

Jazz Guitar Chord Voicings

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Acknowledgments

I'd like to acknowledge the following influences on this work:

Ted Greene, for setting such a superb example of how to play the guitar and how to treat other people.

Clare Fischer, whose voicings I have stolen over and over and over again.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Motivation

There are a million chord books you can read, and there are several of them that you should probably read before you ever bother with this one:

- Joe Pass Guitar Chords
- The Barry Harris Harmonic Method for Guitar, by Alan Kingstone

And then there are tons of others to pore through: the various Ted Greene tomes (although I find his arrangement sheets much more useful), one by Chuck Wayne, and the Mickey Baker book, just to name a few.

Why, then, am I writing this? In large part, for my own edification. If I write something down, it sticks better in my mind, and I can always go back and reference it later if I forget it.

But if I had to state a theme behind this book, it's this: There are chord voicings that don't require insane stretches or place your fingers in a Gordian knot, but still come closer to capturing the full nature of jazz harmony as a pianist or a big band might play it than the standard guitar voicings do. When I find those voicings, I put them in here. You may already know all of them – if so, great! If not, stick around – you might learn something. I know I have.

1.2 Guidelines

To make things cleaner, if a string does not have a dot on it, it is not played unless there is an ‘o’ at the top of the fretboard diagram indicating an open string.

Eventually, I will use Ted Greene’s symbols for note movement within a chord.

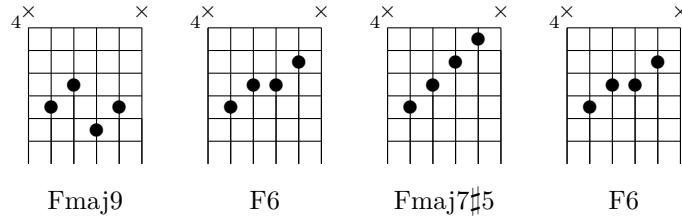
Chapter 2

Movements

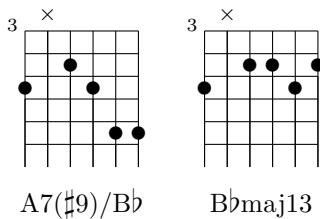
2.1 The One

The one major seven can be a really boring chord to stay on, so it helps to give it some movement.

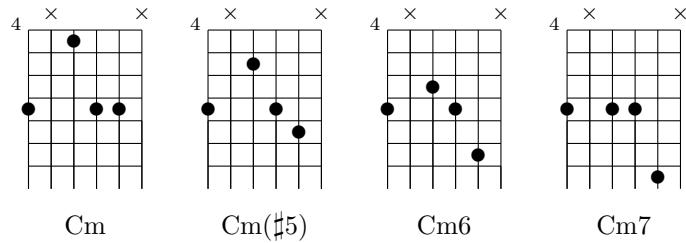
Here's a Barry Harris-esque way to do it, stolen from the string backgrounds of Peggy Lee's recording of Sing A Rainbow.



Here's how Burt Bacharach's 'Alfie' does it:

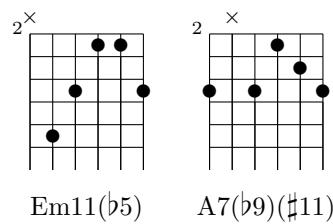


And here's a way to bring motion to a static minor chord, stolen from Vic Juris:

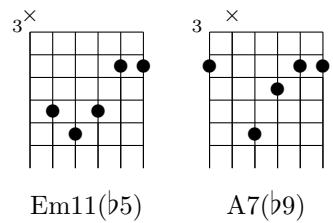


2.2 Minor ii-V

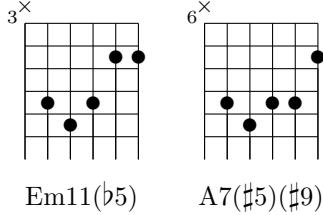
These have the same top note as the first two chords of "Old Folks".



And another way to do it:



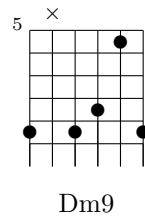
And here's one using the bebop "move it up a minor third to make the ii-V" strategy:



2.3 One Note Moves

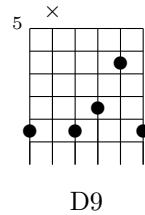
This section is named as such because we start with a basic skeleton of the $\flat 7$ on the 4th string, the 9th on the 3rd string, and the root on the 1st string. By moving the note on the 2nd string by half steps, we can generate a bunch of interesting and useful voicings. Note that the root may be omitted on any of these, or you can grab it with your thumb.

We'll start out with a Dm9 voicing with a half step rub between the 9 and the $\flat 3$:



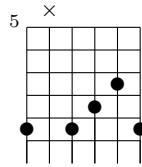
Dm9

Move the $\flat 3$ to the 3, and we end up with a nice consonant D9 voicing:



D9

Move the 3 to the 4, and we end up with a D9sus4 voicing. I call this chord color the “gospel V” – you might also call it C/D or Am7/D.

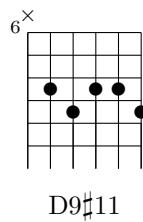


Dm9sus4

With the previous two voicings plus one more one-note move, you can also do a nice ii-V. Note that the easiest fingering for the third chord is to catch both the 4th and 3rd strings with your middle finger.

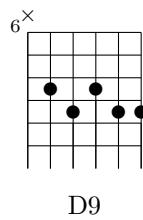
Three fretboard diagrams side-by-side. The first diagram is for Am11, the second for D9, and the third for Gmaj13. Each diagram shows a 5th position voicing with dots indicating finger placement. An 'X' is marked above the 5th string at the 6th fret in all three diagrams.

Move the 4 to the #11, and we end up with a nice D9#11 voicing. The third on the bottom is optional.



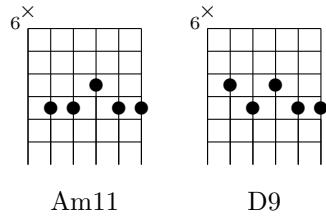
D9#11

Move the #11 to the 5, and we end up with the basic D9 voicing that we all know so well.

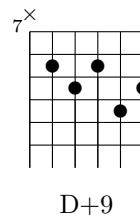


D9

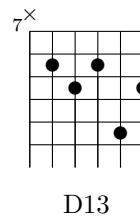
Note that we can move the bottom note from the 3 to the 4 to get a D9sus4 that we can think of as a rootless Am11 to make a ii-V:



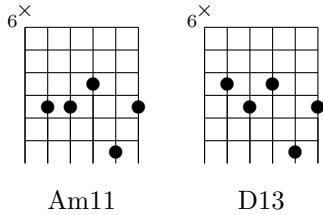
Move the 5 to the ♯5, and we end up with a D+9.



Move the ♯5 to the 13, and we end up with a nice D13 voicing. (This also works as an F♯m7b5, with the root on the bottom.)



Again, you can move the bottom note from the 3 to the 4 to get an Am11 sound to make a ii-V:

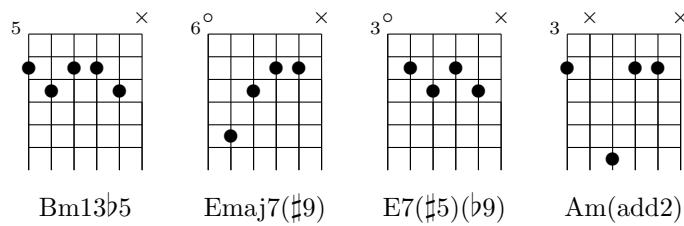


2.4 Clare Fischer

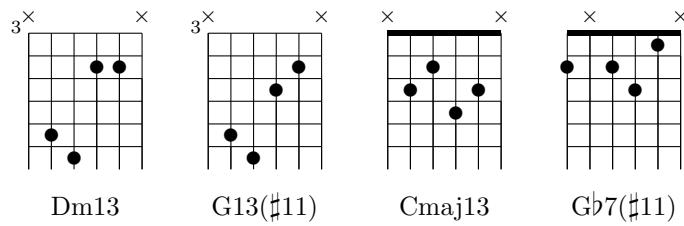
There's a reason Herbie Hancock cites this guy as an influence.

2.4.1 Elizete with Cal Tjader

Here's a minor ii-V in A minor. The ear buys the Emaj7♯9 as a bitonal hybrid of E major (the V chord) and B7♯5 (the II-7 chord).



And a major ii-V in C major (with an extra passing chord at the end):



2.4.2 Pensativa

This example is transcribed/adapted from Clare's comping on the A section of the head.

The image shows four guitar chord diagrams. Each diagram consists of a grid of six vertical strings (labeled 6 at the top) and five horizontal frets. Black dots indicate where to press the strings. The first diagram, labeled $G\flat 6/9$, has dots at (1,2), (1,3), (2,2), (2,3), and (3,2). The second, labeled $E\flat 7(\sharp 5)(\flat 9)(\sharp 11)$, has dots at (1,1), (1,2), (1,3), (2,2), (2,3), (3,2), and (3,3). The third, labeled $D\text{maj}13$, has dots at (1,1), (1,2), (1,3), (2,1), (2,2), (2,3), (3,1), (3,2), and (3,3). The fourth, labeled $A\flat 7(\flat 5)$, has dots at (1,3), (2,2), (2,3), (3,2), and (3,3).

Comping behind Bud's solo, Clare plays this voicing for the second chord in the sequence instead:

A guitar chord diagram showing a voicing for $E\flat 7(\flat 9)(\sharp 11)$. The grid has six strings and five frets. Dots are placed at (1,1), (1,2), (1,3), (2,1), (2,2), (2,3), (3,1), (3,2), and (3,3).

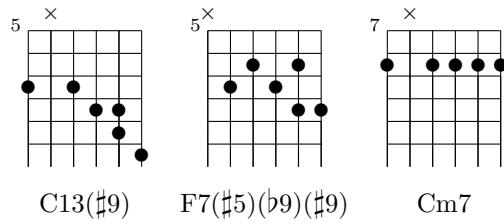
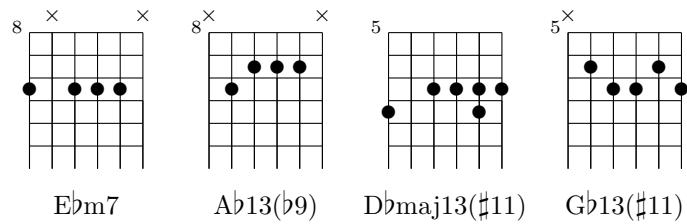
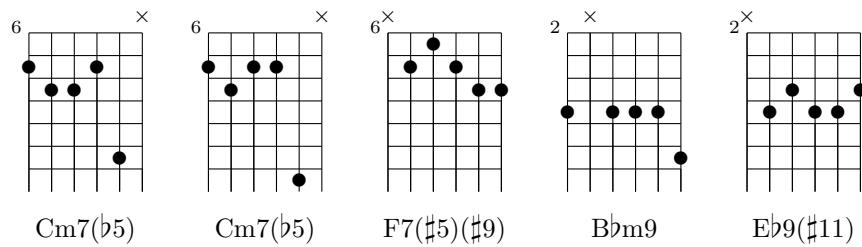
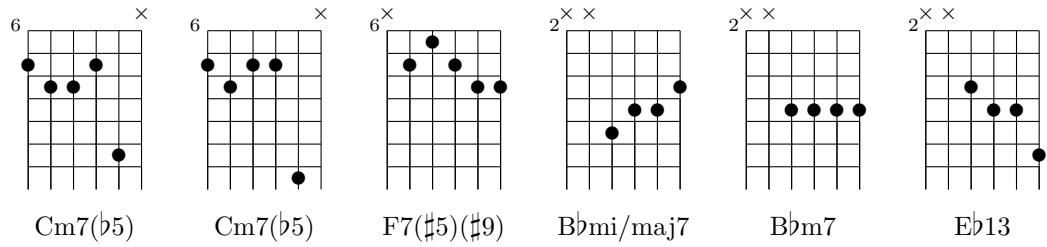
2.4.3 Morning

I have a YouTube video lesson on these sequences.

Verse

In the first sequence, note the contrapuntal motion. The soprano voice moves up chromatically while first the tenor voice and then the bass voice moves down chromatically.

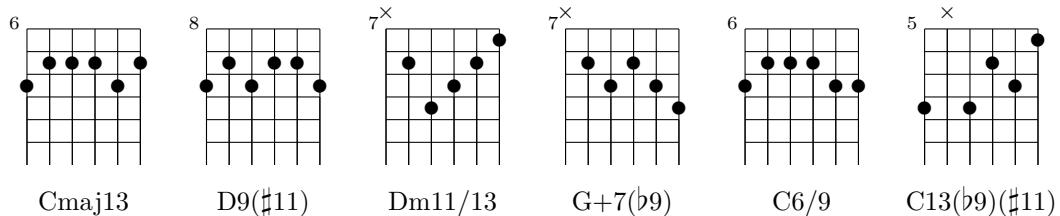
With voicings with more than one note on the string, the inner voice moves down.



2.4.4 Samba da Borboleta

This is a cool tune on Bossa Nova Jazz Samba, almost a contrafact of Take The A Train.

This excerpt is the second A section, coming into the bridge.

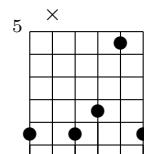


Chapter 3

Rubs

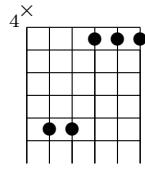
These refer to chords with either a half-step or whole-step rub in them. On guitar voicings, often this rub ends up between the 2nd and 3rd strings, since these are a major third apart rather than a fourth.

Here's a minor-seventh voicing we've seen earlier with a rub between the 2 and the $\flat 3$. You can omit the bottom note or grab it with your thumb. Credit goes to Brian Pardo for showing me this one.



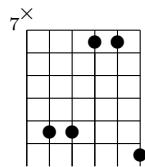
Dm9

Here's a rootless 13th voicing that a piano player might play with a half-step rub in the middle. Donald Fagen loves this one. You'll want to catch both of the bottom two notes with your pinky. Of course, you can omit the top note if desired. It also makes a nice Am6/9 if you add a sixth-string A.



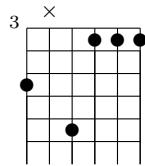
D13

Or if you move this higher up the neck, you can put the root on top. I stole this one from Ed Bickert.



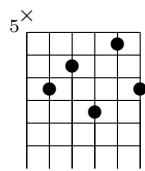
F13

And a similar voicing with a different note in the bass gets you a sus(b9) sound. Credit goes to Damian Garcia for showing me this one.



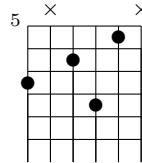
Bb7sus(b9)

Here's a nice major seventh voicing with a rub between the M7 (3rd string) and the root (2nd string). Credit goes to Brian Pardo for showing me this one. You can omit the bottom note or grab it with your thumb.



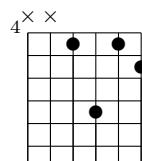
Fmaj7

And a permutation of it with the fifth on the bottom. I stole this one from Vic Juris.



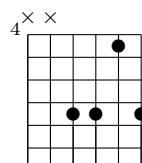
Fmaj7

Here's a $7\sharp 9$ voicing with the $\flat 7$ on top and a rub between the $\sharp 9$ and the 3.



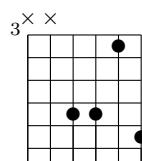
C7 \sharp 9

And the same idea, but with the root on top and the $\flat 7$ on bottom.



C7 \sharp 9

Here's a dominant voicing with the rub between the 6 and the $\flat 7$. This one is a nice move from the previous chord, from the I to the IV on a blues, for example.



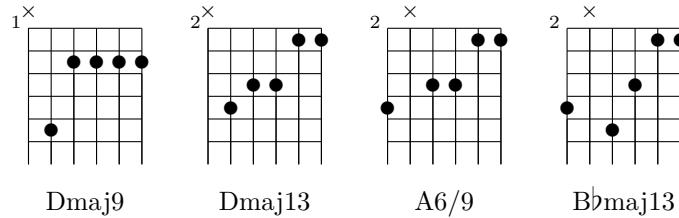
F13

Chapter 4

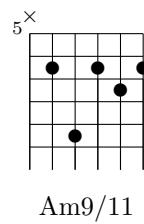
Miscellaneous Grips

This section is a catch-all for interesting voicings that don't fall cleanly into one of the earlier chapters. I'll follow the convention from Joe Pass Guitar Chords and separate these into five general families of function (and sound).

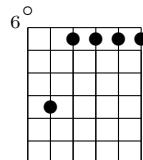
4.0.1 Major



4.0.2 Minor

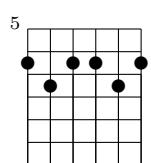


The Dmaj9 voicing in the previous section also works great as a minor voicing, either with an implied root a minor 3rd below, or with an open 6th string. I stole this idea from George Harrison on the bridge to Learning How To Love You, where it's played like this:

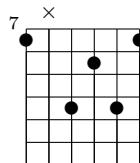


Em11

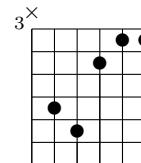
4.0.3 Dominant



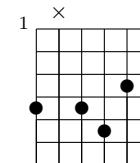
G9



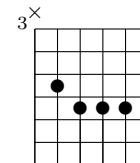
C7(b9)



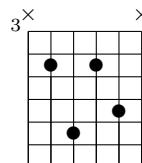
C7(#9)(b13)



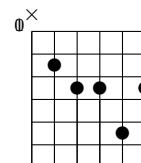
Aflat13(#11)



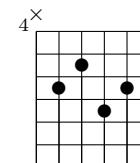
E13flat9



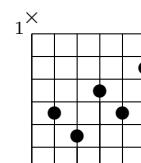
D+7



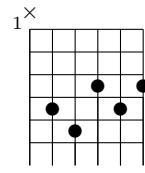
F13sharp9



C7(#5)(#11)



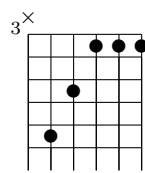
E7sharp9 or Bflat13(b9)



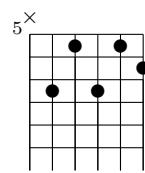
E7 or B \flat 7(\flat 9)(\sharp 11)

4.0.4 Diminished

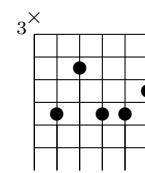
4.0.5 Half Diminished



Em7 \flat 5



Em7 \flat 5



Em9 \flat 5