

The Essential Jazz Harmony Book

by
Dan Haerle

For All Instruments



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Introduction

This is a collection of a variety of information that is applicable to jazz piano, jazz improvisation, jazz arranging, and jazz theory. Moreover, the applications of this material may be many and varied. In a way, it is like the first book I wrote in 1974, but on steroids!

I have learned a lot about this music in the 41 years since that first book. And, as a teacher, I continue to learn how to explain things in a clear, concise way. One of the hardest things to do is to teach someone something that you know very well. In fact, you may be very knowledgeable about a particular subject, but unable to explain it to anyone. This is why many musicians do not choose to teach and prefer to pursue their art as a performer. As it happens, I like to do both!

This book will be valuable to pianists and guitarists, but I especially encourage musicians, who do not play a chordal instrument, to use this text to improve their total musicianship. Arrangers and composers need to have a solid grasp of harmony. Vocalists need to be able to accompany themselves and write their own music. Educators may find this a useful text for a variety of courses. Jazz soloists will have a better chance to play what they hear in their minds.

I hope you find the book helpful in your quest for excellence!

Dan Haerle
Denton, Texas
September 2015

Albums by Dan Haerle

Live at Luminous Sound, 2012 – Dan Haerle, piano;
Brad Leali, saxophone; James Driscoll, bass; Ed Soph, drums

Aspiration, 2011 – Dan Haerle, piano;
Bob Bowman, bass; Jack Mouse, drums

Standard Procedure, 2004 – Dan Haerle, piano;
Bob Bowman, bass; Jack Mouse, drums

The Truth of the Matter, 1999 – Dan Haerle, keyboards;
Bob Bowman, bass; Jack Mouse, drums

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Chords — Intervals and Triads

Before discussing jazz chords and their voicings, you need to understand a bit about traditional harmony. Knowing something about intervals will be a big help in understanding the structure of chords. Chords are mainly built in 3rds, so it will be very helpful to know the difference between a major 3rd and a minor 3rd. A major 3rd consists of two whole steps. A minor 3rd consists of a whole step and a half step. Both are shown here:



There are four types of traditional triads (chords with three notes): Major, Minor, Augmented and Diminished. The structure of these triads is:

Major – a major 3rd and a minor 3rd
 Minor – a minor 3rd and a major 3rd

Augmented – two major 3rds
 Diminished – two minor 3rds



Here are the four types of traditional triads notated in all 12 keys:



Diminished 7th Chords

Diminished 7th chords are built exclusively using minor 3rds. So, after you build the chord tones 1, 3, 5, 7, if you go up another minor 3rd, you're back to the root. Therefore, you can't have a diminished larger than a 7th chord. The other chord families can have 9^{ths}, 11^{ths} and 13^{ths}. There is a way to add pseudo extensions to diminished 7th chords, and that will be discussed on the next page.

The following examples show that there are only three different diminished 7th sounds which may be spelled differently. Notice that each staff below contains a single diminished 7th sound with four different enharmonic spellings!

The image displays three musical staves, each containing four different enharmonic spellings of a single diminished 7th chord. The chords are labeled as follows:

- Staff 1: C[#]o⁷, D[#]o⁷, F[#]o⁷, B^bAo⁷
- Staff 2: C[#]o⁷, E^bO⁷, G[#]o⁷, A[#]o⁷
- Staff 3: Doo⁷, F[#]o⁷, G[#]o⁷, B[#]o⁷

A large watermark logo is overlaid on the staves.

There are more than four spellings of each diminished 7th chord. For example, D[#]o⁷ could be spelled as E^bo⁷, A[#]o⁷ could be spelled as B^bo⁷ and G[#]o⁷ could be spelled as A^bo⁷. Learn to recognize the chord tones, regardless of their spelling.

Much of the confusion results from the fact that diminished chords often are not labeled correctly. A diminished 7th chord is built on the leading tone of the key and normally resolves up a half step. It may not be obvious if, for example, it is an F[#]o⁷ and is labeled as an Ao⁷. The chord may also resolve to a substitution for the normal resolution. Antonio Carlos Jobim used the progression B^bo⁷ to A-7 in his composition, "Wave," and it sounds very good. The progression is really Eo⁷ (B^bo⁷) to FΔ, and A-7 is a substitution for FΔ!

The image shows a musical staff with four measures, each containing a chord symbol:

- Measure 1: D^Δ
- Measure 2: B^bO⁷
- Measure 3: A-7
- Measure 4: D⁷

Dominant 7th Scales in C

(An appropriate voicing precedes each scale)

The image displays 18 musical staves, each representing a different dominant 7th scale in the key of C. Each staff includes a chord voicing in the left hand and the scale pattern in the right hand. The scales are arranged in two columns of nine.

Scale Name	Chord Voicing
MIXOLYDIAN	C15
LYDIAN DOMINANT	C15
5TH MODE HARMONIC MINOR	C7b9
DIMINISHED WHOLE TONE	C7ALT
WHOLE TONE	C7#5
C MAJOR PENTATONIC	C7
Gb MAJOR PENTATONIC	C7ALT
MAJOR BLUES	C7
LYDIAN DOMINANT, b2	C15b9
BEBOP	C15
LYDIAN BEBOP	C15
HALF-WHOLE DIMINISHED	C15b9
5TH MODE HARMONIC MAJOR	C15b9
5TH MODE MELODIC MINOR	C7b9
Bb MAJOR PENTATONIC	C7sus4
D SYNTHETIC PENTATONIC	C7#11
MINOR BLUES	C7#9
3RD MODE HARMONIC MAJOR	C7b9

Magic Voicings

I call the following voicings magic, because they are versatile and magically transform themselves into different chords. Plus, I believe they have a good jazz sound, because they contain tensions. By that, I mean that each voicing contains two notes either a half step or a whole step apart. The result is a good idiomatic jazz voicing. Below are two inversions of the same four notes, which I simply call Voicing 1 and Voicing 2. Note that the same voicing serves five different chords!

Voicing 1

A musical staff in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb). It displays five chord voicings. Above each voicing is a label: F13, B7 ALT, C-9, Eb Δ+11, and A ∅. The notes are represented by circles on the staff lines. A large, faint watermark of a stylized 'A' is overlaid on the staff.

Voicing 2

A musical staff in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb). It displays five chord voicings, which are inversions of the ones in Voicing 1. Above each voicing is a label: F13, B7 ALT, C-9, Eb Δ+11, and A ∅. The notes are represented by circles on the staff lines. A large, faint watermark of a stylized 'A' is overlaid on the staff.

Voicings 1 and 2 are inversions of each other. Select a chord root and play them in all 12 keys. At first, you will probably find it easier to move the voicings up and down chromatically. Eventually, you should practice them around the circle of 4^{ths} so that you have to jump a 4th or 5th to the next key. This requires you to know the voicings well!

These are shapes that feel more or less the same to the hand whether they involve black notes or white notes. Try to think of each voicing as a unit, not four separate notes. Understanding the interval structure will help you learn the voicings. Voicing 1 has a major 3rd, a whole step and a perfect 4th. Voicing 2 has a perfect 4th, a half step and a major 3rd.

Notice on which chord tone each voicing is built:

- 1) For a dominant 13th chord, voicing 1 is built on the 7th of the chord and voicing 2 is built on the 3rd.
- 2) For an altered dominant 7th, voicing 1 is built on the 3rd of the chord and voicing 2 is built on the 7th.
- 3) For a minor chord, voicing 1 is built on the 3rd of the chord and voicing 2 is built on the 6th.
- 4) For a major 7th chord, voicing 1 is built on the root of the chord and voicing 2 is built on the #4th.
- 5) For a half-diminished chord, voicing 1 is built on the 5th of the chord and voicing 2 is built on the root.

Turnarounds — Progressions 1

A turnaround progression does just what its name implies: it doesn't go anywhere, it just turns around in the key. These progressions usually occur in the last measure or two of a section of a tune. It might either be at the end of an A section to prepare the repeat of the 2nd A section or it might be at the end of a B section (bridge) to return to the beginning of the last A section.

Most songs begin either on the I chord or the II chord of the key. Sections will commonly end on the I chord (or a common tone substitute). A typical turnaround progression will start on the I chord and "turn around" to either the I chord or the II chord. Here are examples of both types of common turnarounds:

Two musical staves showing common turnaround progressions in C major. The first staff shows a progression from C major (I) to A7 (VI), D7 (II), G7 (V), and back to C major (I). The second staff shows a progression from C major (I) to F major (IV), E7 (III), A7 (VI), and D7 (II). Both progressions are marked with Roman numerals below the chord names.

With a couple of chord substitutions and quality manipulations, they might look like this.

Two musical staves showing modified turnaround progressions in C major. The first staff shows a progression from C major (I) to Eb7 (bIII), D7 (II), Db7 (bII), and back to C major (I). The second staff shows a progression from C major (I) to F7 (IV), E7 (III), A7alt (VI), and D7 (II). The modified chords are circled in grey.

Notice that in the first measure, the A-7 was changed into an A7 and then a tritone substitution was made. In the second measure, the D7 is a tritone substitution for G7.

In the second turnaround above, the FΔ was changed into an F7 in the first measure and the A-7 in the second measure was changed to an A7alt.

Voicings for Tunes

This section includes voicings to 21 standard tunes, with substitute names. Some of the chord progressions are written in the staff to make them easier to read, but they should be played an octave lower so that they sound fuller. In general, voicings should normally be played as close to middle C on the piano as possible. An octave lower, they start to sound muddy. An octave higher, they may sound thin.

At first, play the chord progressions with the roots of the chords in the left hand and the voicings in the right hand. This will help you internalize the whole sound with the root as the foundation. When comping, this is one way the chords can be played. As long as you aren't too active with the left hand, causing a conflict with the bass player, it is perfectly okay to play a chord this way.

Pianists should then shift the voicings over to the left hand and find other tones that can be played in the right hand for a two-hand voicing. Generally, the things to play in the right hand include octaves, octaves with a note in the middle, intervals of a 4th stacked on top, and triads of various types. The notes are drawn from the chord tones of the scale that relates to the chord. Of course, the voicings may be played in the left hand to accompany improvisation in the right.

Horn players, you should play these voicings with the roots in the left hand and use the sustain pedal to hold the chord while playing over it on your instrument. At first, arpeggiate the voicing on your horn in concert key and then play the appropriate scale or mode, while sustaining the chord. Since you can only play one note at a time on a horn, this is an excellent way to determine which notes sound good to you with the chord. Also, play the chord progressions in your horn key to reinforce which color tones are strong and sound good on the chord.

All of these voicings are presented in whole notes, but you should try playing a variety of rhythms and articulations. Good comping usually involves a balance of short chords and sustained chords. Pianists should listen to keyboard players accompanying great horn players, to see what they do, and imitate rhythms and articulations that are appealing. Also, remember that jazz rhythms are typically syncopated. Try to play chords on the anticipations instead of always on the beat. The section on blues comping in this book shows some rhythmic patterns for experimentation.

Harmony is the foundation of everything we do in jazz, whether it be arranging/composing, accompanying, improvising or teaching. Just knowing the notes of a scale is of little use unless you know how it sounds against the harmony. The piano, or other chord instrument, is a basic tool that should be used as part of your daily practice and study of jazz.