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Foreword

This book is written primarily for beginning jazz pianists and other musicians who may have little or no piano facility but know the sound of jazz music and want to obtain a "hands-on" understanding of harmony at the keyboard. It has evolved from many years of teaching jazz piano harmony to non-pianists. It is designed to function both as a class piano teaching method and as a comprehensive resource for one-on-one jazz harmony instruction.

The focus of the text is strictly on harmony. The goal is to help students master jazz piano voicings and apply them fluently to tunes (popular songs or jazz compositions.) These skills are important for all jazz players. Non-pianists need to understand harmony in order to master jazz linear improvisation on their own instruments, write arrangements, compose, and better comprehend the chords they hear when playing with pianists or guitarists. Beginning jazz pianists must first master voicings before they can coherently improvise lines with their right hands or comp (accompany other players.)

These days, there is no shortage of written theoretical information about jazz piano voicings. The *problem* is that of bridging the gap between theory and application; there are countless individuals who "understand" all of the theory, but cannot use it at the keyboard.

This book provides a **systematic practice routine** for learning and applying the language of **mainstream jazz harmony**. It meets a need for a text which can really assist any novice in gaining a basic orientation at the keyboard, even if his/her notational reading skills are limited. At the same time, it is designed to help a student move well beyond the basic voicings, and provide a logical path toward real harmonic sophistication. Most importantly, it is meant to give the student an organized approach for exploring any harmonic style.

By "mainstream jazz harmony" I refer to a harmonic language that corresponds roughly with jazz piano practice originating in the 1940's and 1950's, and is still in constant use today. It is founded in tertian chord construction, with harmonies built on the basis of third intervals, rather than fourths or clusters. The understanding of tertian harmony is fundamental to the development of skillful voice leading in both playing and writing, and prepares a musician to intelligently assimilate more modern styles. I view the more contemporary jazz language built on 4ths to be a natural evolution from tertian harmony; the later chapters move in that direction.

Although I use the terms "chord" and "voicing" fairly interchangeably, there is a slight distinction. The term "chord" in this text denotes the basic sound of the chord tones and extensions, as described by a symbol (see pp. 10-11.) "Voicing" refers to one of the many ways chord tones and extensions can be arranged vertically or distributed between the hands. **The strongest voicings on piano are economical, with no unnecessary doubling of notes.** Therefore, the exercises presented in this text develop from two-note voicings up to six, adding notes systematically along the way.

To The Student

The method of this text can equip you with the skills needed to quickly harmonize tunes at the piano and effectively comp in a mainstream jazz group. In order to harmonize tunes quickly, you need to be flexible enough to apply harmonic ideas in all keys. Comping goes a step further, and requires you to execute harmonizations in time with a good ryhthmic feel. Comping is really the art of listening to your musical environment and spontaneously supporting the musical statements being made within the group.

Naturally, in order to comp authentically in the jazz tradition, you need to listen to and carefully imitate the comping language of good pianists (see Appendix H.) You will find that this language is both harmonic and rhythmic—a good jazz pianist plays harmonically strong chord voicings with a good time feel. You have to practice and master the voicings first, since you have to be secure about *what* to play before worrying about *how* and *when* to play it. Then you can focus on the rhythmic feel. To gain all of these skills, I find that two practice activities (detailed on pp.3-6) are necessary:

I. Using This Book

So here is the method of this text. If you have questions about terminology used, please refer to sections III and IV (pp.10-17) which detail some basic theory and this book's organization. As mentioned above, to become fluid with mainstream jazz harmony, you should practice:

1) Harmonic exercises. This means drilling chord voicings alone and within typical progressions so that your hands do them automatically and can find them quickly in all keys. Chapters 1-9 provide the exercises. Appendices A-D are the tools for mastering them.

2) Tune Harmonization. As you are learning new voicings, you need to contiually apply them to tune after tune. Praciticing the harmonic exercises will make this activity much easier. A fakebook is your resource for tune leadsheets. See page 4 for information about harmonizing tunes.

1) Practicing Harmonic Exercises

This text includes nine chapters of harmonic exercises, each dedicated to a specific kind of voicing structure. The chapters progressively add voices and build on one another. Start with the Preliminary Exercises (p.18.) You can then proceed sequentially through the chapters, but it is also OK to study individual ones out of sequence. The main thing is to focus on only one chapter at a time. Proficient jazz pianists feel comfortable jumping from one kind of voicing structure to another. Eventually you will too, but to gain that proficiency you should stay with the voicing structures of a single chapter until they are mastered.

The object is to wean your eyes from the written exercise pages through memorization and by using the Chord Drills and Practice Patterns in Appendices A and B. Work to make the voicing drills a matter of motor reflex, always mastering smaller pieces of material in time with a good rhythmic feel. Then combine them with other pieces, eventually covering twelve keys. Below is a step-by-step approach for working on a given chapter. When practicing these steps remember to: 1) use a metronome and /or the enclosed play-a-long CD as pacing devices; 2) recite roots to stay aware of what you are actually playing; and 3) add rhythms (Appendix C) or RH melodic phrases (Appendix D) to further strengthen your command of the exercise.

Step 1 **Memorize the II-V-I and Minor II-V-I Primary Exercises** (see p. 13-15)

The best way to do this is to repeat each II-V grouping (e.g. Em7-A7) many times until it feels natural, and then add the I chord (Em7-A7-DM7) and continue the repetitions. When each key area feels comfortable, string them together as they are written, adding one new key area at a time. When the full pages are memorized, continue to practice them using the Practice Patterns in Appendix B.

Step 2 **Practice the Primary Voicings in all keys**

Most chapters present twelve voicing structures that occur within the Primary Exercises (the first two chapters have less.) They are collectively displayed on the introduction page to each chapter. The voicings include two inversions of each of the following chord qualities: minor seventh, dominant seventh, major seventh, m7(b5), diminished seventh, and altered dominant . Starting with the minor seventh chords, drill the voicings in all keys using the practice instructions outlined in Appendix A,

Step 3 **Begin to apply the voicings to tunes** (see next page)

As the voicings become familiar through steps 1 and 2 above, begin to devote equal time to tune harmonizations (see next page) while continuing the exercises. You should always be working to musically perfect specific tunes using the chapter's voicings. Also it is a good idea to casually read through fakebooks, trying to apply the voicings on sight. Don't get discouraged; this skill improves with experience and as the voicings become more secure. Study the four tunes at the end of the chapter (see p.17).

Step 4 **Memorize the Dominant Cycle, Major Cycle, and Diminished / Tri-tone Sub Primary exercises** (see page 15)

Use Practice Patterns 25-29, and note the special practice instructions in the title bars.

Step 5 **Select *Secondary* Exercises to practice in all keys** (see page 16)

Choose the ones that appeal to your ears. The dominant alteration, cycle variations, and CESH exercises can be used with the Practice Patterns in Appendix B. The turnarounds have no practice patterns; just repeat each key area many times until it is comfortable.

Chapter 1 Shell Voicings

The voicings in this first chapter are simple but functional. They make use of the root and either the third or the seventh of a chord. Sometimes referred to as "shell" voicings, these are commonly used as left-hand accompaniment in the piano stylings of Bud Powell, Horace Silver, Sonny Clark, and others who play primarily in the "be-bop" idiom. With only two notes, they are harmonically incomplete; however, they do convey enough information to supplement many right hand melodies or improvised lines, especially those in the be-bop style where melodies are crafted to clearly outline the harmony. Most jazz pianists play these kind of voicings in a relatively sparse and percussive manner on medium or up-tempo tunes.

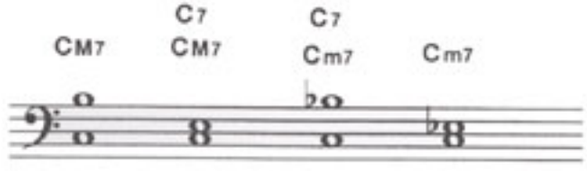
Shell voicings are most effective when the top note (played by the thumb) falls between D below middle C and the D next to middle C. These voicings are particularly useful in supporting an improvised line played in the middle range of the keyboard, which is stylistically typical of be-bop playing. If your melody or improvisation should dip lower and conflict with a voicing, here are some options: a) break the voice leading and pick the other inversion (e. g. R-3 instead of R-7) which falls in a lower register; b) for that moment play only the root, a R-5, or nothing at all in the left hand; or c) play the entire melody up an octave.

When you apply shell voicings to tunes, it is OK to break voice leading occasionally in order to select the inversion which best complements a given melody note (i.e. does not double it.) Since the voicings are likely to be somewhat rhythmically detached from each other, voice leading with shell voicings is not as critical as with the voicings in later chapters. Nonetheless, it is still always best to avoid breaking voice leading within II-V and II-V-I progressions.

Note that any R-3 (a third) structure may be expanded into a R-10 (a tenth), which sounds fuller. Whether or not you are able to use a tenth in place of a third depends upon the size of your left hand and spatial distance the tenth covers on the keyboard. Physically, minor tenths are easier reach than major tenths. In a II-V progression, it is more natural to close in from a R-10 voicing to a R-7, rather than expanding from a R-7 to a R10. Try this with the II-V-IB exercise (p.24). When you do this, finger the minor chord (a tenth) with your fifth finger on the bottom, and the dominant (a seventh) with your fourth or third on the bottom. You just have to experiment to decide which tenth intervals fit your hands. But always STOP IMMEDIATELY if you experience any hint of pain in stretching a tenth or, for that matter, while playing anything on the piano.

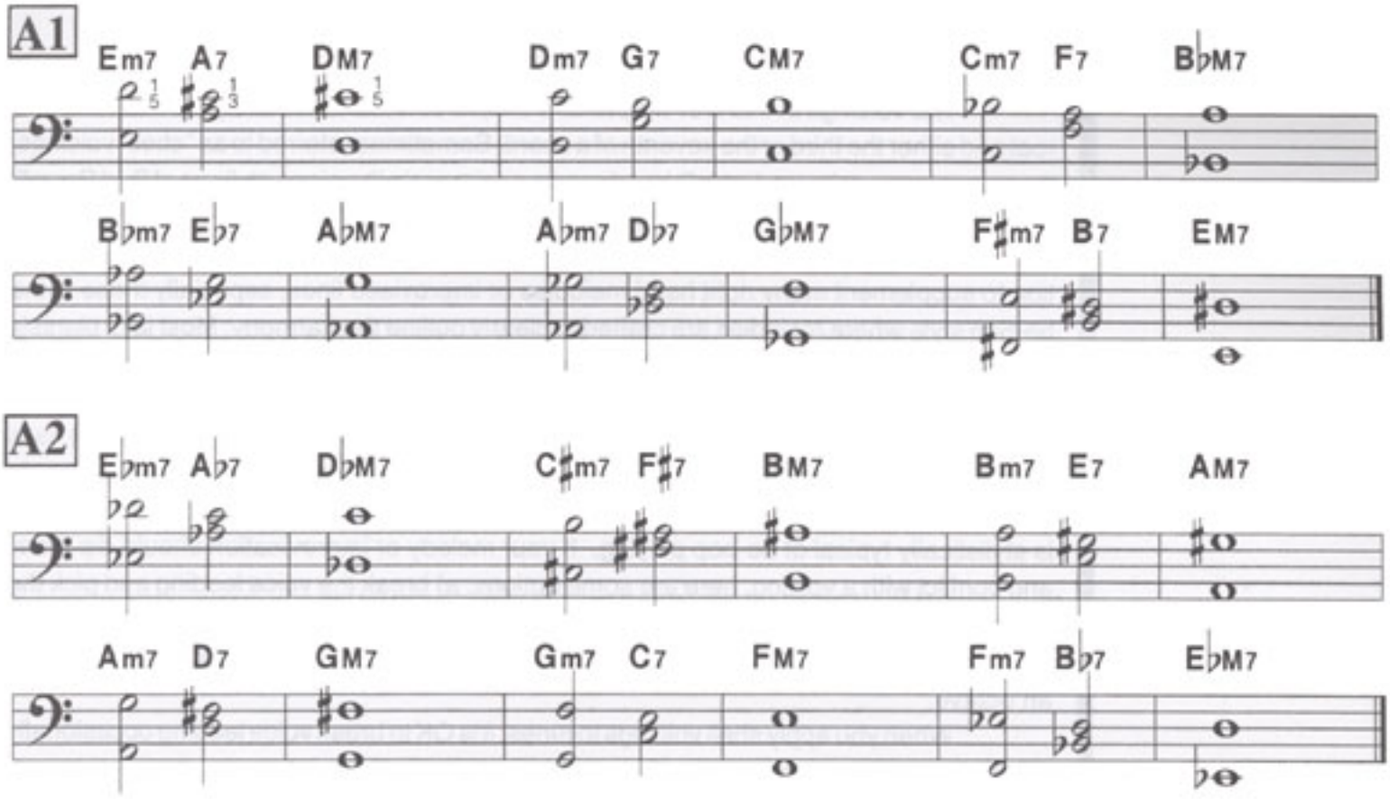
To help solidify these voicings into your left hand, try adding the right hand melodic patterns presented in appendix D to your practice.

Primary Voicings For practice (See Appendix A)



EXERCISE 1-1A : II-V-I

1. Memorize these voicings as written, repeating each key area many times.
2. Practice the first three voicings individually in all keys. See Appendix A.
3. Play the progression in all keys using Appendix B, # 1,3,5,6,8,10,12.



LH Finger Movement

II chord forms minor seventh interval (5th finger and thumb).

II to V: Interval closes to a major third. The root jumps up a fourth (5th finger to the 3rd finger); the top voice (thumb) drops a half step.

V to I: Interval opens to a major seventh. The root drops a fifth (3rd finger back to the 5th finger); the top voice (thumb) stays constant.

I to new II: Interval closes to a minor seventh. The root stays constant (5th finger). The top voice (thumb) drops a half step.

A1

Em7	E	D
A7	A	C#
DM7	D	C#
Dm7	D	C
G7	G	B
CM7	C	B
Cm7	C	Bb
F7	F	A
BbM7	Bb	A
Bbm7	Bb	Ab
Eb7	Eb	G
AbM7	Ab	G
Abm7	Ab	Gb
Db7	Db	F
GbM7	Gb	F
F#m7	F#	E
B7	B	D#
EM7	E	D#

Formula

New Key
1 Step Down

IIm7	V7	I	IIm7
7 $\xrightarrow{m_2}$	3 —	7 $\xrightarrow{m_2}$	7
R $\xrightarrow{4}$	R $\xrightarrow{5}$	R —	R

A2

Ebm7	Eb	Db
Ab7	Ab	C
DbM7	Db	C
C#m7	C#	B
F#7	F#	A#
BM7	B	A#
Bm7	B	A
E7	E	G#
AM7	A	G#
Am7	A	G
D7	D	F#
GM7	G	F#
Gm7	G	F
C7	C	E
FM7	F	E
Fm7	F	Eb
Bb7	Bb	D
EbM7	Eb	D

Chapter 3 Four-Voice Shell Extensions

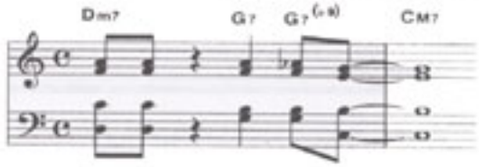
Four-voice shell extensions are an expansion of the voicings presented in chapter 1 and are mainly used for two-handed comping. The left hand plays R-3 or R-7 shells . The right hand plays two notes: one is either the third or seventh, while the other is either a fifth or a harmonic extension (see p.3). By adding extensions to dominant chords and then raising or lowering them, we create special harmonic tensions called **dominant alterations**, which strengthen the harmonic pull toward a resolution.

Exercise 3-2 introduces voicings with two **dominant alterations** (b9 and #5) within the context of the minor II-V-I progression. But these altered dominant chords are also used quite commonly when resolving to major chords. Examples of this are presented as Dominant Alteration Secondary Exercises(p.54.). Also note that the #9, b5, and # 4 extensions are introduced in various other secondary exercises as well.

When should you use an altered dominant voicing? Your ear is always the final judge, but here are some guidelines:

1. Dominant chords resolving up a fourth to minor chords almost always sound best with dominant alterations replacing a natural 9th or 13th.
2. Dominant chords resolving up a fourth to major or other dominant chords are frequently altered, as long as the melody does not emphasize a conflicting 9th or 13th.

If you are comping behind improvised jazz choruses where the original melody has been abandoned, you can use dominant alterations freely in V-I resolutions. Listen to the soloist to hear if he/she is using altered tensions in the improvised line. In any case, it is always safe to follow an unaltered dominant with an altered dominant just before the harmony resolves. For example:

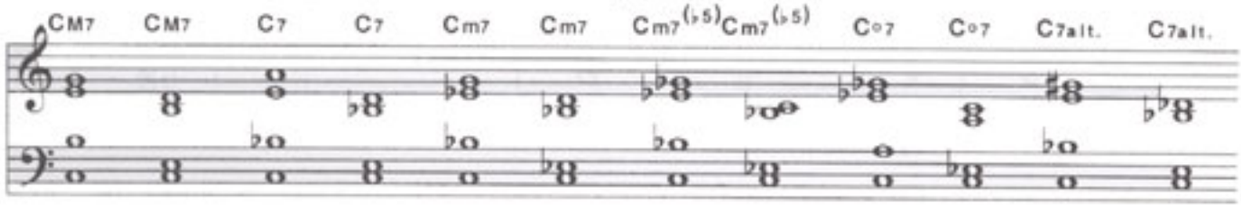


The altered dominant voicings of this chapter utilize either a b9 or a #5. When you are harmonizing a lead sheet, you can usually apply these voicing tensions interchangeably to any altered harmony in a tune. For example: if the chord symbol on a tune specifies C7#5, you can usually use a voicing of C7b9 if that inversion (based off the third) leads more strongly. Since this chapter is about mastery of this specific 4-voice format, always choose the inversion which provides the best voice-leading.

If you have mastered the voicings in chapter 1, the new sounds generated in this chapter will originate in your right hand. Pay attention to the right hand interval structures that occur: M2, m3, M3, and P4. To place the voicings in the most effective keyboard range, follow these guidelines:

1) Your LH thumb (the third or seventh or the chord) should fall no lower than D below middle C.
2) The top voice in your RH should be placed no higher than C# an octave above middle C.

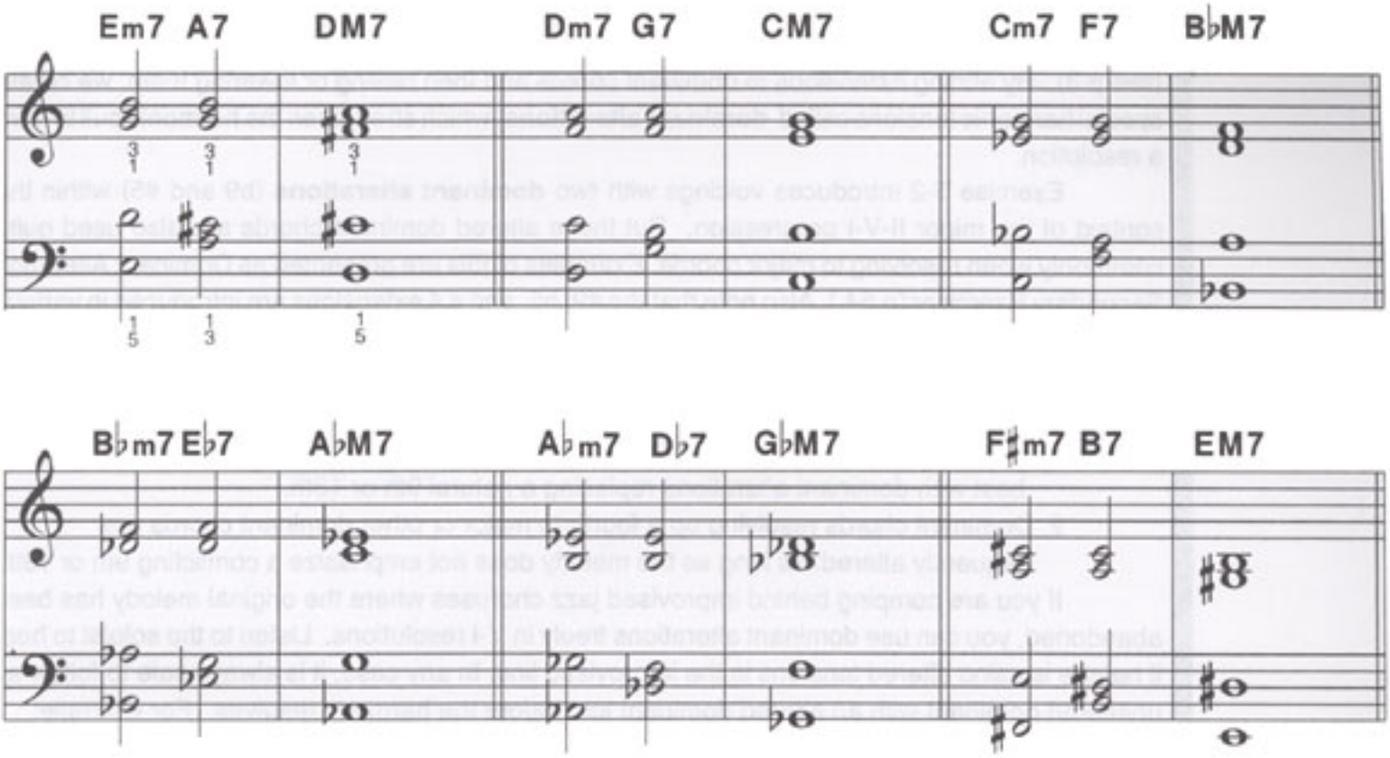
Primary Voicings for practice (See Appendix A)



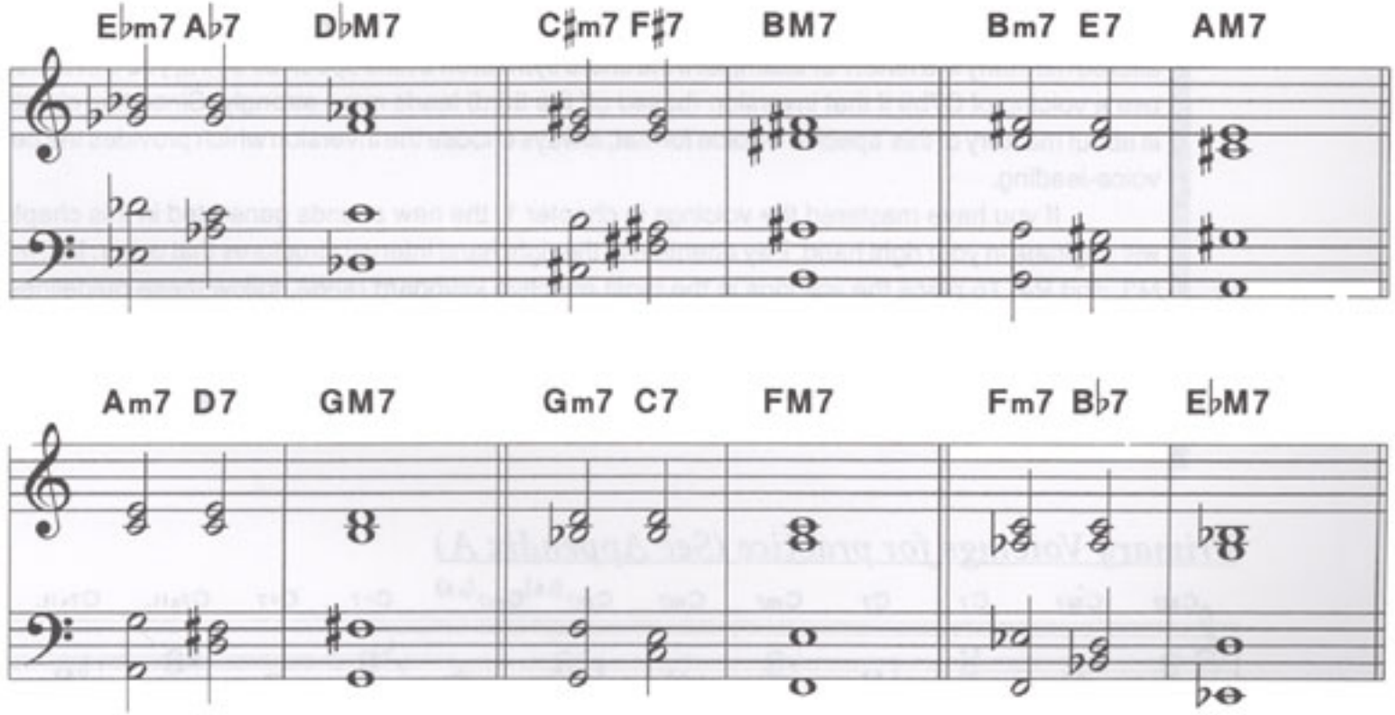
EXERCISE 3-1A : II-V-I

1. Memorize as written, repeating each key area many times.
2. Practice the first three voicings individually in all keys. See Appendix A.
3. Play progression in all keys using Appendix B, # 1,3,5,6,8,10,12.

A1



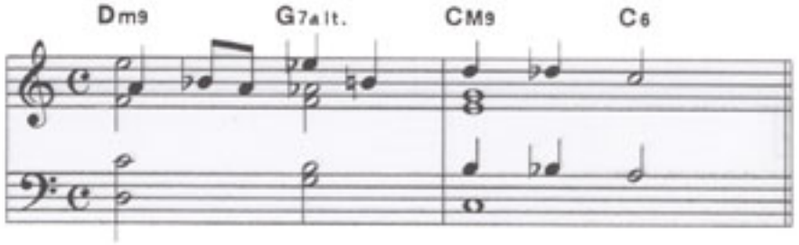
A2



Chapter 5 Five Voice Shell Extensions

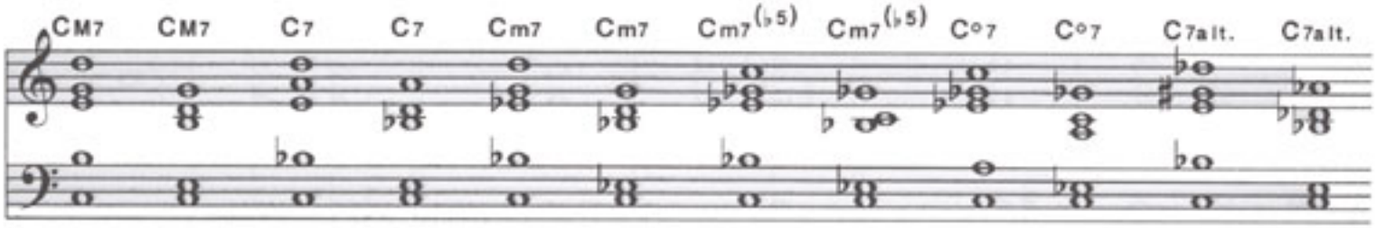
The voicings in this chapter build directly upon those of chapter 3, but use two extension notes in each chord instead of one. The extensions used are the 9th (or substitutes b9, #9, or the root) and the 5th (or substitutes 13, b5, or #5.) The voicings which result are harmonically very rich and colorful. Because five voice shell extensions use two extension notes, this chapter generates more secondary exercise possibilities than the earlier ones. Select and practice the ones that appeal to your ears.

These voicings are useful strictly for comping purposes, since they are spread between the two hands. Because they contain roots, the texture is heavier and more grounded than rootless voicings. Therefore, they are especially appropriate for ballads. Because they are spread out, the chords present special opportunities for the manipulation of inner voices, which is appropriate in slower tempos. For example:

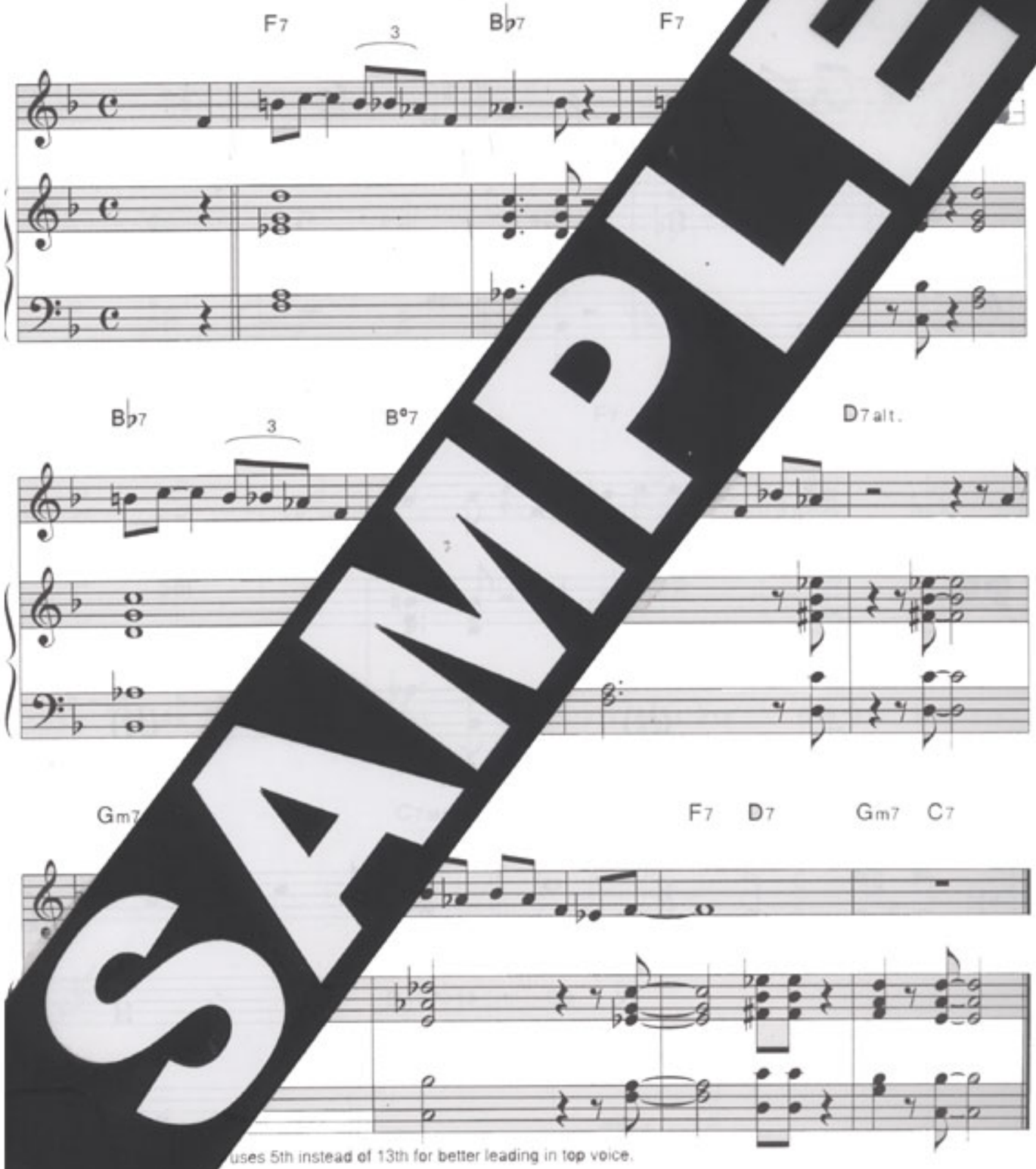


For the strongest harmonic support, be sure that all notes for both hands fall between Eb an octave and a sixth below middle C, and G an octave and a fifth above middle C.

Primary Voicings For practice (See Appendix A)



Shew's Blues



SAMPLE

See p. 28 for suggested fingerings and articul-tions of the melody.

#9
II-V B : Descending Half Steps

Start off the 3rd

Bm7	E7
Bbm7	Eb7
Am7	D7
Abm7	Db7
Gm7	C7
F#m7	B7
Fm7	Bb7
Em7	A7
Ebm7	Ab7
Dm7	G7
Dbm7	Gb7
Cm7	F7

#10
II-V-I A :Ascending Minor Thirds

Start low off the 7th

Fm7	Bb7	EbM7
Abm7	Db7	GbM7
Bm7	E7	AM7
Dm7	G7	CM7
F#m7	B7	EM7
Am7	D7	GM7
Cm7	F7	BbM7
Ebm7	Ab7	DbM7
Gm7	C7	FM7
Bbm7	Eb7	AbM7
C#m7	F#7	BM7
Em7	A7	DM7

#11
II-V-I B :Ascending Minor Thirds

Start low off the3rd

Cm7	F7	BbM7
Ebm7	Ab7	DbM7
F#m7	B7	EM7
Am7	D7	GM7
C#m7	F#7	BM7
Em7	A7	DM7
Gm7	C7	FM7
Bbm7	Eb7	AbM7
Dm7	G7	CM7
Fm7	Bb7	EbM7
Abm7	Db7	GbM7
Bm7	E7	AM7

#12
II-V-I Random Keys

Start from either position

F#m7	B7	EM7
Am7	D7	GM7
Ebm7	Ab7	DbM7
Bm7	E7	AM7
Abm7	Db7	GbM7
Fm7	Bb7	EbM7
Em7	A7	DM7
C#m7	F#7	BM7
Gm7	C7	FM7
Dm7	G7	CM7
Bbm7	Eb7	AbM7
Cm7	F7	BbM7
Am7	D7	GM7
Bm7	E7	AM7
Fm7	Bb7	EbM7
C#m7	F#7	BM7
Dm7	G7	CM7
Cm7	F7	BbM7
F#m7	B7	EM7
Ebm7	Ab7	DbM7
Abm7	Db7	GbM7
Em7	A7	DM7
Gm7	C7	FM7
Bbm7	Eb7	AbM7

Minor II-V-I

#13
Minor II-V-I A : Descending Whole Steps

Start off the 7th

Eø	A7alt	Dm7
Dø	G7alt	Cm7
Cø	F7alt	Bbm7
Bbø	Eb7alt	Abm7
Abø	Db7alt	Gbm7
F#ø	B7alt	Em7
Fø	Bb7alt	Ebm7
Ebø	Ab7alt	Dbm7
C#ø	F#7alt	Bm7
Bø	E7alt	Am7
Aø	D7alt	Gm7
Gø	C7alt	Fm7

#14
Minor II-V-I B : Descending Whole Steps

Start off the 3rd

Bø	E7alt	Am7
Aø	D7alt	Gm7
Gø	C7alt	Fm7
Fø	Bb7alt	Ebm7
Ebø	Ab7alt	Dbm7
C#ø	F#7alt	Bm7
Cø	F7alt	Bbm7
Bbø	Eb7alt	Abm7
Abø	Db7alt	Gbm7
F#ø	B7alt	Em7
Eø	A7alt	Dm7
Dø	G7alt	Cm7

#15
Minor II-V A : Desc. Whole Steps

Start off the 7th

Eø	A7alt	
Dø	G7alt	
Cø	F7alt	
Bbø	Eb7alt	
Abø	Db7alt	
F#ø	B7alt	
Fø	Bb7alt	
Ebø	Ab7alt	
C#ø	F#7alt	
Bø	E7alt	
Aø	D7alt	
Gø	C7alt	