

Music notation has gone through many changes over the centuries, from the earliest versions like Gregorian Chant, to the wildest Graphical scores of 20th and 21st century composers like Cage, Xenakis, Feldman, Cardew and others. Regardless of what, when or where in history, music notation has always been the language of music, by which musicians can read and play a composer's music.

From at least the 17th century through the beginning of the 20th century, notation has remained essentially unchanged. It had developed into a language whereby pitch, technique, expression, dynamics and other parameters could be written or coded, for any musician to read and understand, regardless of any other factors like their language of origin.

The language of any text-based notation is most often Italian. Musicians learning how to read music came to understand the Italian expressions used, such as *Allegro*, *Andante*, *piano*, *forte*, *etc.* These were as common to written music as all the symbols and signs used.

However, as music evolved and the techniques used to play the usual orchestral instruments became more unconventional, the notation used to show that in the written music became equally as unconventional. The symbols and signs of the past were inadequate in describing the new techniques.

The same is true about the newer sound sources now part of the palette the composer can choose from when writing a piece of music. Sounds generated electronically and mechanically from all kinds of sources began being incorporated into much of the new music. Composers, left to their own devices, got creative in notating this on their written scores.

As this evolved more and more, it seemed that each composer created their own notation with virtually no standardization of how to notate these new events. In order to get musicians to play their music, composers needed to rehearse much more and literally explain their new notation to the musicians playing their work.

This was essentially a step backward. Rather than expanding the language to include new symbols and signs used to realize the new techniques, etc., they confused things with a Babel-like approach, speaking many tongues. This had to be frustrating to the musicians. They were comfortable reading and interpreting notation as they had learned it that, up until now, had covered all performance and interpretation requirements.

Now they encountered all sorts of squiggly lines and weird shapes with cryptic instructions. They had no clue how to correctly read and realize these. Some were intuitive enough to figure out, but most weren't. When you shake a musician's foundation like this, you basically tick him or her off. They become reluctant to give it their all.

But, in defense of the composers, they wanted a realization of their work now, not when notation practice caught up to the new enhancements. They found themselves at the vanguard of introducing these new symbols and signs, and having to give musicians playing their work a crash course in understanding and interpreting them.

As more composers developed new notations, they did so without knowledge of what other composers were doing. As a result, many different notations were developed for the same basic events. There was no effort by anyone, to my knowledge, to

standardize these call outs and document them for other composers and musicians to learn and use.

One of my goals is to attempt to do this. There are two or three books now published dealing with this new notation, but there is disparity even among these authors. If I create a standardized reference, even for my own use, it would be helpful. I could obtain the necessary permissions to use notations already used by these authors, as well as from other sources as necessary.

Such a reference could be the text book used by everyone to learn these new signs and symbols. Notation software developers can incorporate these into future versions and upgrades, since many of us rely on these applications to document our scores. Eventually, everyone would be fluent in the new notation language and composers can expand their palette of techniques and expressions used in composing their works.

Pipe dream or feasible? I guess that depends on how ambitious I am to pursue this. As of right now, I plan to dig in and see where it goes.