

Chord Voicing, Overview

There are many different ways to voice jazz harmony at the keyboard, depending upon style, melody, rhythm, mood and many other things. The examples below illustrate the principle elements which create the foundation for all Jazz arranging & piano playing today.

1 Closed position:

The basic 7th chord in it's basic "closed" position.
No matter how complex things get, this should be in the back of your mind.

2 Open position (a):

Open position(b):

The "open" position voices the chord in a more resonant way, creating a rich sound with few notes.

3 Bebop shells-

In the Bebop era of the 40s & 50s the melodic line & improvisation outlined the harmonic extensions (9ths, 11ths, 13ths,) to such an extent that the pianist's left hand merely plays "shells" consisting of 7ths or 3rds.

4 Extended chords-

While 'comping' (accompanying), pianists add the upper notes of the chord (extension) to create tension & colour.

* When playing with a bass the root notes are usually omitted.

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The harmonic extension can be raised or lowered by a semitone depending on what sounds best. There are no hard rules about the choice of extensions-it is a matter of practice & experience to know what will sound best at the time. The choice is normally governed by 1. the melody & 2. the degree of tension that you want to create at the time.

Evan's Voicings

- 2 In the late 50's pianist Bill Evans developed a series of voicings influenced by the classical impressionist composers such as Ravell & Debussy. The upper extension were inverted to produce "voicings" (chords minus the root) which could be played in the left hand leaving the right hand open to play linear, modal based lines. These voicings are very much the basis for most modern Jazz piano.

Exercise 6: Dm9, G13, C^13 (II, V, I)

Exercise 7: Fm9, Bb13, Eb^13 (II, V, I)

Exercise 8: Gm9, C13, F^13 (II, V, I)

Exercise 9: Am9, D13, D7(#9), G^ (II, V, I)

Exercise 10: Dm, G7, C^ (II, V, I)

Exercise 11: Gm, C7, F^ (II, V, I)

Within the rhythm section these voicings are generally used in the left hand with the right hand playing brighter, less dense voicings.

12 To Practise: (PLEASE NOTE-the chord symbols are notated here as you would see them in a "fake" book, leaving you the choice of extensions).

Exercise 12: Dm, G7, Dm, G7, Cm, F7, Cm, F7 (top row); Bbm, Eb7, Bbm, Eb7, Ebm, Ab7, Ebm, Ab7 (bottom row)

Exercise 13: Dm, G7, Dm, G7, Cm, F7, Cm, F7 (top row); Bbm, Eb7, Bbm, Eb7, Ebm, Ab7, Ebm, Ab7 (bottom row)

