

PIANO FINGERS— LESSON TWO

by Dean Slocum

Now we'll study an excerpt from a contemporary jazz tune I wrote called *I Get Around*. You can download the mp3 and complete leadsheet from my web site at www.deanslocum.com.

You'll discover just how easy it is to jazz up your voicings by altering or adding one note. I'll show you how to take your minor 7 chords into the fourth dimension and make your dominant 7 chords sixier. Well, you'll see what I mean. And while we're at it, we'll sharpen up some of the dominant 7 chords by augmenting them and adding the raised 9th (sharp 9).

We'll voice everything with the assumption that there's a complete rhythm section. The reason this makes a difference is that, since the bass player will be covering the bottom notes of each chord, it is unnecessary (and inadvisable) for us to double those notes on the keyboard. Example 1 shows the basic chord chart for the verse or "A" section. Example 2 lists the root positions for each basic chord from Example 1, plus the altered versions and voicings used in Example 3.

Ex. 1. Rhythm section chord chart for *I Get Around*.

Rhythm

♩ = 140 shuffle

The image shows a four-staff musical notation for the rhythm section of the song "I Get Around". The notation is in 4/4 time with a shuffle feel, indicated by a tempo of 140. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The notation includes various chords and melodic lines with fingerings and accents.

Chord chart for the first 13 measures:

- 1: Dm7 Em7 F Em7 Dm7 Em7 F Em7
- 5: Cm7 Dm7 Eb Dm7 Cm7 Dm7 Eb Dm7 E7
- 9: E7 A 7aug#9 Dm7 G7
- 13: Bb9 Gmaj7 A A 7aug

Ex. 2. Chord spellings and voicings for Examples 1 and 3.

The image displays three systems of musical notation, each consisting of a treble and bass clef staff. Above each system are chord symbols and their corresponding voicings. The first system shows Dm7, Dm7⁴, Em7, Em7⁴, F, and F². The second system shows Cm7, Cm7⁴, Eb, Eb², E7, and E7^{#9}. The third system shows A^{7aug}, A^{7aug#9}, G7, G7⁶, Bb⁹, Bb^{9 6}, and G^{maj7} A. The voicings are shown as groups of notes on the staff, with dashed vertical lines indicating the boundaries between chords.

As you can see, we made some fairly simple alterations:

1. The minor 7 chords became much more interesting merely by adding the 4th. The simplest voicing is to play the 4th instead of the 5th (1-4-7-3).
2. You'll recognize the "add 2" chords from Lesson One, though the voicings here are heavier (more notes).
3. The only thing we did to the G7 and Bb9 was add the 6th. As with the minor 7 add 4, an excellent way to voice these chords is to omit the 5th. Thus, the 7 add 6 chord is voiced 1-7-3-6 and the 9 add 6 chord is voiced 1-7-9-3-6. The E7 was improved by simply adding the sharp 9 (voiced 1-3-7-#9-1).

So that you can easily transpose these voicings to any other key, you'll need to know that the minor 7 chords (i.e. Dm7) are built on the Dorian mode and the dominant 7 chords (i.e. G7) are built on the Mixolydian mode. A simple way to build the Dorian scale is to begin with the major scale and lower the 3rd and 7th notes one half-step. The D Dorian is an easy place to begin: all white keys (D-E-F-G-A-B-C-D). To change a major scale to Mixolydian, lower only the 7th note by a half-step. The G Mixolydian is all white keys (G-A-B-C-D-E-F-G).

When spelling the voicings for the A^{7aug}(#9), I used F instead of E# for the augmented 5th interval. Even though E# is the correct spelling, F is easier to read. Within limits, I prefer readability over enharmonic correctness. Often, the most sensible spelling of a chord depends on what precedes or follows it. Also notice that the C naturals, since they represent the #9, should theoretically be B sharps. But let's leave B sharps where they belong—in the theory books.

Now take a look at Example 3. Remember, we're assuming the bass player is providing the "bottom" of each chord. Hear the difference one note can make in a chord voicing. And notice the eighth note rhythmic comps on the first beats of bars 1, 3, 5 and 7. They help to reinforce the shuffle feel.

Ex. 3. Each chord has only one note added or changed from the more basic chords in Ex. 1.

Keyboard
 ♩ = 140 shuffle

1 $Dm7^4$ $Em7^4$ $F2$ $Em7^4$ $Dm7^4$ $Em7^4$ $F2$ $Em7^4$

5 $Cm7^4$ $Dm7^4$ $E\flat 2$ $Dm7^4$ $Cm7^4$ $Dm7^4$ $E\flat 2$ $Dm7^4$ $E7$

9 $E7$ $E7^{\#9}$ $A 7aug^{\#9}$ $Dm7^4$ $G7^6$

13 $B\flat 9^6$ $Gmaj7$ A $A 7aug^{\#9}$

Though Ex. 3 may not be the easiest sight read, having the mp3 to listen to and play along with should help. Now let's use simpler examples to recap two of the most common chord types you're likely to encounter: the minor 7 and the dominant 7. Examples 4 and 5 provide a more direct A–B comparison between the “stock” versions of these two chords and the minor 7 add 4 and dominant 7 add 6.

Ex. 4. “Stock” voicings for the minor 7 (Dm7) and dominant 7 (G7) chords.

♩=80 ballad

Ex. 5. Substituting the 4th in place of the 5th in the minor 7 chord (Dm7⁴), and substituting the 6th in place of the 5th in the dominant 7 chord (G7⁶).

♩=80 ballad

And I used to think this stuff was rocket science. Before closing, here's a quick comment about chord symbols. I'm so particular about their look and how they're written that I created my own chord suffix library in Finale. For example, I won't use G13 to mean G7 add 6. But since it is commonly symbolized that way, you should know that's what it means. The 13th is simply the 6th an octave higher. But G13 taken literally would include the 9th and 11th. Not a pretty chord unless you sharpen the 11th, but even then it's not the same chord as G7⁶.

I know I'm being extremely picky. G13 has been an accepted shorthand for G7⁶ for a long time, so some might suggest that I just get over it. OK, I'm over it. Wow. That's better. But I'm still going to write it as G7⁶.

In Lesson Three, we'll continue with the bridge from *I Get Around* to study all the torturous things we can do to a dominant 7 chord. We'll twist it and contort it. But don't worry. It'll be a beautiful thing.

Dean Slocum is a Nashville pianist and composer who, in his spare time, sneaks into music libraries at night to change all the G13s to G7⁶. He's the author of a contemporary piano instructional book, Between the Lines. web site: www.deanslocum.com email: pianodean@deanslocum.com.

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