

PIANO VOICINGS FOR YOUR JAZZ BAND

GOALS

- Quickly Identify the notes of a chord—not the scale!
- Different approaches for students with and without harmonic knowledge
- Choose a shape or formula
- Think numbers and shapes – not note names
- Build the chord & LISTEN
- Use what you already know to learn new things

CHORD TYPES

- Major Scale Harmony
 - Major (I)
 - Minor (ii)
 - Dominant (V)
- Melodic Minor Scale Harmony
 - Half-diminished (iiø/)
 - Altered Dominant (V_{alt})
 - Minor Major (C- 7)

I CΔ
 root 2nd 3rd 4th 5th 6th 7th octave 5th root 7th 3rd I

II D-7
 root 2nd 3rd 4th 5th 6th 7th octave 5th root 7th 3rd II

V G7
 root 2nd 3rd 4th 5th 6th 7th octave 5th root 7th 3rd V

I C-Δ (or) C-+7 minor-major
 Aø (or) A-7b5 half-diminished (or) Locrian #2

VI b5 b6

VII B7alt altered (or) diminished whole-tone
 b9 +9 +11 bl3 (or) b5 (or) +5

- Most of the progressions you will see are based on:
 - ii-V-I progressions or pieces of them
 - Cyclical progressions (bass movement in 4th's)
 - Blues based 12 or 16 bar patterns

SHELL VOICINGS

- “A” Voicing: 1st & 7th in LH
- “B” Shape: 1st & 3rd in LH
- Also possible in 2 handed voicing

Dm7 G7 Cmaj7 Dm7 G7 Cmaj7

Dm7 G7 C-7

ROOTLESS VOICINGS

- “A” Position
 - Start with 3rd on bottom
 - Stack up in 3rd’s (3-5-7-9)
- “B” Position
 - Start with 7th on bottom
 - Stack up the same notes (7-9-3-5)
- Rule of Thumb
 - In general, RH Thumb should stay between middle C and the C one octave higher

"A" Position: D-7, G7, CΔ

"B" Position: D-7, G7, CΔ

little finger: 3rd, 7th, 3rd, 7th, 3rd, 7th

3 – 7 – PRETTY

- LH plays 3-7 or 7-3
- Add ANY NOTE with your LH thumb that sounds good
- Context determines what “sounds good”
- This encourages students to use their EARS

Dm7, G7, Cmaj7, Dm7, G7, Cmaj7

GENERIC MAJOR (ROOT ON TOP)

- 3 notes in RH, 2 notes in LH
- Start with Root on top
- Stack down in Perfect 4ths

INTERVAL FINGER HARMONIC FUNCTION

R.H. 5 Tonic

R.H. 2 5

R.H. THUMB 9

P.4

L.H. 2 6

L.H. 6 3

GENERIC MAJOR (5TH ON TOP)

- 3 notes in RH, 2 notes in LH
- Start with 5th on top
- Stack down in Perfect 4ths

GENERIC VOICINGS OF AN FMA⁹ (OR) INTERVAL FINGER HARMONIC FUNCTION

TONIC

R.H. 5 5

R.H. 2 9

R.H. THUMB 6

P.4

L.H. 2 3

L.H. 6 MA7

RESULT: F⁹ FMA⁹

GENERIC MINOR (3RD ON TOP)

- 3 notes in RH, 2 notes in LH
- Start with minor 3rd on top
- Stack down in Perfect 4ths

INTERVAL: P4, P4, P4
 FINGERING: R.H. 5, R.H. THUMB, L.H. 2, L.H. 5
 HARMONIC FUNCTION: m3 7, Tonic 5
 RESULT: E m1

GENERIC DOMINANT

- Start on Root or 5th – both work!
- LH plays 3rd & 7th

INTERVAL: P4, P4, MAJ. 3
 FINGERING: R.H. 5, R.H. 2, R.H. 2, L.H. 2, L.H. 5
 HARMONIC FUNCTION: T, 5, 9, 7, 3
 RESULT: F9

INTERVAL: P4, P4, TRI. 3
 FINGERING: R.H. 2, R.H. 1, L.H. 2, L.H. 5
 HARMONIC FUNCTION: 5, 6, 3, 7
 RESULT: F13

MIRACLE VOICING

- Pick any note...
- Descend by:
 - Major 3rd
 - Perfect 4th
 - Perfect 4th
 - Perfect 4th

INTERVALLIC CONSTRUCTION: MAJ. 3, P. 4, P. 4, P. 4
 FINGERING: R.H. 5, R.H. THUMB, L.H. 2, L.H. 5
 HARMONIC FUNCTION: T, MAJ, m3, 7, 9, 11, 13
 TONIC (HARMONY): F (FMA) STRONG MAJOR, C (C) WEAK MAJOR, A (Am) MINOR, D (D) SUB. DOMINANT, Bb (Bbm) LYDIAN

HALF-DIMINISHED CHORDS

- Learn these in all inversions
- Drop 2 System

- Students with Harmonic Knowledge
 - ii half-diminished – IV minor 6 (D half dim 7 = Fm6)
- Students without Harmonic Knowledge
 - Probably won't need these chords anyway
 - Just play Shell Voicings (1-3, 1-7, 3-7, 1-3-7, etc)
 - Take the Generic Minor Voicings (Stacked 4th from the 3rd on top) and flat the 5.

FULLY DIMINISHED CHORDS

- There are only 3 of them!
- Any note can go up a whole step
- Quick formula:
 - LH: Play any note of the diminished chord
 - RH: Go down 1/2 step, build a major chord
- Easy analysis: where does a Diminished Chord come from? The 3rd of a Dominant b9 chord
- Some polychord voicings are interchangeable (Eb/E works for E, G, Bb, and C# diminished)

UPPER STRUCTURE CHORDS

- Most useful for Altered Dominant Chords
- Quick formulas that are easier to remember than trying to create voicings from scratch
- Utilizes math concepts in the music classroom
- RH plays a triad (in any inversion) according to the desired extensions
- LH plays 3-7 or 7-3 of the dominant chord

(Since this isn't a Dominant Chord, don't play 3 & 7, play 1 & 5 instead.)

DESIRED HARMONY	FRACTION	EXAMPLE	IMPLEMENTATION
X ⁷ (b9) OR X ¹³ (#11)	$\frac{II}{I7}$	C ¹³ (#11)	$\frac{D}{C7}$
X ⁷ (#9)	$\frac{bIII}{I}$	C ⁷ (#9)	$\frac{Eb}{C}$
X ⁷ (b9)	$\frac{bV}{I}$	C ⁷ (b9)	$\frac{Gb}{C}$
X ¹³ (b9)	$\frac{VI}{I7}$	C ¹³ (b9)	$\frac{A}{C7}$
X ⁷ (#9) OR X ⁷ (#5)	$\frac{bVII}{I7}$	C ⁺ 7(#9)	$\frac{Ab}{C7}$

TIPS

- Rhythm is more important than notes
- Keep a notebook (Voicing Inventory)
- Practice Method: Cyclical Progressions
 - Descending 2nds
 - Perfect 4ths
 - Chromatically (Ascending & Descending)
- Pick 1 voicing per week and have your pianists try to ONLY play them. Once mastered, move to the next one.
- Pianists will begin listening to whether their voicing choices fit with the chart or not.
 - Example: Using upper structures (polychord) won't sound good if they are picking extensions the band isn't playing (b9 vs. natural 9).
- Which voicings fit with which textures?
 - Try to find the compositional techniques being used in the horn writing.
 - Make sure the pianist, guitarist, and bassist are TALKING. (The piano should never play in the same register as the guitarist unless there is good reason to do this.)
 - If your guitarist can only play 3rd/7th, have your pianist play open 4th voicings
 - If your pianist understands tritone substitution, have them talk with the bass player and communicate when they try it.



RESOURCES

- Books
 - Voicings for Jazz Keyboard (Frank Mantooth)
 - The Jazz Piano Book (Mark Levine)
 - Anything by Dan Haerle (published by Jamey Aebersold)
- Online
 - Open Studio Jazz (www.openstudiojazz.com)
 - Chad LB / Jazz Lesson Videos (www.jazzlessonvideos.com)
 - Jeremy Siskand (www.jeremysiskind.com)
 - Noah Kellman (www.noahkellman.com)
 - Jens Larsen—great for guitarists, too! (www.youtube.com/jenslarsen)

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