Jazz Piano Basics
by Matt Harris

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Introduction

Twenty five years of playing jazz piano and fifteen years of teaching have helped me to devise this easy, understandable, and fun method for teaching beginning jazz piano voicings.

This book will lay the groundwork for strong voicings and voice leading by focusing primarily on II-V-I progressions - the most common chord progression in jazz. The melodies from Section 5 are composed over chord progressions from standard tunes including *Satin Doll, Autumn Leaves, Blue Bossa, There Will Never Be Another You, Take The "A" Train, All The Things You Are, Watch What Happens,* and *Stella By Starlight.*

The CD accompanying this book contains a slow and fast version of all the tunes with bass and drum accompaniment. The CD should make practicing fun and exciting while incorporating sophisticated voicings into a real-time musical situation. Drum loops used with permission from Paul Carman's *CD Metranome, Volume 1* - straight ahead swing 4/4 (www.paulcarman-music.com).

How To Use This Book

Section 1 explains how to identify the correct notes (chord tones) of Major 7th, Dominant 7th, Minor 7th, Minor 7th (♭5) chords beginning with 3rd's and 7th's (also called *guide tones*).

Section 2 explains how to spell (identify the chord tones) in II-V-I progression beginning with 3rd's and 7th's and ending with 4-note altered voicings.

Section 3 offers a dictionary of notated chord voicings in every key, beginning with 2-note voicings and ending with 4-note altered chord voicings in major and minor keys (closed position).

Section 4 shows six different progressions with which to practice chord voicings in all keys. Remember to choose voicings that require minimal movement of individual notes, thus constituting good voice leading. Use the blank bass clef staff to write in voicings if needed. You can practice all six progressions with a metranome beginning at ♩=60 to as fast as possible.

Section 5 presents easy and a more challenging versions of the chord progressions to eight standard tunes. A blank bass clef staff is provided so you can copy in voicings if needed, once again, striving for economy of hand movement between chords. The CD with bass and drums accompaniment offers slower and faster versions of the tunes for practice purposes.

Register To Play 3rd's And 7th's To Support Chords Or Melodies

The most important element of sophisticated jazz piano voicings is the recognition and inversion of the 3rd and 7th scale degrees (*guide tones*) of the chord. This voicing is sometimes called the "shell voicing".
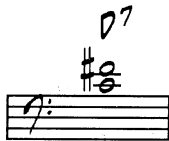
For maximum clarity, proper hand placement is essential when playing the 3rd's and 7th's of any chord.

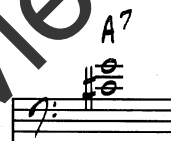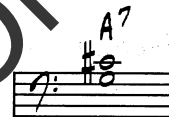The 3rd or 7th should be at or below middle C, but not lower than E♭ or D below middle C.
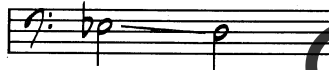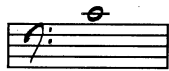
Examples:
1. High Register:

    O.K.   Too High! (Both notes   Perfect

                                are above middle C)

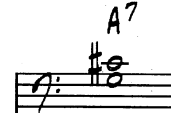2. Low Register:

    O.K.   Too Low! (The C# is   Good

                                below D)

Practice all of the exercises in Sections 4 and 5 four ways:
      1. Left hand playing root, right hand playing voicing.
      2. Right hand playing voicing, no left hand
      3. Left hand playing voicing, no root.
      4. Left hand playing voicing, no root, with melody or improvisation in right hand.

Practice the exercises in Section 4 with a metronome starting at ♩=60 or slower. Add difficulty by gradually increasing the tempo.

The 3rd and 7th shell voicings may also be practiced with any of the six chord progressions provided in Section 4.
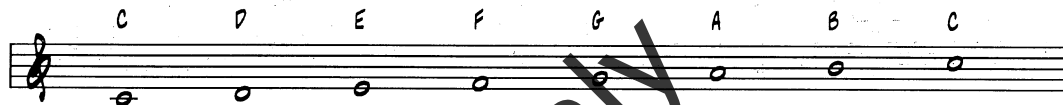
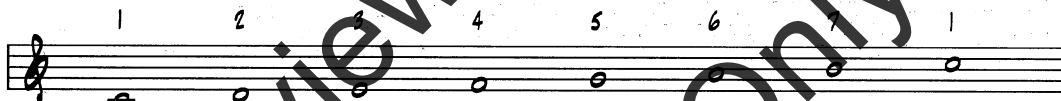## Section I - Identifying 3rd's And 7th's

Major 7 Chord

Chord Type: CMA7

Common Chord Symbols: CMA7, CΔ7, CM7, CMAJ7

Start with a C Major scale.

Simply assign a number to each note starting with 1, the first note being the *root*. In this case the root is C.

The 3rd of a CMA7 chord is the note E.
The 7th of a CMA7 chord is B.

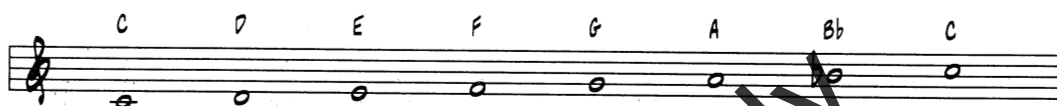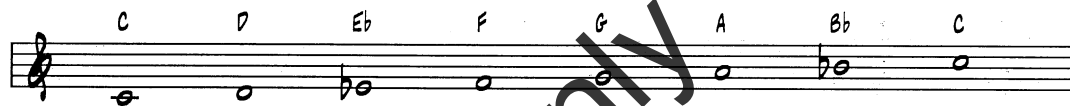Another name for this scale is C Ionian.

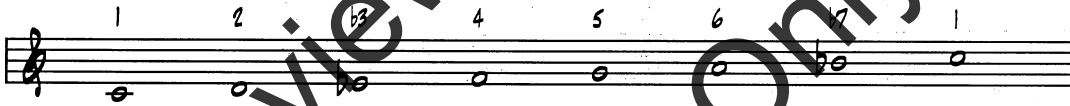## Section I - Identifying 3rd's And 7th's

Dominant 7th Chord

Chord Type: C7

Common Chord Symbol: C^7

Take the same C Major scale (page 2), except this time flat the 7th, lowering it a half-step.

Assign the same numbers as before, but notice that the 7th is now B♭, not B♮.

Notice that this scale is an F Major scale that starts on C.

The 3rd of a C7 chord is E.
The 7th of a C7 chord is B♭.

Another name for this scale is C Mixolydian.

Section I - Identifying 3rd's And 7th's

Minor 7 Chord

Chord Type: CMI7

Common Chord Symbols: CMI7, CMIN7, CM7, C-7

Using the same C Major scale (page 2), flat the 3rd and 7th by taking each down a half-step.

Assign the same numbers as before, but notice that the 3rd is now E♭, not E♮ and the 7th is now B♭, not B♮.

Notice that this scale is a B♭ Major scale that starts on C.

The 3rd of a CMI7 chord is E♭.
The 7th of a CMI7 chord is B♭.

Another name for this scale is C Dorian.

Section I - Identifying 3rd's And 7th's

Minor 7th (♭5) Chord

Chord Type: Cᴍɪ7 (♭5).

Common Chord Symbols: Cᴍɪ7(♭5), Cø7

Using the same C Major scale (page 2), flat the 3rd, 5th, 6th, and 7th, lowering each a half-step.

Assign the same numbers as before, but notice that the 3rd is now E♭, not E♮ and the 7th is now B♭, not B♮. In addition, the 5th is now G♭, not G♮.

Notice that this scale is an ascending E♭ melodic minor scale that starts on the note C.

The 3rd of a Cᴍɪ7 (♭5) chord is E♭.
The ♭5th of a Cᴍɪ7 (♭5) chord is G♭.
The 7th of a Cᴍɪ7 (♭5) chord is B♭.

Another name for this scale is C Locrian ♯2 (sharp 2).

Section II - II-V-I Voicings

2-Note Voicings
(3rd's And 7th's)

You've probably noticed a recurring hand position when playing the various 3rd and 7th shell voicings. Once you arrive at the voicing for the minor 7th chord, one finger goes down a half step followed by the other finger going down a half step for each change of chord. The finger which moves first depends on the inversion* of the 3rd and 7th.

Getting used to the feel of the hand position and finger movement is important, but it is equally important to *hear* the resolution of the 7th to the 3rd.

The ability to hear good chord voicings and proper voice leading is a vital skill for novice jazz pianists as they build a strong foundation for negotiating more complex chords later. I strongly encourage that both teachers and students learn to sing arpeggios of the different chord qualities - major, dominant, minor, etc. in all of their inversions. It is also extremely important to be able to sing the 3rd's and 7th's of chords in a progression, concentrating on the resolution of the 7th's to the 3rd's. You may use "la" or any other syllable to sing pitches. Students may elect to use solfege syllables if they're comfortable doing so.

Exercise A:

> Play II-V-I progressions in Sections 4 and 5 with the roots in the left hand, 2-note chords in the right hand.

Exercise B:

> Play the melodies in Section 5 with the right hand, and 2-note voicings (shell voicings) in the left hand.

*Inversion: the inversion of a chord or an interval indicates which note is on the bottom and which one is on the top. For instance, transposing a pitch up or down an octave creates an inversion, changing the sound of the chord.

Section II - II-V-I Voicings

3-Note Diatonic Voicings

3-note voicings begin with the 3rd and 7th, and depending on the inversion, you add either the 5th or the 9th on top of the existing 3rd and 7th of the minor chord.

Here's How It Works:

When the 7th is the top note of your shell voicing for the minor 7th chord, add the 9th of the chord above it.

The 9th of the minor chord becomes the 13th on the dominant 7th chord, which resolves to the 9th of the major 7th chord.
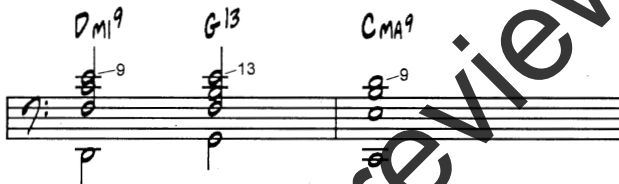
When the 3rd is the top note of your shell voicing for the minor 7th chord, add the 5th of the chord above it.
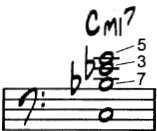
The 5th of the minor chord becomes the 9th of the dominant 7th chord, which resolves to the 5th of the major 7th chord.

You should notice minimal movement of individual voices between chords when voiced properly. This constitutes good *voice leading*.

Exercise A:

Play II-V-I progressions in Sections 4 and 5 with the roots in the left hand, 3-note chord in the right hand.

Exercise B:

Play the melodies in Section 5 with the right hand, and 3-note voicings in the left hand.

Section II - II-V-I Voicings

3-Note Voicings With Alterations

"Altered" voicings will use the same notes for the minor chord and major chord in a II-V-I but the dominant 7th chord may have the alteration of ♯9, ♭9 or ♯5 (♭13).

Here's How It Works:

When the minor chord has the 9th on top, you can lower the top note of the dominant chord a half step making it ♭13th or ♯5. Again, you will hear the smooth shift in color as the 9th moves to the 13th and then down another half step in the major 7th chord to the 9th.
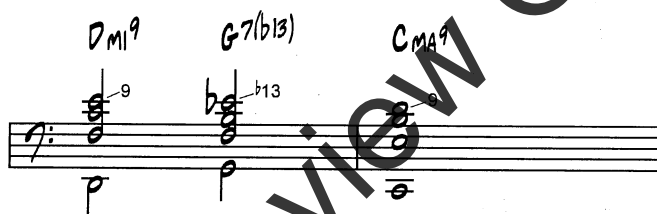
When the minor chord has the 5th on top, you may have the option of making the 9th on the following dominant 7 chord either ♯9 or ♭9. You will hear the difference in color immediately. See which alteration of the 9th you like best. Both sound great!
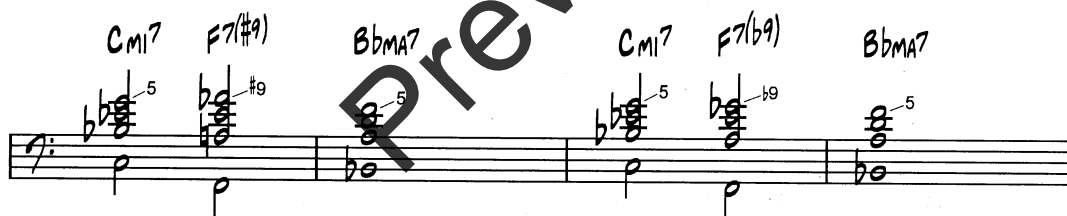
The melody of a song will help dictate which alteration to use. Avoid using half steps adjacent to the top note of a voicing and the melody.

Exercise A:

Play II-V-I progressions in Sections 4 and 5 with the roots in the left hand, altered 3-note chords in the right hand.

Exercise B:

Play the melodies in Section 5 with the right hand, and 3-note altered voicings in the left hand.

Section II - II-V-I Voicings

3-Note Minor Voicings

A II-V-I chord progression in a minor key normally has a ♭5 in the minor chord, a ♭9 or ♯9 in the dominant chord, and of course a minor 7th chord as the "I" chord.

Here's How It Works:

The minor 7(♭5) chord must have these 3 notes: ♭3, ♭7, ♭5. The chord can be in any inversion as long as the 3rd and 7th are in a good register. The easiest way to voice the dominant chord is to keep all the notes the same except the 7th of the MI7(♭5) chord, which resolves down a half step. You will notice that the ♭5 now becomes the ♭9 of the dominant chord. All 3 notes of the dominant chord (3, ♭7, ♭9) will need to resolve to the minor "I" chord. The 7th resolve to the ♭3. The 3rd resolves to the ♭7, and the ♭9 resolves to the 5th of the minor I chord.

The other option is to use a ♯9 on the dominant chord. In this example, everything from the above voicing stays the same except the ♭5 of the first minor chord will go up a step to the ♯9 of the dominant chord. This may resolve to the 5th of the minor I chord.

Exercise A:

    Play II-V-I (minor) progressions in Sections 4 and 5 with the roots in the left hand, 3-note chords in the right hand. Also practice the 3-note voicings in the left hand without the roots.

Section II - II-V-I Voicings

4-Note Diatonic Voicings

Here's How It Works:

Start with a 3-note voicing and add another note inside the voicing instead of on top.

When the MI7th voicing has the 9th on top, add the 5th of the chord between the 3rd and the 5th
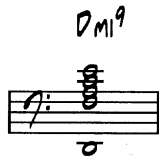
The 5th of the minor chord will become the 9th of the dominant 7th chord and will resolve to the 5th of the MA7th chord.
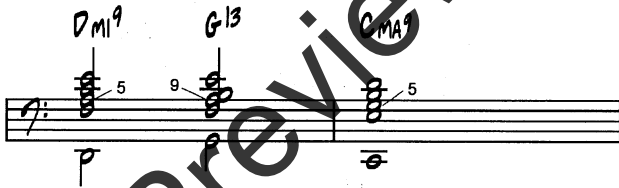
When the MI7th voicing has the 5th on top, add the 9th right below the 3rd.
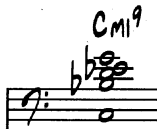
The 9th of the minor chord will become the 13th of the dominant chord, which will resolve to the 9th of the major 7th chord.
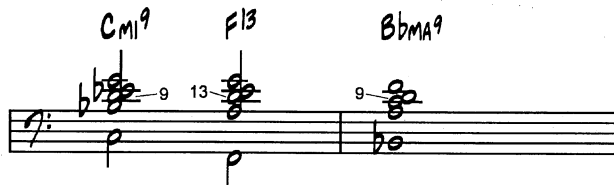
Exercise A:

Play II-V-I progressions in Sections 4 and 5 with the roots in the left hand, 4-note chords in the right hand.

Exercise B:

Play the melodies in Section 5 with the right hand, and 4-note diatonic voicings in the left hand.

Section II - II-V-I Voicings

4-Note Voicings With ♭9, ♯9, Or ♭13 Alterations On Dominant 7th Chords

When the II chord of the II-V-I progression has the 9th on top, the 5th of the subsequent dominant chord may be raised a half step, creating the ♭13th. The 9th will usually be lowered or raised a half step as well, creating the ♭9 or ♯9 in addition to the 13th.

When the II chord of the II-V-I progression has the 5th on top, the subsequent dominant chord is inverted, placing the 9th on top. The 9th may be lowered or raised a half step creating a ♭9 or ♯9 respectively. The 5th of the same chord will usually be lowered as well, creating a ♭13 to add to the ♭9 or ♯9.

Exercise A:

> Play II-V-I progressions in Sections 4 and 5 with the roots in the left hand, altered 4-note chords in the right hand.

Exercise B:

> Play the melodies in Section 5 with the right hand, and 4-note altered voicings in the left hand.

Section II - II-V-I Voicings

Two Important Rules When Deciding To Use Natural 9 And 13, And Altered 9th's And ♭13th's.

When the root of a dominant chord resolves anywhere other than a V to I, use the ♮9 and/or ♮13.

> *Watch What Happens*: the F7 chord in measure 3 resolves to an Fmi7 chord in measure 5. Therefore, the F7 chord should have a ♮9, ♯11 and a ♮13.

> *There Will Never Be Another You*: the D♭7 chord in measure 10 resolves to E♭MA7 in measure 11. Therefore, the D♭7 chord should have a ♮9, ♯11 and a ♮13.

When the root of a dominant 7th chord resolves V to I, use any combination of ♭9, ♯9, ♯11, ♭13, regardless of the quality of the chord to which it resolves.

> *Satin Doll*: the C7 chord in measure 18 resolves to an FMA7 chord in measure 19. Therefore, the C7 chord may have a ♭9, ♯9, ♯11 or ♭13 present.

> *Blue Bossa*: the G7 chord in measure 6 resolves to a CMi7 chord in measure 7. Therefore, the G7 chord may have ♭9, ♯9, ♯11, or ♭13 present.

Section II - II-V-I Voicings

4-Note Minor Voicings With ♭9, ♭13 Alterations On Dominant 7th Chords

The 4th note added to the minor 7, ♭5, or 11 chord is either the natural 9th or the root. The 9th is beautiful when resolved to the ♭13th of the dominant chord. However younger players often find the dissonance of this note unsettling, especially when taken out of context of the II-V. Do not use the 9th if the 3rd is the top of the MI7♭5 voicing as it will create a half step on the top of your voicing.
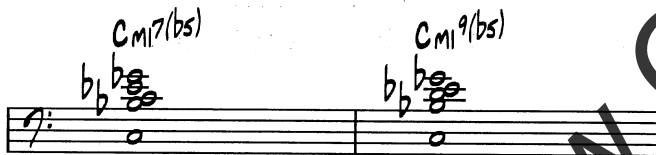
When the ♭5 is the top note of the II chord, the ♭5 will become the ♭9 of the subsequent dominant chord. Resolve the natural 9 down a half step to the ♭13th, the 3rd becomes the 7th of the dominant chord and the 7th resolves down a half step to the 3rd of the dominant chord.

The ♭9 of the dominant chord now resolves to the 5th of the minor I chord; the 7th to the ♭3, the ♭13th to the 9th, and the 3rd to the ♭3.
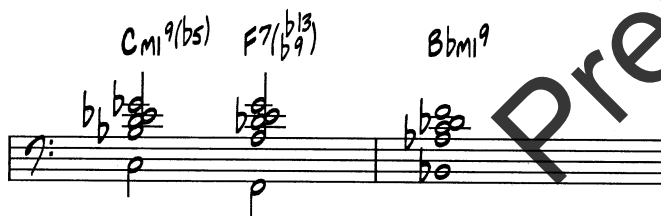
Section II - II-V-I Voicings

4-Note Minor Voicings With ♭9, ♭13 Alterations On Dominant 7th Chord

If the ♮9 is on top of the II chord, resolve the 9th down a half step to the ♭13th of the dominant chord, and the 7th down a half step to the 3rd, the ♭5 to become the ♭9, and the 3rd to become the 7th.

The ♭13 of the dominant chord resolves to the 9th of the minor I chord. The 3rd resolves to the ♭7, the ♭9 to the 5th, and the 7th to the ♭3 of the minor I chord.

Exercise A:

Play II-V-I progressions in Sections 4 and 5 with the roots in the left hand, altered minor 4-note chords in the right hand.

Exercise B:

Play the melodies in Section 5 with the right hand, and 4-note voicings in the left hand without the roots.

Section III - Chord Voicings
2-Note

3-Note Diatonic

3-Note Altered: 7(♭9) or 7(♭13)

3-Note Altered: 7(♯9) or 7(♭13)

3-Note Minor: Mɪ7(♭5), 7(♭9), Mɪ7

4-Note Diatonic: MI⁹, 13, MA⁹

4-Note Altered: MI9, 7(♭9,♭13), MA9

4-Note Altered: MI9, 7(♯9,♭13), MA9

4-Note Minor: MI9(♭5), 7(♭9,♭13), MI9

4-Note Minor: MI9(♭5), 7(♯9,♭13), MI9

Section IV - Chord Progressions

Cycle Of Fourths

Dmi7   G7   Cma7

Gmi7   C7   Fma7

Cmi7   F7   Bbma7

Fmi7   Bb7   Ebma7

Bbmi7   Eb7   Abma7

Ebmi7   Ab7   Dbma7

Abmi7   Db7   Gbma7

C#mi7   F#7   Bma7

F#mi7   B7   Ema7

Bmi7   E7   Ama7

Emi7   A7   Dma7

Ami7   D7   Gma7

Cycle Of Fifths

Dmi7   G7   Cma7

Ami7   D7   Gma7

Emi7   A7   Dma7

Bmi7   E7   Ama7

F#mi7   B7   Ema7

C#mi7   F#7   Bma7

Abmi7   Db7   Gbma7

Ebmi7   Ab7   Dbma7

Bbmi7   Eb7   Abma7

Fmi7   Bb7   Ebma7

Cmi7   F7   Bbma7

Gmi7   C7   Fma7

Down By Whole Steps

Dmi7   G7   Cma7

Cmi7   F7   Bbma7

Bbmi7   Eb7   Abma7

Abmi7   Db7   Gbma7

F#mi7   B7   Ema7

Emi7   A7   Dma7

Ebmi7   Ab7   Bbma7

C#mi7   F#7   Bma7

Bmi7   E7   Ama7

Ami7   D7   Gma7

Gmi7   C7   Fma7

Fmi7   Bb7   Ebma7

Up By Whole Steps

Dmi7   G7   CMA7

Emi7   A7   DMA7

F#mi7   B7   EMA7

Abmi7   Db7   GbMA7

Bbmi7   Eb7   AbMA7

Cmi7   F7   BbMA7

Ebmi7   Ab7   BbMA7

Fmi7   Bb7   EbMA7

Gmi7   C7   FMA7

Ami7   D7   GMA7

Bmi7   E7   AMA7

C#mi7   F#7   BMA7

Down Chromatically

Dmi7	G7	Cma7

C#mi7	F#7	Bma7

Cmi7	F7	Bbma7

Bmi7	E7	Ama7

Bbmi7	Eb7	Abma7

Ami7	D7	Gma7

Abmi7	Db7	Gbma7

Gmi7	C7	Fma7

F#mi7	B7	Ema7

Fmi7	Bb7	Ebma7

Emi7	A7	Dma7

Ebmi7	Ab7	Dbma7

Up Chromatically

Dmi7   G7   Cma7

Ebmi7   Ab7   Dbma7

Emi7   A7   Dma7

Fmi7   Bb7   Ebma7

F#mi7   B7   Ema7

Gmi7   C7   Fma7

Abmi7   Db7   Gbma7

Ami7   D7   Gma7

Bbmi7   Eb7   Abma7

Bmi7   E7   Ama7

Cmi7   F7   Bbma7

C#mi7   F#7   Bma7

Cycle Of Fourths (Minor)

Dmi7(b5)	G7	Cmi7	

Gmi7(b5)	C7	Fmi7	

Cmi7(b5)	F7	Bbmi7	

Fmi7(b5)	Bb7	Ebmi7	

Bbmi7(b5)	Eb7	Abmi7	

Ebmi7(b5)	Ab7	Dbmi7	

Abmi7(b5)	Db7	Gbmi7	

C#mi7(b5)	F#7	Bmi7	

F#mi7(b5)	B7	Emi7	

Bmi7(b5)	E7	Ami7	

Emi7(b5)	A7	Dmi7	

Ami7(b5)	D7	Gmi7	

Cycle Of Fifths (Minor)

Dmi7(b5)   G7   Cmi7

Ami7(b5)   D7   Gmi7

Emi7(b5)   A7   Dmi7

Bmi7(b5)   E7   Ami7

F#mi7(b5)   B7   Emi7

C#mi7(b5)   F#7   Bmi7

Abmi7(b5)   Db7   Gbmi7

Ebmi7(b5)   Ab7   Dbmi7

Bbmi7(b5)   Eb7   Abmi7

Fmi7(b5)   Bb7   Ebmi7

Cmi7(b5)   F7   Bbmi7

Gmi7(b5)   C7   Fmi7

Down By Whole Steps (Minor)

Dmi7(b5) | G7 | Cmi7 |

Cmi7(b5) | F7 | Bbmi7 |

Bbmi7(b5) | Eb7 | Abmi7 |

Abmi7(b5) | Db7 | Gbmi7 |

F#mi7(b5) | B7 | Emi7 |

Emi7(b5) | A7 | Dmi7 |

Ebmi7(b5) | Ab7 | Dbmi7 |

C#mi7(b5) | F#7 | Bmi7 |

Bmi7(b5) | E7 | Ami7 |

Ami7(b5) | D7 | Gmi7 |

Gmi7(b5) | C7 | Fmi7 |

Fmi7(b5) | Bb7 | Ebmi7 |

Up By Whole Steps (Minor)

Dmi7(b5)   G7   Cmi7

Emi7(b5)   A7   Dmi7

F#mi7(b5)   B7   Emi7

Abmi7(b5)   Db7   Gbmi7

Bbmi7(b5)   Eb7   Abmi7

Cmi7(b5)   F7   Bbmi7

Ebmi7(b5)   Ab7   Dbmi7

Fmi7(b5)   Bb7   Ebmi7

Gmi7(b5)   C7   Fmi7

Ami7(b5)   D7   Gmi7

Bmi7(b5)   E7   Ami7

C#mi7(b5)   F#7   Bmi7

Down Chromatically (Minor)

Dmi7(b5)   G7   Cmi7

C#mi7(b5)   F#7   Bmi7

Cmi7(b5)   F7   Bbmi7

Bmi7(b5)   E7   Ami7

Bbmi7(b5)   Eb7   Abmi7

Ami7(b5)   D7   Gmi7

Abmi7(b5)   Db7   Gbmi7

Gmi7(b5)   C7   Fmi7

F#mi7(b5)   B7   Emi7

Fmi7(b5)   Bb7   Ebmi7

Emi7(b5)   A7   Dmi7

Ebmi7(b5)   Ab7   Dbmi7

Up Chromatically (Minor)

Dmi7(b5)   G7   Cmi7

Ebmi7(b5)   Ab7   Dbmi7

Emi7(b5)   A7   Dmi7

Fmi7(b5)   Bb7   Ebmi7

F#mi7(b5)   B7   Emi7

Gmi7(b5)   C7   Fmi7

Abmi7(b5)   Db7   Gbmi7

Ami7(b5)   D7   Gmi7

Bbmi7(b5)   Eb7   Abmi7

Bmi7(b5)   E7   Ami7

Cmi7(b5)   F7   Bbmi7

C#mi7(b5)   F#7   Bmi7

Section V - Standard Chord Progressions
Satin Doll
(Easy)

CD Track 1-2

Satin Doll

Autumn Leaves

(Easy)

Autumn Leaves

Blue Bossa

(Easy)

Blue Bossa

There Will Never Be Another You

CD Track 7-8

(Easy)

There Will Never Be Another You

CD Track 7-8

Take The "A" Train

(Easy)

Take The "A" Train

CD Track 9-10

FAST SWING

All The Things You Are

(Easy)

All The Things You Are

CD Track 11-12

Watch What Happens

(Easy)

Watch What Happens

CD Track 13-14

Stella By Starlight

(Easy)

Stella By Starlight

CD Track 15-16

FAST SWING

About The Author
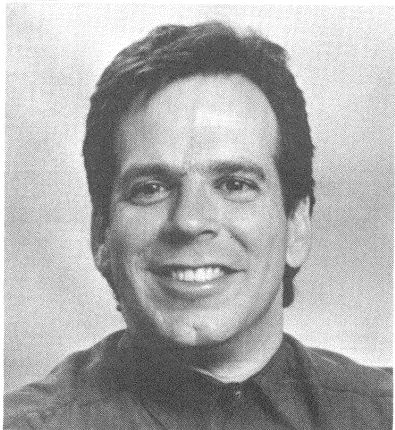
Matt Harris graduated from the University of Miami (FL) with a Bachelor's degree and from the Eastman School of Music (NY) with a Master's degree in Jazz Composition. He moved to Los Angeles (CA) in 1984 after touring with jazz greats Maynard Ferguson and Buddy Rich. In addition to his devotion to jazz education, Matt's versatility as a writer, arranger, and performer keep him very busy in the L.A. studios. His music can be heard on numerous jingles, film scores, CD's, and live productions.

Matt has four CD's of original music including "Reflections", his first big band recording, featuring the Klüvers big band available from Kendor Music.

Matt has two piano books and more than 150 pieces of music published by Kendor Music, Walrus Music, Heritage Jazz Works, and UNC Jazz Press. Matt has been commissioned to write music for bands from Australia, New Zealand, Japan, the Airmen of Note, The Falconaires, and many high schools and colleges throughout the country. He has also arranged music for the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra and the Metrapole Orchestra from the Netherlands.

Matt is the Director of Jazz Studies at California State University Northridge, directing the award winning Jazz "A" Band and teaching jazz arranging, improvisation, combos, jazz harmony, class piano, and private piano instruction. Matt's touring schedule includes high schools, universities, and various venues across the globe.

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