

2. Chords

The first step to comprehending jazz theory is to master the construction, notation, and voicings of the chords used in jazz.

Construction and Notation

As in other styles of popular music, **chord symbols** (often called **chord changes** or simply **changes**) are the harmonic shorthand used by jazz musicians. In a chord symbol, a capital letter identifies the root of the chord. The symbols to the right of the root provide details about the rest of the chord.

Triads			
Symbol	Name (pronunciation)	Construction	Alternate Symbols
C	C major	major third and perfect fifth above root	(none)
Cmi	C minor	minor third and perfect fifth above root	Cm, Cmin
C ^o	C diminished	minor third and diminished fifth above root	Cdim
C+	C augmented	major third and augmented fifth above root	Caug
Csus	C suspended	perfect fourth and perfect fifth above root	Csus4
C2	C two	major second and perfect fifth above root	Csus2

Triads (three note chords) are the basic building blocks of classical music theory. Even though triads are less common in jazz than they are in other popular styles, it is important to have an understanding of their construction since they are the basis of the seventh chords so prevalent in jazz.

Triads are commonly divided into four qualities: **major**, **minor**, **diminished**, or **augmented**. **Suspended** triads and **two chords** are also common in some contemporary music (Ex. 2.01).

Ex. 2.01
Triads



18—Chords

- *Altered thirteenths.* The thirteenth is typically not altered. A raised 13 would be the same pitch as a flat seventh, which is redundant, and a lowered thirteenth is the same tone as a raised fifth (Ex. 2.21).

The designation $\flat 13$ is sometimes used to indicate a $\sharp 5$ (enharmonic notes displaced by an octave). If a $\flat 13$ appears in a chord symbol, it probably means the absence of a natural 5, because the relationship between the natural 5 and the $\flat 13$ would result in a dissonant minor ninth interval.

EX. 2.21

Altered Thirteenths (Compared to Diatonic Thirteenth)

Flat 13 = Diatonic 13 lowered by half step

Diatonic 13

Sharp 13 = Diatonic 13 raised by half step

Flat 13 = Diatonic 13 lowered by half step

Diatonic 13

Sharp 13 = Diatonic 13 raised by half step

Flat 13 = Diatonic 13 lowered by half step

Diatonic 13

Sharp 13 = Diatonic 13 raised by half step

Combining diatonic extensions and alterations. Diatonic extensions and alterations are often combined within the same chord, offering rich and full sonorities.

One of the more common is the dominant seventh chord with a ninth, sharp eleventh, and thirteenth added. In Example 2.22, this chord structure, (with an $E\flat$ root), is voiced for full jazz ensemble.

Notice that the chord symbol (shown above the Bass part) is $E\flat 7 \sharp 11$, even though both 9 and 13 are part of the chord. Often when altered tones are included in the chord symbol, the other diatonic extensions are assumed and are not listed.

EX. 2.22

Final Chord with Extensions and Alterations

Dean Sorenson, "One More for Johnny," bar 213 (ZB433)
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SAXOPHONES

BASSES

BASS

$E\flat 7 \sharp 11$

Chapter 2 Study Questions

(1) Write major triads in root close position on every note in the chromatic scale. Play them on a keyboard or your instrument. Repeat this process with minor, diminished, and augmented triads.

(2) Write major seventh chords in close position on every note in the chromatic scale. Include all inversions. Play them on a keyboard or your instrument. Repeat for the other Group 1 seventh chords (dominant seventh and minor seventh).

(3) Write major seventh chords in root open position on every note in the chromatic scale. Play them on a keyboard or your instrument. Repeat for the other Group 1 seventh chords (dominant seventh and minor seventh).

(4) Choose a jazz ensemble chart or lead sheet and write all the chords designated by the chord symbols using close position inversions to create smooth voice leading from chord to chord. Use only the root, third, fifth, (and seventh) from each chord. For this exercise, ignore any extensions.

(5) Choose a jazz ensemble chart or lead sheet and write all of the chords in root close position as indicated by the chord symbols. Include any alterations or extensions if they are indicated. Remember that even though “7” does not necessarily appear in a chord symbol with an extension, it is implied. The same often holds true for the ninth in eleventh and thirteenth chords and the thirteenth in eleventh chords.

(6) Create your own **Chord Construction Guide** like the one found on page 20, using seventh chords on roots other than C. A blank table is available in the Kjos Multimedia Library at www.kjos.com.

For more written exercises, see Chapter 2 of the *Basic Jazz Theory Workbook* by Dean Sorenson (Kjos edition number L80).

5. Harmony

Jazz harmony—indeed all Western harmony—is defined by the **root motion** (movement between the roots) in a **chord progression**. This root motion is the defining characteristic in whether the harmony is **tonal** or **modal**.

Chord progressions (also referred to as **chord changes**, or simply **changes**) are defined as sequences of chords over time. Progressions range from simple to highly complex. The most basic progressions are not even progressions at all, but include only a single chord. The solo sections of many beginning jazz ensemble charts follow this formula, inviting students to improvise over a single repeating chord.

In **tonal harmony**, the chords move in much the same way as in standard “legit” harmony, with cadential root motion by fourth or fifth prevailing (a dominant seventh chord resolving to a major seventh chord, for example). Each chord functions as **tonic**, **dominant**, or **subdominant**, with some taking on multiple roles simultaneously.

Modal harmony, in contrast, refers to chord progressions that include little, if any, traditional cadential chord movement. Root motion is often by the interval of a second or third, and many modal tunes use a single chord type (for example, the minor seventh chord) moving around in parallel motion through the entire progression.

To help identify this root movement and provide a common language for the discussion of tonal and modal harmony, jazz harmonic analysis employs Roman numerals. This is the same convention as in classical theory, where the numerals are used to indicate relative position and function of chords within a key center.

Various schools of thought offer slight variations in how the Roman numerals are notated. Some systems present all numerals in upper case regardless of chord quality. In contrast, this text presents minor and diminished chords in lower case, and major and augmented chords in upper case (Ex. 5.01).

Adding more notes to a voicing beyond the guide tones will create a more dense sound (which may or may not be musically desirable). Example 7.15 shows a quick and easy method for adding voices. It requires three simple steps:

Even though only Group 1 seventh chords are shown in Example 7.15, this method will work with virtually any chord type.

1. Begin with a root close position seventh chord in a middle register.
2. Move the guide tones down one octave.
3. Retain the root and the fifth in their original octave.

For additional color, it is possible to substitute the ninth for the root. The thirteenth may also be swapped out for the fifth on the dominant seven chord.

Ex. 7.15
Creating Comping Voicings

The example shows three rows of musical notation, each representing a different chord type: C major seventh (Cma7), C dominant seventh (C7), and C minor seventh (Cmi7). Each row consists of four measures. The first measure shows the root close position seventh chord. The second measure shows the result of moving the 3rd and 7th notes down one octave, with the instruction "MOVE 3 AND 7 DOWN". The third measure shows the result of retaining the root and 5th notes, with the instruction "RETAIN R AND 5". The fourth measure shows the result of substituting the 9th note for the 1st note, with the instruction "SUBSTITUTE 9 FOR 1 IF DESIRED".

These techniques are easily applied to isolated voicings, but most chords occur in progressions. They need to move smoothly from one voicing to the next. Use principles of good voice leading as discussed on pages 40–42 to create voicings that move effortlessly between one another. Often this is as simple as inverting the notes in the right and/or left hands (changing the octave of either note in either hand).