

THE JAZZ LANGUAGE

by Dan Haerle

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GUIDELINES FOR THE CONNECTION OF VOICINGS

As soon as some fluency in spelling voicings is gained, the next step is to learn how to connect one voicing to another. Example 2 shows a number of short chord progressions with typical uses of the four voicings presented in this chapter.

Example 2

Example 2 shows two rows of musical notation on a treble clef staff. The first row contains four pairs of chords with interval labels above them: 5th, 5th, 5th, and 2nd. The second row contains four pairs of chords with interval labels above them: 3rd, 3rd, 3rd, and 3rd. Each chord is labeled with its name and voicing category (A or B). Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 below the notes.

Row 1:

- A min9 (A) to D13 (B) to G Maj9 (A) [5th]
- D min7 (B) to G9 (A) to C Maj7 (B) [5th]
- C min7 (B) to Db7 (B) [2nd]
- Ab7 (A) to G Maj6 (A) [2nd]

Row 2:

- G Maj6 (A) to E min9 (A) [3rd]
- G Maj6 (A) to E min7 (B) [3rd]
- C Maj7 (B) to A Maj7 (B) [3rd]
- C Maj7 (B) to A Maj6 (A) [3rd]

In Example 2, notice that there is as little vertical motion as possible in moving from one voicing to another. A minimum amount of motion in connecting chord voicings has several important advantages:

- 1) It eliminates unnecessary motion for a keyboard player.
- 2) In arrangements for horns, it helps avoid awkward angular melodic motion in inner parts.
- 3) It creates the smoothest possible flow in the music.

Though there are no rules as such, it will be helpful to follow certain steps in selecting voicings for a series of chords in a progression. They are as follows:

- 1) *Analyze the type of progression.*

What is the actual distance between the roots of the chords? All progressions can be summarized as either a progression of a 5th (inversion of a 4th), progression of a 2nd (inversion of a 7th), or progression of a 3rd (inversion of a 6th). Always reduce the interval to its simplest terms, i.e., a minor 3rd rather than an augmented 2nd, or a major 3rd rather than a diminished 4th.

- 2) *Choose the proper category of voicing (A or B).*

Keep in mind the following factors:

a) Progression of a 5th (4th) - Change category (A to B, B to A)

b) Progression of a 2nd (7th) - Keep the same category.

c) Progression of a 3rd (6th) - Either change category or keep the same category. It may be desirable to move to a higher register or to a particular voicing.

- 3) *Write the specific voicing.*

Keep in mind the function, register, and a smooth flow from voicing to voicing.

Generally speaking, it would be a good idea to keep the voicing as close to middle C on the piano as possible. This will insure that the voicing is neither muddy nor thin and has good clarity and fullness. Other notes may be added to fill out these shells later.

Now go back and look at Example 2 again and observe how the guidelines have been followed. Notice that the distance between the roots is indicated above each pair of chords. Also, notice that the proper category of voicing has been chosen according to the type of progression. Finally, you should realize that none of the minor II chords use a voicing with a 6th in it and that all of the dominant 7th chords include a 7th in the voicing.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is meant by the term "voicing chords"?
2. What are the four voicings introduced in this chapter?
3. What are Category A and Category B voicings?
4. What considerations affect the use of certain voicings?
5. For the present, what voicing is the only choice for a half-diminished chord?
6. Why does one try to use as little vertical motion as possible in moving from one voicing to another?
7. What are the three guidelines for the connection of voicings?
8. What are the three types of root progressions and how do they affect the choice of category of a voicing?