JAZZ PIANO VOICINGS 101

Presented By

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CHORD SYMBOL NOMENCLATURE

• The FIRST step toward successful piano voicings
• Quite possibly the biggest FLAW of jazz…yet the one aspect that piano players MUST master FIRST

• Chord symbols can be broken into ‘families’
  • Major 7
  • Minor 7
  • Dominant 7
  • Half-diminished
  • Diminished 7

The MAJOR 7th family
• Spelled 1, 3, 5, 7 (all from the major scale)
• Here are SOME of the many ways that you might be asked to build a C major chord in jazz…

Cmaj7
CHORD SYMBOL NOMENCLATURE
The MAJOR 7\textsuperscript{th} family

\[ C_{ma7} \]

CHORD SYMBOL NOMENCLATURE
The MAJOR 7\textsuperscript{th} family

\[ C_{\Delta 7} \]

CHORD SYMBOL NOMENCLATURE
The MAJOR 7\textsuperscript{th} family

\[ CM_7 \]

CHORD SYMBOL NOMENCLATURE
The MAJOR 7\textsuperscript{th} family

\[ C_{6/9} \]

CHORD SYMBOL NOMENCLATURE
The MAJOR 7\textsuperscript{th} family

(spelled 1, 3, 5, 7…all from the major scale)

\[ C_{maj7}, C_{ma7}, C_{\Delta 7}, CM_7, C_{6/9}, C \]
The MINOR 7th family

- Spelled 1, -3, 5, -7 (all from the major scale)
- Here are SOME of the many ways that you might be asked to build a C minor 7th chord in jazz...

Cmin7

Cmi7

C-7

Cm7
The DOMINANT 7th family
• Spelled 1, 3, 5, -7 (all from the major scale)
• Here are SOME of the ways that you might be asked to build a C dominant 7th chord in jazz...

C7, C9, C13

The HALF-DIMINISHED 7th family
• Spelled 1, -3, -5, -7 (all from the major scale)
• Here are SOME of the ways that you might be asked to build a C half-diminished 7th chord in jazz...

Cm7(♭5)
Or ANY of the minor 7th ways of notation with (♭5) or (-5) in parenthesis

The DIMINISHED 7th family
• Spelled 1, -3, -5, -7* (6) (all from the major scale)
• Here are SOME of the ways that you might be asked to build a C diminished 7th chord in jazz…

CØ
The DIMINISHED family

**Cdim** or **Cdim7**

**C°** or **C°7**

Let's review…

- Major 7th (1,3,5,7) Cmaj7, Cmaj7, Cmaj7, CMaj7, Cmaj9, C
- Dominant 7th (1,3,5,-7) C7, C9, C13
- Minor 7th (1,-3,5,-7) Cmin7, Cmin7, C7, Cm7
- Half-diminished (1,-3,5,-7) C#7(add9), Cm7(add9), C
- Diminished 7th (1,-3,-5,-7) Cdim, Cdim7, C°, C°7

TWO SCENARIOS…

- Playing as a part of a rhythm section
  - Piano, bass, drums…

  **OR**

- Playing as an accompanist
  - Piano ONLY (no other instruments)

Chord 'spellings' are simply functional association with the implied harmony (i.e. root, 3rd, 5th, 7th) and their various inversions (3rd, 5th, 7th, root…)

Chord ‘voicings’ in jazz often include the following:

- ESSENTIAL notes (3rd, 7th)
- COLOR notes (9th, 13th, altered notes)
- ROOTLESS (especially in a trio setting)
TRIO SETTING

- In most cases, the ‘voicing’ will be built in the LEFT HAND…
- The voicing can be ‘extended’ with the RIGHT HAND
- The ROOT of the chord will most often be covered by the bassist

VOICING ‘TERRITORY’

- As with any sport, good jazz voicings have a playing field (boundary lines) that must be adhered to at all times…

VOICING ‘TERRITORY’

- If the voicing extends TOO LOW…the result will be muddy, hard-to-decipher, ineffective chords
- If the voicing extends TOO HIGH…the result will be thin, brittle, ineffective chords

HIP JAZZ VOICINGS

- For each chord family, we’ll provide TWO choices…the ‘A’ choice, and the ‘B’ choice…
- Each choice will include ‘scale degrees’ (always built from the MAJOR scale point of view)
- Always build chord voicings from BOTTOM to TOP (regardless of the scale degree)
HIP JAZZ VOICINGS

- MINOR 7th chord voicings…

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MINOR 7th voicings use 4 note ‘stacks’

- Let’s build a D-7 chord using the ‘A’ voicing:
  - ‘D’ is the GRAND ROOT…(i.e. D = 1)

- Let’s build the same D-7 chord using the ‘B’ voicing:
  - ‘D’ is still the GRAND ROOT…(i.e. D = 1)

Although still ‘in bounds’, this is not as good of a choice

- Here are ALL of the ‘A’ and ‘B’ voicings for MINOR 7th chords…

HIP JAZZ VOICINGS

- DOMINANT 7th chord voicings…

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DOMINANT 7th voicings use 3 note stacks

- Let’s build a G7 chord using the ‘A’ voicing:
  - ‘G’ is the GRAND ROOT…(i.e. G = 1)

- Let’s build a G7 chord using the ‘A’ voicing:
  - ‘G’ is the GRAND ROOT…(i.e. G = 1)
Let’s build the same G7 chord using the ‘B’ voicing:
- ‘G’ is still the GRAND ROOT…(i.e. G = 1)

Although BOTH are ‘in bounds’, this is a better choice…

Here are ALL of the ‘A’ and ‘B’ voicings for DOMINANT 7th chords…

Let’s build the same C∆7 chord using the ‘A’ voicing:
- ‘C’ is the GRAND ROOT…(i.e. C = 1)

Let’s build a C∆7 chord using the ‘A’ voicing:
- ‘C’ is the GRAND ROOT…(i.e. C = 1)

Let’s build the same C∆7 chord using the ‘B’ voicing:
- ‘C’ is still the GRAND ROOT…(i.e. C = 1)

Although still ‘in bounds’, this is not as good of a choice
HIP JAZZ VOICINGS

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PUTTING IT INTO ACTION!

Let’s VOICE the following progression…

D\(^{-7}\)  G\(^7\)  C\(^{\Delta 7}\)

PUTTING IT INTO ACTION!

• Since the first chord is D\(^{-7}\) choose either the ‘A’ or ‘B’ voicing…remembering that your choice MUST be in bounds…

PUTTING IT INTO ACTION!

• Let’s assume that you chose the ‘A’ voicing…

PUTTING IT INTO ACTION!

• NOW…you are ready to PROGRESS to the G\(^7\) chord.
  
  • Based on the choice you made for the D\(^{-7}\), one of the two choices for the G\(^7\) will now be a closer & smoother choice than the other…

  • Either ‘A’ to ‘A’ or ‘A’ to ‘B’ is going to be a better choice…

PUTTING IT INTO ACTION!

• Here is what the ‘A’ to ‘A’ choice would look like…
• Now...you are ready to progress from the G7 chord to the C7 chord.

• Based on the choice you made for the G7, one of the two choices for the C7 will now be a closer & smoother choice than the other...

• Either 'B' to 'B' or 'B' to 'A' is going to be a better choice...

• Here is what the 'B' to 'B' choice would look like...

• Here is what the 'B' to 'A' choice would look like...

• As you can tell, 'B' to 'A' is a smoother choice!

• Here is what the whole progression looks like...

• Here is what the same progression would look like if we simply used root position chord 'spellings'...

YOU be the judge...it is time to stop spelling and start voicing!
PICKING UP THE PACE

• It is good to have voicing choices, but choosing takes time…
• In all cases, you have to decide whether to STAY in the same voicing category from one chord to the next (‘A’ to ‘A’) or (‘B’ to ‘B’)…OR…whether to SWAP categories (‘A’ to ‘B’) or (‘B’ to ‘A’)
• You can reduce the amount of time it takes to choose by simply looking at the ROOT MOVEMENT of the chords as they progress….

PICKING UP THE PACE

• Let’s play the ‘GREATER THAN…LESS THAN…OR EQUAL TO’ game (sounds like 4th grade math!!!)

PICKING UP THE PACE

• If the ROOT MOVEMENT (one root to the next) is GREATER than the interval of a 3rd…SWAP (‘A’ to ‘B’) or (‘B’ to ‘A’)
  • Example…F♯7 B7 E♯7 (‘A-B-A’ or ‘B-A-B’)

PICKING UP THE PACE

• If the ROOT MOVEMENT (one root to the next) is LESS than the interval of a 3rd…STAY in the same category…(‘A’ to ‘A’) or (‘B’ to ‘B’)
  • Example…F7 G7 A7 (‘A-A-A’ or ‘B-B-B’)

PICKING UP THE PACE

• If the ROOT MOVEMENT (one root to the next) is EQUAL to the interval of a 3rd…STAY or SWAP (depending upon the DIRECTION of the third. If the root moves UP a 3rd, STAY…If the root moves DOWN a 3rd, SWAP)
  • These general guidelines work in MOST cases, but you MUST stay within the boundary lines
  • Examples…
    - C♯7 E7 STAY…(‘A-A’) or (‘B-B’)
    - F7 D7 SWAP…(‘A-B’) or (‘B-A’)

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

• The bottom line for voicings…get from one chord symbol to the next, as smoothly as possible, while staying within the established boundary lines.
  • Use ‘hip’ voicings that incorporate essential harmonic notes, color notes, and avoid duplicated effort.
**HALF-DIMINISHED CHORDS**

- HALF-DIMINISHED 7th chord voicings...

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<tr>
<th>'A'</th>
<th>Alt. 'A'</th>
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Use the alternate voicings when there is too much 'BITE' to the sound...

**DIMINISHED 7th CHORDS**

- DIMINISHED 7th chords are a bit of a PERFECT STORM...
- They are constructed by stacking a series of minor 3rd intervals (i.e. C-Eb-Gb-A)
- If you invert the notes of a diminished 7th, you end up with the same four notes (i.e. Eb-Gb-A-C)
- In essence, there are only THREE different diminished 7th chords

**DIMINISHED 7th CHORDS**

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

**DIMINISHED 7th CHORDS**

Solve the chord voicing BEFORE/AFTER the diminished chord...THEN...simply choose what note would make a great ANCHOR NOTE for the diminished chord

C – (D#/Eb) – (Gb/F#) – A... WHICH of these four notes would make the best anchor note (bottom note) for our diminished 7th chord? Answer... Gb/F#
• Play all diminished 7th chords in ‘root position’...even though you MAY have to rename the root.
• Always put the ORIGINAL ROOT (D#) in your new chord symbol.