

Chapter 1 – Initial Row Construction

There are hundreds, perhaps thousands of ways to write out twelve pitches without repeating a single note. Sometimes a composer will intentionally create a linear ordering of twelve different pitches (a "row") with certain predetermined intervals next to each other. This composer is looking for a particular sound palette to work with and knows that a specific combination of notes, in a given order, will achieve this goal – the sound that is being created is already known by the composer. In this case there aren't many surprises when the composition is being written. This can be a great tool, particularly in the world of commercial music, where "time is money" and there isn't a great deal of room for experimentation. A downside to this approach is that it is possible to find ourselves using similar groupings of notes for all of our compositions. This happens generally because we get comfortable with the groupings and refrain from trying something new. Perhaps a new approach for some fresh perspective is in order.

Example 1 represents a method for a random ordering of a 12 - note group (row) using the alphabet, your name (or any words/letters that you want to substitute) and the twelve pitches as a guide.

Ex. 1 For Letters:

A, M, Y
B, N, Z
C, O
D, P
E, Q
F, R
G, S
H, T
I, U
J, V
K, W
L, X

Use Note:

C
C# (Db)
D
D# (Eb)
E
F
F# (Gb)
G
G# (Ab)
A
A# (Bb)
B

Ex. 2

J E R R Y E. G A T E S

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Refer to examples 1 & 2. Using my name, JERRY E. GATES, will give me 11 pitches out of the 12 that I need. The twelfth note will be the last one available. The "J" in JERRY corresponds to the note A. The "E" in JERRY coincidentally is the same as note E. The first "R" matches the note F. Now what do we do with the second "R" since the note F is already taken? There are two possibilities.

The first is that we can go to the top of the note list and use the first unused note. In this case, and my choice, is to use the note C. This note has not yet been used. The second possibility, which is a little less random, is to choose *any* note that has not been used. Either choice is acceptable. The main idea is to come up with a 12 note ordering that is fairly random.

Next in line is the "Y" in my name. The note C has been already taken so I will go to the next unused note which is C#(Db). The letter "E" is an *any* note choice because I've decided that I would like to choose a note from those that are remaining. I chose D#(Eb). The "G" in Gates represents note F#. Letter "A" is also an *any* note choice, the note D and "T" corresponds to the note G. Letters "E" and "S" in GATES are the unused notes Ab(G#) and Bb(A#). This brings me to the only note left which is B. My ordering of these pitches, or row, then consists of notes A, E, F, C, C#, D#, F#, D, G, Ab, Bb & B.

Example 3 represents a second method that can be used to assemble a 12 pitch ordering of notes using the alphabet and again my name as a guide. Notice that the difference between examples 1 & 3 is the way that the alphabet is laid out. Follow the same procedure as in example 1. This time the "J" in Jerry now represents the pitch D#. The letter "E" represents C# and so on. In example 4, it can be immediately observed that this second method gives us a very different ordering of pitches.

Ex. 3

For Letters:	Use Note:
A, B, C	C
D, E, F	C# (Db)
G, H	D
I, J	D# (Eb)
K, L	E
M, N	F
O, P	F# (Gb)
Q, R	G
S, T	G# (Ab)
U, V	A
W, X	A# (Bb)
Y, Z	B

Example 4 demonstrates the completed 12 - note row using the second method.

Ex. 4

J E R R Y E. G A T E S

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Now that we have some pitches to work with we can begin to compose.