

When a new student comes to my home for their 1st lesson, I introduce them to my cats, Leo & 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 "I'm bored with the chords I play - if I just knew some better voicings"

So that's what this article is going to be about: chords & voicings. For those of you who don't know, the word voicing refers to how the notes of a chord are arranged. For instance,

Em11 and Em11

9th, b7th, 11th, b3rd, 5th, ROOT

11th, b7th, b3rd, 9th, 5th, ROOT

are different voicings of Em11

because the order or arrangements of notes are not the same. But they are both Em11 chords, the same 6 letter names are contained in both voicings - the order is different, that's all.

Of course, the sounds of the 2 chords are slightly different too, which is what makes learning more about voicings worthwhile.

We'll start off talking about 'major' type chords & voicings. The basic major chord contains the 1st, 3rd & 5th tones of the major scale. EX: a Bb major chord contains the Bb D and F tones out of the Bb MAJOR SCALE: (Bb)¹ C² (D)³ Eb⁴ (F)⁵ G⁶ A⁷ Bb⁸

Some good-sounding voicings of this chord are :

FRET NUMBER → 3

As you may know, major chords are often voiced with one of the tones doubled. Some of the more interesting voicings (among the many!) are illustrated here in a simple chord progression:

NOTE: You will have to use a righthand "fingerstyle" (instead of just a flat pick) to play many of the chords in this article.

Here is a simple progression using some 3 note major chords again. Notice the smooth connections.

One of the most common tones to be added to simple major chords (is the 9th (or 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:

and here are some tasty voicings on the top 4 strings (in various keys):

Notice, that if you play the 1st three chord here in a row, as in a progression, you have a variation on the basic C D E progression. Which

leads us to a basic point: All major type chords can replace the simple major chord, according to your personal taste. More on this soon.

When you add both the 7th & 9th tones to the major chord, the MAJOR 9th chord appears. As with its brother (fear not, feminist ladies) and sister the $\Delta\Delta 9$ and $\Delta 7$, the $\Delta 9$ is just an enriched major chord, therefore.....

These Enriched chords are ^{also} commonly referred to as EXTENSIONS.

Some rich voicings of the $\Delta 9$ are:

The MAJOR 6th chord is formed by adding the 6th tone to the basic major chord. It has its own unique sound, very sweet, loved by many, shunned by others. Steel guitar players usually play richer, fuller voicings of this chord than do most of us 'regular' guitar players. One reason is that the tuning of the steel guitar lends itself better to nice 6th chord voicings. But one who is willing to work can get quite a few of these voicings on regular old (or new) 6 string guitars too.

Here are some of my favorite of these steel voicings:

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:

These four voicings can be played on the bottom 4 strings as well.

Of course, as with the other major extensions, you can use the major 6th chord in place of the basic major chord wherever your ears say yes.

Handwritten guitar chord diagrams for A6, E6, C6, G6, D6, and A6. Each diagram shows the fretboard with fingerings and includes a bass line with notes and accidentals.

Well, that's it for now. Next time, we'll continue with the other major extensions and also discuss how to go about learning + memorizing new voicings.

(This information, but more detailed and organized from a variety of angles, will be in my book CHORD CYCLOPEDIA, to be released by Dale Zdenek Publications in the near future).

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