

An introduction to rootless jazz chords (Rootless lite)

A musical staff in treble clef with a key signature of one flat. The notes are D, F, A, Bb, and C. To the right of the staff is a chord diagram with five lines and five dots. The dots are on the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 7th lines, labeled 9, b7, 5, and b3 respectively. Below the diagram is the text **Dm⁹**.



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A musical staff with five lines and five dots. The dots are on the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 7th lines, labeled 9, 7, 5, and 3 respectively. Below the diagram is the text **Cmaj⁹**.

A musical staff with five lines and five dots. The dots are on the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th lines, labeled 13, 3, 9, and b7 respectively. Below the diagram is the text **G¹³₉**.



An introduction to rootless jazz chords

A-Shapes

*Rootless lite**

Glen Rose

Teachers notes and workbook

This is the lite version of the study on rootless chords.
The full, “heavy-version”, video lesson, is available on request. (\$19.99)

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*Rootless lite**

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*This is the “**lite**” version of the study on rootless chords (A-Shapes). The full, “**heavy**” **version** video lesson is available on the website

Introduction

The purpose of this study . . .

This short study will introduce to you how to make the commonly used rootless jazz chords that all professional jazz pianists have in their chord vocabulary, at their fingertips. The rootless jazz chords give us access to the extended, jazz color tones and all of their possible alterations. They are made with just four tones, which can be played in either the left hand or right hand.

This isn't a serious college study for young jazz students wanting to conquer all jazz skills so they can get out and play gigs and make a mark for themselves in the jazz world. This, so called, "lite" study is mostly aimed at people who are beginning chord-concept players or those who would like to get introduced to the sound and concept of the sophisticated rootless chords in an easy and friendly way. Here we take just a small bite of the apple instead of trying to digest the entire thing.

In this 'lite', introductory study you can get an understanding of how the chords are made, enjoy the sound of them in a few keys and mix them into your chord playing where you can. If you chose to learn them in more keys you can do so at your own pace. I have more, in-depth, lessons available on this subject if you are interested in going further.

Left hand or right hand.....

When the rootless chords are played in the left hand it leaves the right hand free to play melodies or solos. If they are played in the right hand then the left hand can play the root notes low on the piano. When used this way, they can be used to harmonize melody notes where possible under melodies and other chord techniques are generally mixed with in with the rootless chords in order to follow the shape of the melody lines. This means that normal, simple 4-note jazz chords are used to harmonize melodies but rootless chords are used where it is opportune because the top note of the chord falls on the melody. Good examples of this are the opening Cm9 chord of *Cry Me a River* or the beginning Am9 chord used on *Laura*. Throughout both those song examples the rootless chords intermingle with normal simple 7th jazz chords to make lush chord arrangements.

Rootless jazz chords for singers...

Playing with rootless chords in the right hand, while the left hand plays bass notes, open 7th's and 5th's, is ideal for singers accompanying themselves on piano. An full jazz chord sound is achieved effortlessly by merely playing rootless chords throughout, while the voice handles the melody. Short instrumental breaks between the singing are also easily created by rolling the chords and, or moving them up an octave for variation.

If a walking bass line is played under the rootless chords then a pleasing jazz sound is created, which adds another jazz effect into the palette of artistic choices of the pianist.

Studying the chords within the ii-V-I jazz progression...

Rootless chords take more effort to learn than making the basic triads, 1,3-5 and simple 7 chords (1,3,5,7). But the sophisticated sound that the chords bring make the effort worthwhile. We learn them by using them to make the ii-V-I jazz progression. This is where they are used abundantly when playing standards and the progression gives us a clear understanding of their sound and function.

Chord vocabulary...

From an intellectual viewpoint music can be looked at as being made up entirely of chords and chord progressions. Classical, pop, standards, folk, latin, it's all just chords.

If you analyze the classical composers music you can start to discover and explain the mystery of their beautiful compositions. You can feel the thrill of understanding the music when you study and describe it in terms of its chords and the movement of the chord progressions. We can view the chords as being used to support and harmonize beautiful melody lines.

I like to say that it's enjoyable to play chords and enjoy them for their own sake, without attaching them to any song. Just play and enjoy the sound of the chords you have learned and can play. Roll them through various keys and combine them in any way you chose to. Experiment to see what works and what you like the sound of.

There are so many ways to make chords. We build a chord vocabulary as we keep studying that we can draw from as we need it for various situations in our playing. All chord concept playing must begin by learning the basic chords. This means simple triads at first but that vocabulary that is very limiting and can't be applied to playing standards. For playing standards one must first learn the five basic chord types which are made up of four-note, chords of the 7th. There are five chord types or "qualities," that can be made off of any of the twelve tones in music. All of these chords have the fundamental spelling of 1-3-5-7 in their root position. We have major 7, dominant 7, minor 7, minor7b5 and diminished 7. Once these five chord types are learned and understood we can move on to all of the varied ways to use them and expand upon them. The rootless jazz chords are just one of the expansions.

Using chords for making fills and solos...

For our purpose of playing standards, chords are also used to create melody lines, "fills" and solos. This goes for the five basic chord types as well as the rootless jazz chords. We make melodies, fills and solos with chord outlines. That means instead of playing the chords as solids we break them up and see them as individual notes, 1-3-5-7, an *outline* of the chords. We can play them in any combination or inversion for our creative solos and fills. We expand upon this with our rootless jazz chords and can use 1-3-5-7-9-11-13 for our chord outlines, giving us even more to draw from.

My task here, as teacher, has been to find a way that presents a clear understanding and give the student a pathway to these chords that is obtainable and friendly without getting bogged down in endless mathematical studies and boring exercises. I've tried to make the presentation enjoyable and informative. If the student comes away with the ability to play and understand the rootless jazz chords in just two or three keys then I believe my effort will have been a success.

The video lesson and this book are tied together but both present material not shown in the other. The video lesson shows how to play a simple nursery rhyme, *Mary Had a Little Lamb*, in a fun and cool sounding way with the rootless chords. This book ends up with showing how to apply the rootless chords to A-section of *Misty* by playing the ii-V-I pattern in three keys. *Misty* is a gateway song for beginning chord concept players and jazz students. If one understands the chord progression to *Misty* they will be rewarded by finding the same patterns and

chord movements that are used in countless other standards. If you use rootless jazz chords to make the ii-V-I patterns, you will enrich your playing those patterns with the sound of sophisticated jazz sounds.

In making the video and book, I've tried to move and explain slowly so that you can learn and absorb on a non-boring way and start enjoying the beauty of jazz chords.

The book is a combination of lessons written in my own personal manuscript combined with my computer created charts and diagrams that I make for my students so that they can learn with big and clear graphics. Even if you only learn the rootless jazz chords in two keys, I think it will add a lot of enjoyment to your playing and understanding of the many ways to make chords when playing standards by chord concept.

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PS.

Keep in mind as you work with the chords in this book that these are the "A-shapes." There is another set of rootless shapes as well called the B-shapes. They are made with the same notes as the A-shapes but are inverted into another position. When one learns both sets of shapes then there are more creative possibilities, employments and enjoyments of them for our playing.

ROOTLESS JAZZ CHORDS ACCESS COLOR TONES

ROOTLESS JAZZ CHORDS GIVE US ACCESS TO THE EXTENDED JAZZ COLOR TONES. THE TONES BEYOND "7" ARE THE COLOR TONES (9, 11 & 13)



THE 3RD & 7TH MUST BE PRESENT TO MAKE JAZZ COLOR TONES

A vertical list of numbers 7, 5, 3, and 1(Root). The numbers 7 and 3 are each preceded by a small pink dot. An arrow points from the text "THE 3RD & 7TH MUST BE PRESENT TO MAKE JAZZ COLOR TONES" to the pink dot next to the number 7.

THE 3 + 7 DEFINE THE BASIC QUALITY OF CHORDS THE ROOT DOES NOT.

A vertical list of numbers 7, 5, 3, and 1(Root). The numbers 7 and 3 are each preceded by a small pink dot. An arrow points from the text "THE 3 + 7 DEFINE THE BASIC QUALITY OF CHORDS THE ROOT DOES NOT." to the pink dot next to the number 3.

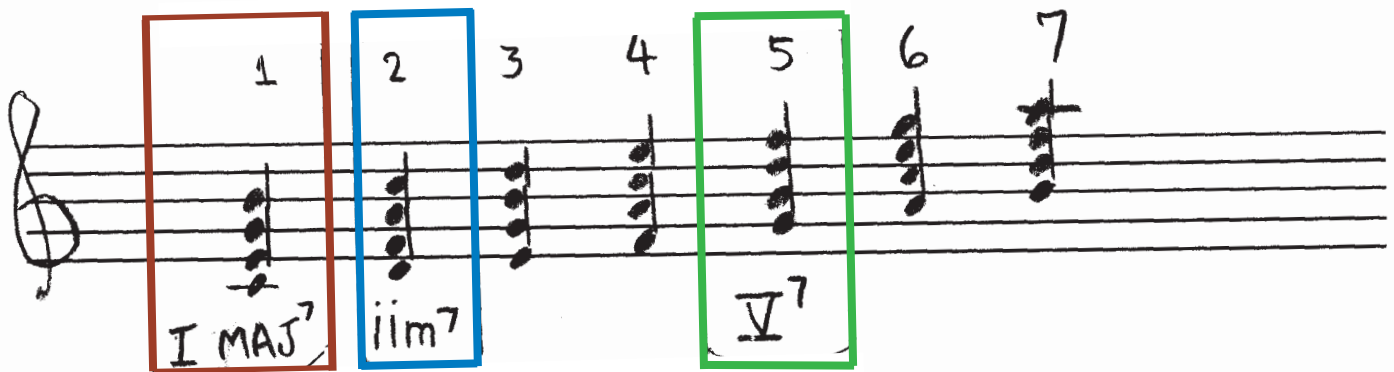
← THE FIFTH NOTE IS GENERALLY DISPENSIBLE BUT IS FREQUENTLY USED.

1 (ROOT) ← THE ROOT DOES NOT NEED TO BE IN A CHORD TO DEFINE IT.

HARMONIZE THE MAJOR SCALE

KEY OF C

BUILD 4-NOTE CHORDS ON EVERY SCALE TONE BY USING EVERY OTHER NOTE IN THE SCALE



IN THIS STUDY WE WILL WORK WITH THE ii, V AND I CHORDS TO MAKE THE ii-V-I JAZZ PATTERN AND LEARN OUR ROOTLESS JAZZ CHORDS.

MAKE ALL THREE CHORDS ROOTLESS 9's

THE II-V-I PROGRESSION WITH BASIC 4-NOTE JAZZ CHORDS

ii^{m7} V I^Δ

Dm⁷ G⁷ C^Δ

ADD A 9TH TO EACH CHORD AND DROP THE ROOT

ii^{m9} V⁹ I^{Δ9}

Dm⁹ G⁹ C^{Δ9}

II-V-I WITH ROOTLESS 9 CHORDS

ii^{m9} V⁹ I^{Δ9}

Dm⁹ G⁹ C^{Δ9}

ADD THE 13 TO THE V CHORD

C MAJOR SCALE

ADD THE 13 TO THE DOMINANT V

(*) 13

(13)

(9)

(7)

(5)

(3)

(1)

CONTINUE CHOOSING EVERY OTHER NOTE IN THE C MAJOR SCALE - ADD THE 13 TO THE V CHORD

G¹³₇

V CHORD

CONNECTING MINOR 9 TO DOMINANT 13

WHEN STUDYING THE ROOTLESS A-SHAPES WE NEED TO FIND A WAY TO CONNECT THE $m^9(ii)$ TO THE DOMINANT 13 WITH JUST FOUR TONES IN EACH CHORD. THE 13 CHORD HAS TOO MANY NOTES IN IT AND THE SOUND WOULD BE TOO THICK IF WE PLAYED THEM ALL. WE ELIMINATE THE NON-ESSENTIAL ROOT AND FIFTH AND ARE LEFT WITH A FOUR-NOTE DOMINANT 13 CHORD THAT HAS THE 3, 7, 9 AND 13.

IF WE STACK THE TONES STARTING FROM THE "7" WE CAN CONNECT IT SMOOTHLY TO THE MINOR 9, LIKE YOU SEE IN THE ILLUSTRATIONS BELOW.

WE NEED TO REMOVE SOME NOTES AND REARRANGE THEIR ORDER

FIRST: DROP THE ROOT AND 5TH

REARRANGE THE NOTES TO THIS POSITION, STACKING THE TONES UP FROM THE 7.

THIS INVERSION OF THE DOMINANT 13 CHORD WILL CONNECT SMOOTHLY TO THE MINOR 9 CHORD.

THIS IS VERY SMOOTH VOICE LEADING. ONLY ONE NOTE IS DIFFERENT IN THE TWO CHORDS. BUT THE ROOT NOTE IN THE LEFT HAND CHANGES THE DEFINITION OF ALL THE TONES IN THE RIGHT HAND (SEE NEXT PAGE)

Dm^9 G^{13}_9

ii^m^9 V^9