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PLAYING PIANO WITH CHORDS

TUNES, CHORDS AND TECHNIQUES IN ALL STYLES

BY JOACHIM PEERENBOOM



PLAYING PIANO WITH CHORDS

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Introduction

Thank you for purchasing *Playing Piano with Chords*. This book will equip you with a great variety of essential tools and techniques to do just that. You will learn how to jump-start a number of different playing styles, whilst also igniting your own creativity.

Although this is a book about playing the piano, I want to tell you a story about how I learned to play the guitar when I was fifteen years old. After buying my first guitar, I started out learning the most basic chords with chord charts that I had found in a song book and was able to play my first simple song accompaniments after a week or so. After a few weeks I started playing in a band with my brother and two friends. We were not good, but we had lots of fun and it was a start! Another friend of mine at school, who was and is to this day a phenomenal guitarist, gave me guitar lessons once a week. He showed me more ways to voice chords, play my favorite songs by ear, play and solo over the blues and build my own rock solos. I could apply what I was learning every week right away to create my own songs. Me and my friends had a great time exploring music, our instruments, playing concerts and meeting lots of people.

It has always struck me how different piano practice looks for many people, even today. Although I like and value classical music, it has never had the same meaning, practicality and potential for joy for me as rock, pop, blues,

funk or jazz does. Of course, the value of a good musical education, classical or otherwise cannot be overestimated. It teaches you not only musical skills, but also nurtures your intellect, helps you to learn in a structured way and can create lasting relationships when making music with others. But I know many people, who stopped their piano practice along the way, because they could not relate to merely playing classical pieces from sheet music, without ever pursuing their own ideas and musical tastes on the piano.

I always wanted to apply the same experience and fun I had when learning the guitar to playing the piano, and to be able to share these lessons with others. This book is the result. Just as a basic guitar course would, it focuses mostly on chords. Chords are the magical building blocks for most musical styles. A lot of classical music is comprised of chords as well, and once you know where to look you will get a new understanding for these characteristics.

Using chords as building blocks, the book guides you through different styles of music. In addition to the most common chords, you will learn unique tips and tricks, as well as special chord types and chord voicings that are more suitable for specific styles. You will understand the distinct sound of different types of music and how you can create it using chords in context.

The book is divided into two parts. Starting with chord basics, you will journey through blues, pop, rock, classical music, funk, jazz and neo soul in **part one**. In each chapter you will learn new ways to apply and voice chords to turn them into music. Many of the examples are built around the same chords to teach you a great variety of applying and playing those chords in different ways.

Not only will you learn how to play the examples in each chapter, but you will also get valuable tips and formulas to create your own chord progressions and songs in all the styles. By applying the techniques you learned to your own music and playing, you will be able to greatly expand your musical vocabulary, understanding and abilities.

Part two of the book teaches you the fundamentals of soloing and creating melody lines in different styles of music, so that you can start creating your own music and solos. A great emphasis is put on blues improvisation as it enables you to improvise over rock, pop, funk or soul as well. Additional techniques will get you started with your own jazz improvisation.

If you have trouble reading sheet music or have no clue at all about how music is notated, check out the **extra content** where you will find the most important elements explained. However, this book is written in a way that allows you to grasp many ideas without being able to read sheet music, just by using the numerous chord charts in each chapter.

How to use this book

There are different ways to use this book. The obvious one is to work through it in a linear fashion, from start to end. This is a good way, because most chapters build upon the previous ones with the difficulty level steadily rising. However, you can also skip or jump as you like and get started with your preferred style of music right away. If you are not sure about musical concepts you find, you can always skip through the previous chapters to get the idea. Sometimes you also might jump ahead if a tune is too difficult or not to your liking, and come back to it later.

No matter where you start, I would recommend that you start reading part two of the book as soon as possible so that you can improve your melodic and improvisation skills while working on part one.

The book comes with audio tracks for the musical examples which are indicated by the numbers above the sheet music. In addition to that, videos for each chapter feature the same examples with a virtual keyboard and the sheet music, to ease up the learning process even more. Slow down the sections you are working on in your media player to figure out how to play them correctly.

Once you have learned to play certain examples or songs in the book, you can start to use the play-along tracks. Start with the slower versions and practice until you can play at normal speed. The play-alongs in normal

speed are specifically longer than the song arrangements, so that you can take your time to repeat sections or improvise. You can also use them to play your own ideas and chord progressions!

You're about to take your piano skills to the next level and explore the possibilities of this marvelous instrument using your own creative genius. Let the journey begin!

PART I

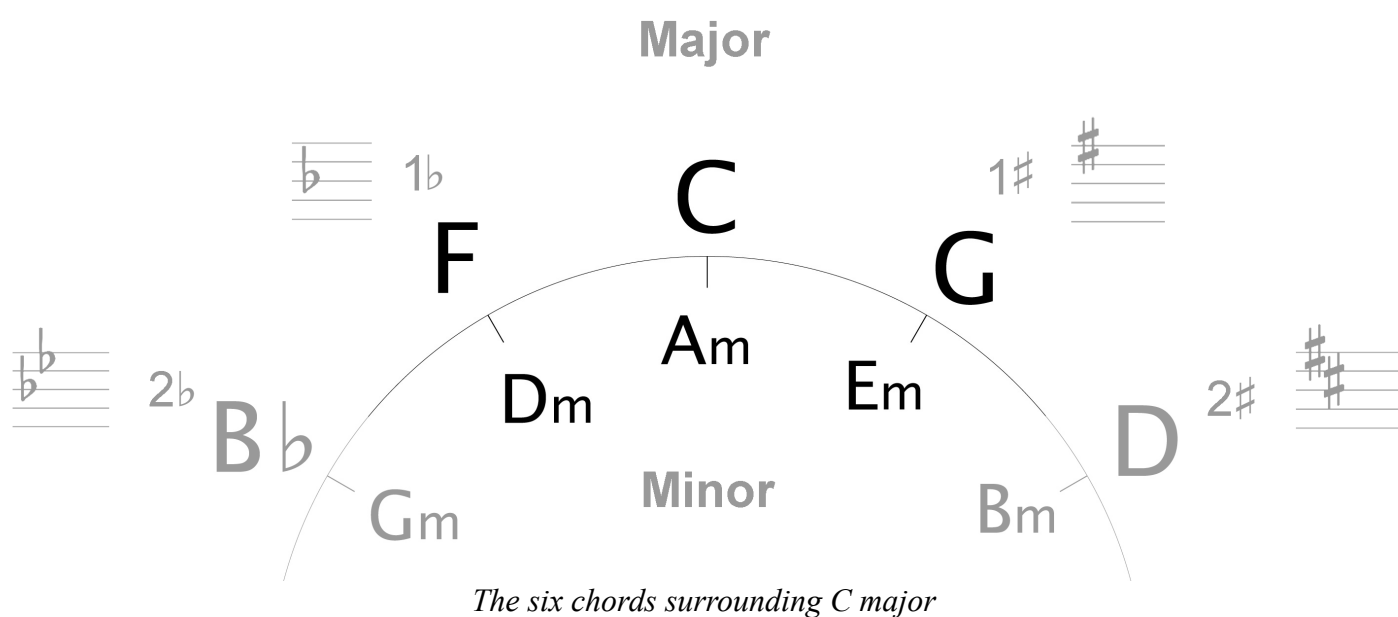
CHORDS
AS
BUILDING BLOCKS

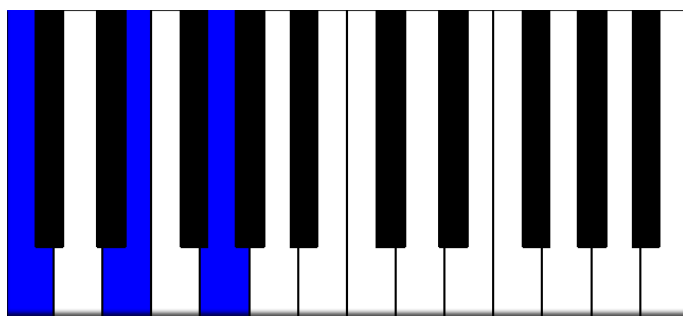
Pop and Rock

Most songs in **pop and rock** music consist of rather simple chord progressions which mainly use major and minor chords. As noted above, just learning these two types of chords (or learning all 12 major chords and knowing that you have to lower the third one half step to get to the minor chord) will enable you to play many rock and pop songs. But by using the Circle of Fifths you can take it even one step further and create your own chord progressions and songs. Here is the very simple formula:

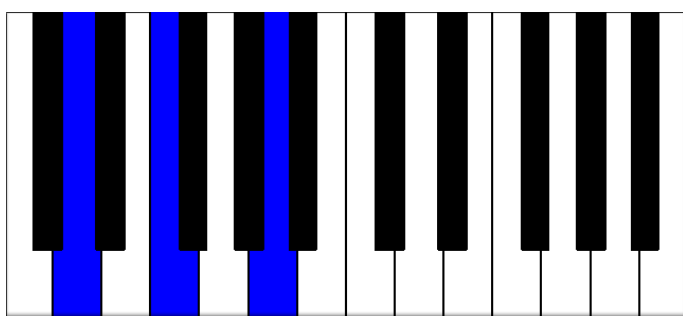
Just take the segment of six chords around any chord in the chart and use them to create your song.

So let's say you decide to use C major as your root. You then create a segment of six chords surrounding C major consisting of F major, C major, G major, D minor, A minor and E minor.

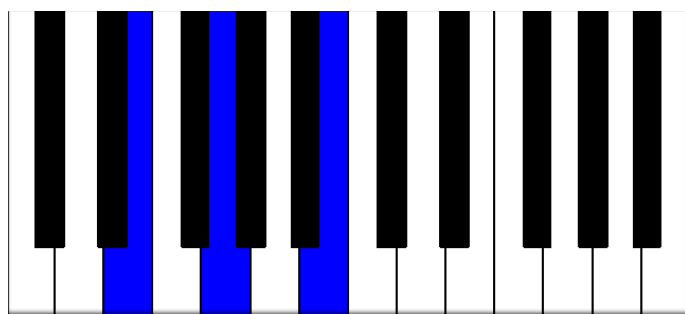




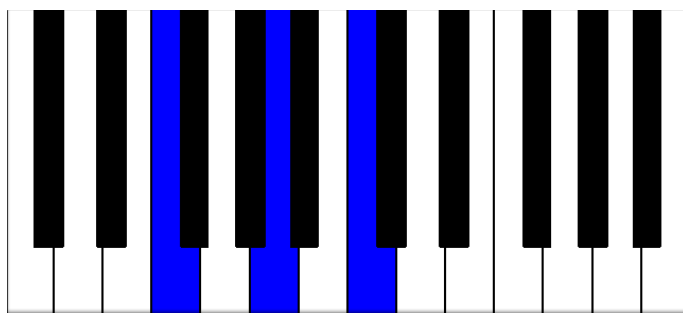
C major LH 5 3 1 RH 1 3 5



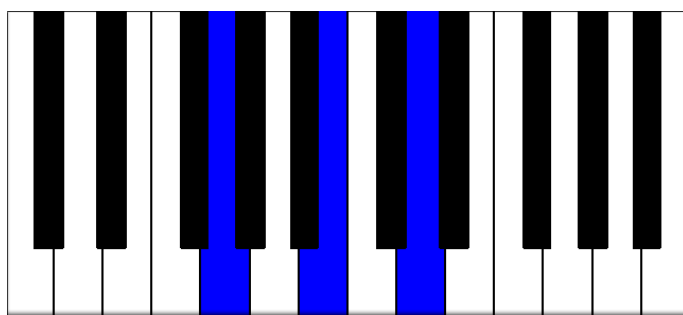
D minor LH 5 3 1 RH 1 3 5



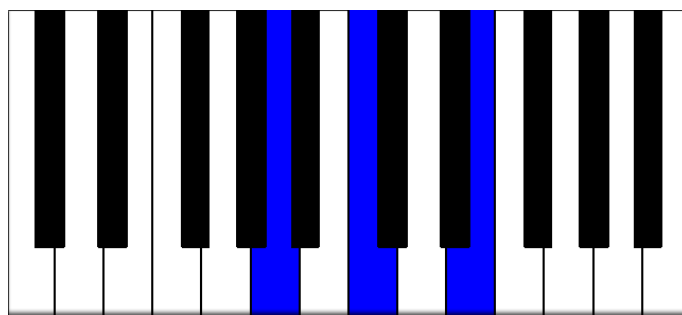
E minor LH 5 3 1 RH 1 3 5



F major LH 5 3 1 RH 1 3 5



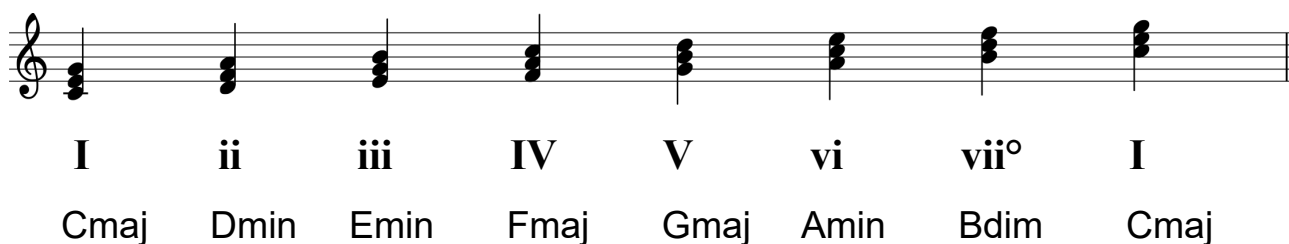
G major LH 5 3 1 RH 1 3 5



A minor LH 5 3 1 RH 1 3 5

Using just those six chords in any sequence, rhythm or length will give you a decent chord progression. You could create another progression in the same key and a little bridge and can have a complete song. Actually most rock and pop songs are built using exactly the same formula.

The reason why this formula works so well is because all the 6 chords surrounding the root chord are built by the notes of the major scale of the root chord. The Circle of Fifths outlines the major scale in this distinct pattern around the root note. Remember the harmonized major scale? The resulting chords are exactly the same chords as in the segment you're using in the Circle of Fifths (excluding the diminished chord on the VII, which we will leave out for now, as do most rock and pop songs).



The diatonic chords of the C major scale

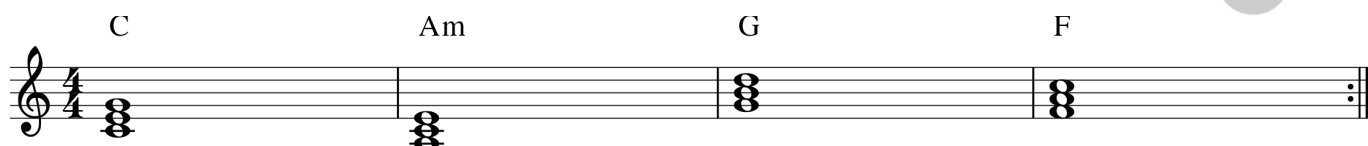
So let's build a chord progression with the Circle of Fifths using this formula. Start on **C major**, then move down to **A minor**, then up right to **G major** and finally to **F major**. That's it! You can play these chords in this order and you will have created a chord progression in less than a minute. This chord progression is one that you will have heard many times before if you listen to popular music regularly. You could use any other order or number of chords if you like the way they sound together, or play some of them longer or shorter. But for now, stay with these chords.

If you look at the degrees of the diatonic chords, your progression moves like this:

$$\text{I} - \text{vi} - \text{V} - \text{IV}$$

Starting on the first degree of the C major scale, it moves to the sixth degree (A minor), then stepwise down to the fifth (G) and fourth (F) degrees.

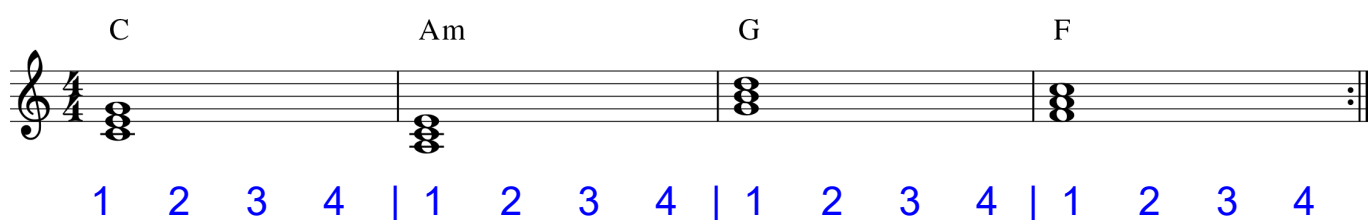
Like you did with the blues, you should be able to fill this progression with music.



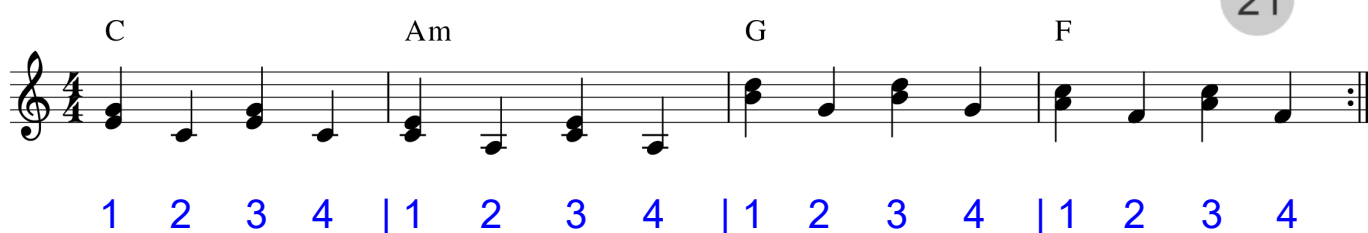
This is the easiest way of playing the chords. They are all in root position and held out for one whole bar.

To make it sound a bit more interesting, you need to change your way of playing the chords. But first let's recap what you have learned about rhythm so far.

One bar in a 4/4 **time signature** consists of four beats with the note length of a quarter note. In the above example you would count four beats for each whole note chord.

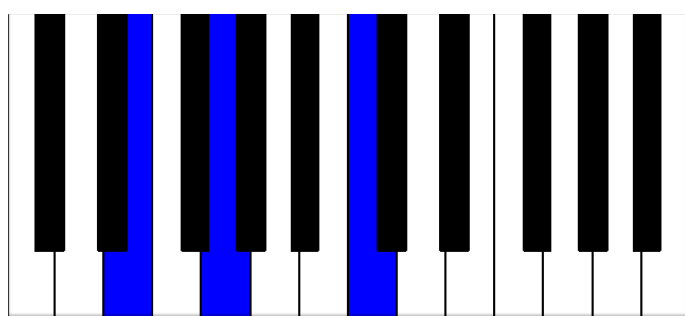


You can break down the chords into quarter notes so that on beats 1 and 3 you play the two upper notes of the triad, and on beats 2 and 4 you play the root note. This will sound a lot more interesting and look like this:

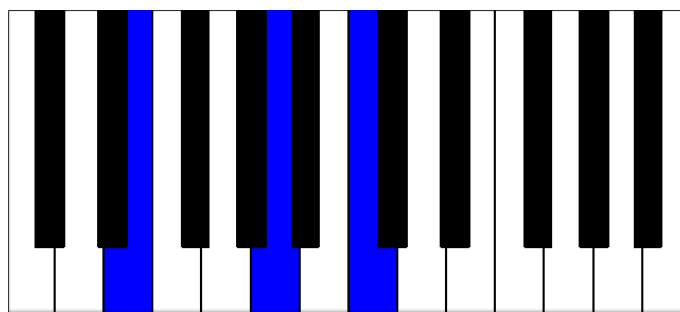


One thing you might have noticed is that the jump from the A minor chord to the G chord is not so easy to play, because they are almost one octave apart. This is where chord inversions come into play. You can change your first two chords to create something which is called good **voice leading**, meaning simply that the chords can be played smoothly one after another and are positioned closer to one another on the keyboard. For the C chord use the first inversion stacked upon the E. For the A minor chord use the second inversion stacked upon the E as well.

22



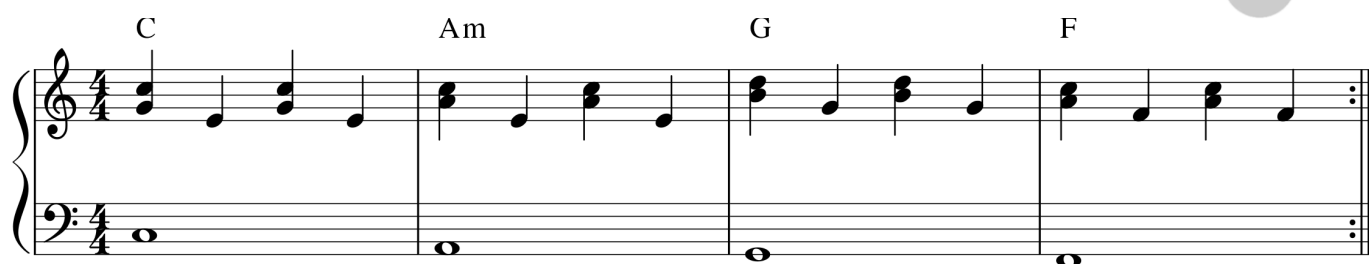
C major, First Inversion LH 5 3 1 RH 1 2 5



A minor Second Inversion LH 5 2 1 RH 1 3 5

Once you feel comfortable playing the inversions, this progression should be much easier to play because of the better voice leading. It sounds a bit weaker though, because the first two chords are played with higher sounding notes now. To make the progression sound fuller simply add the root notes in the left hand, played one or two octaves down. This is the most basic way of making your chords sound richer and you can use it almost always.

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Add the ninth for pop and ballads

A simple trick can make your progression sound much sweeter if you are creating a rock ballad or a pop song. To use this trick you first have to understand the interval of the **ninth**.

All chord tones so far in the book have been derived from the C major scale. If instead of stopping at the octave (or the eighth degree) you continue counting upward, you get more chord tones to choose from.



The first additional chord tone you can use is the ninth. Note that the ninth is the same tone as the second degree of the scale, in this case D. This makes it much easier to memorize and apply.

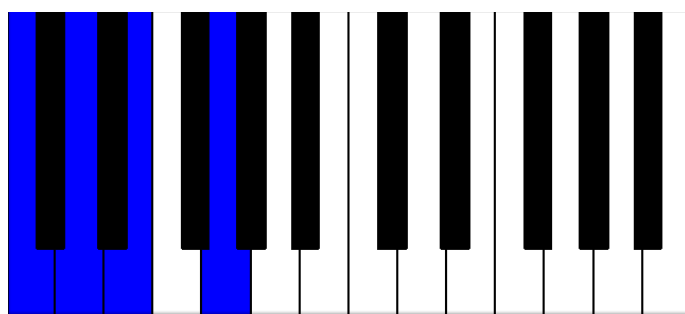
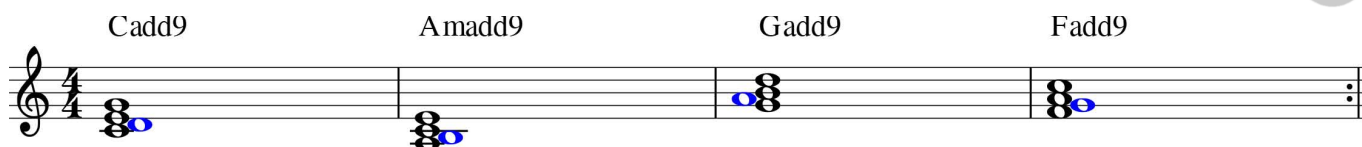
Ninth = Second

or

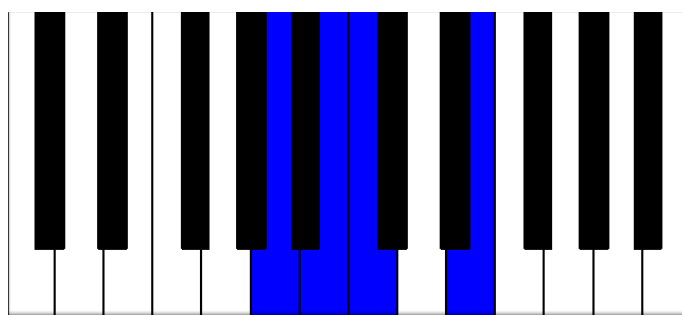
9 = 2

Knowing this, you can easily form chords with an added ninth (or added second) for the chords you use in your progression by playing the ninth with your second finger. The chord symbols for these chords are *add9* or *add2*.

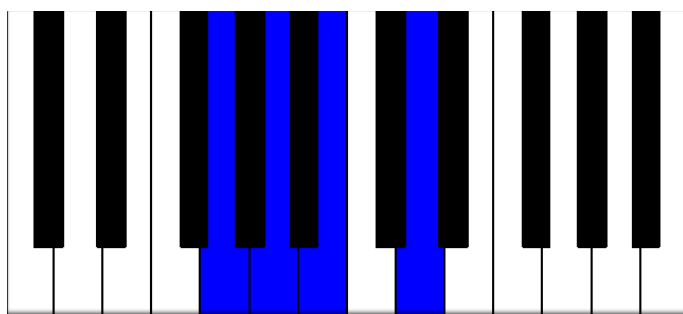
24



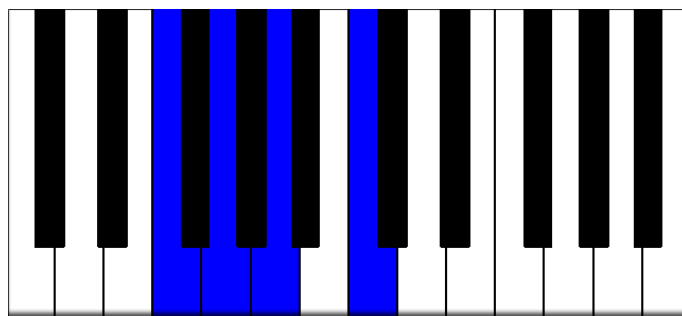
Cadd9 LH 5 4 3 1 RH 1 2 3 5



Amadd9 LH 5 4 3 1 RH 1 2 3 5



Gadd9 LH 5 4 3 1 RH 1 2 3 5



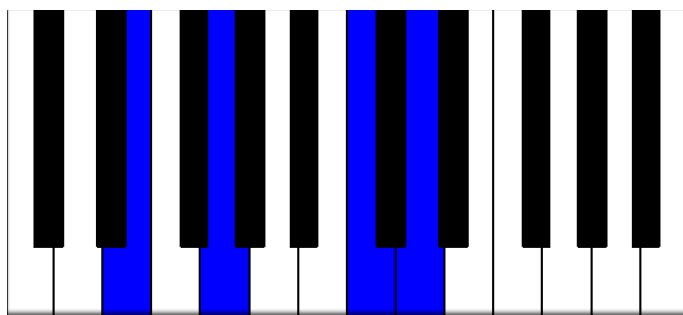
Fadd9 LH 5 4 3 1 RH 1 2 3 5

Adding the ninth give the chords much more color and sweetness, a sound which you may have heard many times before.

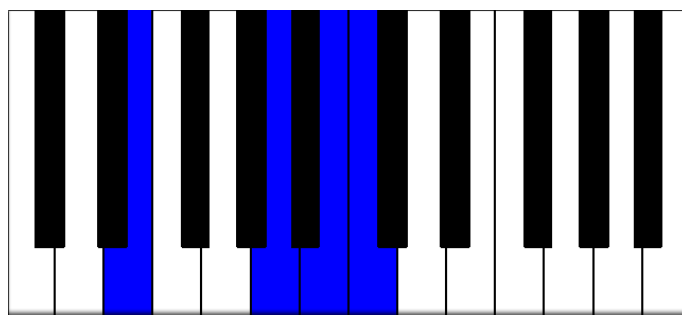
If you add the ninth to your inverted broken chords, you end up with a nice sounding progression.

25

Cadd9 Amadd9 Gadd9 Fadd9



Cadd9 2nd Inversion LH 5 4 2 1 RH 1 2 4 5



Amadd9 3rd Inversion LH 5 3 2 1 RH 1 3 4 5

These inversions are a bit awkward to play at first, but they provide a good exercise in finger independence at the same time.

You can add a lot more flow to the chord progression if you arpeggiate the chords. An eighth note pattern could look like this.

26

Cadd9

Amadd9

Gadd9

Fadd9

1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + | 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + | 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + | 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +

Because you are playing eighth notes now, you have to count not just 1 – 2 – 3 – 4, but 1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and to include all the notes of the resulting eight eighth beats of the bar.

A great trick to add more variation to a chord progression is to play the whole progression one octave higher when repeating it.

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The musical score consists of two systems, each with four measures. The first system shows a Cadd9, Amadd9, Gadd9, and Fadd9 progression. The right hand plays eighth-note arpeggios, and the left hand plays sustained roots. The second system repeats the same progression one octave higher, with the right hand playing chords on the first beat and arpeggiating on the second, third, and fourth beats, while the left hand continues with sustained roots.

You can also add some more movement to your left hand by playing the octave of the root in the left hand. Instead of playing eighth notes in the right hand on every beat, you can play the whole chord on the first beat and arpeggiate the chord starting on beat two. Note that the left hand adds the octave of the root to the melody line (played with the thumb) while holding out the root during the whole bar (played with the little finger). In this way you can distribute chord arpeggios between both hands to create beautifully flowing arrangements.

Cadd9 Amadd9 Gadd9 Fadd9

1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + | 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + | 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + | 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +

You can expand this pattern by playing it one octave higher as you did with the previous one.

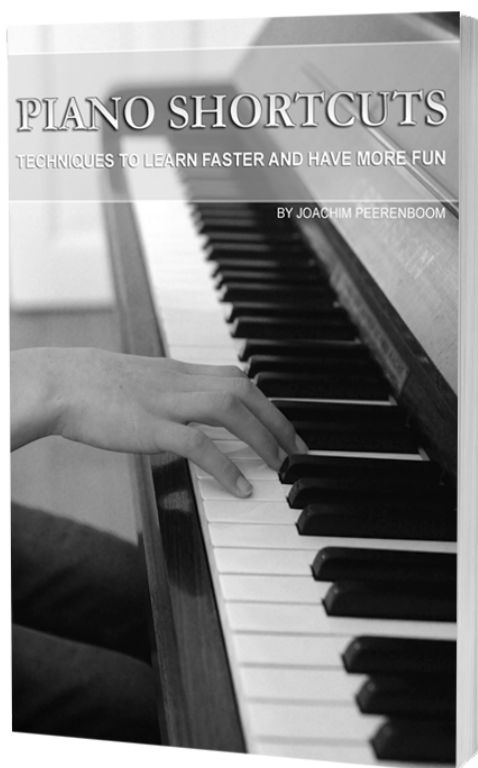
Cadd9 Amadd9 Gadd9 Fadd9

5 Cadd9 Amadd9 Gadd9 Fadd9

Now you have three really nice patterns in our toolbox. You can also combine them and create more variations. The following example uses the third and first patterns in turns.

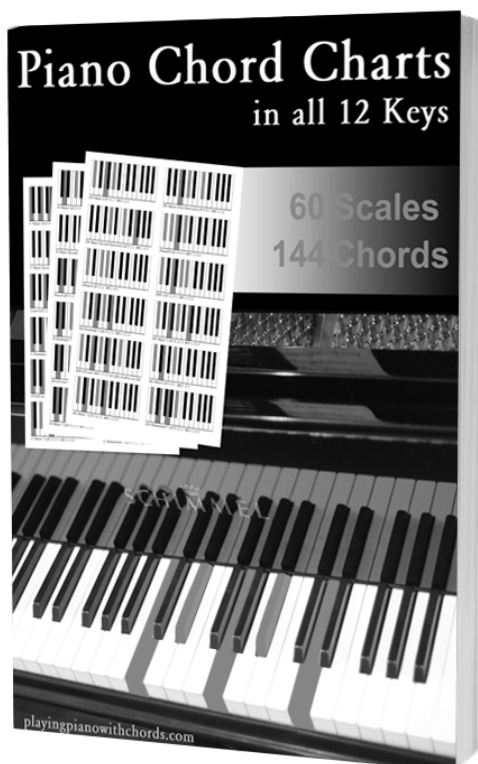
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PLAYING PIANO WITH CHORDS

Many songs in popular music are built around just a few chords. Explore and learn those chords and apply them to play pop, rock, blues, funk, neo soul and jazz. Take your piano playing to the next level and learn a wealth of tunes, chords and techniques in all styles!

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- how to use chords as building blocks for blues, rock, pop, funk, classical, jazz & neo soul
- easy ways to apply and voice chords and turn them into music
- tips and formulas to create your own chord progressions and songs in your style
- common chord types and voicings and how to apply them
- improvisation techniques for all styles

You will get:

- easy to read chord charts
- 100+ audio tracks
- full songs for you to play with drum accompaniment and play-along tracks
- video content with sheet music and a virtual keyboard in all styles

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