

# The Art of Voice Leading by Craig Hlady

Voice leading is an important aspect to consider when it comes to playing chord progressions and comping, and is a common practice among pianists. By using stepwise motion and common tones with the top note of each chord, you will find that it will help alleviate the problem of large jumps up and down the neck when moving from chord to chord. This makes for a much more economical and efficient transition and a smoother sound.

Below are the chord changes to the Miles Davis classic "Tune Up", which is a good example to practice some of these concepts with its series of descending II-V-I chord changes.

E m7
A7
DMaj7
D m7
G7

7 CMaj7
C m7
F7
BbMaj7
EbMaj7

13 E m7
F7
BbMaj7
A 7b13

By using the various inversions of the Drop Two 7th chords, with their substitutions and tensions added, there are many options available to explore. However, before practicing these voice leading exercises, make sure you are quite familiar with the basic voice-led inversions for the common II m7 - V7 - I maj7 chords on the middle four and top four string sets. Doing so will allow you to fully understand where all the original chord tones are on each string and will make it easier to see which notes are actually being moved when the tensions and substitutions are added. Play through the examples slowly until memorized, and then begin transposing to other keys.

17
Dm7
G7
CMaj7
Dm7
G7
CMaj7
Dm7
G7
CMaj7
Dm7
G7
CMaj7

17

3	3	1	6	6	5	10	8	8	13	12	12
2	0	0	5	4	4	7	7	5	10	10	9
3	3	2	7	5	5	10	9	9	12	12	10
3	2	2	5	5	3	8	8	7	12	10	10

21
Dm7
G7
CMaj7
Dm7
G7
CMaj7
Dm7
G7
C6
Dm7
G7
CMaj7

21

5	3	3	8	7	7	10	10	8	13	13	12
5	3	1	6	6	7	10	8	8	13	12	12
5	4	4	7	7	5	10	10	9	14	12	12
3	3	2	7	5	5	10	9	7	12	12	10

Below are some voice leading exercises moving through ii-V-I chord changes on Tune Up. The first example uses common tones in the lead with as little movement as possible. In Ex.2 the progression continues the voice leading with an upward ascending motion. Ex.3 follows with a downward descending motion with lead note of the chords. Start slowly and gradually increase the tempo as it will take a while to really become acquainted with them. Also feel free to experiment with where and when to shift to a new string set with the chords as there is more than one way of fingering these. Also included are some of the alternate chord names which demonstrate some Sus4 to Maj7 and Maj7b5 to Dom7 chord substitution concepts. Pay attention to which chord tone these tensions are applied to on the parent chord so you can memorize and apply freely on your own. It also does help to play this with a backing track with a strong root motion outlining the original chord changes so you can hear how they sound against the bass.

Ex.1 Common tones

25 E m7      A 9      DMaj7(69)      D<sup>6</sup>      Dm11      G 13(b9)      CMaj7#11      CMaj7

25 C#m7b5      F#7sus4      B 7sus4      C/D      Db7#9      Am 69      Am9

5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
4	4	4	2	5	4	4	4
5	5	4	4	5	3	4	5
5	4	4	2	5	4	3	3

33 Cm11      F 7(#5)      Bb<sup>6</sup>      EbMaj7      Em11      F9#5      BbMaj7(69)      A9#5

33 C 7sus4      A7#5#11      G 7sus4  
Dm11      C m7      A 7sus4      Eb7b5      D 7sus4      Db7b5

6	6	6	8	8	8	8	6
5	6	5	7	7	6	5	4
3	6	5	8	7	7	7	5
3	6	5	6	7	6	5	4

Ex.2 Ascending motion

41 E m7      A 13      DMaj7      D 6      D<sup>6</sup>      Dm9      G7#9b13      CMaj7      C<sup>6</sup>      CMaj7(69)

41 G 6      C#m11b5      B m9      F#m7      B 7sus4      F Maj7      BMaj7(b5)      Am9      D 7sus4      E 7sus4

5	7	7	5	5	5	6	7	8	10
4	4	6	5	5	5	4	5	8	10
5	5	7	4	4	3	4	5	7	9
5	4	5	4	4	3	3	5	7	9

49 Cm9      F 13      F 9      Bb<sup>6</sup>      Eb<sup>6</sup>      Em7      F 13      Bb<sup>6</sup>      A 13

49 EbMaj7      EbMaj7b5      Am7b5      F<sup>6</sup>  
G 7sus4      C 7sus4      G 6      EbMaj7b5      G 7sus4      GMaj7b5

10	10	11	13	13	12	13	13	14
8	8	10	13	11	12	15	13	12
8	7	10	12	12	12	14	12	12
8	7	10	12	10	12	13	12	11

## Ex.3 Descending motion

57

Em9 A9b13 DMaj7(69) D<sup>6</sup> Dm7 G9b13 CMaj7 CMaj7(69)

57

G Maj7 DbMaj7b5 F#7sus4 B7sus4 F 6 Db7(9b13) Am9 E7sus4

14	13	12	12	10	11	12	10
12	12	12	10	10	10	12	10
12	12	11	11	10	10	12	9
12	11	11	9	10	9	10	9

65

Cm11 Cm9 F13 F9 BbMaj7 BbM7(69) Eb<sup>6</sup> EbMaj7 Em11 F9(13) F13 Bb<sup>6</sup> A9

65

F7sus4 EbMaj7 EbMaj7b5 Am7b5 Gm9 D7sus4 C7sus4 Gm9 E7sus4 A7sus4 EbMaj7b5 G7sus4 C#m7b5

11	10	10	8	10	8	6	6	10	8	8	6	6	5
11	8	8	8	10	8	6	4	7	7	7	6	6	4
10	8	8	8	10	7	5	5	7	7	7	7	5	4
10	8	7	7	8	7	5	5	7	7	6	6	5	4

Once you have some of these voice led-chord voicings under your fingers at a slow tempo, try plugging in some rhythmic variety while voice leading with the tensions and ascending/descending motion. Finally experiment and work out some of your own variations. There are endless possibilities to explore. But remember some of these voicings and substitutions can sound a little outside of the norm. Always be aware of the context you are playing in to make sure they are appropriate for the playing situation as sometimes they might not be the best choice. Happy comping!

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Em7 A7 DMaj7 Dm7 G7 CMaj7

81

Cm7 F7 BbMaj7 Em7 F7 BbMaj7 A7