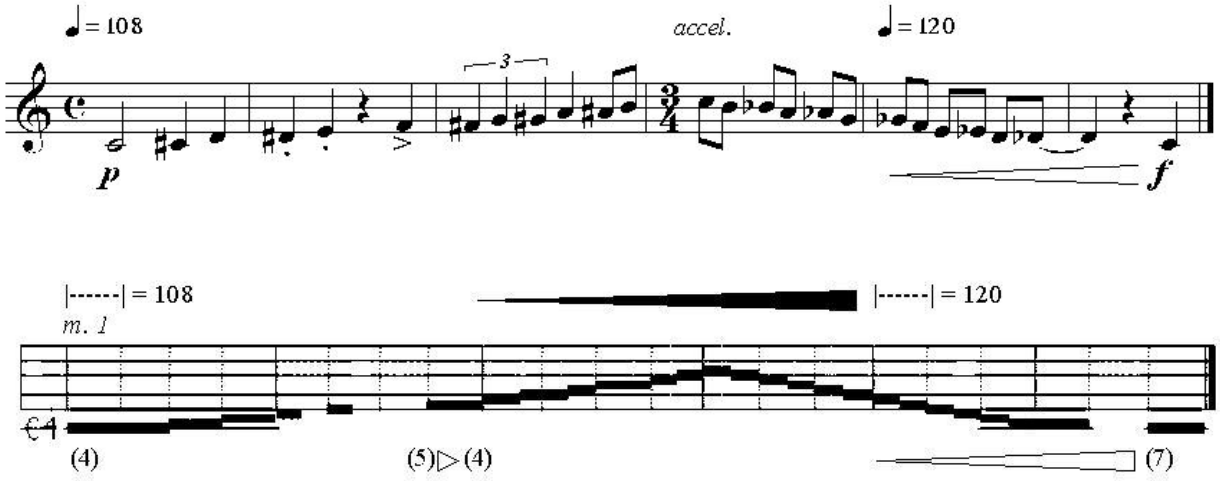
Prevedini Notation: An Overview

Prevedini notation is a system of notating music in the octave-based 12-tone equal-tempered system using a direct visual mapping of pitch and rhythm on a five-line staff similar to traditional notation but without the need for accidentals, key signatures, or rhythmic value symbols. One of the challenges of traditional Western music notation, from a learning perspective, is the mixture of cognitive processes involved in encoding and decoding the written system. In traditional notation, for instance, pitch distances and note letter names are mapped visually onto a vertical axis, but chromatic inflections of those pitches (sharps, flats, etc.) use the affixing of discrete symbols - a separate type of information format altogether - which are then superimposed on the mapping of pitch denoted by note letter names as indicated in positions on the vertical axis of the five-line staff. The result is that a single musical element - pitch - requires the performer to simultaneously decode both linear and nonlinear information formats. A similar dilemma is presented by the traditional notation of rhythm, in which the sequence of note durations moves forward in time on a left-to-right horizontal axis, but the relative durations of sounds and silences themselves are encoded in a non-intuitive combination of symbols which must be learned by rote, including the complex inflection of dots, tuplets, and ties. Prevedini notation is a system I have developed which seeks to simplify this dilemma by notating all elements of pitch on a simple linear vertical continuum and all elements of time on a simple linear horizontal continuum.

Students of twentieth century Western classical music may note the apparent similarity of this notation system with that used by Luigi Russolo in his *Risveglio di una città*. However, there are several important ways in which Prevedini notation differs from this. Russolo's system is similar to Prevedini notation in that pitches are mapped as bold horizontal bars superimposed on a five-line staff. However, Russolo's staff has the lines equally spaced as in traditional notation, while Prevedini notation uses a five-line staff of unequally spaced lines, so that the twelve chromatic pitches in an octave can be represented purely by vertical position. This includes the unequal spacing of ledger lines above and below the staff. In addition, Russolo relies on traditional indications of dynamics, whereas Prevedini notation uses a purely numerical indication of loudness that does not depend on the learning of terminology in Italian or any other spoken language. Nor is Prevedini notation equivalent to the various chromatic staff systems attributed to Arnold Schönberg, as the latter rely on traditional representation of rhythm and do not attempt a compromise between chromatic notation and traditional five-line staff placement of letter names for ease of learning by those already somewhat accustomed to the traditional system. Nor is Prevedini notation a system of neumes, as the shapes created by the horizontal black bars do not constitute abstract rhythmic or gestural symbols; they are simply the consequence of a one-to-one pitch graph.

The system is illustrated using a short musical excerpt below, showing the same content in both traditional notation (top) and Prevedini notation (bottom). One will note that, because the system maps pure quantities of pitch, the differences between enharmonic spellings (such as C-sharp and D-flat) are neutralized. In practice, performers may use whichever pitch names are appropriate to refer to the notes in musical context. In addition, I propose the option of listening the twelve chromatic pitches in ascending order - from C to an upper B - as follows: C, R, D, M, E, F, S, G, L, A, T, B. Here, R, M, S, L, and T are derived from Re, Mi, Sol, La, and Ti, the solfège pitches of a "Do" scale in C major which, when flattened, give the "black notes" of the chromatic scale. Finally, instead of a clef, a reference note "C" is indicated. This can be C4 for "middle C", C3 for the octave below, or other registers of C as well.



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