

JAZZ GUITAR VOICINGS SERIES

THREE-NOTE VOICINGS AND BEYOND

by Randy Vincent



SHER MUSIC CO.

The Jazz Guitar Voicings Series

Three-Note Voicings and Beyond

by Randy Vincent

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Author's Introduction

This book is primarily about three-note voicings for jazz guitar, but also deals with some four and five note voicings that are a necessary consequence of some of the three-note ones. For example, triads are three-notes by themselves, but are used in "slash" chords and Upper Structure voicings as well as some triad-pair hybrid voicings, so we'll check those out too.

To use this book you should at least have the basics of playing the guitar and enough knowledge of standard music notation to be able to interpret the examples. The book proceeds in a logical fashion so beginners to jazz guitar can start at the beginning of the book and proceed as far as they'd like to go, while more advanced players can skip sections they're already familiar with and jump in anywhere they find interesting. The material covers a range from quite basic to very advanced.

Many of the examples are fragments from standard tunes, so a good approach to application would be to study the tune fragment, practice the suggested exercises, then work out the rest of the tune using the concept demonstrated. You can find all of the tunes in the New Real Book series available from Sher Music Co.

Three-note voicings are especially suited to a "dynamic" concept where harmony is derived from three independent moving voices. Since the voices may have independent rhythms, it makes the chord diagrams a little tricky. In general the diagrams are standard guitar "grids" with dots showing where the fingers go and fret numbers along the side. For multiple moving lines with independent rhythms we generally use hollow dots for sustaining notes and solid dots for voices in motion. In some cases it is necessary to have a new diagram with one or two notes sustaining from the previous diagram. These will be shown by hollow or solid dots in parenthesis.

I have found the studies in this book to be a great source of material for practical use in comping, melody playing, and for jazz improvisation, and I am still working on much of it, so it should provide years of fun stuff to practice.

SPECIAL THANKS:

To Chuck Sher, who not only made this book possible, but without his encouragement it never would have happened.

To Chuck Gee for his patience and expertise.

To Erik Lindquist for his assistance with proofreading and contact information.

Dedicated to the memory of my father Ralph L. Vincent 1919-2010

Randy Vincent

About the Author

Randy Vincent has had a long and illustrious career in jazz. He has performed, toured and/or recorded with Dizzy Gillespie, Joe Henderson, Bobby Hutcherson, Bebop And Beyond, The Turtle Island String Quartet, and many others.

Randy has taught jazz guitar at Sonoma State University since 1981 and has conducted clinics throughout the US and overseas. Some of his more well-known former students include Julian Lage, Dave MacNab, Chris Pimentel, and Liberty Ellmen. He currently teaches at Sonoma State University and privately.

He is the author of a previous Sher Music Co. book, “Jazz Guitar Voicings, Vol.1 - The Drop 2 Book.”

He has performed at numerous jazz festivals including the Monterey Jazz Festival and Dizzy Gillespie’s 75th birthday celebration at the Hollywood Bowl, as well as performing regularly with the Santa Rosa Symphony’s Pops Concerts.

A selected discography of Randy’s recordings:

- Randy Vincent - “Nisha’s Dream” and “Mirror Image”
- Bobby Hutcherson - “Ambos Mundos”
- Bebop And Beyond - “Bebop And Beyond Plays Dizzy Gillespie” (featuring Dizzy)
and “Bebop And Beyond Plays Thelonious Monk” (featuring Joe Henderson)
- Stephanie Ozer - “O Comeco” (featuring Leny Andrade)
- Larry Baskett Trio - “Chalice” and “Poor Boy Blue”
- Mel Graves - “Emotion In Motion”
- Turtle Island String Quartet - “Spider Dreams”
- Peter Welker - “Para Peachy” and “We’ll Be Together Again
- Welker/Oster Jazz Alliance - “Shining Hour” and “Detour Ahead”
- Vern Thompson - “Passions Of The Heart”, “Sea Of Dreams” and “Convergence”
(featuring Bob Sheppard, Akira Tana, Tony Dumas and Billy Childs)
- Mike Vax Big Band - “Alternate Route”
- Dave Eshelman’s Garden Big Band - “Milagro’s Journey”

Chapter 1 - Three-Note “Shell” Voicings

CYCLES

Play Ex. 1-1, the first four measures of the bridge to Duke Jordan’s “Jordu.” This is the sound of what many musicians refer to as “shell” voicings, which are 3-note voicings for seventh chords consisting of the root, 3rd and 7th of each chord. Notice the clear uncluttered sound and streamlined voice leading, as well as the ease with which they can be played on the guitar. This makes them a practical foundation for creating a system of generic voicings for jazz guitar.

Ex. 1-1

Now play Ex. 1-2, a “jazzed-up” (literally) version of the first couple of bars of the same progression using a device called tritone substitution to create a more interesting bass line. More on this later.

Ex. 1-2

ROOT MOVEMENT

Let’s do a bit of analysis on the first example. The chords are moving counter-clockwise around the circle of 5ths. This means, in theory, that each new chord root is a 5th lower than the previous chord root. If we tried to do this literally, we’d very quickly “run out of guitar”. Fortunately there’s an easy solution. The inversion of down-a-5th is up-a-4th, so we merely alternate down-a-5th from the fifth string to the sixth string with up-a-4th from the sixth string back to the fifth string. This is shown in Ex. 1-3.

Ex. 1-3

ADDING THE 3RDS AND 7THS

Now we have used the bottom two strings, leaving the middle two, the third and fourth strings, for the 3rds and 7ths. The best way to voice the 3rds and 7ths is not to have them follow the down-5-up-4 cycle, but to create a smooth melodic voice leading by having the 3rds and 7ths invert and swap places with each chord change. This is shown in example 1-4.

Ex. 1-4

finger: (3) (3) (3) (3) (3) (3)
 string: 4 4 4 4 4 4 (etc.)

down 1/2 step down 1/2 step down 1/2 step down 1/2 step down 1/2 step (etc.)

finger: 2 2 2 2 2 2
 string: (4) (4) (4) (4) (4) (4)

Notice that the 3rd of G7, the note B, is on the fourth string, while the 7th, the note F, is on the third string. When we change to C7, the B note drops by a half step to the 7th of C, the note Bb, and the F note drops by a half step to the note E, the 3rd of C. Notice that the shape on the fingerboard remains unchanged as the chords change. This is because all the chords in the first three bars are dominant 7 chords whose 3rds and 7ths are a tritone apart, and the tritone is the only interval that inverts into itself (an augmented 4th is enharmonic, or sounds the same as, its inversion, a diminished 5th).

Ex. 1-5 shows the bass line for Ex. 1-2. The line always drops by a half step after alternately going down or up by a tritone.

Ex. 1-5

down a tritone down 1/2 step up a tritone down 1/2 step down a tritone down 1/2 step up a tritone down 1/2 step (etc.)

finger: 3 1 3 1 3 1 3 1
 string: (5) (6) (5) (6) (5) (6) (5) (6)

A DYNAMIC CONCEPT OF HARMONY

By the way, let's talk about an important point. Most guitar players learn chords by looking at the inevitable chord grid diagrams and memorizing the "grip" that their fingers make in matching the shape on the diagram. This is what I call a "static" concept. The spelling of each vertical chord is correct but the horizontal voice-leading may be distorted by the fact that what comes before and after gets ignored. In the method we are using here the melodic lines are creating the chords so the horizontal voice-leading is automatically correct. This is what I call a "dynamic" concept. The chord shapes are there, but are actually created by the individual moving lines.

ALTERNATE FINGERINGS

The shapes themselves can be fingered in several different ways. Ex. 1-6 shows several possible fingerings for our first chord shape, followed by three sets of practical fingerings to use for playing the cycle in Ex. 1-1 and 1-2. The first set of fingerings uses the same fingers to play the same notes that were used in Ex. 1-3, 1-4, and 1-5. This fingering has the greatest economy of hand motion, so why the other two sets of fingerings? The second set leaves the first finger free to possibly add notes on higher strings later on, while the third set leaves the fourth finger free for the same purpose. Therefore you should practice the cycles with all three fingerings, so that when the time comes you'll be ready.

Ex. 1-6

Alternate fingerings



2 1 3
2 1 4
3 1 4
3 2 4



3 2 4
3 2 4
2 1 3



1 2 4
2 3 4
1 2 3

(leaves 1st finger free)
(leaves 4th finger free)

MAJOR 7 AND MINOR 7 CYCLES

Look at Ex. 1-7A, which shows the voice leading for the 3rds and 7ths of major7 chords going around the cycle of 5ths. The interval between the 3rd on the fourth string and 7th on the third string in this case is a perfect 5th. When the chord changes we again swap the 3rd and 7th, which places the 7th on the fourth string and 3rd on the third string. This changes the 5th into its inversion, a perfect 4th. The note B is a common tone between the first two chords. It's the 3rd of G and also the 7th of C, so the note doesn't move at the first change of chords. The note F# drops by a whole step to change from the 7th in the first chord into the 3rd of the second chord. On the next movement in the cycle the process is reversed. Now the E becomes the common tone while the B moves down a whole step, and so on. Ex. 1-7B is identical except a half-step lower, creating the voice leading for the 3rds and 7ths of minor7 chords going around the cycle of 5ths.

Ex. 1-7

A **B**

GMA^7 CMA^7 FMA^7 B^bMA^7 (etc.) GMI^7 CMI^7 FMI^7 B^bMI^7 (etc.)

down a step common tone down a step (etc.) down a step common tone down a step (etc.)

common tone down a step common tone common tone down a step common tone

Play Ex. 1-8, which shows the first two bars of maj7 chords going around the cycle and the first two bars of m7 chords going around the cycle. Be sure to start high on the fingerboard and extend the cycles as long as you can until you "run out of guitar".

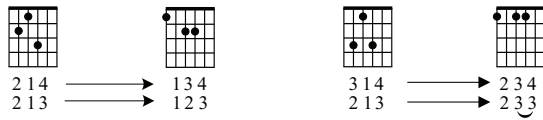
Ex. 1-8

GMA^7 CMA^7 FMA^7 B^bMA^7 (etc.) GMI^7 CMI^7 FMI^7 B^bMI^7 (etc.)

9 8 7 6 8 8 6 6

Ex. 1-9 shows two practical sets of fingerings to use to play the cycles. Feel free to experiment and find more if you can.

Ex. 1-9

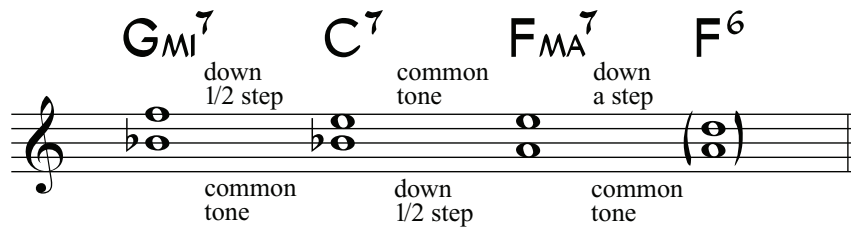


II-V-I PROGRESSIONS

DIATONIC CHORDS

Now we have forms available for dom7, maj7, and m7 chords with roots on both the fifth and sixth strings, so we have everything we need to play II-V-I progressions in any key with great voice leading. As you probably already know, any II-V-I goes counter-clockwise around the circle of 5ths, just like the cycles we've been working on. However, the traditional II-V-I is diatonic, meaning all the notes of all the chords belong inside the scale of the I chord. This causes the qualities of the chords to change as they progress through the cycle, making the II chord a m7, the V chord a dom7, and the I chord a maj7. The roots of the first three chords in the cycles we've seen so far are G, C, and F, so they could be converted into a II-V-I in the key of F by selecting the qualities II^{m7}-V^{dom7}-I^{maj7}, making the three chords G^{m7}-C⁷-F^{maj7}. Ex. 1-10 shows the voice leading of the 3rds and 7ths for this progression.

Ex. 1-10



The 3rds and 7ths still swap and the upper and lower lines continue to take turns between being common tones and stepping down the scale. The notes in parenthesis shows what happens if we continue that process, which is exactly what my ear wants to hear, so the F^{maj7} changes into F⁶, which is completely compatible with the F^{maj7} I chord function. The I^{maj7} to I⁶ movement is very commonly used to create a feeling of motion when the progression has gone “static” on the I chord (notice this was used in Ex. 1-1 on the D^b chord).

Play Ex. 1-11, the II-V-I in F in three-note “shell” voicings. The root of the II chord and the I chord are located on the fifth string, while the root of the V chord is on the sixth string.

Ex. 1-11

