

Jam Song Book

27 Singing Songs

using the Nashville Number System



If you're interested in learning lead breaks or solos for any of these songs or tunes, the Mountain Music Parlor offers classes and lessons for all the bluegrass instruments. Contact Renee at 775-843-5500.



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The Nashville Number System (as it's used in this booklet)

The Nashville Number System was developed for people who know basic chord shapes on their respective instruments, but who don't have an extensive knowledge of music theory. Instead of calling out or writing down actual chord names when playing with others, we call or write the "Nashville Numbers". Most of the singing songs in this booklet use this system. It takes a little getting used to, but once you get the hang of it, this system allows you to play pretty much any song at a jam, no matter what key it's called in.

The key of G is known as the "bluegrass key" because many of the "hallmark" licks on the fretted instruments (guitar, banjo, mandolin and dobro) are played using G position chords. To play in other keys, many well-known traditional musicians use a capo. Doc Watson called a capo a "cheater", but he wasn't afraid to use it! And you shouldn't be afraid, either!

Although most popular bluegrass and folk songs are written in the keys of G, C, and D, sometimes, in a jam, a vocalist will call a tune in a key that suits their voice. It might be E. Or B-flat. Or the dreaded F! What will you do? Use the Nashville Number System!

In the chart on the next page, the chords shown in green are the only chords you'll need to know to play all the tunes in this booklet, in pretty much any key that I've ever heard anyone call at a jam session (in my 50+ years of playing). Here they are -- 17 chords -- G, C, D, D7, Dm, A, A7, Am, Bb, B7, Bm, E, E7, Em, F, F#7, F#m.

All the information in yellow is for those of you who don't want to use capos. You'll need to learn all those yellow chords!

So -- how to use this chart!

Here's a snippet of one of the tunes from this booklet

Gold Watch and Chain
A.P. Carter, 1933

IV I

Oh, how can I stay here without you

V I

I have nothing to cheer my poor heart

IV I

This old world would seem sad, love, without you

V I

Tell me now that we're never to part

The roman numerals stand for the chords.

Using the chart, you can see that, --- if you get lucky and the jammer calls the tune in the key of G, the chords would be:

IV - C
I - G
V - D

But if the jammer calls the tune in the key of Bb, you have 2 choices -- play with no capo, or with your capo on the 3rd fret:

No capo:	Capo 3, playing in G position
IV - Eb	IV - C
I - Bb	I - G
V - F	V - D

The Nashville Number System

Roman numerals are typically used when writing chords on a song sheet. In a jam session, however, when people “call out” chords, they will simply call the numbers shown in this chart. In other words, in the key of G, if someone calls out, “6 minor”, the chord will be an Em.

Key	Capo Options	I	IV	V	II	ii	III	iii	VI	vi	VII
G	No Capo	G	C	D	A7	Am	B7	Bm	E7	Em	F
C	No Capo	C	F	G	D7	Dm	E7	Em	A7	Am	Bb
D	No Capo	D	G	A	E7	Em	F#7	F#m	B7	Bm	C
Bb	Capo – 3, Play G	Bb	Eb	F	C	Cm	D	Dm	G	Gm	G#
B	Capo – 4, Play G	B	E	F#	C#	C#m	D#	D#m	G#	G#m	A
A	Capo – 2, Play G	A	D	E	B	Bm	C#	C#m	F#	F#m	G
E	Capo – 2, Play D OR Capo – 4, Play C	E	A	B	F#	F#m	G#	G#m	C#	C#m	D
F	Capo – 3, Play D OR Capo – 5, Play C	F	Bb	C	G	Gm	A	Am	D	Dm	Eb

This chart is designed to support folks attending the jams hosted by The Traditional American Music Project. If it doesn't make any sense, then you probably haven't come to any of our jams! Please join us – our jams are FREE, and the quickest way to learn this method of transposing music. This system was designed for country and bluegrass musicians back in the 1940's, and is still widely used today.

For schedule and location of our jams, visit www.sierratramp.org or send an email to bluegrastramp@gmail.com

Amazing Grace

By John Newton, 1779

Chorus:

I I⁷ IV I
 Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
 I V
 That saved a wretch like me
 I I⁷ IV I
 I once was lost, but now am found
 I V I
 Was blind but now I see.

Tw'as grace that taught my heart to fear
 And grace my fears relieved
 How precious did that grace appear
 The hour I first believed

Chorus

Through many dangers, toils and snares
 I have already come
 Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far
 And grace will lead me home

Chorus

When we've been here ten thousand years
 Bright shining as the sun
 We've no less days to sing God's praise
 Than when we first begun.

Chorus

Blue Moon of Kentucky

By Bill Monroe, 1946

I

IV

Blue moon of Kentucky keep on shining

I

V

Shine on the one that's gone and proved untrue

I

IV

Blue moon of Kentucky keep on shining

I

V

I

Shine on the one that's gone and left me blue

Chorus

IV

It was on a moonlight night

I

The stars were shining bright

IV

When they whispered from on high

I

V

Your love has said good-bye

I

IV

Blue moon of Kentucky keep on shining

I

V

I

Shine on the one that's gone and said good-bye

Blue Ridge Cabin Home

By Louise Scruggs & Gladys Flatt, late 40's

I

IV

There's a well beaten path on this old mountainside

V

I

Where I wandered when I was a lad

I

IV

Well, I wandered alone to the place I call home

V

I

In those Blue Ridge hills far away.

All verses and choruses have same chords

Chorus:

Oh I love those hills of old Virginia
 From those Blue Ridge hills I did roam
 When I die won't you bury me on the mountain
 Far away in my Blue Ridge mountain home

Well my thoughts wander back to that ramshackle shack
 In those Blue Ridge hills far away
 My mother and dad are laid there to rest
 They are sleeping in peace together there

Chorus

I return to that old cabin home with a sigh
 I've a longing for days gone by
 When I die won't you bury me on this old mountainside
 Make my resting place upon the hills so high.

Chorus

Bury Me Beneath the Willows

Traditional

Chorus I IV
 Bury me beneath the willows
 I V
 Under the weeping willow tree
 I IV
 When she hears that I am sleeping
 I V I
 Maybe then she'll weep for me

All verses and choruses have the same chords

My heart is sad and I'm in sorrow
 Weeping for the one I love
 When shall I see her, oh, no never
 Till we meet in Heaven above

Chorus

Tomorrow was to be our wedding
 But Lord, oh Lord, where can she be?
 She's gone, she's gone to find another
 She no longer cares for me.

Chorus

She told me that she did not love me
 I could not believe it true
 Until an angel softly whispered,
 "She no longer cares for you".

Chorus

Place on my grave a snow white lily
 To prove my love for her was true
 To show the world I died of grieving
 But now, I'm dead, my love, "Adieu".

Chorus

Dark Hollow

Traditional

I V I

I'd rather be in some dark hollow

I IV I

Where the sun don't ever shine

I I⁷ IV

Than to be here at home knowing that you're gone

I V I

Would cause me to lose my mind

Chorus: I V I

So blow your whistle freight train

I IV I

Carry me further on down the track

I I⁷ IV

I'm going away, I'm leaving today

I V I

I'm going but I ain't coming back

I'd rather be in some dark hollow

Where the sun don't ever shine

Than to be in some big city

In a small room with you on my mind

Chorus

East Virginia Blues

Traditional

I
I was born in East Virginia
IV I
North Carolina I did go
IV I
There I spied a fair young maiden
V I
But her name I did not know

Oh her hair was dark in color
And her cheeks were rosy red
On her breast she wore a white lilly
Where I longed to lay my head

Chorus

I
I don't want your green back dollar
IV I
I don't want your silver change
IV I
All I want is your love darling
V I
Won't you take me back again

Last night I seen her walkin'
With another by her side
And I thought I heard her tell him
That she soon would be his bride.

Chorus

I'd rather be in some dark holler
Where the sun refused to shine
Than to see her with another
How I want her to be mine.

Chorus

Fireball Mail

By Fred Rose, 1942

Chorus

I

Here she comes, look at her roll

V

There she goes, eatin' that coal

I

Watch her fly, huggin' the rail

V

I

Let her by, by, by, the Fireball Mail

All verses and choruses have the same chords

Let her go, look at her steam,
Hear her blow, whistle and scream
Like a hound dog wagging its tail,
Dallas bound, it's Fireball Mail

Engineer, making up time,
Tracks are clear, look at her climb
See that freight, clearing that rail,
I'll bet she's late, late, late, the Fireball Mail

Watch her swerve, look at her sway,
Get that curve out of the way
Watch her fly, look at her sail,
Let her by, by, by, the Fireball Mail

Chorus

Gold Watch and Chain

By A.P. Carter, 1933

IV

I

Oh, how can I stay here without you

V

I

I have nothing to cheer my poor heart

IV

I

This old world would seem sad, love, without you

V

I

Tell me now that we're never to part

Chorus

IV

I

I will pawn you my gold watch and chain, love

V

I

I will pawn you my gold diamond ring

IV

I

I will pawn you this heart in my bosom

V

I

Only say that you'll love me again

Take back all the gifts you have given

But a ring and a lock of your hair

And a card with your picture upon it

It's a face that is false, but is fair

Chorus

Tell me why that you do not love me

Tell me why that your smile is not bright

Tell me why you have grown so cold-hearted

Is there no kiss for me, love, tonight

Chorus

Gone, Gone, Gone

By Harlan Howard, 1961

I IV
 He said if I ever deceived him
 V I
 He'd be gone before I could count ten
 I IV
 Well I guess that I didn't believe him
 V I
 Just look at the trouble I'm in

Chorus I IV
 He's gone gone gone, gone gone gone
 V I
 Crying won't bring him back
 I IV
 The more that I cry, the faster that train flies
 V I
 Further on down the track

I lost every right to be happy
 When I lost the heaven I'd found
 He said that he'd leave, and he left me
 Before my first tear hit the ground

Chorus

And if I only knew where to find him
 I'd crawl there on my hands and knees
 Each tick of the clock's a remindin'
 He's one second further from me

Chorus

Hard Times Come Again No More

By Stephen Foster, 1854

I IV I

Let us pause in life's pleasures and count its many tears,

I V I

While we all sup sorrow with the poor;

I IV I

There's a song that will linger forever in our ears;

I V I

Oh Hard times come again no more.

Chorus:

I IV - I

Tis the song, the sigh of the weary,

I V

Hard Times, hard times, come again no more

I IV I

Many days you have lingered around my cabin door;

I V I

Oh hard times come again no more.

While we seek mirth and beauty and music light and gay,
 There are frail forms fainting at the door;
 Though their voices are silent, their pleading looks will say
 Oh hard times come again no more.
(Chorus)

There's a pale drooping maiden who toils her life away,
 With a worn heart whose better days are o'er:
 Though her voice would be merry, 'tis sighing all the day,
 Oh hard times come again no more.
(Chorus)

Tis a sigh that is wafted across the troubled wave,
 Tis a wail that is heard upon the shore
 Tis a dirge that is murmured around the lonely grave
 Oh hard times come again no more.
(Chorus)

Hey, Good Lookin'

By Hank Williams, 1951

I

Hey, hey, good lookin', whatcha got cookin'?

II

V

I - V

How's about cookin' somethin' up with me?

I

Hey, sweet baby, don't you think maybe

II

V

I - I⁷

We could find us a brand new recipe?

Bridge:

IV

I

I got a hot-rod Ford and a two-dollar bill

IV

I

And I know a place right over the hill.

IV

I

There's soda pop and the dancing is free,

II

V

If you wanna have fun come along with me.

I

Hey, hey, good lookin', whatcha got cookin'?

II

V

I

How's about cookin' somethin' up with me?

I'm free and ready, so we can go steady.

How's about savin' all your time for me?

No more lookin', I know I've been taken

How's about keepin' steady company?

I'm gonna throw my date-book over the fence

And find me one for five or ten cents.

I'll keep it 'til it's covered with age

'Cause I'm writin' your name down on every page.

Hey, good lookin', whatcha got cookin'?

How's about cookin' somethin' up with me?

I'll Fly Away

By Albert Brumley, 1929

I IV I
 Some bright morning when this life is over, I'll fly away
 I I - V I
 To that home on God's celestial shore, I'll fly away

Chorus I
 I'll fly away, oh glory
 IV I
 I'll fly away (in the morning)
 I
 When I die, hallelujah by and by
 I - V I
 I'll fly away

When the shadows of this life have gone, I'll fly away
 Like a bird from these prison walls I'll fly, I'll fly away
Chorus

Oh how glad and happy when we meet, I'll fly away
 No more cold iron shackles on my feet, I'll fly away
Chorus

Just a few more weary days and then, I'll fly away
 To a land where joys will never end, I'll fly away
Chorus

In the Pines

Traditional

Chorus:

I I⁷
 In the pines, in the pines
 IV I
 Where the sun never shines
 I V I
 And you shiver when the cold winds blow
 I I⁷ IV I
 Ooh, ooh, ooh, ooh, ooh, ooh,
 I V I
 Ooh, ooh, ooh.

The longest train I ever saw
 Went down that Georgia Line
 The engine passed at six o'clock
 And the cab passed by at nine

Chorus

Little girl, little girl, what have I done
 That makes you treat me so
 You've caused me to weep, you've caused me to mourn
 You've caused me to leave my home

Chorus

I asked my captain for the time of day
 He said he threw his watch away
 It's a long steel rail and short cross tie
 I'm on my way back home

Chorus

I Saw The Light

By Hank Williams, 1948

Chorus I I⁷
 I saw the light I saw the light
 IV I
 No more darkness no more night
 I
 Now I'm so happy no sorrow in sight
 I V I
 Praise the Lord I saw the light

I
 I wandered so aimless, my life filled with sin
 IV I
 I wouldn't let my dear Savior in
 I
 Then Jesus came like an angel in the night
 I V I
 Praise the Lord I saw the light

Chorus

Just like a blind man I wandered alone
 Worries and fears I claimed for my own
 Then like the blind man that God gave back his sight
 Praise the Lord I saw the light

Chorus

I was a fool to wander and stray
 For straight is the gate and narrow is the way
 But now I have traded the wrong for the right
 Praise the Lord, I saw the light

Chorus

Jambalaya

By Hank Williams, 1952

I

V

Goodbye, Joe, me gotta go, me oh my oh.

V

I

Me gotta go, pole the pirogue down the bayou.

I

V

My Yvonne, the sweetest one, me oh my oh.

V

I

Son of a gun, we'll have big fun on the bayou.

Chorus (same chords as verse)

Jambalaya, crawfish pie and filé gumbo
 'Cause tonight I'm gonna see my ma cher amio.
 Pick guitar, fill fruit jar and be gayo,
 Son of a gun, we'll have big fun on the bayou.

Thibodaux, Fontaineaux, the place is buzzin',
 kinfolk come to see Yvonne by the dozen.
 Dress in style and go hog wild, me oh my oh.
 Son of a gun, we'll have big fun on the bayou.

Chorus

Settle down far from town, get me a pirogue
 And I'll catch all the fish in the bayou.
 Swap my mon to buy Yvonne what she need-o.
 Son of a gun, we'll have big fun on the bayou.

Chorus

Keep on the Sunny Side

By Ada Blenkhorn, 1899

I IV I

There's a dark and a troubled side of life

I V

There's a bright and a sunny side too

V I

Though we meet with the darkness and strife

V I

The sunny side we also may view

Chorus

I IV I

Keep on the sunny side, always on the sunny side

I V

Keep on the sunny side of life

I IV I

It will help us every day it will brighten all our way

I IV I V I

If we keep on the sunny side of life

Oh the storm and its fury broke today
Crushing hopes that we cherish so dear
The clouds and storm will in time pass away
The sun again will shine bright and clear

Chorus

Let us greet with a song of hope each day
Though the moment be cloudy or fair
Let us trust in our Savior always
To keep us every one in His care

Chorus

Life's Railway to Heaven

(aka *Life is Like a Mountain Railway*)

By Charles Davis Tillman, 1890

I		IV		I
Life is like a mountain railroad, with an engineer that's brave;				
I		II		V
We must make the run successful, from the cradle to the grave;				
	I		IV	I
Watch the curves, the hills and tunnels; never falter, never fail;				
	I		V	I
Keep your hand upon the throttle, and your eyes upon the rail.				

<i>Chorus</i>		IV		I
Blessèd Savior, Thou wilt guide us,				
	I		V	
Till we reach that blissful shore;				
	I		IV	
Where the angels wait to join us				
	I	V	I	
In Thy praise forevermore.				

As you roll across the trestle,
 Spanning Jordan's swelling tide,
 You behold the Union Depot
 Into which your train will glide;
 There you'll meet the superintendent,
 God the Father, God the Son,
 With the hearty, joyous greeting,
 Weary pilgrim, welcome home!

Chorus

Long Black Veil

By Danny Dill and Marijohn Wilkin, 1959

I
 Ten years ago, on a cold, dark night
 V IV I
 Someone was killed neath the town hall light

I
 There were few at the scene, but they all did agree
 V IV I
 That the slayer who ran looked a lot like me

Chorus IV I IV I
 She walks these hills in a long black veil
 IV I IV I
 She visits my grave while the night winds wail
 I IV I
 Nobody knows, nobody sees
 IV V I
 Nobody knows but me

The judge said Son, what is your alibi
 If you were somewhere else, then you don't have to die
 I spoke not a word thought it meant my life
 For I'd been in the arms of my best friend's wife

Chorus

The scaffold was high and eternity near
 She stood in the crowd and shed not a tear
 But sometimes at night when the cold winds moan
 In a long black veil she cries over my bones

Chorus

Long Journey Home

Traditional

Chorus I
 Lost all my money but a two dollar bill
 IV I
 Two dollar bill boys, two dollar bill
 I
 Lost all my money but a two dollar bill
 I V I
 I'm on my long journey home

All verses and choruses have the same chords

Cloudy in the West and it looks like rain
 Looks like rain, boys, looks like rain
 Cloudy in the West and it looks like rain
 I'm on my long journey home
Chorus

Homesick and lonesome and I'm feeling kind of blue
 Feeling kind of blue, boys, feeling kind of blue
 Homesick and lonesome and I'm feeling kind of blue
 I'm on my long journey home
Chorus

There's black smoke a rising and it surely is a train
 Surely is a train boys, surely is a train
 There's black smoke a rising and it surely is a train
 I'm on my long journey home
Chorus

Mountain Dew

By Bascom Lamar Lunsford and Scotty Wiseman, 1928

I

There's a big hollow tree down the road here from me

IV

I

Where you lay down a dollar or two

I

If you stroll 'round the bend, then come back again

I

V

I

There's some good old mountain dew

Chorus

I

I⁷

They call it that good ol' mountain dew

IV

I

Them that refuse it are few

I

I'll hush up my mug if you fill up my jug

I

V

I

With some good old mountain dew

My uncle Mort, he's sawed off and short
 He measures about four foot two
 But he thinks he's a giant when you give him a
 pint
 Of that good old mountain dew

Chorus

My Auntie June's got a brand new perfume
 It has such a beautiful pew
 Imagine our surprise when we had it analyzed
 It was good old Mountain Dew

Chorus

My brother Bill's got a still on the hill
 Where he runs off a gallon or two
 The buzzards in the sky get so drunk they can't
 fly
 From smelling that good old mountain dew

Chorus

Nine Pound Hammer

Traditional

I IV
 This nine pound hammer is a little too heavy
 I V I
 For my size, buddy for my size

Chorus:

I IV
 Roll on buddy, don't you roll so slow
 I V I
 How can I roll when the wheels won't go

It's a long way to Harlan, it's a long way to Hazard
 Just to get a little booze, just to get a little booze
Chorus

Oh the nine pound hammer killed John Henry
 Ain't gonna kill me, ain't gonna kill me.
Chorus

There ain't one hammer down in this tunnel
 That can ring like mine, that can ring like mine.
Chorus

Buddy when I'm gone, won't you make my tombstone
 Out of number nine coal, out of number nine coal.
Chorus

I'm goin' up on the mountain, just to see my baby
 And I ain't comin' back, no, I ain't comin' back
Chorus

Old Home Place

By Dean Webb & Mitch Jayne, 1960

I III IV I
It's been ten long years since I left my home

V
In the hollow where I was born

I III IV I
Where the cool fall nights make the wood smoke rise

I V I
And the fox hunter blows his horn

I fell in love with a girl from the town
I thought that she would be true
And I ran away to Charlottesville
And worked in a sawmill or two

Chorus:

V I
What have they done to the old home place

II V
Why did they tear it down

I III IV I
And why did I leave my plow in the field

V I
And look for a job in the town

Well the girl ran off with somebody else
The tariff took all my pay
And here I stand where the old home stood
Before they took it away

Well the geese fly south and the cold wind moans
As I sit here and hang my head
I've lost my love I've lost my home
And now I wish that I were dead.

Chorus

Red River Valley

Traditional

I
 From this valley they say you are going
 V
 We will miss your bright eyes and sweet smile
 I I⁷ IV
 For they say you are taking the sunshine
 V I
 That has brightened our path for a while

Chorus (chords same as verse)

Come and sit by my side if you love me,
 Do not hasten to bid me adieu
 But remember the Red River Valley
 And the one that has loved you so true.

Won't you think of the valley you're leaving
 Oh how lonely, how sad it will be?
 Oh think of the fond heart you're breaking
 And the grief you are causing to me

Chorus

As you go to your home by the ocean
 May you never forget those sweet hours
 That we spent in the Red River Valley
 And the love we exchanged mid the flowers

Chorus

Roll in my Sweet Baby's Arms

Traditional

Chorus

I V
 Roll in my sweet baby's arms, roll in my sweet baby's arms

I I⁷ IV
 Gonna lay around the shack till the mail train comes back

V I
 Then roll in my sweet baby's arms

Chords are the same for all verses & choruses

Ain't gonna work on the railroad, I ain't gonna work on the farm
 Gonna lay around the shack till the mail train comes back,
 Then roll in my sweet baby's arms

Chorus

Now where was you last Friday night, while I was lyin' in jail
 Walkin' the streets with another man,
 You wouldn't even go my bail

Chorus

Your mama was a beauty operator, your sister could weave and spin
 Your daddy owned an interest in an old cotton gin,
 Just a' watchin' that money roll in

Chorus

I know your parents don't like me, they drove me away from your door
 If I had my life to live over again,
 I'd never go there no more

Chorus

Rough and Rocky

Traditional

I IV I
 Darlin' I have come to tell you
 I V
 Tho' it almost breaks my heart
 I IV I
 But before the mornin', darlin'
 V I
 We'll be many miles apart

Chorus IV I
 Don't this road look rough and rocky
 I V
 Don't that sea look wide and deep
 I
 Don't my baby look the sweetest
 V I
 When he's in my arms asleep

Can't you hear the nightbird's cryin'
 Far across the deep blue sea
 While of others you are thinking
 Won't you sometimes think of me

Chorus

One more kiss before I leave you
 One more kiss before we part
 You have caused me lots of trouble
 Darlin', you have broke my heart

Chorus

Shady Grove

Traditional

Chorus: ii I
 Shady Grove, my little miss
 ii
 Shady Grove, I say
 IV I
 Shady Grove, my little miss
 ii I ii
 I'm bound to go away

All verses have same chords as chorus

Cheeks as red as a blooming rose
 Eyes the prettiest brown
 She's the darling of my heart
 The sweetest girl in town
Chorus

Went to see my Shady Grove
 She was standing in the door
 Her shoes and stockin's in her hand
 And her little bare feet on the floor
Chorus

I wish I had a big fine horse
 And corn to feed him on
 And Shady Grove to stay at home
 To feed him while I'm gone
Chorus

A kiss from pretty little Shady Grove
 Is sweet as brandy wine
 There ain't no girl in this old world
 That's's prettier than mine
Chorus

Will The Circle Be Unbroken

by Ada R. Habershon with music by Charles H. Gabriel, 1907

I I⁷
 I was standing by the window
IV I
 On a cold and cloudy day
I
 When I saw the hearse come rolling
I V I
 To carry my mother away

Chorus I I⁷ IV I
 Will the circle be unbroken, bye and bye Lord, bye and bye
I V I
 There's a better home a waiting, in the sky Lord in the sky.

I said to the undertaker
 Undertaker please drive slow
 For that body you are carrying
 Lord I hate to see her go
Chorus

Well I followed close behind her
 Tried to hold up and be brave
 But I could not hide my sorrow
 When they laid her in that grave
Chorus

I went back home Lord that home was lonesome
 Since my mother, she was gone
 All my brothers and sisters crying
 What a home so sad and alone
Chorus