

MICHAEL GUNDLACH

THE

COCKTAIL PIANO

METHOD

VOLUME

1

TECHNIQUES OF STYLISH PIANO ENTERTAINMENT

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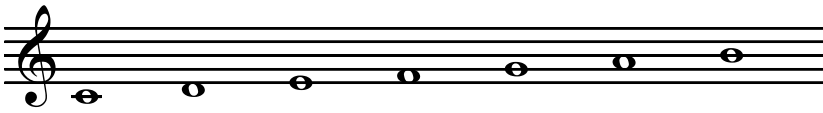
Harmony – Part 1

To be able to develop your own stylish piano arrangements from songs you first need a good fundamental knowledge of harmony. We will work step by step through this chapter on elementary basic principles.

Diatonic harmony

By “diatonic harmony”, we mean the chords that can be created using the notes of the normal major scales. We will start with the key of C major and the accompanying C major scale:

C major scale



If you form a four-part chord with each note, or each step (scale degree), of the normal major scale you get the following chords:

Cmaj7 Dm7 Em7 Fmaj7 G7 Am7 Bm7b5

I II III IV V VI VII

Steps (scale degrees) in Roman numerals

Almost all the chords that you need, to play popular songs, are at your disposal in the major scales. To understand them better, let's look at which chords are on which step (scale degree).

Step	Type of Chord
I + IV	Major7 chord (= major triad with major seventh)
II, III + VI	Minor7 chord (= minor triad with minor seventh)
V	Dominant seventh chord (= major triad with minor seventh)
VII	Half diminished chord (consists of two minor and one major third)

1a

CMaj7

Am7

Dm7

G7

CMaj7

Musical score for exercise 1a in C major, 4/4 time. The piece consists of two measures. The first measure contains a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The second measure is a whole-note chord. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

1b

FMaj7

Dm7

Gm7

C7

FMaj7

Musical score for exercise 1b in F major, 4/4 time. The piece consists of two measures. The first measure contains a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The second measure is a whole-note chord. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#).

1c

GMaj7

Em7

Am7

D7

GMaj7

Musical score for exercise 1c in G major, 4/4 time. The piece consists of two measures. The first measure contains a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The second measure is a whole-note chord. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#).

1d

DMaj7

Bm7

Em7

A7

DMaj7

Musical score for exercise 1d in D major, 4/4 time. The piece consists of two measures. The first measure contains a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The second measure is a whole-note chord. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#).

Oh, Lady Be Good

Music: George Gershwin

Lead sheet

G C7 G G#dim Am7
 D7 G D7 G7
 C D7 C/G G D/F#
 Em Em/D# Em/D Em/C# D7
 Fine
 D.C. al Fine

We'll practice what we just learned with the song "Oh, Lady Be Good". If you bought a songbook in which you have only the melody and chord symbols to work on, the song would be notated as in the above lead sheet.

Parts of the melody can be played very well with the fourth sixth chords of the major scale. Because the piece is in the key of Gmaj, we need the chords from the G major scale:

Fourth sixth chords of the G major scale

G Am Bm C D Em F#mb5
 I II III IV V VI VII

Already in the first bar we can use these triads in the right hand:

notated in bar 1:

G

what you can play:

G

In bars 9 and 10 we have the dominant of the key of Cmaj and must therefore use the fourth sixth chords of the C major scale.

notated in bars 9 and 10:

G7 C

what you can play:

G7 C

As we have already learned from page 15, the dominant can be varied in the right hand with three minor chords. In the key of Gmaj the dominant is a D7 chord and Am, Bbm and Bm are the three variation chords, that can be used in bar 8 and also in bars 16 and 17 due to the chromatic melody.

notated in bar 8:

D7

what you can play:

D7

notated in bars 16 and 17:

D7

what you can play:

D7

In two bars of "Oh, Lady Be Good" we find a dominant with a ninth in the melody-voice. Thus the dominant with the ninth, which we learned on page 12, inevitably comes into practical use:

notated in bar 2:

C7

what you can play:

C7

notated in bar 11:

D7

what you can play:

D7

Tip: Try to put into practice that which you have learned from the lead sheets from "Oh, Lady Be Good" before you attempt to play the complete composition!

Oh, Lady Be Good

Music: George Gershwin

Arr.: Michael Gundlach



♩ = 154

Chords: G C7 G G#dim

Chords: Am7 D7 G D7

Chords: G C7 G G#dim

Chords: Am7 D7 G G7

Harmony – Part 4

Altering notes

Single notes of a chord can be raised or lowered a half-tone. In technical jargon we call this “alteration”. In this chapter, for the time being, we want to concentrate on the altered fifth of the chord. A lowering of the fifth is shown by the sign “b” before the number (b5) and sometimes with a minus sign before the number (-5). An example:



The raised fifth is notated with a sharp sign before the number (#5), or with a plus sign before the number (+5). Sometimes we see a plus sign without a number after the chord symbol (e.g. “G+”). The raising of the fifth in the dominant seventh chord adds a wonderfully new tone color to the music, very popular among cocktail pianists. Therefore we want to examine this altered dominant chord more closely. A G7 chord with a raised fifth looks like this:



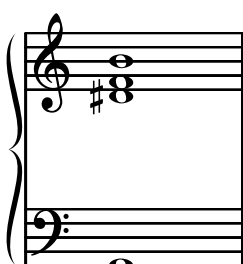
The upper three notes of the chord are played with the right hand and the root is played with the left hand:



The three notes of the right hand can be played in two inversions:

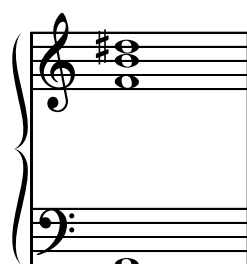
1st inversion

G7#5



2nd inversion

G7#5



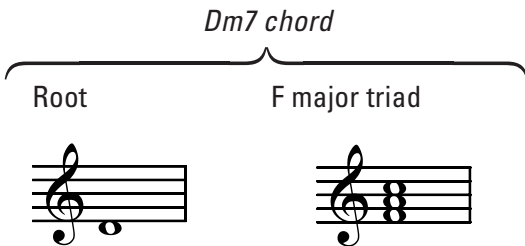
Certainly the most attractive fill for many pianists is inventing his own little melody. The question naturally arises, which notes can I play and how can I best put them together? The last example shown on page 39 already gives us an indication: The notes of the triad in the right hand have been separated into single notes and played one after another. A variation of the melody fill exists therefore in the use of the single notes of a chord.

Fill / minor7th chord

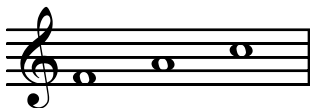
Let's take a Dm7 chord:



In a Dm7 chord there is, apart from the root "D", an F major triad:



F major triad separated into single notes



The three notes of the F major triad lend themselves very well to playing a fill with a Dm7 so we want to practice this extensively. Every one of the following examples consists of three exercises, each with two bars. In the examples 14a – 14c we will practice the fills in an ascending movement, while the examples 15a – 15c are given in a descending movement. Furthermore, in each case the examples are printed in three keys.

14a Dm7 G7 Dm7 G7 Dm7 G7

Red. Red. Red. Red. Red. Red.

Typical Harmony Sequences – Part 1

If you analyze the songs of popular music, you will often find the same, or rather similar harmony sequences (cadences). If you know these (and can master them and play them well) your own interpretation of songs will be much easier.

Chord insertions – Part 1

Typical harmony sequences are often already notated in a lead sheet. If such cadences are not already available, these can be created through inserting additional chords later and therefore enriching the song harmonically. Let's assume we would find in the music score a C major chord that was in three consecutive bars (key of Cmaj, 1st scale degree):

|| C | C | C ||

The first alternative (in order to avoid boredom) would be to insert just one chord, for instance the dominant:

1st variation || C | G7 | C ||

Instead of the dominant you could insert a sus chord

2nd variation || C | F/G (Gsus4) | C ||

These two variations have already been practically implemented in "S Wonderful" (page 50 bars 15–17) with the chords Eb, Ab/Bb and Eb.

With cocktail piano, the dominant with the raised fifth also fits nicely:

3rd variation || C | G7#5 | C ||

If you have one and the same chord over a longer period of time you can, of course insert more chords. So our three bars of Cmaj can be augmented with a II. and V. scale degree:

4th variation || I | II V | I ||
 C | Dm7 G7 | C ||

In addition to the II. and V. scale degree, the VI. Scale degree could also be inserted:

5th variation || I VI | II V | I ||
 C Am7 | Dm7 G7 | C ||

It is a matter of personal taste as to which of the five variations are employed. You must consider, however, that the melody must fit with the newly inserted chords. If this isn't the case, melodies can be modified and made to fit in.

Swanee River

Swanee River is one of those songs that display, in its original, a very simple harmony, as the lead sheet shows:

Swanee River

Traditional

Lead sheet 1

Chord progression for Swanee River (Lead sheet 1):

Staff 1: C F C G7

Staff 2: C F C G7 C

Staff 3: G C F C

Staff 4: C F C G7 C

The song is in the key of C major and in the original version, uses the chords of the I., IV. and V. degrees. The obvious suggestion, therefore, is to insert the new harmony sequences from the previous chapter. Although there are only 16 bars in the complete piece, you can use this harmony sequence several times. If you analyse "Swanee River", you will find the harmonic sequences from the I., IV. and I. degrees altogether four times, in the bars 1–3, 5–7, 10–12 and 13–15:

	I		VI		I	
	C		F		C	

Transformed into the typical harmony sequence, the three bar cadence looks like the following:

	C	C7/E		F	F#dim		C/G	
--	---	------	--	---	-------	--	-----	--

Swanee River

Traditional
 Arr.: Michael Gundlach



♩ = 76

C C7/E F F#dim C/G Am7

D7 G7 C C7/E F F#dim

C/G Gsus4 G7 C G7 G7#5

CMaj7 C7/E F F#dim C/G G7#5

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The Cocktail Piano Method – Exercises in all Keys

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Please note:

This PDF file contains practice examples from the book in all keys, except for the keys already printed in the book. The sequence of the examples correspond with the topics addressed in the book. Because the notes of the G flat major scale and the F sharp major scale are essentially the same, we've omitted the F sharp major key in the PDF file.

Harmony – Part 1

B♭Maj7 Gm7 Cm7 F7 B♭Maj7

AMaj7 F♯m7 Bm7 E7 AMaj7

E♭Maj7 Cm7 Fm7 B♭7 E♭Maj7

EMaj7 C♯m7 F♯m7 B7 EMaj7