

# Guitar in the Stage Band

a crash-course by Eitan Muir (revised Feb 2018)

## Glossary of musical terms and jazz slang

*chart* - (*slang*) the sheet music for a piece; or the piece itself.

*comp* - (*slang*) abbreviation for 'accompany'.

*tonic* - the root note; first note in a chord or scale. Learn your theory.

*triad* - three-note chord, usually built from scale degrees  $\wedge 1$ ,  $\wedge 3$  and  $\wedge 5$  in a key.

*voicing* - the way a chord's notes are arranged and spaced.

## Tone

Tone (*timbre*) starts with the player. Strive for an organic, natural response from the amp - the more balanced your sound, the better equipped you will be to exploit subtle timbral variation. Modern stage bands play a wide range of styles, and your role in the band could change drastically from one chart to the next - leave your options open. In some contexts it may be appropriate to slightly scoop the mids

## Volume

You must be audible above the drums – approximately equal to the piano. If you can't hear the piano, the drummer is too loud. If you improvise, leave yourself some space to play solos. Some guitarists like to play with volume knobs or boost pedals before a solo, but really it is best to stick to one setting and play softly when not soloing. There are two rules: 1) Don't be shy, and 2) If the bandleader yells, you're too loud.

## Technique

The thumb is most commonly used for 4-to-the-bar comping in Swing-era charts. The thick, dark "thmp" that the thumb provides is desirable in most of these, regardless of tempo or dynamics - the aim being to blend perfectly with - and reinforce - the bass. Listen to Freddie Greene and the Count Basie band.

Plectrums are usually used for playing single-note lines and arpeggios (e.g. in ballads); and are often necessary for comping in *modern swing*, funk and Afro-cuban charts. It may also be used for four-to-the-bar comping in very loud, bright sections ("chnk chnk" as opposed to "thmp thmp").

## Voicings

The following page provides some basic movable shapes for common jazz chord types; just to get you started. Your job is to learn your music theory and extended harmony, and apply that knowledge to discover more possible voicings. The white circle is the root of each chord – for each chord type, there will be one shape with a 6<sup>th</sup> string root, and one with a 5<sup>th</sup> string root. Some tips:

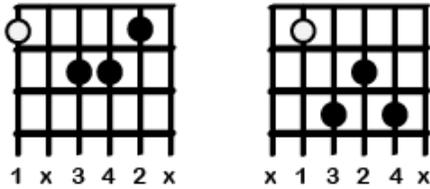
- Try to keep your playing between the 4th and 10th frets - the tone of the guitar is most consistent (and jazz-appropriate) in this area.
- The larger the band is, the fewer notes you should play. In a typical 17-piece stage band, two- or three-note voicings work excellently. It is often desirable to omit the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> strings.
- Extended chords can be reduced to simpler forms of the same chord type e.g. (C9 can be played as C7). In many cases, this works both ways - simple chords can be extended (Dm7 can be played as Dm9).

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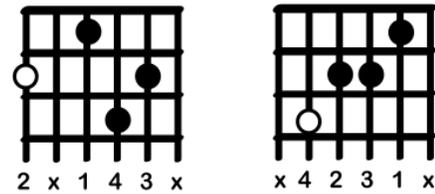
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## Basic jazz guitar chords - 5th and 6th string roots

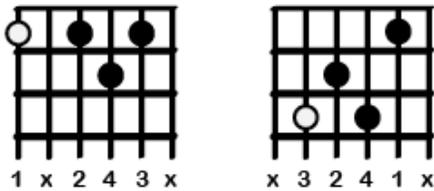
Major 7 (Maj7, Δ7)



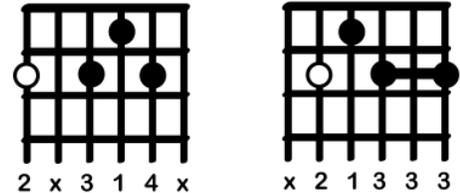
Major 6 (Maj6, Δ6)



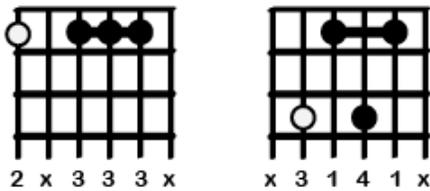
Dominant 7 (7, dom7)



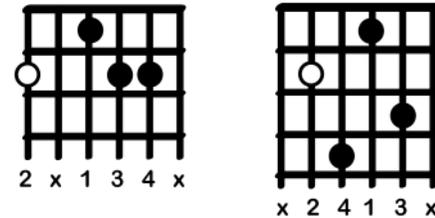
Dominant 9 (9, dom9)



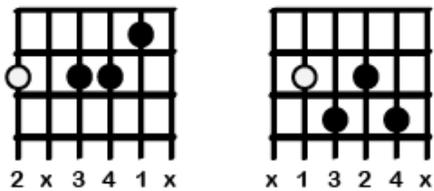
Minor 7 (m7, -7)



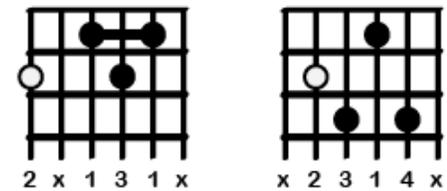
Minor 6 (m6, -6)



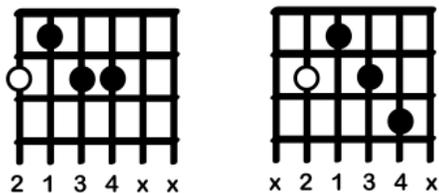
Minor 7 flat 5 / half-diminished (ø, m7b5)



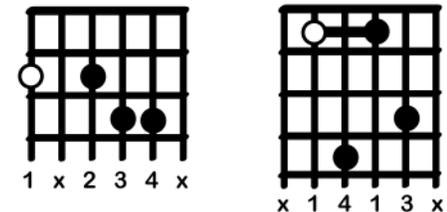
Diminished 7 (ø, ø7)



Dominant 7 (#9) (7(#9), 7#9)



Augmented 7 (+7, 7(#5), 7(b13))



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## Harmonic reduction

Jazz music uses what is known as 'extended harmony'. Put simply, extended harmony is the study of adding pitches to common triads to create complex sonorities. The two staves below number the notes of the C major scale (we call these numbered notes 'degrees') and illustrate how a C major triad (three-note chord) is built from the odd-numbered degrees of the C major scale, then how the C major triad can be extended for use in a jazz setting.

The image shows two musical staves. The first staff is titled 'C major scale' and shows the notes C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C on a treble clef staff, numbered 1 through 10. The second staff shows three chord voicings on a treble clef staff, each starting with a double bar line. The first is labeled 'C' and shows notes C, E, G, with degrees 1, 3, and 5 bracketed and labeled 'basic triad'. The second is labeled 'Cmaj7' and shows notes C, E, G, B, with degrees 1, 3, 5, and 7 bracketed and labeled 'basic triad' and 'extension'. The third is labeled 'Cmaj9' and shows notes C, E, G, B, D, with degrees 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9 bracketed and labeled 'basic triad' and 'extensions'.

When starting out in a jazz band, the intricacy of the chord symbols can quickly become rather overwhelming. It is important to remember that you can nearly always *reduce* (simplify or substitute) chords that belong to the same family - chords that share the same basic notes.

## Chord families

1. **Major chords** - Any chord in this family can be reduced to or substituted for both maj7 and maj6 voicings (with the same root). Use your ears and musical intuition to help you decide which reduction sounds best in each context.

maj, maj(add9), maj7, maj7(#11), maj7(13), maj9, maj9(#11), maj13, maj13(#11), maj6, maj6/9, maj6/9(#11)

2. **Minor chords** - This family has two subfamilies:

**Minor 7th** - chords from this subfamily can be substituted for m7 voicings.

m, m7, m9, m11, m13, m7(sus4), m7(b6)

**Minor (Major 7th)** - chords from this subfamily can be substituted for m6 voicings.

m, m(maj7), m(maj9), m11(maj7), m13(maj7), m6, m6/9

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3. Dominant chords - This family has two subfamilies:

Diatonic dominant - chords in this sub-family can be substituted for 7 or 9 voicings.

7, 7(#11), 7(13), 9, 9(#11), 11, 13, 13(#11)

Altered dominant - chords in this sub-family can be tentatively substituted for +7 or 7(#9) voicings.

7(b5), 7(#5), 7(b9), 7(#9), 7(#9b9), 7(#5#9), (7b5b9), 7(b5#9), 7(#5b9), 7(b13), 7(b13b9),  
7(b13#9), 7(b5b13)

4. Half-diminished - chords in this family can be substituted for m7(b5) voicings.

m7(b5), m9(b5), m11(b5), m7(b5b9), m11(b5b9), m13(b5), m13(b5b9)

5. Diminished - Diminished chords are rarely extended or altered.