

Jazz Harmony-Building Chords

There are two approaches to thinking about chord construction which are essential. We can build a chord from it's root, adding the upper notes relating to the interval from the root (rather than the key):

Fig 1. (maj7th)

Maj3rd Cmaj C6 C^ Min3rd Cm Cm6 Cm7

1,3(maj) 1,3,5 1,3,5,6 1,3,5,7 1,3(min) 1,3,5 1,3,5,6 1,3,5,7

We must also think of how the chord relates to the key in which we are in at the time:

Fig 2.

I II III IV V VI VII VIII

maj7th min7th min7th maj7th dom7th min7th half- dim

Here we are in the key of C major-each diatonic chord is naturally major,minor,dominant,or half diminished. There is also a diminished chord which does not occur naturally in the diatonic scale but is used frequently (fig 3.)

Fig 3

C° (dim)

Jazz musicians like to colour these basic chords by extending them further:

Fig 4. Major chord extension

Maj3rd Cmaj C6 C^ C^9 C^(#11) C^13(#11)

Notice that in Fig 4 there is an F# used instead of a natural F (which would naturally occur in the key of C). This is largely due to taste as a natural F would not have the clarity here so we sharpen the 11th. All the upper extensions (9th and above) can be raised or lowered depending on the particular effect required.

Fig 5. Minor chord extensions

Min3rd Cm Cm6 Cm7 Cm9 Cm11 Cm13

While most chords can be played without extensions, the Dominant 7th chord always tends to have at least a 9th added

Fig 6. Dominant chord extensions

C7 C9 C7(b9) C7(#9) C9(#11) C13

These chords now need to be positioned on the keyboard (or arranged) so as to make the most effective use of the notes-this is known as "voicing":
Fig 7.

Fig 7 shows five chords in C major: C9, C7(#9), C13, C7(#9b9b13), and C7(#11). The notation is presented in a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. The C9 chord has a flat 9th (Bb) in the bass. The C7(#9) chord has a natural 9th (B) in the bass. The C13 chord has a natural 13th (F) in the bass. The C7(#9b9b13) chord has a flat 9th (Bb) and a flat 13th (Eb) in the bass. The C7(#11) chord has a natural 11th (F#) in the bass. The bass line for the last two chords includes a circled bass note.

Major voicings

Fig 8.

Fig 8 shows five major chords in C major: C^, C^9, C%, C^9, and C^(#11). The notation is presented in a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. The C^ chord has a natural 9th (B) in the bass. The C^9 chord has a natural 9th (B) in the bass. The C% chord has a natural 9th (B) in the bass. The C^9 chord has a natural 9th (B) in the bass. The C^(#11) chord has a natural 11th (F#) in the bass. The bass line for the last chord includes a circled bass note.

Minor voicings

Fig 9.

Fig 9 shows five minor chords in C minor: Cm7, Cm9, Cm%, Cm11, and Cm13. The notation is presented in a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. The Cm7 chord has a flat 7th (Bb) in the bass. The Cm9 chord has a natural 9th (B) in the bass. The Cm% chord has a natural 9th (B) in the bass. The Cm11 chord has a natural 11th (F) in the bass. The Cm13 chord has a flat 13th (Eb) in the bass. The bass line for the last chord includes a circled bass note.