

General Guidelines for Jazz Guitar

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Equipment

- full or semi-hollow body guitar - any electric guitar can sound appropriate if set up and played properly
- medium to heavy gauge strings (flat wound preferred)
 - .011 - .050
 - .012 - .052 (called jazz light gauge)
 - .013 - .054 (called jazz med gauge)
- *note that the action should be higher to obtain more resonance
- medium to heavy gauge plastic pick
 - small to medium size w/ smooth edges
- use fingerboard pick-up (rhythm)
 - occasional use of bridge pick-up for rock or funk style (“chicken scratch”)
- adjust the guitar strap so that the guitar is at the same height while you are standing as it is while seated
 - this is **very** important for proper technique
- amp with open back speaker cabinet
 - keep the highs and lows set softer and the mid-range set louder
 - some use of reverb and/or delay as needed depending on the room ambiance
 - careful consideration with regard to the use of any other effects
- a volume pedal is very important for dynamic changes in the music
- fingernails longer on picking hand, very short on fingerboard hand
 - care of fingernails is very important for proper tone production

Techniques

- Freddie Green “chunking style” w/ pianist
 - keep volume lower and play harder
 - all down strokes (think of drummer’s ride cymbal hand)
 - may include some muted eighth notes for rhythmic variety (drummer’s ride cymbal pattern)
 - mute the strings not included in the voicing
 - the fingerboard hand takes an active role in the process
 - lift slightly between each quartet note
 - modify with respect to different tempos
 - be certain to set up very close to the pianist (in the crook of the piano)
- comping w/out pianist
 - try to emulate the technique of a jazz pianist
 - use your pick hand fingers to play the notes of the voicing simultaneously
 - do not use your pick to “sweep” across the strings or strum chords
 - volume can be set higher so that one can utilize a lighter touch
- single line melodies
 - remember that the guitar is a transposing instrument, it sounds down an octave
 - down stroke on quarter notes or notes of greater length
 - alternate strokes (down/up) for eighth notes or notes of lesser length
 - this greatly secures rhythmic accuracy
 - note that these guidelines are subject to the tempo

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Techniques continued

- attempt to phrase as a horn player would
- slur the upbeat into the downbeat in a line of eighth notes
- this is very difficult to adhere to when sight reading
- it is possible to give the aural impression of slurring by accenting articulated upbeats
- **use great discretion when bending notes**
 - very little or none used in most jazz playing (even blues tunes from the jazz repertoire)
 - more in fusion styles
 - blues style is very different than jazz style
- hold pick so as to be able to utilize fingers to play strings simultaneously (demonstration)
- avoid open strings as they can not be played with expression (demonstration)

Voicings

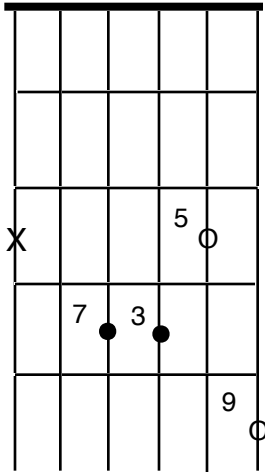
- **you can never go wrong with just 3rds and 7ths**
- include 9th or 13th (or both) on all dominant 7th chords (when not just playing 3rds & 7ths)
- when “chunking” w/ pianist, play mostly 3rds and 7ths to avoid harmonic contradictions
- when comping w/out a pianist, play 3rds and 7ths w/ one or two color notes on top
 - think of the top note as a melody (voice leading)
 - you may play the top voice rhythmically different than the 3rd & 7th instead of all simultaneously
 - practice chord solos: voice melody on top note (string) of voicing
- avoid open chords
- avoid “power chords” (root and fifth on bottom notes)
 - avoid any voicing with root/fifth combination on lower three strings
- when playing with a bassist, omit the root & fifth in lower register
- do not slide around the neck with the same hand position for different chords (use voice leading)
- study and understand how all the notes of each chord function
 - memorize the scale/chord degree of each note in a chord
 - don't focus on the note name but rather the note “number” (scale/chord degree)
 - the note names change but the note “numbers” remain constant in all keys
- **altered extensions are not optional when playing with a jazz ensemble**
 - if unsure of an extension, just play the 3rd & 7th
 - study and understand a variety of chord symbols
 - there is no standardization of chord symbols
 - don't forget to use your ears for the final test of a voicing
- all chords may be derived from 5 basic major scale patterns (demonstration)
 - do not attempt to memorize Mel Bay's encyclopedia of “6 trillion” chords
 - memorize the five basic major scales and their five major triad chord voicings
 - all other chords may be derived from these five chords
 - Source: A Modern Method for Guitar Bk 1 by William Leavitt published by Hal Leonard
 - start on page 60

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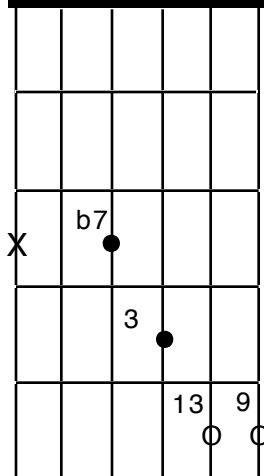
Construction of Voicings - 3rds, 7ths, & “color notes”

Assumed root on 6th string

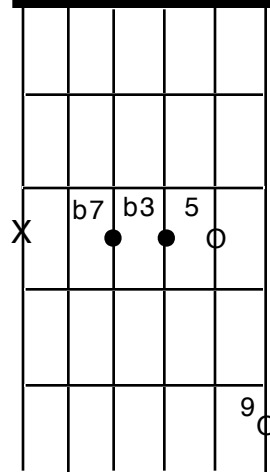
G maj 7



G 7

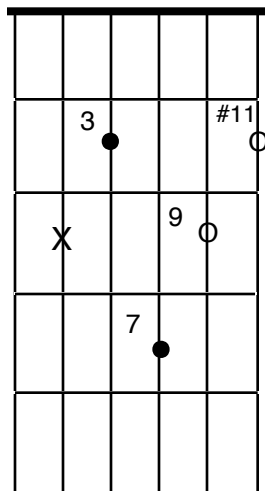


G min 7

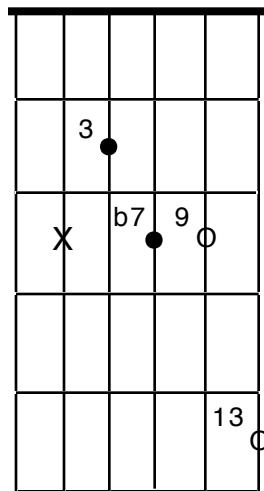


Assumed root on 5th string

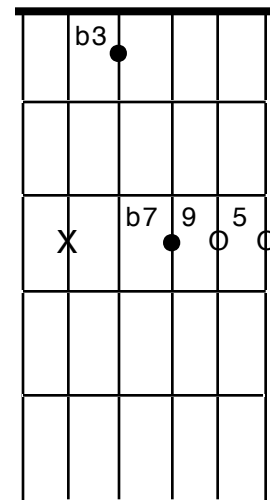
C maj 7



C 7



C min 7



- KEY:**
- X = Assumed root
 - = 3rd/7th
 - = Color notes