

L. “DROP 2” VOICINGS

Bebop, hard bop, contemporary jazz.

Bill Evans, Barry Harris, Oscar Peterson, Kenny Barron.

AN ARRANGING technique used when voicing for four horns. The basic approach is to take the third and sixth voicings (aka four-way close) and “drop” the second from top tone down an octave. But you can actually apply the drop 2 method to any of the four-note voicings we’ve looked at, in any inversion. Some examples:

Dm7 Dm7 F7+11 Eb6
thirds rootless mel min grip 6th voicing

Musical notation showing four examples of Drop 2 voicings for Dm7, Dm7 (rootless), F7+11, and Eb6. The notation is presented in two staves: a treble clef staff for the right hand and a bass clef staff for the left hand. The first example (Dm7 thirds) shows a four-note chord in the right hand with the second note dropped an octave. The second example (Dm7 rootless) shows a four-note chord in the right hand with the root note omitted. The third example (F7+11 mel min grip) shows a four-note chord in the right hand with the second note dropped an octave. The fourth example (Eb6 6th voicing) shows a four-note chord in the right hand with the second note dropped an octave. The bass clef staff shows the root notes for each chord: D, F, A, and Eb.

It’s most common to take the top three tones in the right hand and the dropped tone in the left. This makes it easier to add emphasis to the “dropped” voice by playing it louder or by rolling chromatically up or down to it. You could also play three notes in the LH, one with the RH thumb and add a melody note on top. (Oh, and if you think about it for a bit, you could also regard “drop 2” as “raise 3”, just of a different inversion of the chord.)

Drop 2 is a great way of taking the “girl tied to railway tracks” melodrama out of 7^b9 voicings:

G7 adjusted to G7^b9 ... Drop 2 (all inversions)

Musical notation showing five examples of Drop 2 voicings for G7 adjusted to G7^b9. The notation is presented in two staves: a treble clef staff for the right hand and a bass clef staff for the left hand. The first example shows a four-note chord in the right hand with the second note dropped an octave. The second example shows a four-note chord in the right hand with the second note dropped an octave. The third example shows a four-note chord in the right hand with the second note dropped an octave. The fourth example shows a four-note chord in the right hand with the second note dropped an octave. The fifth example shows a four-note chord in the right hand with the second note dropped an octave. The bass clef staff shows the root notes for each chord: G, G, G, G, and G.

BLOCK CHORDS II

DROP 2

JUST AS we interwove close position 7^b9 and 6th chords for the basic “four-way close” block chord style, we can do the same with drop 2 voicings for a richer, more spread block chord style as used by Barry Harris and many others. The following block chords are the same as four-way close, but with the second voice dropped an octave:

C6 (drop 2)

Musical notation for C6 (drop 2) chord progression. The notation is in G-clef (treble clef) and F-clef (bass clef). The right hand (treble clef) contains a sequence of seven chords: C6, F7(b9), G7(b9), F7(b9), E7(b9), D7(b9), and C6. The left hand (bass clef) contains a sequence of seven notes: C, F, G, F, E, D, and C. The notes in the left hand are all quarter notes.

Cm6 (drop 2)

Musical notation for Cm6 (drop 2) chord progression. The notation is in G-clef (treble clef) and F-clef (bass clef). The right hand (treble clef) contains a sequence of seven chords: Cm6, F7(b9), G7(b9), F7(b9), E7(b9), D7(b9), and Cm6. The left hand (bass clef) contains a sequence of seven notes: C, F, G, F, E, D, and C. The notes in the left hand are all quarter notes.

Cm7 (drop 2)

Musical notation for Cm7 (drop 2) chord progression. The notation is in G-clef (treble clef) and F-clef (bass clef). The right hand (treble clef) contains a sequence of seven chords: Cm7, F7(b9), G7(b9), F7(b9), E7(b9), D7(b9), and Cm7. The left hand (bass clef) contains a sequence of seven notes: C, F, G, F, E, D, and C. The notes in the left hand are all quarter notes.

C7 (drop 2)



These lines can be quite confusing to read and internalise. The best way to learn them is to pick a tune where part of the melody moves by scale tones (good examples are *Solar*, *Lullabye of Birdland*, *There Will Never Be Another You*, *Mr PC* – don't worry about the tempo, we're not going to play them up to speed). Practise the scalar part of the tune first in four-way close in the RH only, then in drop 2, leaving the dropped tone out of the RH and playing it down the octave in the LH instead.

Don't get hung up on trying to voice entire tunes in block chords. Too much of this chordal sound is too rich – harmonically too dense – especially when the chord changes are moving at a fast rate. Just look for snippets of tunes where the changes are simple enough to accommodate block chords for a bar or two.

Once you've internalised a few of these lines, try dropping them into solos – as little quotes to begin with, then varying the rhythm. Some pianists have developed block chord soloing to an Olympian standard, but you don't have to lock yourself away for ten years of obsessive practice to be able to use this sound.

An example of Miles Davis's *Solar* voiced in block chords is given in Chapter Four.

S. SLASH CHORDS & POLYCHORDS

Contemporary, funk, fusion, ECM.

Herbie Hancock, Joe Zawinul, Chick Corea.

SLASH CHORDS are nothing more or less than a triad over an unobvious bass note, any inversions, root close-voiced or low. The gesture is borrowed from rock and pop music.

Pop music is essentially triadic in character and this is reflected in the way it is notated. Pop charts are often composed entirely of triads (with the occasional dominant 7th) and simple diatonic slash chords. The slash chords typically indicate a 3rd or 5th in the bass (eg C/E or C/G), a sus chord (eg F/G for G7sus) or are used just to indicate stepwise motion in the bass line between chords. They are also used to indicate more complex harmony in a simplified triadic manner – Fm/D, for instance, instead of D \emptyset , or A/F# for F#m7. This clean-cut triadic sound may seem tame to jazz ears, but don't dismiss it out of hand – it has its uses.

There are lots of possibilities for using more adventurous slash chords in a jazz context, but arguably the two most useful are:

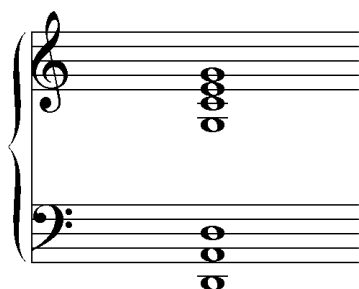
E/C B \flat /C



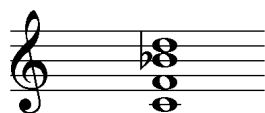
giving C Δ +5 C7sus (9)

It's common to play triad expansions and, particularly on the sus voicing, to reinforce the bass root with an octave, 5th, 9th or 10th – as in the sus voicing Herbie Hancock used on *Maiden Voyage* (from the album of the same name):

D7sus (C/D)



These sus slash chords, when close-voiced, also work as minor 11th chords on the related II – in the case of B \flat /C, Gm11:



You can also use fuller chords over a bass note, or chords on top of other chords (known as polychords). Some common examples:

- B/F = F7 \flat 9 (and A \flat 7 \flat 9, B7 \flat 9, D7 \flat 9) plus the diminished lot)
Gm7/C = C7sus (a good way of thinking of sus chords is as a II-V in one chord – C7sus F Δ is a substitute for Gm7 C7 F Δ)
B \flat Δ /C = C7sus13
G \emptyset /C = C7sus \flat 9 (this is one convenient way to think of sus \flat 9 chords – C7sus \flat 9 is a G \emptyset C7 \flat 9 progression in one chord)
D = C Δ +4, D7sus and all the other chords from G major and G melodic minor (NB a triad over a triad)
A \flat m = F7 \flat 9 (and A \flat 7 \flat 9, B7 \flat 9, D7 \flat 9) (NB a triad over a chord)
D7

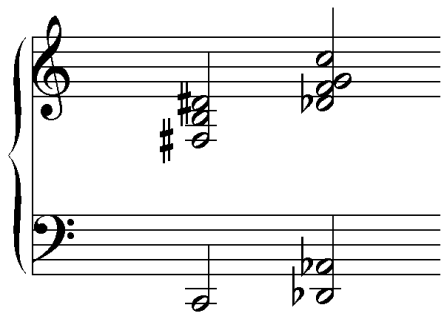
These voicings are often written into parts either to specify a specific voicing or as a quick aid to reading. Note also the common convention of written slash chords with an oblique slash and polychords with a horizontal one.

There are some very weird and wonderful possibilities available (and some just plain weird ones), particularly with polychords. Even when the resulting voicing doesn't make any sense when analysed as a traditional chord type, the coexistence of the triads tends to give these voicing a high degree of polytonal coherence which makes them appealing, particularly if you move them around in parallel.

Slash chords moving in parallel can make for a particularly exciting modern sounding way of arranging and playing. Chick Corea and the late lamented Michael Brecker have explored this compositional approach a lot. Check out the intro to Brecker's *Not Ethiopia* and the pickup to The Crusaders' *Street Life* for innovative uses of slash chord motion. ECM-style tunes also make frequent use of slash and polychords.

Here are a couple of examples often used as reharmonisations for a I chord (most commonly, but not exclusively, at the end of a tune). Instead of $C\Delta$, we could play:

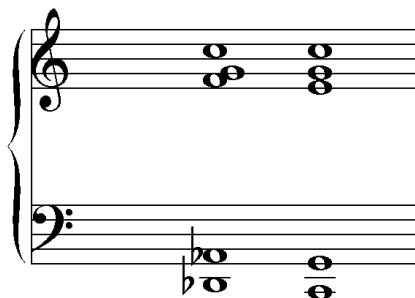
B/C E_b7^{13}
 D_b



You might think of describing the first one as a sort of diminished Lydian (hey, might be easier just to think of it as a slash chord – there's a reason they call it shorthand – it's easier to write and read). The second one spells out $D_b\Delta+4$, which has enough tones in common with $C\Delta$ to make it a viable substitute. Note that we've thickened the LH with R 5. Oh, and we can play E/C as a reharmonisation of I as well.

Miles Davis used the B/C type slash chord a lot, as a final I in the *Workin'/Steamin'/Relaxin'* Quintet and more extensively on *In A Silent Way*. The D_b voicing is often left as is, but it can be smoothly resolved to C by dropping the lower notes by a semitone:

$D_b\Delta+4$ $C\Delta$

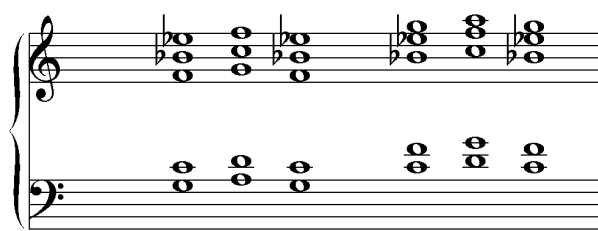


Diatonic approach

The whole voicing is shifted up or down, and adapted where necessary to stay within the chord-scale. We've seen this sort of thing before with the fourth voicings and So What voicings used in rides:

E \flat Δ +4

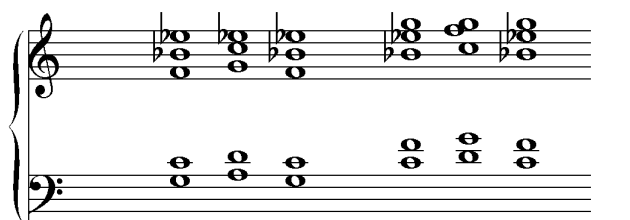
Fourths *So What*



In both examples we've used the Lydian chord-scale to get round the avoid note (A \flat , the natural 4th) – you can turn a Δ chord into a Δ +4 whenever you like, since the soloist is usually only ever going to play the natural 4th as a passing note. A subtler, smoother sound can be achieved with this kind of approach by leaving the top note unaltered:

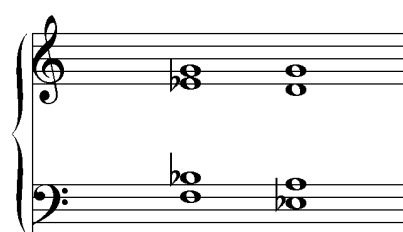
E \flat Δ +4

Fourths (adjusted) *So What (adjusted)*



Sometimes this technique involves using different voicing types of different chords:

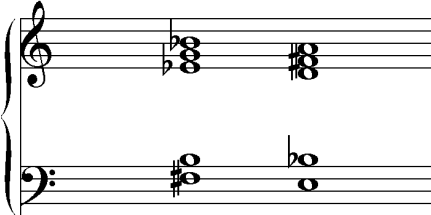
Cm7 F7
Fsus *Fourths*



Parallel approach

The whole voicing is shifted exactly as is, without worrying about whether the shifted voicing stays within the chord-scale. You can move up or down by semitone or tone:

semitone approach to... E \emptyset C7 US II



The image shows a piano voicing exercise on a grand staff. The right hand (treble clef) has two chords: the first is E \emptyset (E4, G4, B4) and the second is C7 US II (C4, E4, G4, Bb4). The left hand (bass clef) has two chords: the first is C7 US II (C3, E3, G3, Bb3) and the second is E \emptyset (E3, G3, B3). This illustrates a parallel approach where the entire voicing is shifted up by a semitone.

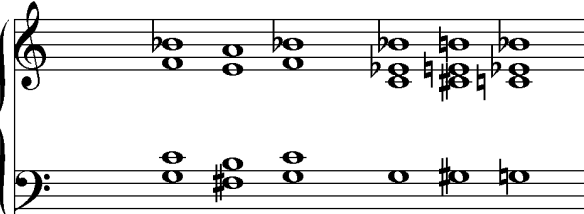
This particular example is often used in places such as the first chord of *Stella*, where it gives you something good to play over the pickup note to the melody. But don't forget it can be used over all the chords from the parent G melodic minor.

Where approaches involving non-chord tones are concerned, it's best not to linger too long on the approaching voicing or you can create some fearful harmonic clashes against what the rest of the band is doing. Treat parallel approaches the same way you'd treat passing tones in a solo line – ie, don't place them on strong beats or hold them against the underlying harmony.

A good way to begin getting into approaches is to wait for a bit of space in the melody or solo and sashay your voicing up-and-down or down-and-up:

E \flat Δ

Fourths *Drop 2*



The image shows a piano voicing exercise on a grand staff for the Eb Δ chord. The right hand (treble clef) shows two voicings: 'Fourths' (Eb4, G4, Bb4) and 'Drop 2' (Eb4, G4, Bb4). The left hand (bass clef) shows two voicings: 'Fourths' (Eb3, G3, Bb3) and 'Drop 2' (Eb3, G3, Bb3). This illustrates parallel approaches where the entire voicing is shifted up and down.

Which is a good way to add interest to situations such as the A section of *Green Dolphin Street* – in fact, this tune is a great testing ground for learning approaches, since the version Miles Davis popularised uses four Δ chords moving completely in parallel. Parallel approaches work best when the written chords sit and breathe for a whole bar or more.

Dominant approach

This is an extension of block-chord logic where non-chord tones are voiced as dominants. Play a voicing for the V of the chord you're approaching (not the key the tune is in) to move a tone or semitone up or down. Of course, once you've added a dominant, you can alter it any number of different ways. For instance:

C7alt	FΔ	C7	FΔ
<i>US</i>	<i>bIIIIm</i>	<i>Drop 2</i>	
		<i>13th</i>	<i>3rds</i>

The musical notation shows four chords in a sequence: C7alt, FΔ, C7, and FΔ. The first two chords are in the key of C major, and the last two are in the key of F major. The voicings are as follows: C7alt (US) has a top line of G4, Bb4, D5, F5 and a bottom line of C3, Eb3, G3; FΔ (bIIIIm) has a top line of Ab4, C5, Eb5, F5 and a bottom line of F3, Ab3, C4; C7 (13th) has a top line of G4, Bb4, D5, F5 and a bottom line of C3, Eb3, G3; FΔ (3rds) has a top line of Ab4, C5, Eb5, F5 and a bottom line of F3, Ab3, C4.

Again, there are plenty of possibilities for keeping the top tone the same, using different voicing types. For instance:

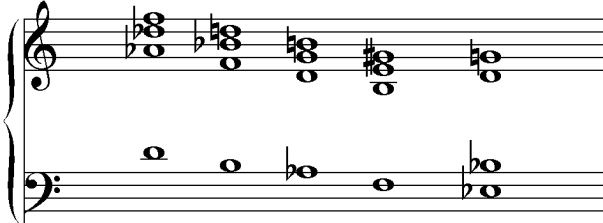
G7b9	CΔ
<i>US</i>	<i>VI</i>
	<i>So What</i>

The musical notation shows two chords in a sequence: G7b9 and CΔ. The first chord is in the key of C major, and the second is in the key of F major. The voicings are as follows: G7b9 (US) has a top line of Bb4, D5, F5, Ab5 and a bottom line of C3, Eb3, G3; CΔ (VI) has a top line of Ab4, C5, Eb5, F5 and a bottom line of F3, Ab3, C4.

Minor third approach

Minor 3rd approach is just one version of parallel approach. We've noted that when voicings are from a diminished scale they can move up or down by minor thirds. So when you see a V-I in a chord chart, you can treat the V as 7^b9 and play this sort of thing:

B^b7^b9 E^bΔ
7^b9 Slash Chords Axis
D^b/D B^b/B G/A^b E/F



You don't have to use all four 7^b9 slash chords (but it's as well to practise them all together like this), and you can also use them ascending. Oh, and by varying which 7^b9 slash chord you end on, you'll find you can resolve smoothly to any chord tone on the Δ chord that follows.

Actually, you could play the same thing when the written progression is Fm7 B^b7 E^bΔ – it's not uncommon for pianists to just ignore the II chord in these contexts. But you'd rarely do this under a soloist, and only under the melody when you're sure it's not going to clash. If you're soloing or you have the fill during a turnaround, it's okay.

You can also move up by a minor 3rd when playing over a minor II-V. For instance, E[∅] is from G melodic minor and A7alt is from B^b melodic minor – a minor 3rd higher. So anything you play over the E[∅] will also work, a minor 3rd up, over the A7alt. The first two chords of *Stella* could be played as follows:

E[∅] A7alt
C7 US II ...up a minor 3rd

