

# CHORD VOICINGS

## Ted Greene's Tips and Examples

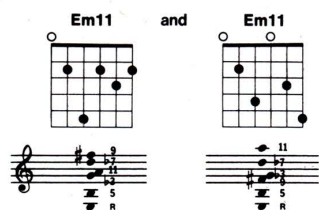
By Ted Greene

**C**HORD CHEMIST TED GREENE brings to mind a character in Dire Straits' "Sultans Of Swing," for like Guitar George, he knows all the chords. He is the author of four books, including *Chord Chemistry* [1971; Dale Zdenek Pub., Box 3245, Westlake Village, CA 91361] and *Modern Chord Progressions* [1976; Zdenek]. Their killer finger stretches and strange and beautiful juxtapositions provide guitar explorers with a veritable Glass Bead Game of seemingly endless chordal permutations and tonal subtleties, and Greene's stunning solo album debut, *Ted Greene* [PMP (Box 163, Tustin, CA 92680), A-5010], is more than enough proof that expanding one's repertoire of chords is worth the effort.

— GP

\* \* \* \*

**W**HEN NEW STUDENTS COME TO MY home for their first lesson I introduce them to my cats, Leo and Zorro, and after knocking over a music stand or two I ask them what they're interested in learning. One of the most common responses goes something like this: "I'm bored with the chords I play—if I just knew some better voicings..." Well, that's what this article is about, chords and voicings. For those who don't know, the word "voicing" refers to how the notes of a chord are arranged. For instance,

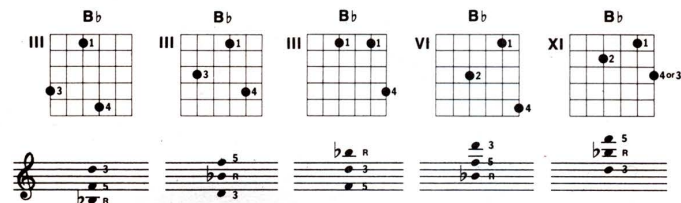


are different voicings of *Em11*: The notes (the letter names) of each chord are the same—the order is different, that's all. Of course the sounds of the two chords are slightly different, too, which is what makes learning more about voicings worthwhile.

Let's start with voicings of major chords. The basic major contains the 1st, 3rd, and 5th tones of the appropriate major scale. For example, a *Bb* major chord contains the *Bb*, *D*, and *F* of the *Bb* major scale:

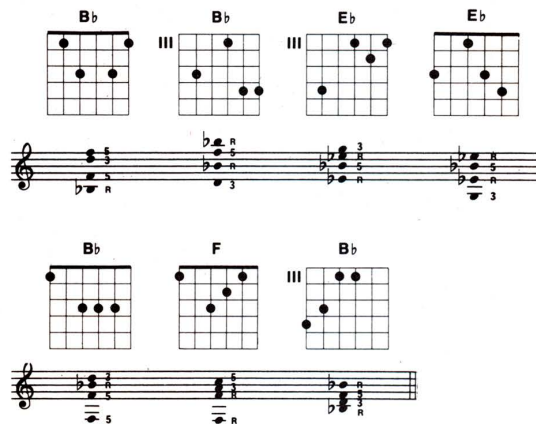
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Bb	C	D	Eb	F	G	A	Bb

Some good-sounding voicings of this chord are:

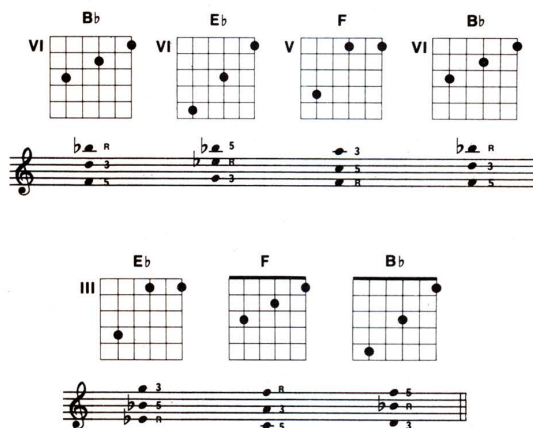


Roman numerals indicate fret numbers.

As you may know, major chords are often voiced with one of the tones doubled. Among the many possibilities, some of the more interesting ones are illustrated here in a simple chord progression (you'll have to use a fingerstyle right-hand technique, instead of just a flatpick, to play some of the chords mentioned in this article):



Here is a simple progression using some three-note major chords again; note the smooth connections:



One of the most common tones to be added to the basic major chord is the 9th (also known as the 2nd) tone of the major scale. The resulting chord seems to be loved by almost everyone and has found its way into many styles of music. Here are some of my favorite voicings (in the keys of *A* and *E*) of what is commonly referred to as the “add 9” chord; the notes designated with open circles are optional:

And here are some tasty voicings (in various keys) on the top four strings:

Notice that the first three chords in the immediately preceding group are a variation on the basic *C, D, E* progression, which leads us to a fundamental point: *All* variations on the major chord can replace the simple major chord, according to your own tastes.

I wonder if there are any curious rascals amongst you readers. If so you probably noticed that

In other words, they provide the exact same voicing, the same pitches—but they’re played in different places. The guitar is

one of the only instruments in which such funniness occurs. If you were *really* curious you might have noticed earlier that

Again—same voicings with different fingerings, or forms.

Another good tone often added to the basic major chord is the 7th (that is, the 7th tone of the major scale). The resulting chord—1, 3, 5, 7—is commonly called the *major 7th*. Some of the various symbols for it are:  $\Delta 7$ , 7, maj7, and M7. Here, numbered for convenience, are some of the most common voicings of this often-used, friendly color:

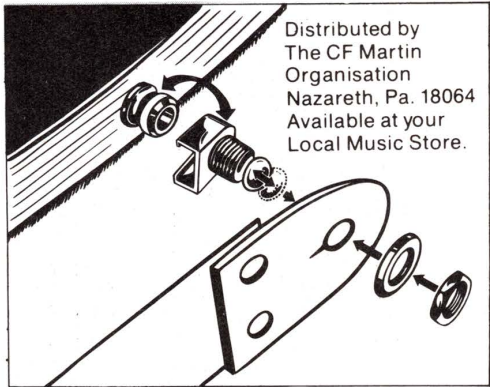
Compare the first and fifth major 7th chord voicings above; compare no. 6 to no. 2; compare 7, 8, and 9 to each other; and compare the last one to the second one.

And here are some slightly more unusual voicings that have thrilled me ever since I first had the pleasure of making their acquaintance. Make sure that your guitar is really in tune for these voicings, because some of them contain two notes right next to each other. (The fourth one, on the 2nd and 7th frets, is a ridiculous stretch.)

*Continued*

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## CHORD VOICINGS

As is the case with the add 9, the major 7th chord may replace the basic major chord whenever you desire the extra spice that the added tone seems to impart. Notice that we're not really using chord substitution when we play *Cadd9* or *Cmaj7* in place of the basic *C* major chord; it's more like we're enriching what's already there. I call this **chord enrichment**.

When you add *both* the 7th and 9th tones to the major chord, the major 9th appears. As with its brother (fear not, feminist ladies) and sister, the add 9 and major 7th, the major 9th is just an enriched major chord. Enriched chords are commonly referred to as **extensions**. When playing the following voicings of the major 9th (which I've selected because they sound particularly rich), there are a few details that you should keep in mind, so we'll number them for convenience. In voicing no. 4, which is hard to play but pretty, fingers 2 and 3 may be reversed. In no. 6, there is no 3rd scale tone. No. 9 is very hard but very pretty. For no. 10, another hard one, a double-stop technique (using a single finger to fret two notes) will be necessary; use finger 2 for the notes on strings four and five. Finally, compare voicing no. 11 to no. 1 and no. 10.

① Bmaj9  
② Bmaj9  
③ Bmaj9  
④ Bmaj9  
⑤ Abmaj9  
⑥ Cmaj9  
⑦ Ebmaj9  
⑧ Abmaj9  
⑨ Ebmaj9  
⑩ Bmaj9  
⑪ Bmaj9

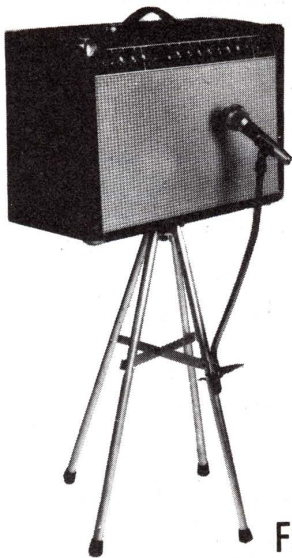
The major 6th chord is formed by adding the 6th scale tone to the major chord: 1, 3, 5, 6. It has a unique sound—very sweet, loved by many, shunned by some. Steel guitar players usually play richer, fuller voicings of this chord than do most of us “regular” guitar players. One reason is that one common tuning of the steel guitar better lends itself to nice 6th chord voicings. But if you're willing to work you can get quite a few of these voicings on a regular old (or new) 6-string guitar, too.

The following section lists some of my favorite voicings for these pedal steel-type chords. The fourth one is a real stretcher (do you hate me yet?). In the last one, use the *side* of the 1st finger for the notes on strings one and two; George Van Eps [*GP*, Mar. '70], who taught this to me, calls it the “5th-finger principle.”



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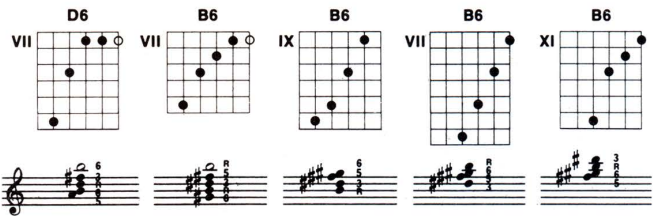
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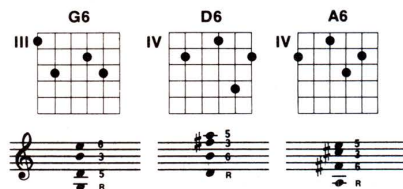
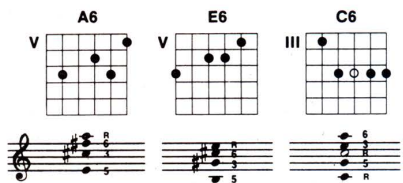
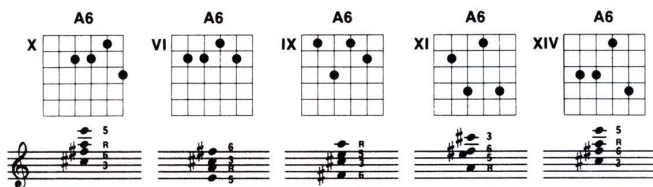
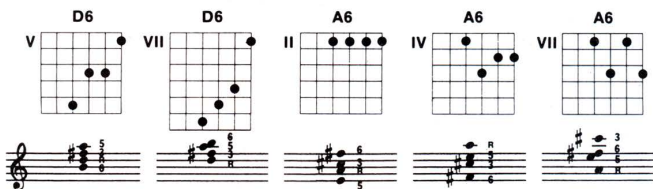
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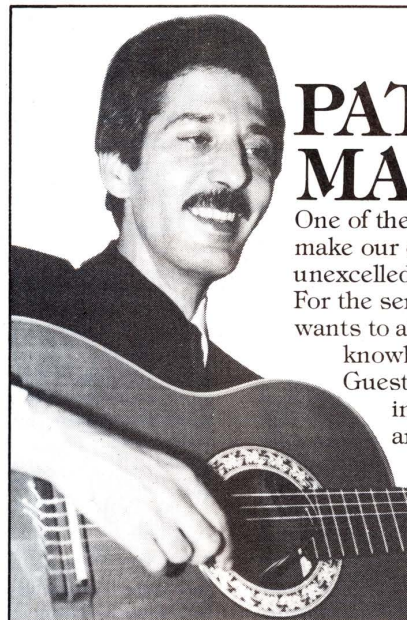
Try arpeggiating your right hand on these forms—it sounds especially good.

And here are some of the many (*many*) other voicings of the 6th chord available on the guitar. The first four A6 voicings correspond directly to the next four (compare the first to the fifth, and so on)—the same notes simply played on different strings.



Of course, as with the other major extensions, you can use the major 6th in place of the basic major chord whenever your ears say yes. B.B. King [*GP*, Mar. '75], for example, often uses a major 6th for the tonic (key chord) in blues progressions.

I hope that this article has helped reveal some of the ways in which the guitar is particularly suited to provide unusual and beautiful chord voicings. All of this information will be included in a much expanded form in a future book, a long-term project called *Chord Cyclopedia* (publication date has not been set; it'll be at least mid-'81). If some of these fingerings look impossible, don't forget how tough the basic chords seemed when you first learned them, and how you can now play them almost automatically. Good luck! ■



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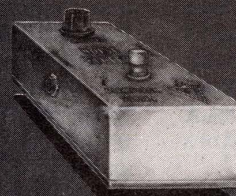
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