

# **Beginning Jazz Piano**

Book One

By Kerry Politzer

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# Introduction

## What is Jazz Piano?

Jazz piano means many things to many people. To some, it brings to mind the virtuosic stride piano of Fats Waller and James P. Johnson. Others might think of smooth jazz pianist David Benoit. It's true that there are many, many styles of jazz, from bebop to post-bop to fusion to free.

The kind of jazz piano I aim to teach in this class could be termed "modern jazz." By "modern," I actually mean the kind that has its origin in the 1940's bebop of Bud Powell. Because bebop piano, with its horn-like right-hand lines and percussive left-hand accents, was a sea change from 1930's stride. Stride pianists were human juke boxes; they did everything at once. Bebop brought about increased rhythmic and harmonic freedom for the pianist (that means you!).

I don't want to solely stick to bebop, however. I want to give you jazz piano you can use on the bandstand today. I want you to acquire tools to apply to the music you are working on, rather than just abstract exercises. Finally, I want you to have fun, if possible.

If you are a vocalist, or you play an instrument other than the piano, you might be wondering why learning jazz piano is important. But no matter what you play or sing, jazz piano skills will contribute immeasurably towards your musicianship. Vocalists can learn to accompany themselves. Drummers can enhance their knowledge of form. Horn players and guitar players can look at soloing in a new light. And everyone gains an exciting compositional tool; it's hard to beat 88 keys stacked on top of each other.

So let's get started!

## Course Objectives

Modern jazz piano incorporates a variety of skills. It is my hope that after completing this course, you will be able to draw on these skills in many different musical situations. Ultimately, you should be able to do three things when presented with a tune:

- play a basic solo arrangement
- comp with the left hand while playing the melody or soloing with the right hand
- comp for a soloist

The course is divided into three parts, each of which consists of five modules. Each module includes tunes, voicings, and a scale or mode. You will be expected to practice the voicings with your left hand and the tune heads with your right. I would also like you to solo, hence the focus on scales and modes. Special topics, such as swing feel, soloing tips, and comping rhythms, will be addressed throughout the course.

For the adventurous among you, the extra credit sections feature brief bios of major jazz pianists as well as transcriptions. It's my feeling that there are no greater teachers than the masters; try to at least listen to the tracks I've referenced, even if you don't learn the transcriptions.

## **Who This Course is For**

If you are taking this course, it is assumed that you can play the piano at a basic level. You should be able to read music in treble and bass clefs, and... to be able to count to 13. Not because we're going to be playing tunes in 13 (we're not), but because we're going to be playing some ninths, elevenths and thirteenths.

## **A Note About This Course**

There are as many different ways to teach jazz piano as there are jazz pianists. While taking this course, you might wonder why certain information might be excluded (or included). Although the theory behind the method will be covered, the understanding of theory isn't our primary objective. Our goal is to be able to enjoy playing jazz piano.

With that said, I have tried to structure this course in such a way that you will be able to use your newfound skills almost immediately. Do you need to comp behind a horn player during a blues? Or is a vocalist requesting solo accompaniment for a standard? Hopefully, after practicing the skills outlined in this course, you'll be able to rise to the occasion.

If you find that our weekly lessons are not challenging enough, feel free to dig into the extras. Conversely, if you find yourself struggling, feel free to contact me at [politzer@pdx.edu](mailto:politzer@pdx.edu). I will try to help if I can.

## **Syllabus**

### **Module One: Blues (Major)**

Voicings (shell, rootless left-hand)

Scale: Blues

Tunes: Billie's Bounce, Straight, No Chaser

Extra Credit: Monk's Straight No Chaser Solo

### **Module Two: Blues (Minor)**

Voicings (shell, rootless left-hand)

Scale: Minor Pentatonic

Tunes: Mr. P.C., Equinox

Extra Credit: Flanagan's Mr. P.C. Solo

### **Module Three: Mixolydian Mode**

Voicings (shell, rootless left-hand)

Scale: Mixolydian

Tunes: All Blues, Bessie's Blues

Extra Credit: Tyner's Bessie's Blues Solo

### **Module Four: Dorian Mode**

Voicings (shell, quartal)

Scale: Dorian

Tunes: Impressions, So What

Extra Credit: Kelly's So What Solo

### **Module Five: Ionian Mode (Major Scale)**

Voicings (shell, rootless)

Scale: Ionian

Tunes: I Could Write a Book, My Romance

Extra Credit: Jarrett's My Romance Solo

## **Module One: The Blues (Major)**



## **The Blues Scale**

Now that we've learned this module's voicings, it's time to think about soloing. There's no better starting point for the blues than the blues scale. It doesn't contain a lot of notes, but each note sounds good when you play it. The defining feature of the blues scale is the flat 5, which gives the scale its unique character. Much has been written about this special note.

Another great thing about the blues scale is that it sounds good over all the chords in a blues. So, you don't really have to worry about "the changes." You can play an F blues scale throughout all 12 bars of an F blues, or a Bb blues scale throughout the whole Bb blues. You don't have to vary it when you get to the IV chord, the VI chord, etc. We will be practicing the blues scale in F and Bb, the two most common blues keys.

One pianist whose playing is saturated with the blues scale is the great Wynton Kelly. He was a big influence on Herbie Hancock.

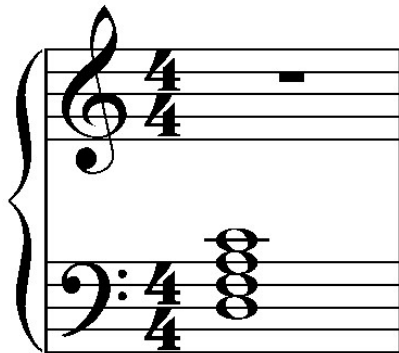
## The Blues Scale in F and Bb



## Voicings

On the piano, the left hand often delineates the harmony that we play. For example, if a lead sheet begins with a Dmin7 chord, our left hand will play some permutation of this chord.

Some beginning jazz piano books instruct the student to include the root, third, fifth, and seventh in a left-hand voicing.



This may be good from a theory standpoint, because the student quickly learns to identify the intervals in a chord. However, most modern jazz pianists do not usually play this type of voicing. And when placed low on the keyboard, it tends to sound muddy. So let's try a different tack.

## Shell Voicings

We're going to begin our study of voicings with the shell voicing: a chord voicing that leaves out one or more notes. There are several advantages to this type of voicing: 1) it is easy to learn; 2) it falls easily into the hand; and 3) it is extremely versatile.

The first shell voicing we are going to learn consists of the root (first note in the scale) and the flat-tenth. Here it is in all keys.



This particular voicing can be used for dominant 7ths, minor 7ths, sus7ths, and minor 7b5s. (See, I told you it was versatile!) It's a perfect starting point for the blues. And we can use it to fulfill our first objective, that of playing a basic solo arrangement. The bass note and seventh are a perfectly respectable backdrop for the right-hand melodies we will learn.

## Blues in F, Shell Voicings

The image shows a blues solo arrangement in F major, using shell voicings for the bass line. The arrangement consists of three lines of four measures each, with chords labeled above the staff. The notes are written as whole notes in the bass clef of a 4/4 staff.

Line 1: F<sup>7</sup>, Bb<sup>7</sup>, F<sup>7</sup>, F<sup>7</sup>

Line 2: Bb<sup>7</sup>, Bb<sup>7</sup>, F<sup>7</sup>, D<sup>7</sup>

Line 3: Gm<sup>7</sup>, C<sup>7</sup>, F<sup>7</sup>, D<sup>7</sup>, Gm<sup>7</sup>, C<sup>7</sup>

Blues in Bb, Shell Voicings

B $\flat$ <sup>7</sup> E $\flat$ <sup>7</sup> B $\flat$ <sup>7</sup> B $\flat$ <sup>7</sup>

5 E $\flat$ <sup>7</sup> E $\flat$ <sup>7</sup> B $\flat$ <sup>7</sup> G<sup>7</sup>

9 Cm<sup>7</sup> F<sup>7</sup> B $\flat$ <sup>7</sup> G<sup>7</sup> Cm<sup>7</sup> F<sup>7</sup>

## Rootless Voicings, Left Hand

Now we're going to get a little fancier. While the shell voicing is a perfectly respectable voicing for the solo piano style, in many situations we will be playing with a rhythm section. The bass player will holding down the fort with a lot of roots, so we will be playing the two notes that are crucial to establishing the harmony: the third and the seventh. These two little notes, in their various permutations, are extremely powerful. Here's how they change the changes:

### Thirds + Sevenths

Thirds	Sevenths	Chord Result
major	major	major 7*
flat 3	flat 7	minor 7**
major	flat 7	dom 7
flat 3	major 7	min-maj 7

Note: \*Add the sharp 5 and you have an augmented chord.  
\*\*Add the flat 5 and you have a min7b5 chord.

When we play a third and a seventh with the left hand, we have two options: 1) play the third on top or 2) play the seventh on top. As you'll see, in the interest of voice leading and hand comfort, we will often alternate the two. Here are the rootless two-note voicings in all keys.



**Blues in F, Rootless Voicings**

1 F<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b7</sup> F<sup>7</sup> F<sup>7</sup>

5 B<sup>b7</sup> B<sup>b7</sup> F<sup>7</sup> D<sup>7</sup>

9 G<sup>m7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> F<sup>7</sup> D<sup>7</sup> G<sup>m7</sup> C<sup>7</sup>

**Blues in Bb, Rootless Voicings**

1 B<sup>b7</sup> E<sup>b7</sup> B<sup>b7</sup> B<sup>b7</sup>

5 E<sup>b7</sup> E<sup>b7</sup> B<sup>b7</sup> G<sup>7</sup>

9 C<sup>m7</sup> F<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b7</sup> G<sup>7</sup> C<sup>m7</sup> F<sup>7</sup>

## **Tunes**

**Billie's Bounce (Charlie Parker)**

10

6

12

Chords: F7, Bb7, F7, F7, Bb7, F7, Am7, D7, Gm7, C7, F7, F7



**Straight, No Chaser (Thelonious Monk)**

The musical score for 'Straight, No Chaser' is presented in three staves of music, each with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat major/D minor). The first staff contains measures 1 through 5, with chord markings Bb7, Eb7, Bb7, and Bb7 above the staff. The second staff contains measures 6 through 9, with chord markings Eb7, Eb7, Bb7, and Bb7 above the staff. The third staff contains measures 10 through 13, with chord markings Cm7, F7, Bb7, and Bb7 above the staff. The piece concludes with a double bar line at the end of measure 13.

## **Extra Credit**

## Thelonious Sphere Monk (1917-1982)



Thelonious Monk is known for his percussive style, surprising harmonies, and memorable compositions. This week, since we are learning his famous blues "Straight, No Chaser," here is a transcription of the first chorus from the *Blue Note Sessions, 1947-52* version.

Notice the varied rhythms. It's always good to listen to the track when you're learning a transcription, as the phrasing and rhythmic feel vary greatly from player to player.

Take a listen at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ujChUYkPvec](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ujChUYkPvec) and see if you can play along.

A musical score for the first chorus of "Straight, No Chaser" by Thelonious Monk. The score is written on three staves in treble clef, with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The first staff contains measures 1 through 5, with chords Bb7, Eb7, Bb7, and Bb7 indicated above. The second staff contains measures 6 through 9, with chords Eb7, Eb7, Bb7, and Bb7 indicated above. The third staff contains measures 10 through 12, with chords C7, F7, and Bb7 indicated above. The notation includes various rhythmic values, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. There are also triplets marked with a '3' and a slur.

## **Module Two: The Blues (Minor)**

## Minor Pentatonic Scale

In this module, we're going to focus on the minor pentatonic scale. This scale is just as versatile as the blues scale, and it can be used over both major and minor blues. Pentatonic scales were often employed in the 1960's, the era of modal jazz. Pianist McCoy Tyner, who played a major role in the recordings of saxophonist John Coltrane, uses pentatonics a lot. Tyner played on Coltrane's tune "Equinox," which we will learn in this module. The introduction to "Equinox" is entirely based on the minor pentatonic scale.

In this scale, which comprises five notes, the first interval is a minor third. Since we're going to play the blues in C minor and C# minor, we will learn our minor pentatonic scale in these two keys. Let's go up and down the scales with each hand.



## Voicings

In this module, we will be playing the blues in a couple of minor keys. A common key for the minor blues is C minor. You might notice that in the eighth bar, the harmony goes to the bVI chord; this is a change from the major blues, which usually goes to the II minor chord.

In our first lesson, we learned dominant 7th and minor 7th chords. Now, we will also play minor chords without the 7th. Our shell voicings will incorporate the root and the 5th, while our rootless voicings will include the minor 3rd and natural 6th.

Here are the root-fifth shell voicings in all keys. (The rootless voicings are identical in shape to those of the last module.)



When we voice a chord without the minor 7th, we have another harmonic possibility at our disposal. While soloing, we are no longer limited to using the minor 7th; we can also play the minor-major 7th.

**Blues in C Minor, Shell Voicings**

The musical score is for a blues in C minor, featuring shell voicings in 4/4 time. It consists of three systems of four measures each. The treble clef staff contains whole rests in every measure. The bass clef staff contains the following voicings:

- Measures 1-4: C minor (C3, Eb3, F3, Gb3)
- Measures 5-8: F minor 7 (F2, Ab2, C3, Eb3)
- Measures 9-12: A sequence of four chords: Ab7 (Ab2, C3, Eb3, F3), G7 (G2, Bb2, D3, F3), C minor (C3, Eb3, F3, Gb3), and C minor (C3, Eb3, F3, Gb3).

The score concludes with a double bar line at the end of measure 12.

### Blues in C# Minor, Shell Voicings

C#m C#m C#m C#m

5 F#m7 F#m7 C#m C#m

9 A7 G#7 C#m C#m

### Blues in C Minor, Rootless Voicings

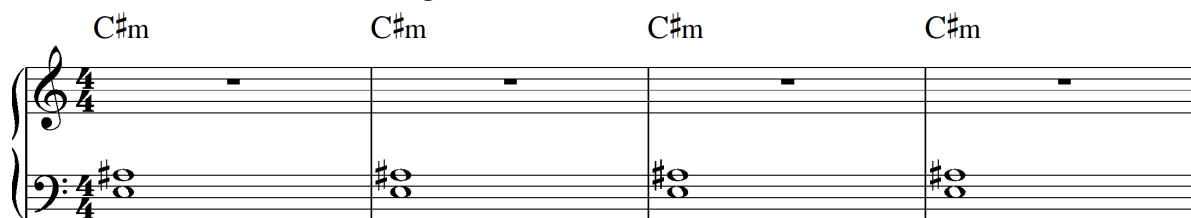
Cm Cm Cm Cm

5 Fm7 Fm7 Cm Cm

9 Ab7 G7 Cm Cm

**Blues in C# Minor, Rootless Voicings**

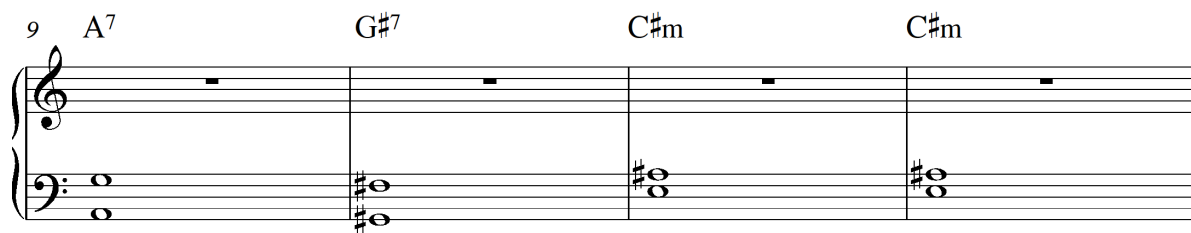
C#m C#m C#m C#m



5 F#m7 F#m7 C#m C#m



9 A7 G#7 C#m C#m





## Comping Rhythms

Following are some simple rhythms that you can use to comp behind a soloist. Practice them with your voicings.



## **Tunes**

**Mr. P.C. (John Coltrane)**

The musical score for "Mr. P.C. (John Coltrane)" is presented in three staves of piano accompaniment. The key signature is one flat (Bb) and the time signature is 4/4. The first staff begins with a Cm chord and contains four measures of music. The second staff begins with an Fm7 chord and contains four measures of music. The third staff begins with an Ab7 chord and contains four measures of music. The chords for each measure are as follows:

Staff	Measure 1	Measure 2	Measure 3	Measure 4
1	Cm	Cm	Cm	Cm
2	Fm7	Fm7	Cm	Cm
3	Ab7	G7	Cm	Cm

**Equinox (John Coltrane)**

The musical score for "Equinox" by John Coltrane is presented in 4/4 time. It consists of three staves of piano accompaniment. The first staff begins with a C#m chord and features a melodic line with eighth and quarter notes, including a half rest in the second measure. The second staff continues the melody, with F#m7 and C#m chords indicated below the notes. A triplet of eighth notes appears in the final measure of the second staff. The third staff concludes the piece with a final melodic phrase and a C#m chord. The key signature has one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4.

Chords indicated above the staff:

- C#m
- C#m
- C#m
- C#m

Chords indicated below the staff:

- F#m7
- F#m7
- C#m
- C#m
- A7
- G#7
- C#m
- C#m

## **Extra Credit**

### Tommy Flanagan (1930-2001)



Detroit-born Tommy Flanagan, a prominent bebop pianist, was known for his trio work and his sensitive accompaniment for vocalists like Ella Fitzgerald and Tony Bennett. Here we get a chance to scrutinize his elegant lines over John Coltrane's Mr. P.C. on *Giant Steps*. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jv5j\\_Lx2R4g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jv5j_Lx2R4g)

15

17

21

25

29

33

l.h.

3

3

3

## **Module Three: The Mixolydian Mode**

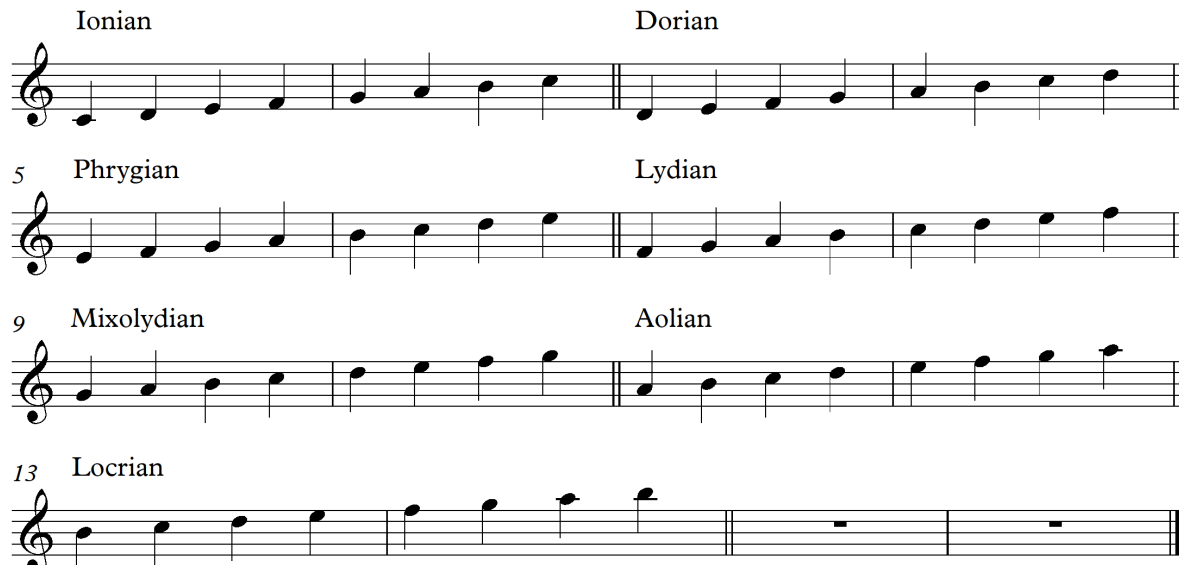
## Modes

As you probably know, there are seven modes built on the major scale:

- Ionian: 1st scale degree
- Dorian: 2nd scale degree
- Phrygian: 3rd scale degree
- Lydian: 4th scale degree
- Mixolydian: 5th scale degree
- Aeolian: 6th scale degree
- Locrian: 7th scale degree

For example, if you played a C major scale, the Ionian mode would be built on the C, the Dorian on the D, the Phrygian on the E, etc.

Here's what the modes look like:



The most commonly used modes in jazz are:

- Mixolydian - for dominant 7th and suspended chords
- Ionian - for major chords
- Dorian - for minor chords
- Lydian - for major chords with a sharp 11
- Phrygian - has a "Spanish" flavor

## The Mixolydian Mode

We're going to begin our study of modes with the Mixolydian mode. Like the blues and pentatonic scales, it's a great tool for playing over a blues. Both of the tunes we will learn this week, "All Blues" and "Bessie's Blues," feature Mixolydian-based heads.



It is a good idea to learn the Mixolydian mode in all keys, but especially the keys of our tunes this week: G and Eb.



## Voicings

In this module, we will play our shell voicings in two new keys: G and Eb. Since our G blues is in 6/8 time, we will practice that series of shell voicings in that time signature.

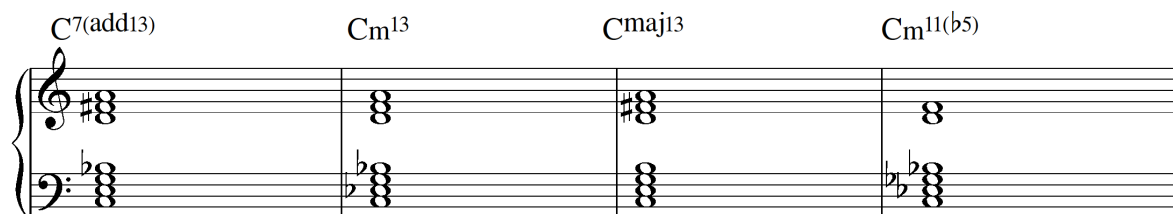
After we work on the shell voicings, we are going to practice our trusty two-note voicings, but this time we will add a third note to make them sound even more appealing. Our new three-note voicing incorporates a fancy *extension*.

## Extensions

Now is probably a good time to review upper extensions, or, those important notes which lie above the octave in which a basic chord is located. In many cases, the use of extensions (ninth, eleventh, and thirteenth) distinguishes jazz from other types of music.

In the introduction of this course, I mentioned that a prerequisite was the ability to count to 13. So, in order to find an extension, simply count the notes above the root of your chord.

Here's a brief demonstration of how extensions are used in common chord changes. As you count up the scale, you'll see the root, third, fifth, seventh, ninth, eleventh, and thirteenth.



The dominant 7th chord has the most possibilities for alterations. We can alter (flat or sharp) these extensions. (Our "All Blues" chart includes the #9 alteration in bars 11 and 12.)

Dominant 7th Extensions and Alterations

Extension	Alteration
9th	b9, #9
11th	#11
13th	b13

Major 7th chords often use a natural ninth and sharp eleventh, while minor chords use a natural ninth, eleventh, and thirteenth.

It should be noted that we do not have to play all of these notes all of the time. Just as we often leave out the root or fifth, we can play the thirteenth without playing, say, the ninth.

In some cases, our alterations might clash with our third and seventh. So, we wouldn't play a b13 at the same time as a natural fifth, or a #9 directly below a natural third.

If you don't already know all of this information, I don't expect you to memorize it right now. But it may be helpful to refer back to during the duration of this course, in case you are wondering why certain notes are used in the voicings.

Blues in G, Shell Voicings

Blues in G, Shell Voicings

System 1: G<sup>7</sup> G<sup>7</sup> G<sup>7</sup> G<sup>7</sup>

System 2: C<sup>7</sup> C<sup>7</sup> G<sup>7</sup> G<sup>7</sup>

System 3: D<sup>7</sup> E<sup>b</sup>7 D<sup>7</sup> G<sup>7</sup> G<sup>7</sup>

Blues in E<sup>b</sup>, Shell Voicings

Blues in E<sup>b</sup>, Shell Voicings

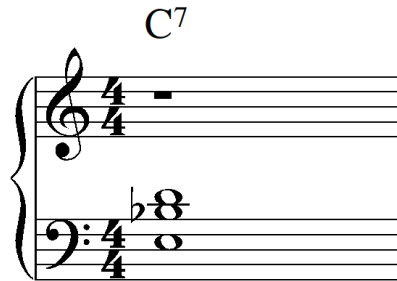
System 1: E<sup>b</sup>7 A<sup>b</sup>7 E<sup>b</sup>7 E<sup>b</sup>7

System 2: A<sup>b</sup>7 A<sup>b</sup>7 E<sup>b</sup>7 E<sup>b</sup>7

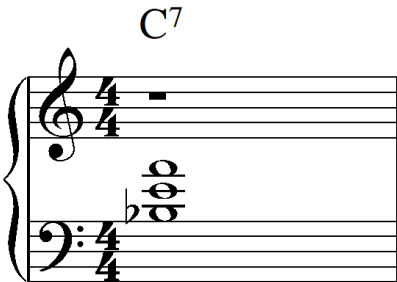
System 3: B<sup>b</sup>7 A<sup>b</sup>7 E<sup>b</sup>7 B<sup>b</sup>7

### Rootless Voicings, Three Notes

Let's take a look at our dominant 7th voicings again. Just like we did before, we will alternate between the third/seventh and seventh/third configurations. But this time, we'll add our third note. When our third is on the bottom of the chord, our ninth goes on top. For example:



But when our seventh is on the bottom of the chord, the extra note will be a thirteenth:



Now you can go back to your series of two-note voicings in every key, this time adding the third note. These voicings are very, very common in modern jazz piano.

**Blues in G, Rootless Voicings**

Blues in G, Rootless Voicings

Chord progression (Bass): G<sup>7</sup>, G<sup>7</sup>, G<sup>7</sup>, G<sup>7</sup>, C<sup>7</sup>, C<sup>7</sup>, G<sup>7</sup>, G<sup>7</sup>, D<sup>7</sup>, E<sup>b</sup>7, D<sup>7</sup>, G<sup>7</sup>, G<sup>7</sup>.

**Blues in E<sup>b</sup>, Rootless Voicings**

Blues in E<sup>b</sup>, Rootless Voicings

Chord progression (Bass): E<sup>b</sup>7, A<sup>b</sup>7, E<sup>b</sup>7, E<sup>b</sup>7, A<sup>b</sup>7, A<sup>b</sup>7, E<sup>b</sup>7, E<sup>b</sup>7, B<sup>b</sup>7, A<sup>b</sup>7, E<sup>b</sup>7, B<sup>b</sup>7.

## **The Swing Feel**

The study of jazz harmony as it relates to the piano seems almost endless. Nevertheless, it's important not to forget about rhythmic feel, although it's not something that can be taught like the notes of a scale. But jazz doesn't sound like jazz without a certain rhythmic feel.

The swing feel is almost impossible to notate. Some people try to do it with triplets, others use a dotted eighth note and sixteenth note, while others think of it as eighth notes with accented off-beats.

A swing feel, which gets its character from accents and note placement, is as personal as a fingerprint. Some musicians, like McCoy Tyner, tend to play on top of the beat; others, like Wynton Kelly, play behind the beat. Chick Corea plays rather evenly spaced notes without a lot of strong accents, while Herbie Hancock varies his accents and note placement.

The best way to develop a swing feel is to play along with albums. To start developing your feel, you might open up YouTube and play with the transcriptions in this course.

## **Tunes**

**All Blues (Miles Davis)**

The musical score for "All Blues" by Miles Davis is presented in three staves. The time signature is 6/8. The first staff contains four measures with chords G<sup>7</sup> above each. The second staff contains four measures with chords C<sup>7</sup>, C<sup>7</sup>, G<sup>7</sup>, and G<sup>7</sup> above each. The third staff contains four measures with chords D<sup>7</sup>, E<sup>b</sup>7, D<sup>7</sup>, and G<sup>7</sup> above each. The melody is written in treble clef, featuring various rhythmic patterns including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. The piece concludes with a double bar line at the end of the third staff.



**Bessie's Blues (John Coltrane)**

The musical score for "Bessie's Blues" by John Coltrane is presented in 4/4 time. It consists of three staves of piano accompaniment. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The melody is composed of eighth and quarter notes, with rests. Above the staff, the chords Eb7, Ab7, Eb7, and Eb7 are indicated. The second staff continues the melody, with chords Ab7, Ab7, Eb7, and Eb7 written above. The third staff concludes the piece with a double bar line, featuring chords Bb7, Ab7, Eb7, and Bb7 written above. The melody in the third staff includes a mix of eighth, quarter, and half notes, ending with a final cadence.

## **Extra Credit**

**(Alfred) McCoy Tyner (1938 - )**



Often imitated but never duplicated, Philadelphia-born pianist McCoy Tyner was a major figure in 1960's modal jazz. He is especially known for his work with John Coltrane.

Tyner makes ample use of pentatonics and voicings based on stacked fourths. He often repeats a phrase, shifting it to different areas of the keyboard. His touch is crisp and sparkling, and his solos are always exciting. Here is a bit of his solo on "Bessie's Blues" from John Coltrane's *Crescent* (1964).

Listen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XMC2bvHk0Bo>.



## **Module Four: The Dorian Mode**

## The Dorian Mode

The Dorian mode, which is based on the second mode of the major scale, can be used over minor, minor 6th, and minor 7th chords. So, together with our minor pentatonic scale, we now have two options when faced with minor chord changes.

Let's practice our Dorian scales in D and Eb, the keys in this week's tunes.

Dm<sup>7</sup>



5 Ebm<sup>7</sup>



## Voicings

In this module, we will focus on a new concept. After we play our shell voicings in the left hand, we will learn how to play three-note quartal voicings. These type of voicings are commonly employed by players like McCoy Tyner and Chick Corea... and just about any other modern jazz pianist. Quartal voicings are essentially stacked fourths that are built on modal scales.

Our tunes, "So What" and "Impressions," employ very simple chord changes - just Dmin7 and Ebmin7. So, let's learn our voicings in these keys.

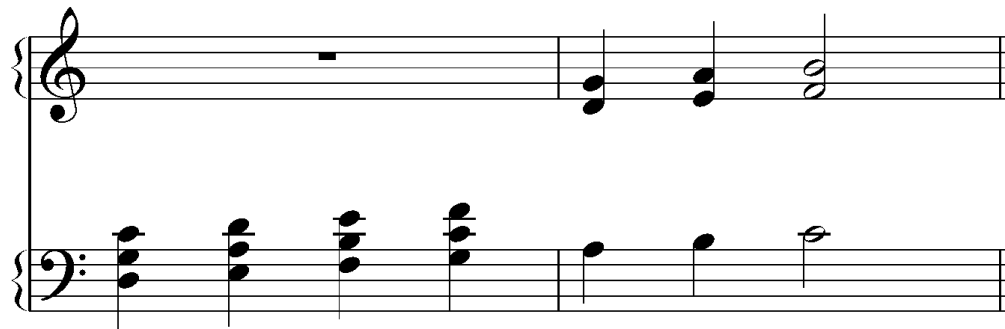
## Quartal Voicings

Quartal voicings are a great tool for playing modal jazz - the style popularized in the 1960's by Miles Davis and John Coltrane. In contrast to bebop tunes, which are often reharmonized standards, modal jazz tunes tend to use simple chord changes that stretch out over many bars. This lets the soloist "stretch out," since he doesn't have to think about "making the changes."

Here is our Dorian scale in bass clef:



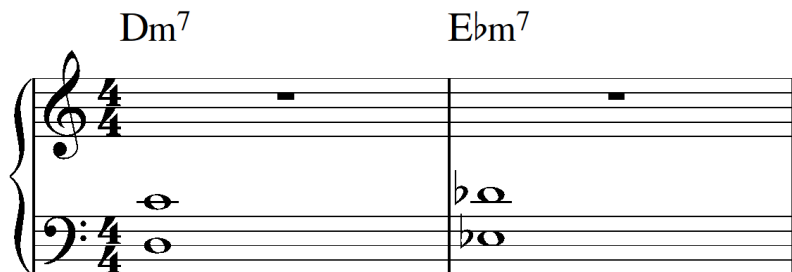
And here it is with two layers of stacked fourths (I've included the treble clef here so as not to use too many leger lines):



The great thing about these modal voicings is that they are interchangeable. Pick one or pick another; they all work over minor chord changes.

We are first going to practice these voicings in the left hand. Then, we will play them with our right hand while putting the root in our left hand. After we have mastered these voicings in both Dmin7 and Ebmin7, we will be able to comp for both ourselves and others over "So What" and "Impressions." (And, of course, just like with our other voicings, we should learn the quartal voicings in every key.)

### Dmin7 and Ebmin7 Shell Voicings



### Dmin7 and Ebmin7 Quartal Voicings, Each Hand

The image shows two systems of musical notation for piano. The first system is for Dmin7, showing a 4-measure exercise in the bass and treble staves. The second system is for Ebmin7, also showing a 4-measure exercise in the bass and treble staves. The notation uses quarter notes and chords to illustrate the quartal voicings for each chord.

### Soloing

The topic of soloing could cover many volumes. There are many factors in a great solo: melodic inventiveness, thematic structure, etc. But in this course, a great solo is not what we're after. We just want to solo, period.

Why aren't we after a great solo? Because many people feel intimidated when asked to sit down at the piano and improvise. What do we play? We have a mode or scale, but which of the notes should we use?

While it can take years to assimilate jazz vocabulary and develop a personal style, here are some simple tips for practicing the art of soloing:

- Know the Tune. This might seem like a no-brainer, but it's essential. If you truly know a tune, you don't have to worry about how many bars or which changes it has. And the head of a tune provides a great starting point for your solo. As Monk entreats, "PLAY THE MELODY!"
- Take Your Time. Soloing is like talking; you always want to breathe between phrases. (Horn players should have no problem with this!) You don't have to play all the time. Make a statement, breathe, and let the next statement come to mind. Play with intention!
- Write it Out. Is a tune giving you trouble? Write out a solo. Composition can be like slowed-down improvisation; you can practice both skills at once if you write out a solo.
- Don't Stress. It's not the end of the world if you don't play exactly what you meant to play.
- Borrow Ideas. Are you stumped for ideas? Listen to recordings of other pianists. If you like what they're playing, try to see if you can transcribe a phrase or two. Then, try these ideas out over different chord changes, keys, and tunes.
- Sing, Sing, Sing. Singing is a great way to train your ears. It also helps you play more melodically. Practice singing a solo without playing your instrument. Then, sing along with what you are playing.





## Tunes

# Impressions (John Coltrane)

The musical score for "Impressions" by John Coltrane is presented in a single-staff format. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The score consists of six lines of music, each containing a single melodic line. The first line begins with a D-7 chord and a repeat sign. The second line starts with a measure number of 5 and includes a first and second ending bracket. The third line begins with a measure number of 10 and an E-flat-7 chord. The fourth line starts with a measure number of 14. The fifth line begins with a measure number of 18 and a D-7 chord. The sixth line starts with a measure number of 22 and concludes with a double bar line. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, slurs, and repeat signs.

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## **Extra Credit**

### Wynton Kelly (1931-1971)



The Jamaican-born Wynton Kelly, who left us much too soon, has influenced legions of pianists with his lilting swing, melodic clarity, and triplet-filled lines. His joyful sound is immediately recognizable.

Kelly may be most well-known for his "Freddie Freeloader" solo on Miles Davis' *Kind of Blue*. Here he is on "So What" from a 2008 Sony Miles Davis compilation. Listen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqNTltOGh5c>.

The musical score is written for piano in 4/4 time. It consists of eight staves of music. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The score includes various musical notations such as eighth notes, quarter notes, half notes, and rests. It features several triplet markings (indicated by a '3' over a bracket) and a final double bar line at the end of the eighth staff.

## **Module Five: The Ionian Mode**

## The Ionian Mode

The Ionian mode is the major scale. It can be used over major, major 6th, and major 7th chords. However, since it has a natural fourth, it is not played over major 7 chords with sharp 11's; that job goes to the Lydian mode, which we will cover next term.

You should be able to play the Ionian mode with both hands in every key. We will work on two tunes that use this diatonic scale: "I Could Write A Book" and "My Romance." "I Could Write A Book" uses notes from the C Ionian mode with one exception (an F# instead of an F), while the melody of "My Romance" only uses notes from the Ionian mode.

## Voicings

In the interest of keeping things simple, I have modified the changes for this module's tunes. Right now, we're just working on dominant, minor, and major chords, so I have taken the liberty of omitting some of the other changes that are often played in these two tunes.

We are going to work on shell and rootless voicings, except we will add one new technique: we'll shift our rootless voicings to the right hand while playing the roots in the left hand. This will help us begin to develop solo piano comping skills. If we can play the right bass note and chord changes, we can accompany a horn player or vocalist (or our own voice, of course).

We began working on rootless three-note voicings in Module Three, but in this module we'll play two-note voicings. This will make the tunes easier to learn. After you've become comfortable with playing thirds and sevenths on tunes with faster harmonic motion, you can add in the ninths and thirteenths.

(A note about the shell voicings: since they are all root-seventh, you might find your left hand jumping around a lot. If you were performing these tunes, you would probably add in some rootless voicings. However, it's a great exercise to familiarize yourself with the roots and sevenths of each chord change.)

Since we're focusing on the Ionian mode this week, we'll be playing a lot of major chords. We are going to learn a common major 6/9 voicing that is based on fourths (a *quartal* voicing).



# I Could Write a Book, Shell Voicings

The musical score for "I Could Write a Book" is presented in 4/4 time. It consists of six systems, each with a treble and bass staff. Chord symbols are placed above the first staff of each system. The bass staff shows the shell voicings for each measure.

**System 1:** Cmaj7, Dm7, G7, Cmaj7, G7

**System 2:** Cmaj7, Cmaj7, Dm7, 1. G7

**System 3:** Cmaj7, Cmaj7, B7, Em7

**System 4:** Em7, A7, Dm7, G7

**System 5:** 2. Am7, Am7, C7, Fmaj7

**System 6:** Cmaj7, Am7, Dm7, G7, Cmaj7, G7

# My Romance, Shell Voicings

Chord progression for 'My Romance' (4/4 time):

Measures 1-4: Cmaj7, Cmaj7, Dm7, G7, Cmaj7

Measures 5-8: Am7, Am7, Dm7, G7, Cmaj7 (1st ending)

Measures 9-12: Fmaj7, Cmaj7, Fmaj7, Cmaj7

Measures 13-16: B7, Em7, Am7, D7, G7, Cmaj7 (2nd ending)

Measures 17-20: Fmaj7, Fmaj7, E7, Am7

Measures 21-24: Cmaj7, Dm7, G7, Cmaj7, Dm7, G7

# I Could Write a Book, Rootless Voicings (Left Hand)

The following table summarizes the chord progressions and voicings for each system in the score:

System	Measure 1	Measure 2	Measure 3	Measure 4
1	Cmaj7	Dm7	G7	Cmaj7
2	Cmaj7	Cmaj7	Dm7	G7 (1st ending)
3	Cmaj7	Cmaj7	B7	Em7
4	Em7	A7	Dm7	G7
5	Am7 (2nd ending)	Am7	C7	Fmaj7
6	Cmaj7	Dm7	G7	Cmaj7

Detailed description of the score: The score is written for the left hand in 4/4 time. It consists of six systems, each with a treble and bass staff. The bass staff contains the rootless voicings, while the treble staff is mostly empty. Chord symbols are placed above the measures. The first system shows Cmaj7, Dm7, G7, and Cmaj7. The second system shows Cmaj7, Cmaj7, Dm7, and G7 (1st ending). The third system shows Cmaj7, Cmaj7, B7, and Em7. The fourth system shows Em7, A7, Dm7, and G7. The fifth system shows Am7 (2nd ending), Am7, C7, and Fmaj7. The sixth system shows Cmaj7, Dm7, G7, and Cmaj7.

# My Romance, Rootless Voicings (Left Hand)

Chord progression for the left hand (Rootless Voicings):

- System 1: Cmaj7, Cmaj7, Dm7, G7, Cmaj7
- System 2: Am7, Am7, Dm7, G7, Cmaj7 (1.)
- System 3: Fmaj7, Cmaj7, Fmaj7, Cmaj7
- System 4: B7, Em7, Am7, D7, G7, Cmaj7 (2.)
- System 5: Fmaj7, Fmaj7, E7, Am7
- System 6: Cmaj7, Dm7, G7, Cmaj7, Dm7, G7

# I Could Write a Book, Rootless Voicings (Right Hand)

The musical score is written in 4/4 time and consists of six systems of two staves each. The right hand (treble clef) plays rootless voicings for various chords, while the left hand (bass clef) provides a simple bass line. The chords and their voicings are as follows:

- System 1:** Cmaj7, Dm7, G7, Cmaj7, G7. The bass line consists of whole notes: C, D, G, C, G.
- System 2:** Cmaj7, Cmaj7, Dm7, 1. G7. The bass line consists of whole notes: C, C, D, G.
- System 3:** Cmaj7, Cmaj7, B7, Em7. The bass line consists of whole notes: C, C, D, G. There is a fermata on the G in the bass line for the Em7 chord.
- System 4:** Em7, A7, Dm7, G7. The bass line consists of whole notes: C, D, G, C. There is a fermata on the C in the bass line for the Em7 chord.
- System 5:** 2. Am7, Am7, C7, Fmaj7. The bass line consists of whole notes: C, D, G, C.
- System 6:** Cmaj7, Dm7, G7, Cmaj7, G7. The bass line consists of whole notes: C, D, G, C, G.

# My Romance, Rootless Voicings (Right Hand)

Chord progression for 'My Romance, Rootless Voicings (Right Hand)':

System 1: Cmaj7 Cmaj7 Dm7 G7 Cmaj7

System 2: Am7 Am7 Dm7 G7 Cmaj7 (1.)

System 3: Fmaj7 Cmaj7 Fmaj7 Cmaj7

System 4: B7 Em7 Am7 D7 G7 Cmaj7 (2.)

System 5: Fmaj7 Fmaj7 E7 Am7

System 6: Cmaj7 Dm7 G7 Cmaj7 Dm7 G7

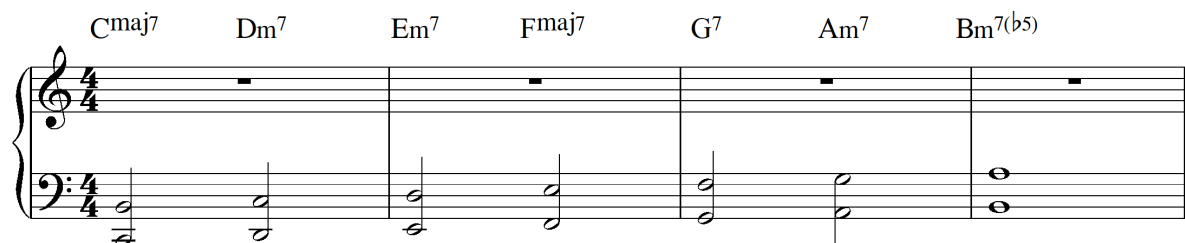
## Playing Over Changes

In this module, we will be playing more complicated tunes than in weeks past. We began our course with simple blues and modal tunes, over which we used only one scale for soloing.

But from now on, we will be learning tunes that include a variety of different chord changes. At first glance, these tunes might seem rather intimidating with their constantly changing chords. How do we figure out what to play?

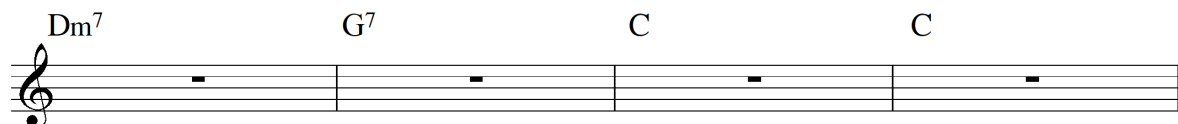
One thing we can do to simplify the improvisation process is to use as few scales as possible, even over multiple chords. Making a harmonic decision at every single chord change takes too much mental energy.

Here's where our modes come in especially handy. Below are all of the root-seventh shell voicings in C Ionian with their associated chord changes. The C Ionian scale works over all seven chords.



So, how can we use this information within the context of a tune?

Let's say that we have a song that ends with a II-V-I in C (three different chords):



Now, we could conceivably use a minor pentatonic scale over the Dm7, a blues scale over the G7, and the Ionian mode for the C chord.

But it would be much simpler to play one scale over the whole phrase. The C Ionian scale uses notes that each chord change has in common (*common tones*). (Of course, you can substitute Lydian, Mixolydian, or any other mode as long as you stay in the key of C. Just start on a different scale degree.)



The modal approach is a good starting point for learning to play over changes. As we progress through this course, we will learn about a variety of other concepts such as chromaticism and

polytonality. However, we will continue to work on the skill of mapping out groups of harmonically similar bars. In the meantime, here's a tip: remember that the head of a tune points us towards a harmonic strategy for soloing. It's safe to say that if a melody contains only the seven notes of the C Ionian scale, we can use those seven notes to solo over the entire tune. (And that's what we'll do for *I Could Write a Book* and *My Romance*.)



## **Tunes**

# I Could Write a Book (Rodgers/Hart)

Chord progression for "I Could Write a Book" (Rodgers/Hart) in 4/4 time:

First system: Cmaj7, Dm7, Cmaj7, G7

Second system: Cmaj7, Cmaj7, Dm7, G7

First ending (1.): Cmaj7, Cmaj7, B7, Em7

Second ending (2.): Am7, Am7, C7, Fmaj7

Third system: Cmaj7, Am7, Dm7, G7, Cmaj7, G7

**My Romance (Rodgers/Hart)**

The musical score for "My Romance" is presented in a single system with eight staves. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major/D minor) and the time signature is 4/4. The melody is written in the treble clef, and the piano accompaniment is written in the bass clef. The chords are indicated above the staff, and the melody is written in a simple, accessible style.

Chords: Cmaj7, Cmaj7, Dm7, G7, Cmaj7, Am7, Am7, Dm7, G7, Cmaj7, Fmaj7, Cmaj7, Fmaj7, Cmaj7, B7, Em7, Am7, D7, G7, Cmaj7, Cmaj7, Dm7, G7, Cmaj7, Am7, Am7, Dm7, G7, Cmaj7, Fmaj7, Fmaj7, E7, Am7, Cmaj7, Dm7, G7, Cmaj7, Dm7, G7.

## **Extra Credit**

## Keith Jarrett (1945 - )

Jarrett's singing tone, inspired improvisations, and lush chord voicings make him one of jazz's living legends. Although he is most famous for his trio with Gary



Peacock and Jack DeJohnette, he first cut his teeth with trumpet player Don Jacoby, saxophonist Charles Lloyd, and drummer Art Blakey.

A true virtuoso of the piano, Jarrett has released critically acclaimed recordings of Bach, Handel, Mozart, and several other classical composers.

[Here is Jarrett's solo](#) on "My Romance" from *Keith Jarrett at the Blue Note* (1994). I've chosen this solo because it is pretty simple and very melodic (it also uses the C Ionian scale a bunch). Listen to Jarrett's phrasing. Does it strike you as unique?

