

The Note Reader

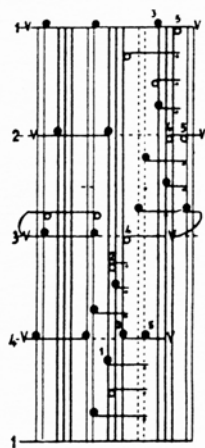
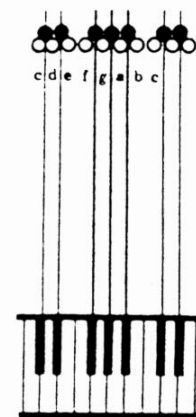
What is KLAVARSKRIBO?

by Mark Gaare, originally from *The Note Reader*, published by MG MUSIC Company, Mesa, AZ, July 1991.

Klavarskribo is a new notational system developed in 1931 by a Dutch electrical engineer, Cornelis Pot. Klavier is the German word for keyboard. As its name suggests, Klavarskribo is based on the piano keyboard and can be classified as a type of tablature notation.

Like a player piano roll, the time-axis is vertical on the page, reading from top to bottom. The notes are placed horizontally relative to the keys on the piano. The basic stave contains 5 lines. These lines are grouped together as 2 lines and 3 lines, forming a visual analogy to one octave of the keyboard. Staves may be added as needed for a particular piece, but generally, 4 staves will suffice for most music. The notes between the lines are always white (or open) and represent the white keys on the keyboard (naturals). The notes directly on the lines are always black and represent the black keys (accidentals).

Measures are subdivided by dotted lines which represent the beat or "count." Counting Numerals may also be placed to the left of the



An excerpt from Chopin's Sonata opus 58, notated traditionally and in Klavarskribo.

stave to indicate the various meters and subdivisions of time. Each note is located in the measure exactly where it is supposed to be played. The end of a note is marked by a halt sign (v) or another note. To avoid confusion, a duration dot is occasionally employed to show that a note is sustained.

Klavarskribo is by far the most widely-accepted and disseminated system out of the hundreds of notational reforms that have been proposed throughout the years. To date, Klavarskribo has been used to produce or transcribe over 20,000 publications. These include: the sonatas of Beethoven, Haydn, and Mozart; the preludes of Chopin; and the complete works of Bach for organ. However, this is still a minute amount in the continuous flow of printed music. There are many teachers in Europe today who have embraced the system wholeheartedly and regularly teach it to

their students. Yet no single major composer writing music exclusively in Klavarskribo has emerged.

Klavarskribo is easy to learn and apply to the keyboard. But the main reason for using Klavarskribo instead of traditional notation is that it simplifies the written scores. It eliminates the need for sharps and flats because each of the twelve notes has its own unique location on the staff. It also eliminates the confusion of multiple defs. Finally, the precise placement of the notes in regards to time is easier to learn and read compared to our traditional system of duration. Flags, beams, and noteheads are all abstract symbols whose meanings must be memorized.

Unfortunately, Klavarskribo's analogies are only relevant to the keyboard. It is unsuitable for notating any other instrument. For instance, there are no "black" or "white" notes on a trumpet. To a saxophonist, notes placed to the left or right don't signify playing lower or higher pitches. There is no room on its keyboard-like staff for the microtones employed by contemporary composers. (Microtones are frequencies that occur in between the standard chromatic intervals.) And just imagine trying to sing a vocal line that is running down the side of a page!