

Jazz Preparation Pack Piano

This booklet has been designed to give you some advice as to the sort of things you might want to spend some time looking at between now and the onset of your course. The idea is to make sure that we 'hit the ground running' in September, by giving you a bit of notice as to the sort of topic areas that may be covered.

It's important to clarify that you will be assigned to a 1-to-1 tutor upon enrolment, and the content of the lessons you receive will be determined by them once they have met you and got a sense of what you would benefit from the most. Naturally, your own interests and aspirations will come into it as well – we don't deliver 'one size fits all' lessons.

Having said that, though, there are certain fundamentals that every Jazz musician needs to deal with in one way or other, and the purpose of this booklet is to give you a bit of a head start in these areas. The idea of this pack is to give you some resources to use and practise so that you have some fundamental concepts and ideas in place for when you begin the course here at Leeds Conservatoire in September.

The idea is to work through these ideas slowly making sure you have internalised the material presented and that you are able to play/demonstrate these when needed. No-one expects you to have fully mastered all of this before you start, but any progress you can make towards that.

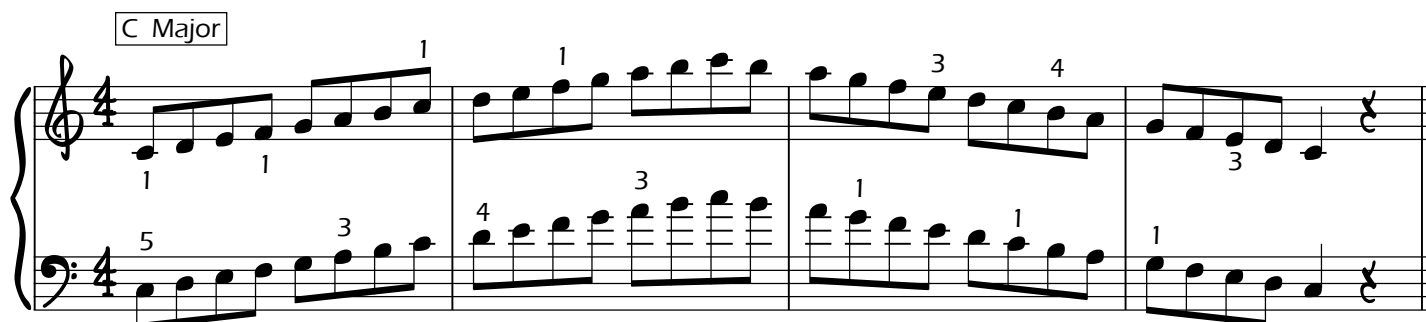
Major Scales

Should be learned in all 12 keys both hands separately and together. Two octaves up and down at a moderate tempo is fine. Strive for an even tone and a legato articulation. Pay special attention to the thumb going under the hand (RH ascending, LH descending) ensuring that it is 'active' and not merely a passive extension of the wrist. Consistent correct fingering will help train good fingering habits and speed up memorisation.

Why is this important?

Knowing all 12 major scales and by extension, the 12 keys is foundational in the journey to master jazz theory and practice. By being comfortable in all keys, we can more easily understand and use the harmonies that naturally arise from the tonal system.

Scales or more often, parts of scales, also constitute one of the most elemental components of jazz 'language'.



Sixth Chords

As pianists, we need to be able to play chords both to accompany other soloists and to support our own melodies. Chords are indicated in jazz by the use of chord symbols. This shorthand tells us a lot about the notes in a chord, but not which order to stack them. The specific arrangement of the notes is called a voicing. There are a great number of possible voicings for any given chord, but the voicings it would be most useful to master first are major and minor sixths.

What is meant by a major sixth chord?

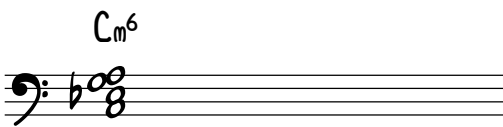
Put simply, it is a major triad with sixth added.



This major sixth voicing, can be used in any inversion:



We also need a minor sixth voicing. Same as a major sixth, but with a minor 3rd.

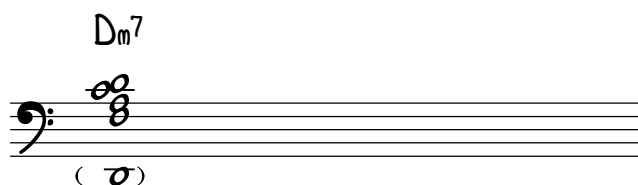
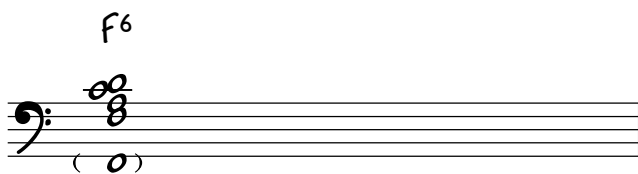


Again, in any inversion:

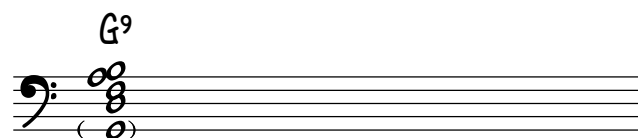
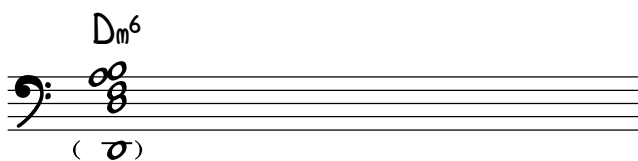


So far so good. But what can we do with these two voicings? Well, it so happens that we can re-purpose these shapes to voice lots of other chord types, by placing them over different roots.

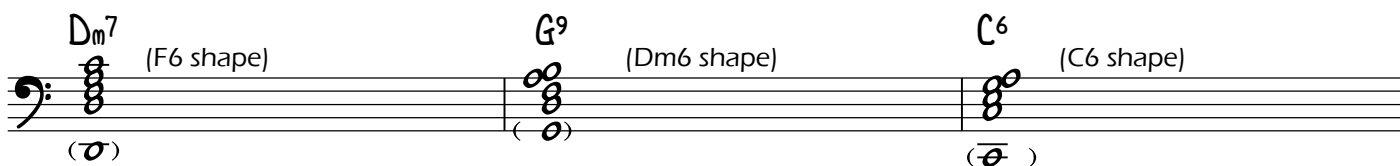
Thus, if we use an F6 voicing over a D root, we get a Dm7 voicing. It's literally the same notes:



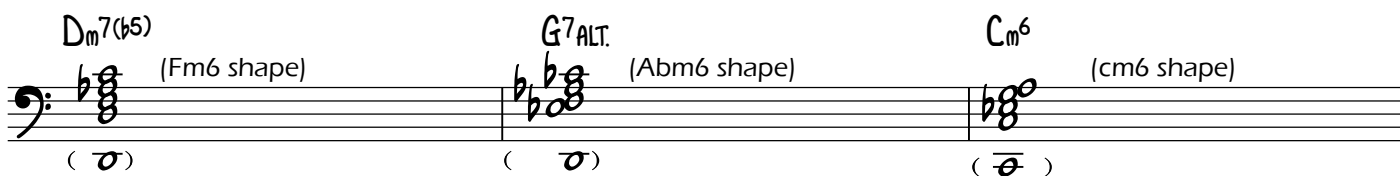
Similarly, if we place a dm6 voicing over a G, for example, we now have a nice (rootless) G9 voicing:



By using the major and minor sixth voicings in these ways, we can construct a 2-5-1 just from 6th voicings.



We can use the Minor sixth voicing with different roots to construct a Minor 2-5-1:



Why is this Important?

Without worrying too much about the details of using these voicings, a familiarity with the basic major and minor sixth shapes will be a foundation of a much larger set of useful voicings.

Dominant Scales

So far we've only looked at Major scales. There is another scale that will be useful to start working on: the Dominant scale, (or Mixolydian).

Simply put, it's the same as a major scale except that the seventh note is flatted (the interval with the root becomes a minor seventh interval as opposed to a major seventh interval in a major scale).



Another way to think of this scale is as all the notes from the key of C major, but starting from the fifth note - G. Sometimes this is described as the fifth 'mode' of C major.

It's also the scale that best represents the chord G7 - a dominant chord.

What use are dominant scales ?

Classical musicians learn scales to help with fingering, sight reading and technique, but from a jazz perspective a scale is much more; It indicates the collection of notes from which we can draw upon when soloing over a given harmony.

We can safely use the notes comprising a G dominant scale over a G7 (or G9, G13) chord, to create a melodic improvisation. As we become more skilled at the use of the scale, we may want to favour some notes over others (typically the chord tones - root, third, fifth), or introduce some chromatic notes not from the scale, but at it's core, the relationship between the scale and the chord will shape melodic choices.

Rather than scattergunning the notes from the scale, jazz musicians organise the material (the notes of the scale in this case) into melodic fragments that can be more easily joined together to create a longer improvisation. These fragments are referred to as 'Language'.

Learning Jazz Language

The most efficient way to develop improvisational skill is to amass a vocabulary of jazz language.

Just as we may write an original story, containing complex plots and themes and emotional qualities, so we may improvise a solo with all the complexity or simplicity of a great narrative. The author writes a story by using words we all know already, and rarely if ever invents new words. Similarly we may improvise using simple patterns and short melodic ideas that have no claim in themselves at being 'original' or 'novel' and yet still have total freedom to express our 'story'.

These melodic 'atoms' are what is called language.

Here are a few examples derived from the dominant scale:

Up the scale in diatonic thirds



Up the scale using diatonic seventh chords



Simple four note pattern taken up the scale



Triads preceded by semitone below, taken up the scale



The best way to use these patterns is in small 'doses', joining up a couple of beats worth to make interesting lines.

We've looked at the dominant scale in particular, because we can use it over both the V7 chord *and* the ii chord in jazz's most common progression: the ii - V7 - I. So for example:



Play the lick and have a look to see how it was made up of some of the example patterns.

Putting it into practice

We study voicings and scales and bits of language with the goal of being comfortable playing the jazz repertoire that we love. Bringing new sounds and ideas into our playing and ultimately expressing ourselves through the medium of jazz.

Here's a short list of tunes to look at, and try out these concepts on.

Autumn Leaves
Take the A Train
All the Things You Are
Sweet Georgia Brown
All of Me
On Green Dolphin Street

Some listening suggestions

Listening to the masters throughout the long and varied history of jazz is not only a joy for its own sake, but informs us both consciously and unconsciously of so much, in ways that reading or studying in isolation cannot do. We learn about feel, taste, conventions, group dynamics, and a million other things.

Here's a few to get going with:

1. Miles Davis – Kind of Blue (1959)
2. John Coltrane – Blue Trane (1958)
3. Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers – Moanin' (1959)
4. Herbie Hancock – Maiden Voyage (1965)
5. Horace Silver – Song for My Father (1965)
6. Hank Mobley – Soul Station (1960)
7. Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong – Ella and Louis (1956)
8. Clifford Brown & Max Roach – Clifford Brown & Max Roach (1954)
9. Charlie Parker – Charlie Parker (Compilation)
10. Jazz At Massey Hall - The Quintet
11. The Best of the Hot 5 & Hot 7 Recordings - Louis Armstrong (20's)
12. Oscar Peterson Trio - Night Train (1963)
13. Bill Evans Trio – You Must Believe In Spring (1981)
14. Keith Jarrett Trio -Standards Live (1985)
15. Carla Bley Live! (1985)

“The artist has to find something within himself that's universal and which he can put into terms that are communicable to other people.” Bill Evans

