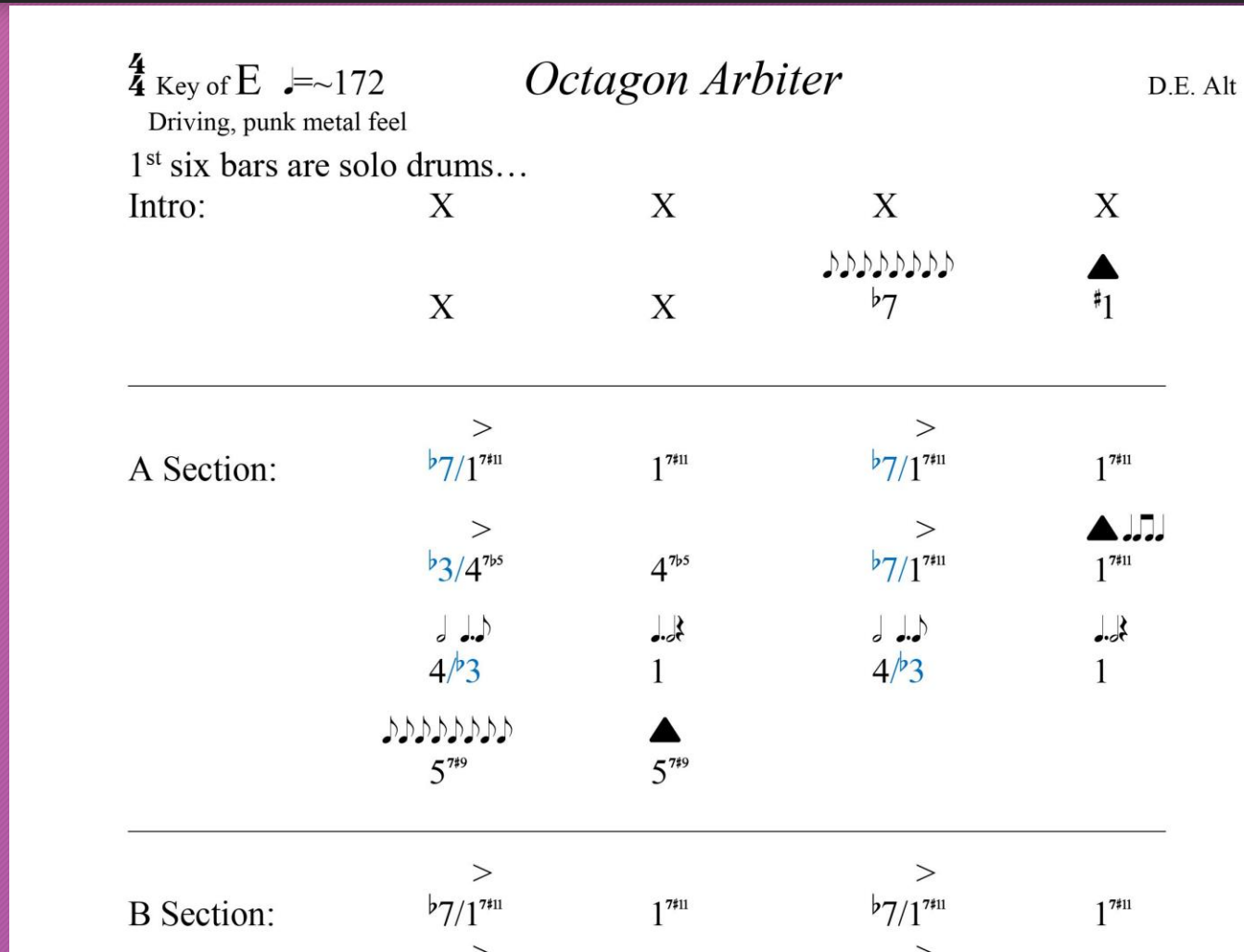
What Might Work Better…

4/4 Key of D ♩= ~124 — *Margaritaville* — Jimmy Buffet

Happy-go-lucky beach feel

Intro:	1	4	5	>1	1
V1,2:	1	1	1	11sus	
	1	1	5	5	
	5⁷	5⁷	5⁷	5⁷	
	5⁷	5⁷	11sus1	>11⁷ ↗	
C1,2:	4	5	11sus1	>1⁷ ↗	
	4	5	11sus1	>1⁷ ↗	
	4	5	1 5/7	◇4	
	5	5			
TA1,2:	1	1			
Instr:	1	1	1	1	

What Might Work Better…



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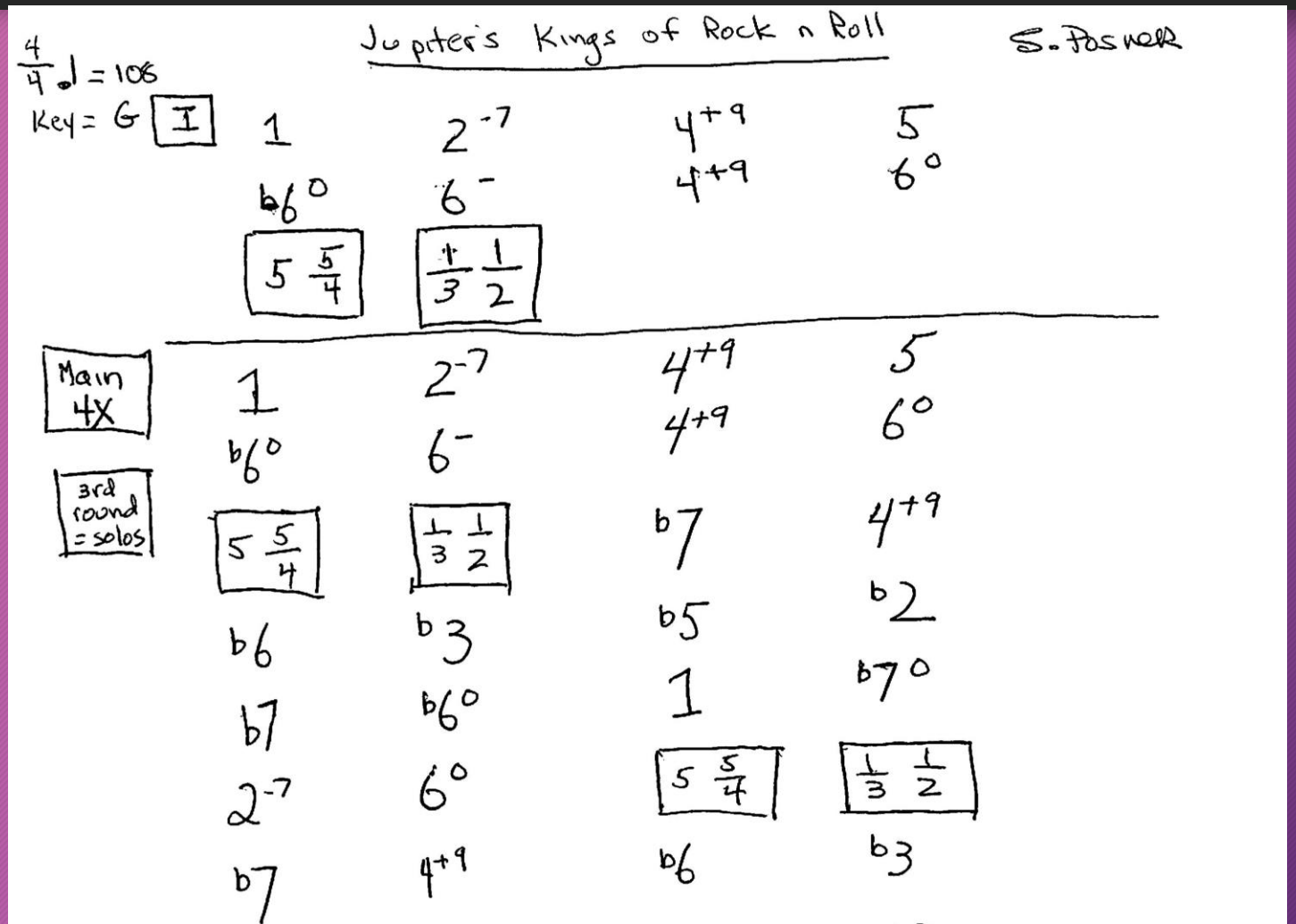


A different mindset…

(Capo 4th Fret) **A Little Too Late** – Tom Prasada-Rao, Nancy Moran & Fett

A E D A
(Verse 1) Every time I see you smile, I hear your mother laughing
D A E
I see her hair come falling down like rings around the moon
D A E A
For all you know the world is right, (and) the sun will rise tomorrow
D A E A
So I'll pack up all my sorrows, for when you leave me too

A E D A
(Verse 2) Every time you turn away, I feel your mother leaving
D A E
Like she did the last time that I held her long ago
D A E A
I don't know how to tell you, all the things that need explaining
D A E A
But I'm all through complaining, I know she had to go

D A
(Chorus) Some people learn, a little too late
E A
Some people bend, some people break
D A
Some know just when, to make their escape
E A
Some people learn, a little too late

E ~~E♭m~~ ~~D♭m/A♭~~
(Bridge) I'd take it back if I could, hold my breath and knock on wood
D A E
Clean my act up really good, if anyone could tell
E ~~C♯dim~~ ~~D♭m/A♭~~
You've got her dimples on your cheek, you've got scars I can't erase
D A E
It's not your fault, it's not your place, to take it on yourself

A E D A
(Verse 3) Every time you talk to me, I hear your mother asking
D A E
Why it couldn't be just like the way it was before
D A E A
Why do people fall in love, and some fall even further
D A E A
Why even bother, she doesn't live here any more

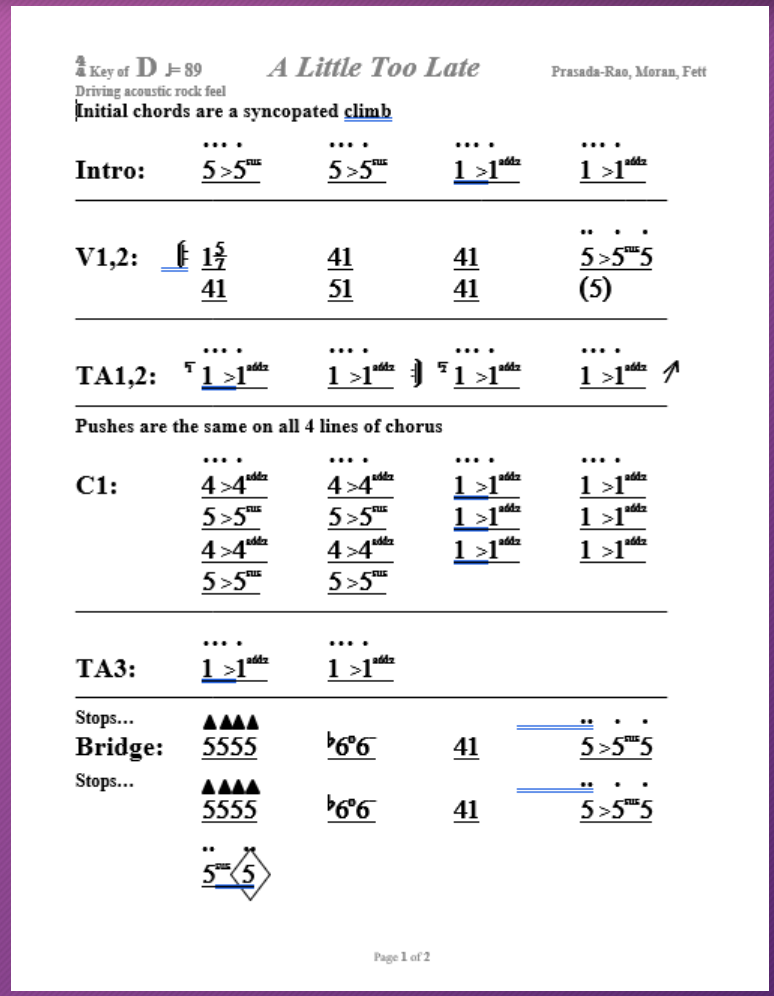
D A
(Chorus) Some people learn, a little too late
E A
Some people bend, some people break
D A
Some know just when, to make their escape
E A
Some people learn, a little too late

E ~~E♭m~~ ~~D♭m/A♭~~ E D
(Tag) Some people bend, some people break…
E A
Some people learn… just a little too late

Countermelody:

I'd take it back if I could, hold my breath, knock on wood
and I'd clean up my act really good
Because you have got scars, and they can be erased
but it isn't your fault, no, it isn't your place
Some people bend, yes, and some people break
Some people know when to make their escape
Some people learn… a little too late

Oh, some people learn



Key of D ♩= 89 ***A Little Too Late*** Prasada-Rao, Moran, Fett

Driving acoustic rock feel

Initial chords are a syncopated climb

Intro: 5 >5 | 5 >5 | 1 >1 | 1 >1

V1,2: 1 5/7 / 4 1 | 4 1 / 5 1 | 4 1 / 4 1 | 5 >5 5 / (5)

TA1,2: 1 >1 | 1 >1 | 1 >1 | 1 >1

Pushes are the same on all 4 lines of chorus

C1: 4 >4 / 5 >5 / 4 >4 / 5 >5 | 4 >4 / 5 >5 / 4 >4 / 5 >5 | 1 >1 / 1 >1 / 1 >1 | 1 >1 / 1 >1 / 1 >1

TA3: 1 >1 | 1 >1

Stops…
Bridge: 5555 | ♭6°6 | 4 1 | 5 >5 5

Stops…
5555 | ♭6°6 | 4 1 | 5 >5 5

5 5

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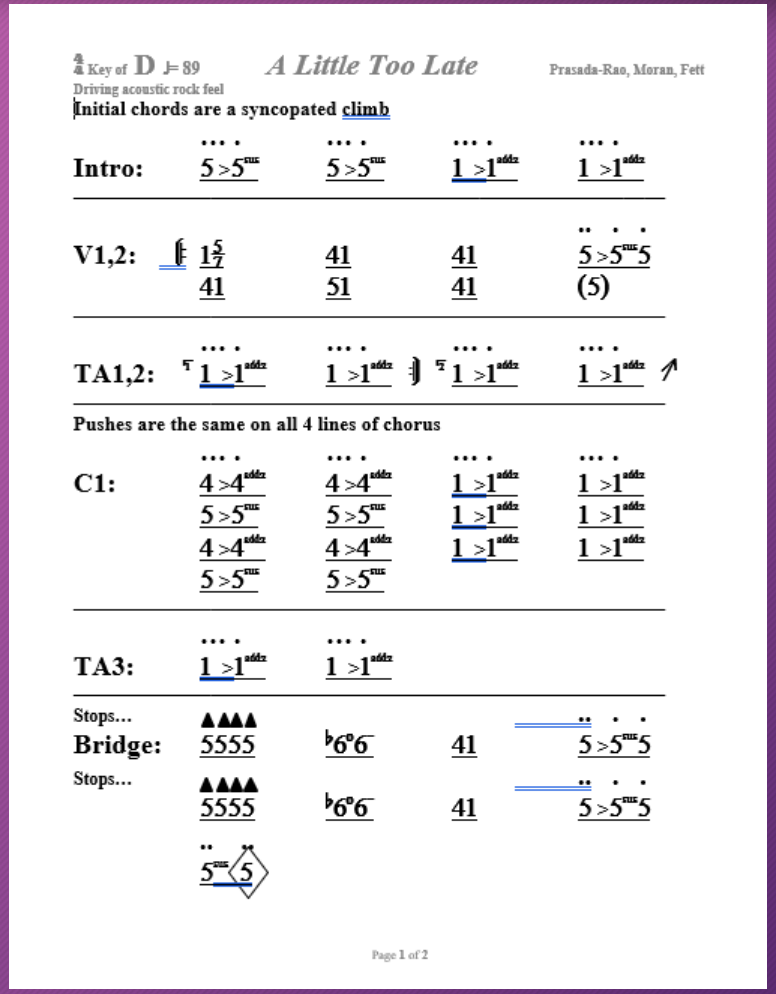
Nashville Number System – Fundamentals

- All chords and notes represented by *relative* numbers, not *literal* letters
- Based on fundamental triads as core
- Based on the diatonic (vs. chromatic) scale (common reference), e.g.,

• Conventional:	C Maj,	D Min,	E Min,	F Maj,	G Maj,	A Min,	B Dim → C Maj
• Early classical:	I,	ii,	iii,	IV,	V,	vi,	vii → I
• Nashville:	1,	2^{-},	3^{-},	4,	5,	6^{-},	7^{o} → 1

Nashville Number System – Fundamentals

- Conveys
  - Song structure – *graphically*
  - Song chords
  - Song dynamics
  - Song time signature and tempo
- Can also convey song arrangement and production



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TA3: 1>1 | 1>1

Stops... **Bridge:** 5555 | ♭6°6 | 4 1 | 5>5 5

Stops... 5555 | ♭6°6 | 4 1 | 5>5 5

5 (5)

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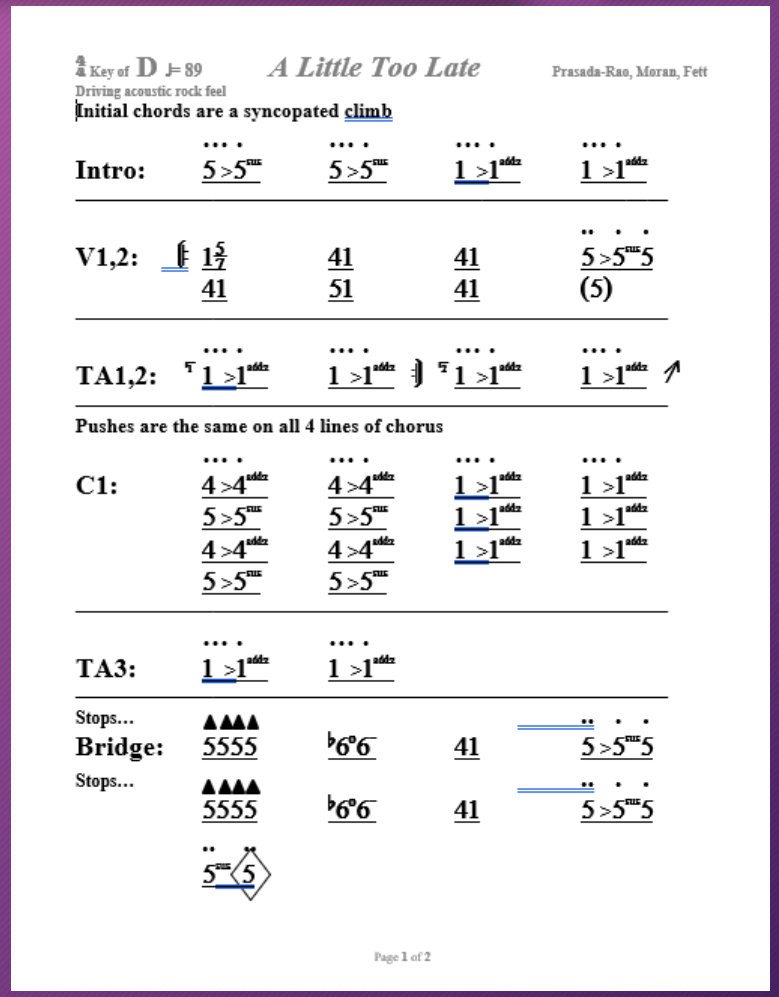
Nashville Number System – Biggest Benefits

- Changing the song key requires NO CHANGE to the chart
  - Chart is entirely *independent* of the song's key, capo positions of guitar, etc.
  - Every song is always "in the key of 1" (or 6 minor)
- Single chart for ALL musicians (and producer, engineer, songwriter, etc.)
  - All are literally "on the same page" together



Key of D ♩= 89 — *A Little Too Late* — Prasada-Rao, Moran, Fett

Driving acoustic rock feel

Initial chords are a syncopated climb

Intro: 5 >5sus | 5 >5sus | 1 >1add2 | 1 >1add2

V1,2: 1 5/7 / 4 1 | 4 1 / 5 1 | 4 1 / 4 1 | 5 >5sus 5 / (5)

TA1,2: 1 >1add2 | 1 >1add2 | 1 >1add2 | 1 >1add2

Pushes are the same on all 4 lines of chorus

C1: 4 >4add2 / 5 >5sus / 4 >4add2 / 5 >5sus | 4 >4add2 / 5 >5sus / 4 >4add2 / 5 >5sus | 1 >1add2 / 1 >1add2 / 1 >1add2 | 1 >1add2 / 1 >1add2 / 1 >1add2

TA3: 1 >1add2 | 1 >1add2

Stops...

Bridge: 5555 | ♭6°6 | 4 1 | 5 >5sus 5

Stops...

5555 | ♭6°6 | 4 1 | 5 >5sus 5

5sus 5

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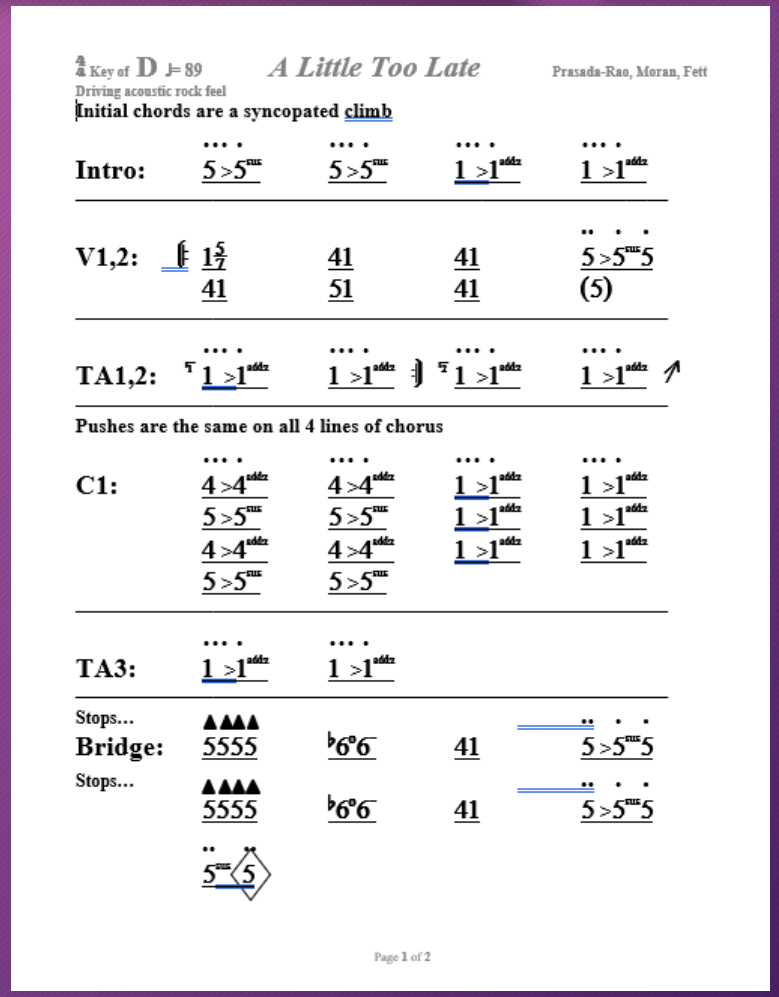
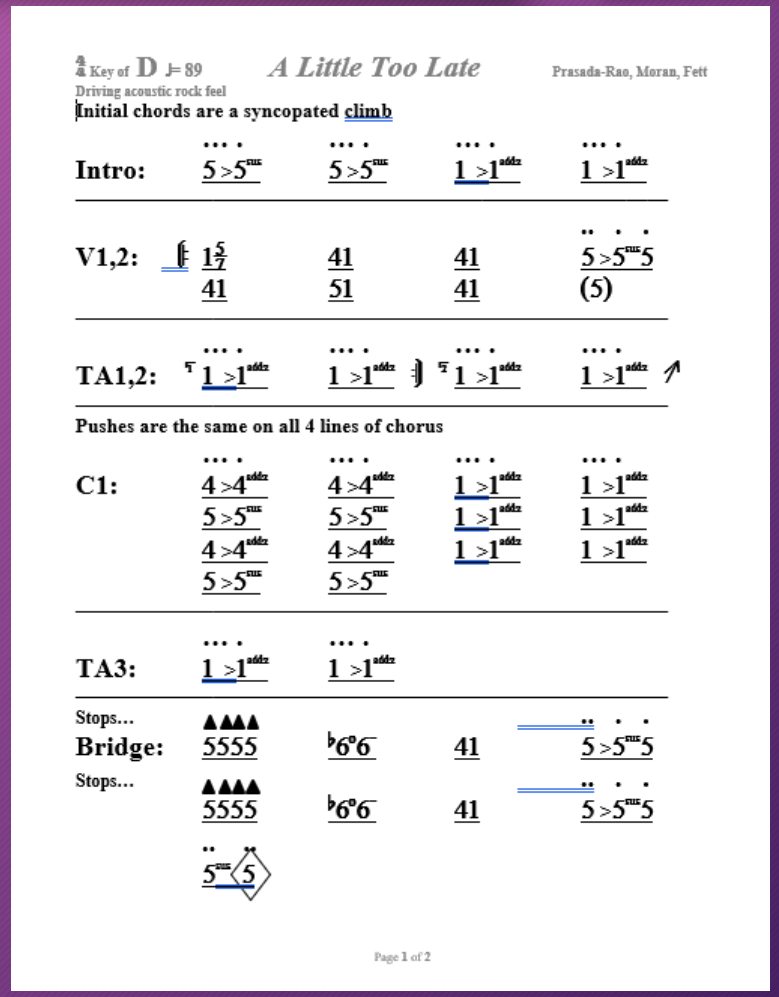
Nashville Number System – Biggest Benefits

- No need to read intricacies of traditional notation or lyrics to get essential information
- Frees up everyone's mind to
  - Not have to focus on rigid chord voicings or transposing
  - Not have to sift through lyric sheet in order to find the chords
  - Look at song from a higher level, rather than "in-the-weeds" mechanics
  - Focus on *implementation* of their parts vs. *learning* the song



Nashville Number System – Biggest Benefits

- Actually encourages (even *liberates*) musicians to bring their skills to the process, and think in a different way
  - Musicians LOVE that!
- Makes working with the song *extremely* fast (live and in studio)



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TA3: 1 >1add2 | 1 >1add2

Stops... Bridge: 5555 | ♭6°6 | 4 1 | 5 >5sus 5

Stops... 5555 | ♭6°6 | 4 1 | 5 >5sus 5

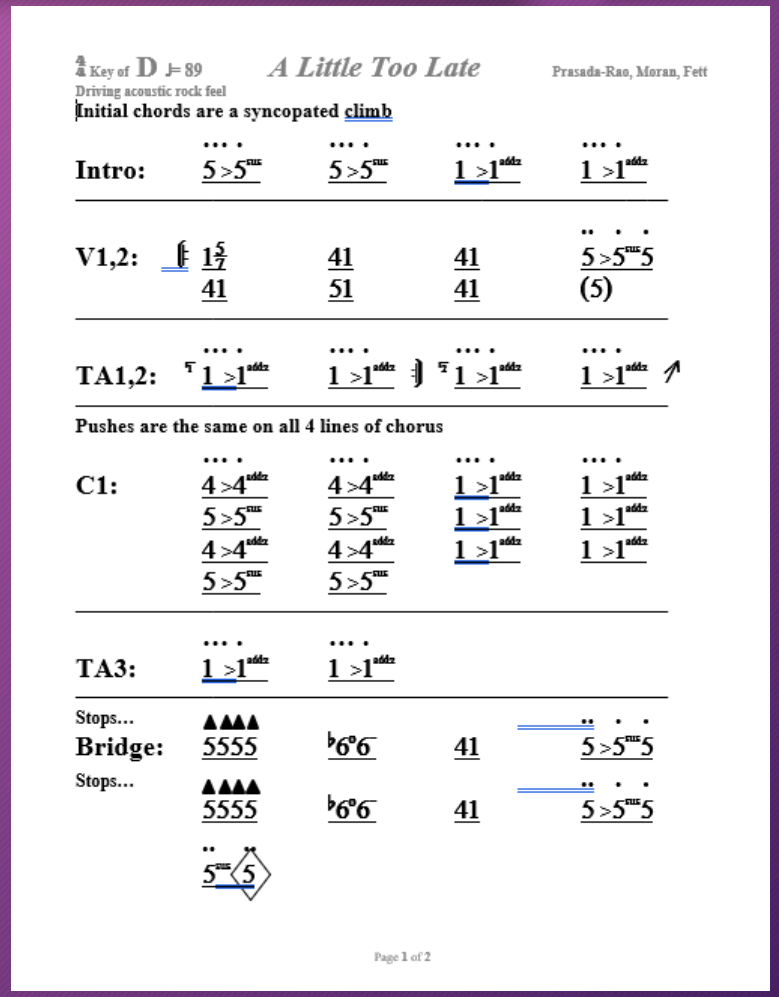
5sus 5

Nashville Number System – Biggest Benefits

- Side-benefit: helps *creators* of the song to understand their own songwriting, structure(s), etc. in a different way
- Side-benefit: actually improves innate understanding of
  - General music theory
  - Relationships of chords
  - Harmonization
  - Improvisation
  - Transposing
  - Ear training and general listening skills (esp. if *creating* charts)
  - And more

  … basically everything it takes to be a great musician –

  and get HIRED!



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TA3: 1 >1add2 | 1 >1add2

Stops...

Bridge: 5555 | ♭6°6 | 4 1 | 5 >5sus 5

Stops...

5555 | ♭6°6 | 4 1 | 5 >5sus 5

5sus 5

NNS – Most Common Elements

- Numbers for all chords and notes: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
  - Flat and sharp (usually written BEFORE the chord): ♭7 ♯5
  - Rests use traditional notation:
- Chord modifiers (can be combined)
  - Minor, Minor 7th, Dominant 7th, Major 7th, Sus 4, Add 2, Diminished, Augmented, etc.

  6^{-} 2^{-7} 5^{7} 1^{Δ} 4^{sus} 1^{add2} 7^{o} 3^{+} etc.
- Bass note below chord (e.g., “5 over 7”) expressed as fraction: $\frac{5}{7}$

NNS – Most Common Elements

- Symbols for internal structure of musical measures
  - Split measures/bars designated by slash / ***, <u>underline</u>, or box

  *** Slash can cause confusion with conventional "chord over bass note notation" for NNS newbies

  - Half measures/bars designated by parentheses ( )
- Symbols for dynamics:
  - Holds (aka, "diamonds"

), stops , pushes/pulls (><) crescendos, climbs/descents ( )
- Leaves room for addition of traditional music notation when applicable
  - Especially rhythmic phrasing:

Rit. ____|

NNS – Wrapup

- Multiple styles and “dialects” exist, and are often mixed
  - But all follow the same essential structure and elements – AND flexibility
- NNS is not just for players, but for singers as well!
  - Numbers and other symbols are written directly over words on lyric sheets
    - That’s why lyric sheets are always double-spaced in Nashville! 😊
- Once you’ve experienced it, you’ll never think about music in the same way again!

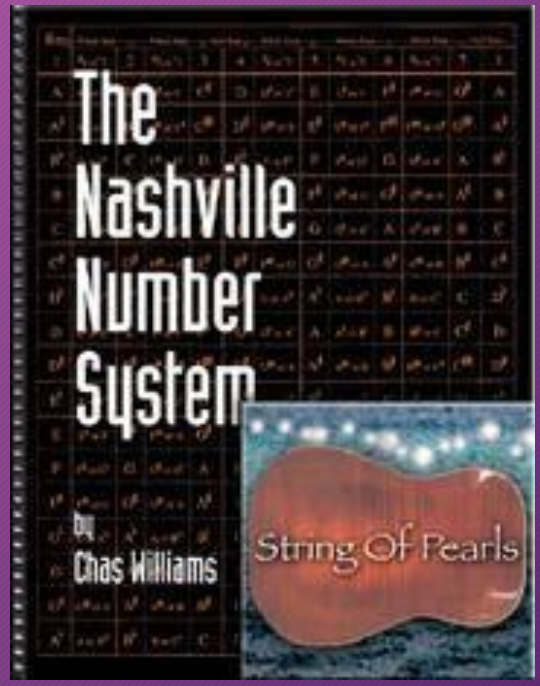
NNS – Where To Go Next

Want to learn LOTS more?

Check out ***The Nashville Number System*** **book**

By Chas Williams

Available HERE at the Retreat!

See Fett after class

Companion iOS app also available from the Apple Store