Michael Gundlach

POP Piano

Method - Volume 2

PLAY AND ACCOMPANY SONGS PROFESSIONALLY
WITH CHORD SYMBOLS

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1. Major Seventh Chord

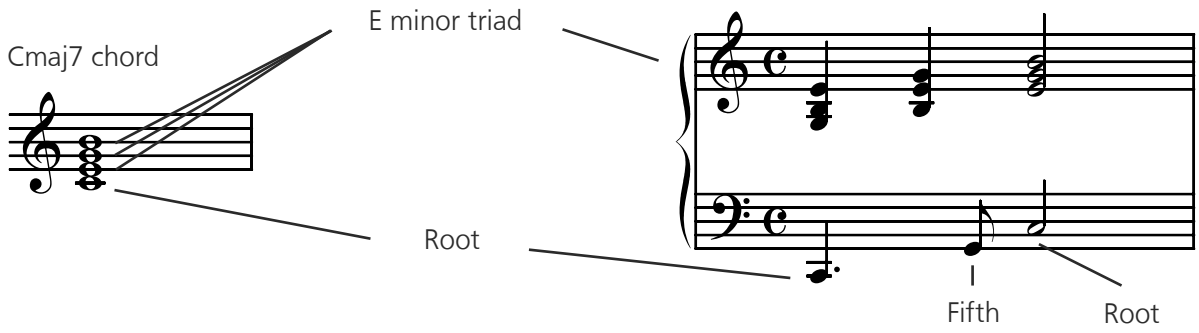
Basic Structure

As pianists, we are often asked to substitute an entire band. The left hand plays the bass lines while the right hand plays the chords and sometimes the melody. This presents many musical challenges and knowledge of these four-part chords will be very helpful. Here are two basic rules:

Rule 1 Most of the time the left hand can play just the root and the fifth of the chord.

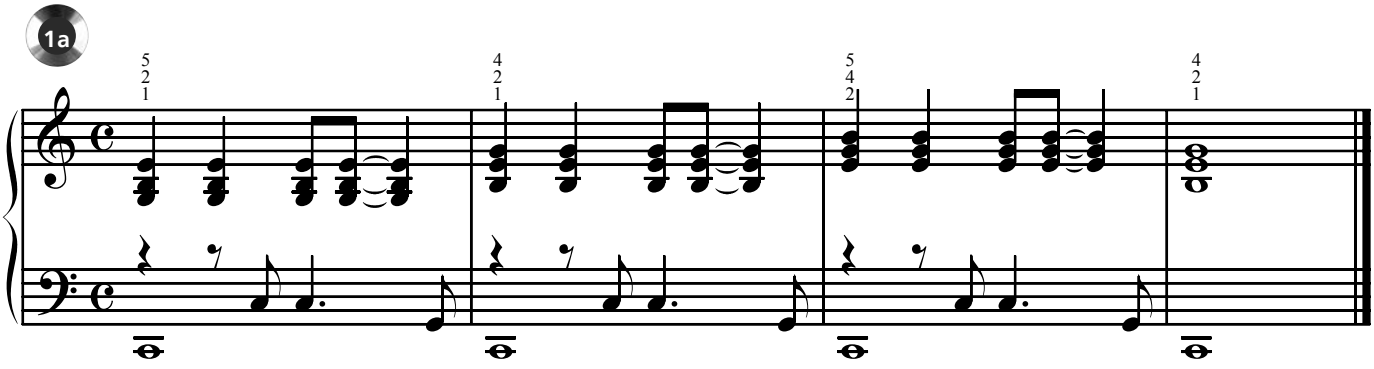
Rule 2 Every four-part chord contains a triad. For example, within a Cmaj7 chord we see an E minor triad.

Using the above rules with a Cmaj7 chord, the right hand could play an E minor chord (or its inversions), while the left hand plays the root and fifth of the chord. Let´s look at an example:



The following rhythmic examples show our two rules in practical use. We´ll use the Cmaj7 chord.

Exercises with the Cmaj7 Chord



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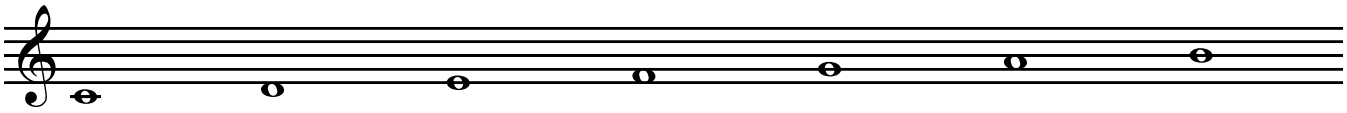
Sixths in Pop Music

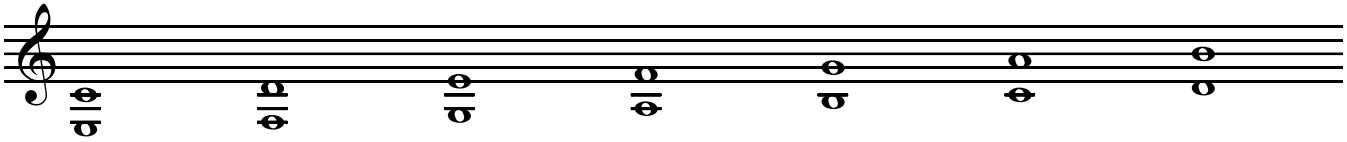
One could write an entire book about "Sixths in Pop Music". This chapter is just a small but interesting part of the story. If you study this carefully, it will broaden your horizons as a pianist.

Sixths in Major Keys

In dealing with a song in a major key, the basis for using sixths is the ordinary major scale. In C major, the major scale looks like this:



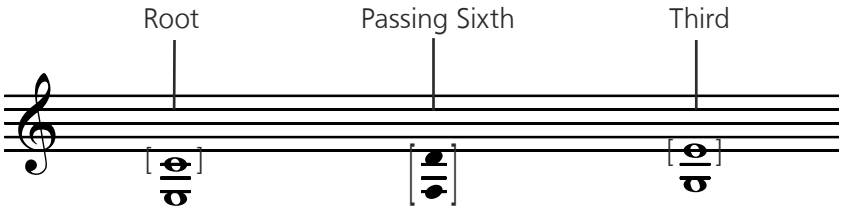
If you add another note a sixth below each of the original notes, it looks like this:



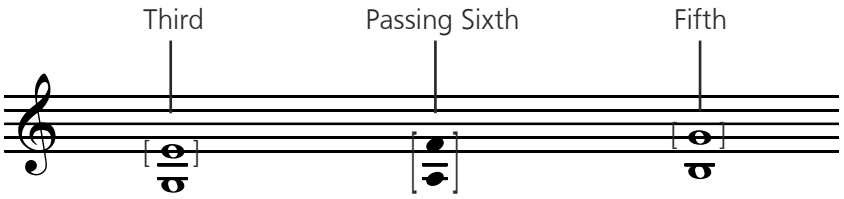
Since we are only using notes of the major scale, we have intervals of both major and minor sixths. These intervals will be played by the right hand. The left hand will continue to play the root and fifth of the chord.

Practical Examples

If you´re playing the notes of the triad (root, third, fifth) in the melody, using the sixth underneath, you can connect them with a passing sixth. An example in C major: the root of the chord in the melody moves through a passing sixth to the third.



Another possibility: connecting the third and the fifth by way of a passing sixth.



The following cadence examples clarify these concepts.

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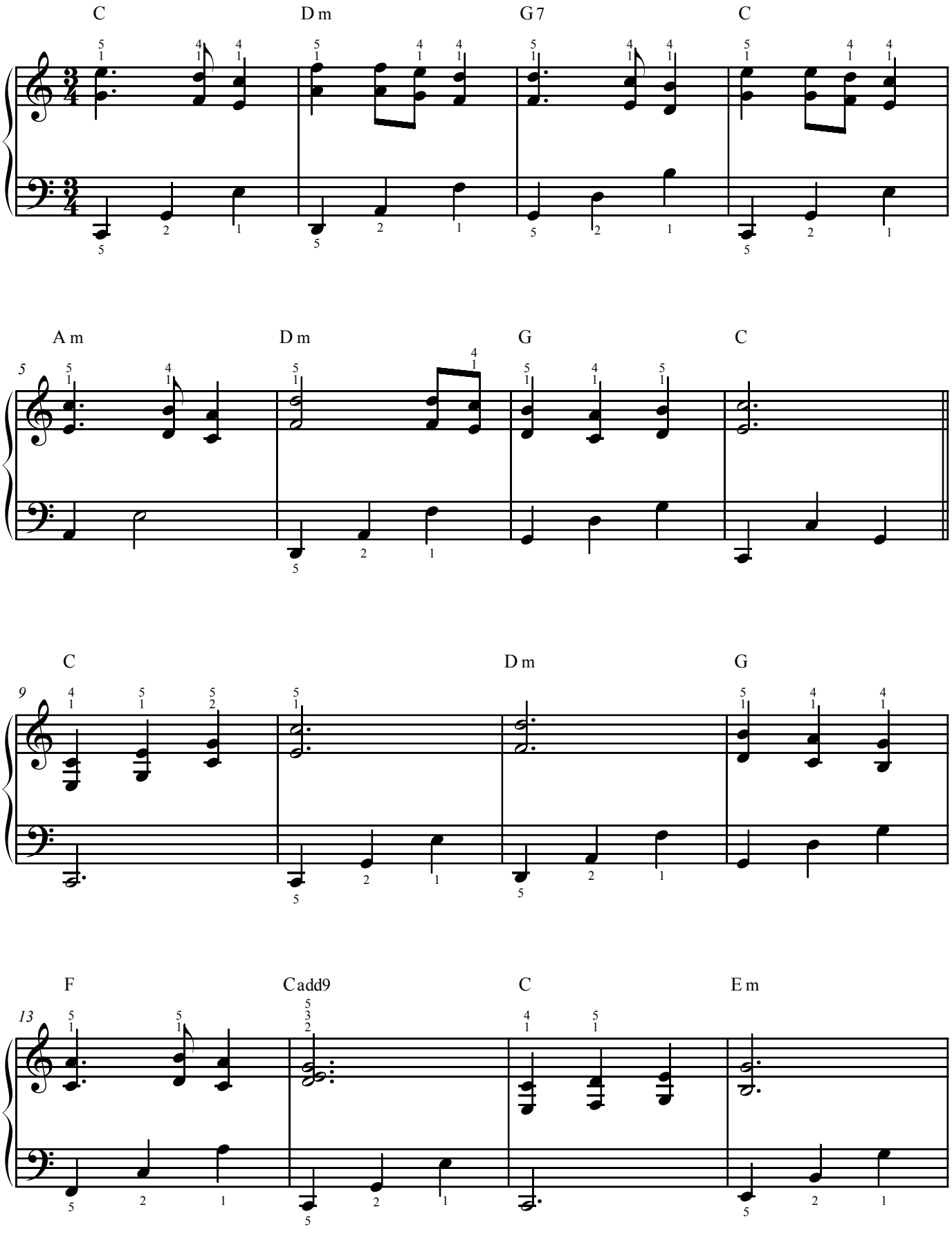
Morning Has Broken

Piano Solo

Traditional
Arr.: Michael Gundlach



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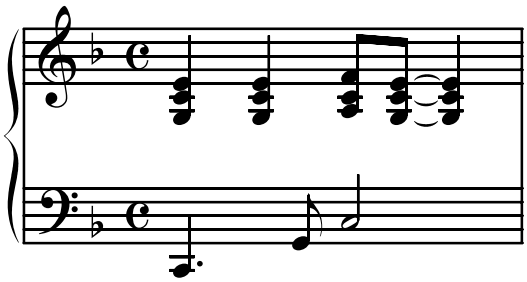
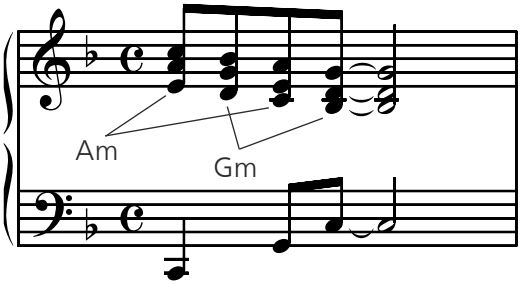
Example: C7 (without the seventh) with the F major chord

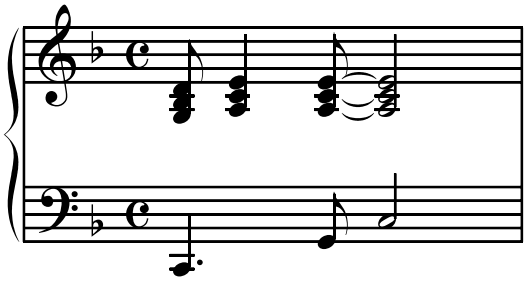


The dominant seventh chord becomes even more interesting when you combine it with two other minor chords. As we saw, the C7 chord can be varied with the D minor or the F major chord. Now we can add the G minor and the A minor chords with the right hand. The left hand continues playing the root and fifth of the C7 chord. Here´s how it looks:

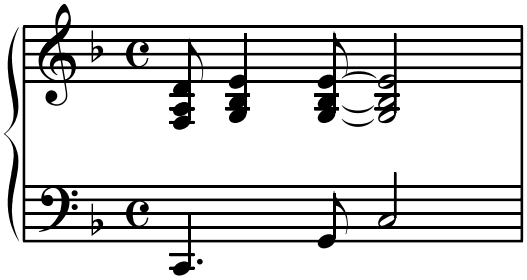
Example: C7 variation using the G minor and A minor chords:



If you play the G minor and the A minor triads in root position, as in the example below, the second of the C7 chord ("D") and the third ("E") are both in the upper voice:



Playing the G minor and the A minor chords in root position here doesn´t sound bad, but in combination with other chords, this isn´t the best solution. If the second ("D") of the C7 chord is in the melody, it´s better to play a D minor triad and play a C7 chord when the third ("E") is in the melody.



The next exercise with the C7 chord utilizes all four passing chords in the right hand (D minor, F major, G minor, A minor). It´s always fun to put these theories into practice!

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Solo Version "Wonderful Day"

In the solo version of "Wonderful Day", we´ll use all of our passing chords with ordinary major and dominant seventh chords. We vary the D major chord with G major and E minor in the right hand, while the A7 chord uses the E minor and F# minor chords. This is easier to understand if you look at the following list of chord variations:

Measure 2	A7	varied with F# minor and E minor
Measure 3	D	varied with G
Measure 4	D	varied with E minor
Measure 8	D	varied with E minor
Measure 9 + 10	A7	varied with E minor and F# minor
Measure 12	D	varied with E minor
Measure 18	A7	varied with F# minor and E minor

Note:
If the sixth of the chord is in the melody, you can omit the fifth. This occurs with the G major chord in measure 17 of the following solo version. The tone "E" in the melody replaces the "D" (fifth of the G major chord).

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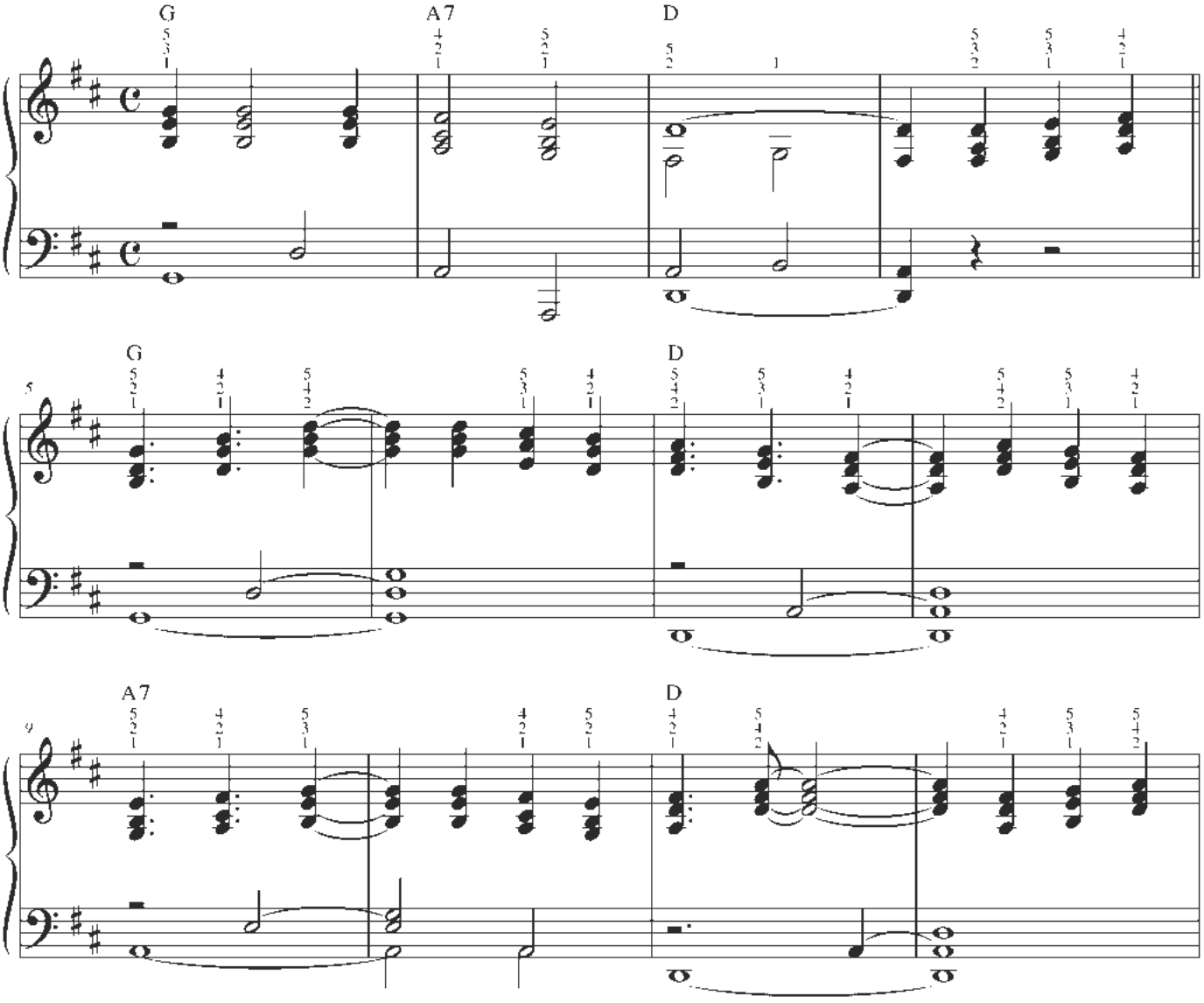
Wonderful Day

Piano Solo

Music: Michael Gundlach



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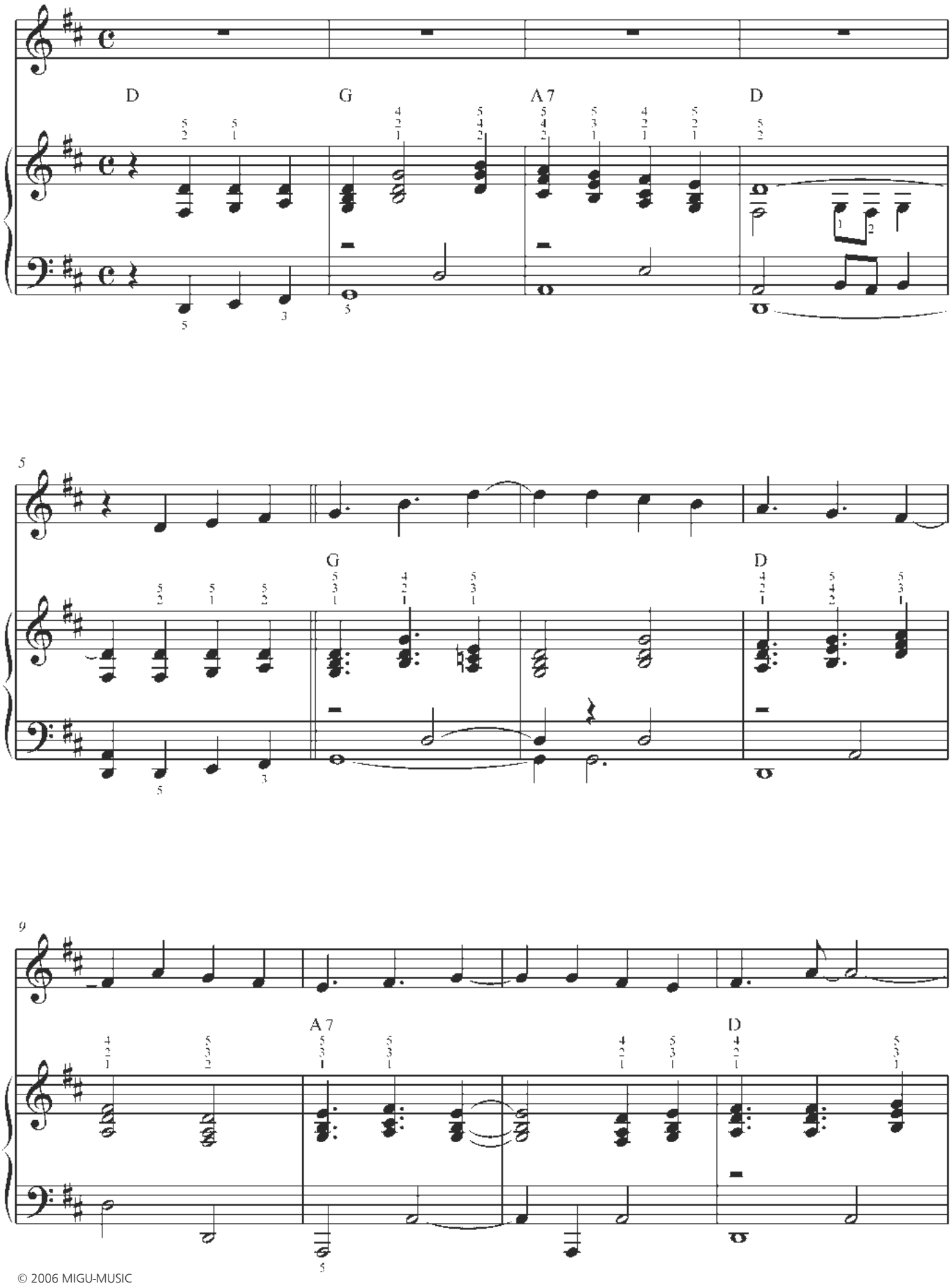
Wonderful Day

Accompaniment

Music: Michael Gundlach



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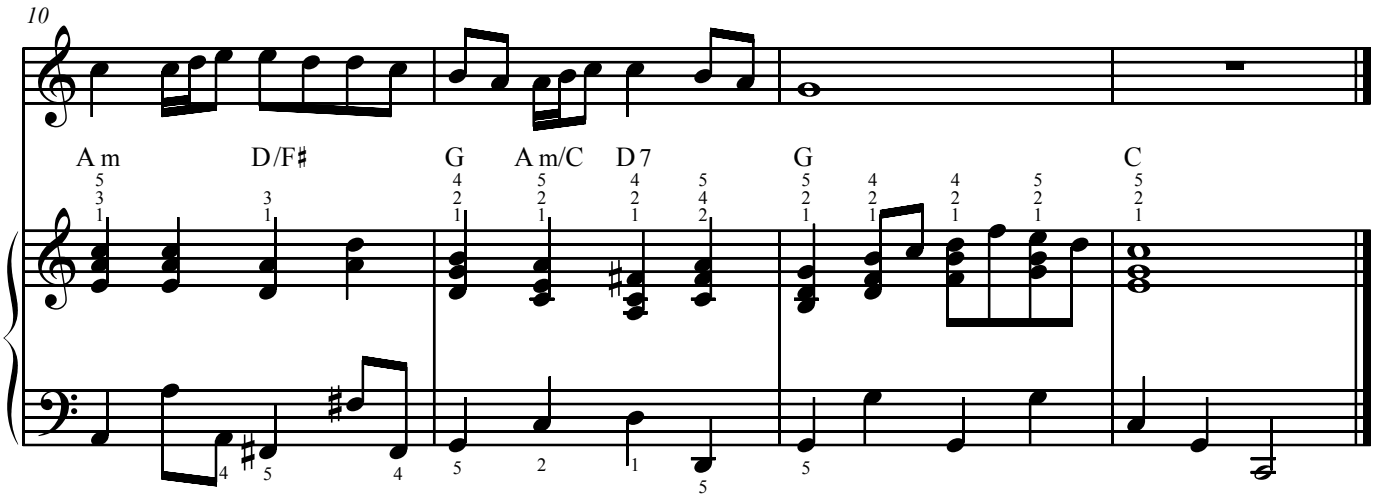
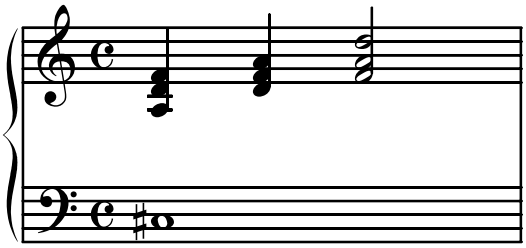


Slash Chords (Minor)

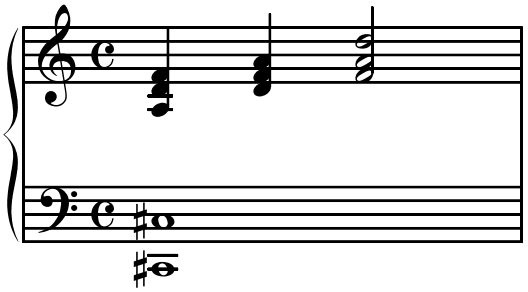
There are also slash chords indicating that the right hand play a minor chord. A D minor chord in the right hand, for example, can be complemented with a different bass note in the left hand. The following examples will show you which tones can be used:

Dm/C# or **Dm / C#** (a Dm chord with the major seventh in the bass)

Simple variation:

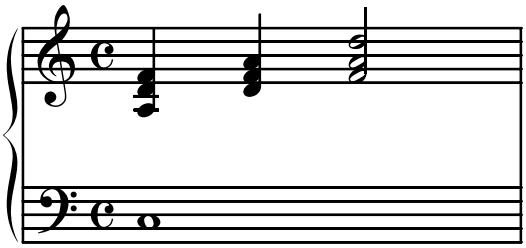


The bass tone can be doubled:

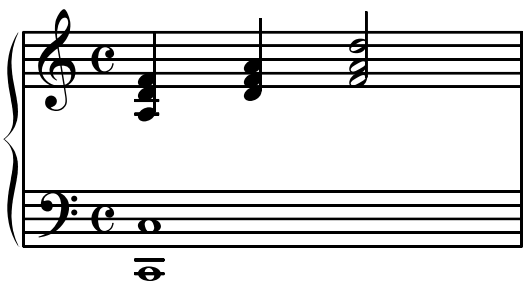


Dm/C or **Dm / C** (a Dm7 chord with the minor seventh in the bass)

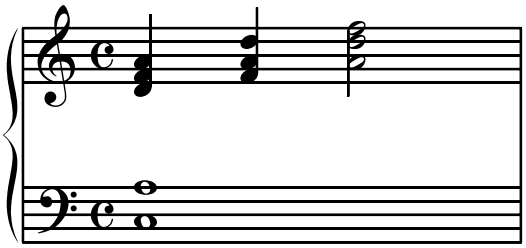
Simple variation:



The bass tone can be doubled:



The note "A" (the fifth of the Dm7) can be added in the left hand:



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Tips and Tricks

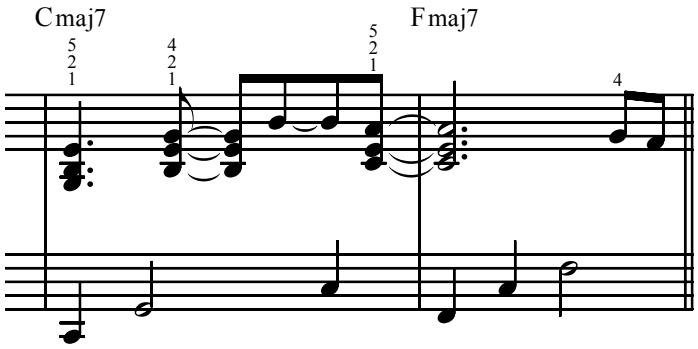
When playing pop songs on the piano, you are bound to have some questions. We´ll show you some answers and solutions in this chapter. We can´t solve all problems here, but these tips will help you interpret songs better.

Anticipated Melody

If certain notes in the melody are anticipated, or played on beat "4 and" of the previous measure, the right hand should also play the indicated chord along with it. The left hand can wait until beat "1" of the next measure, as in this example from "Song for you":

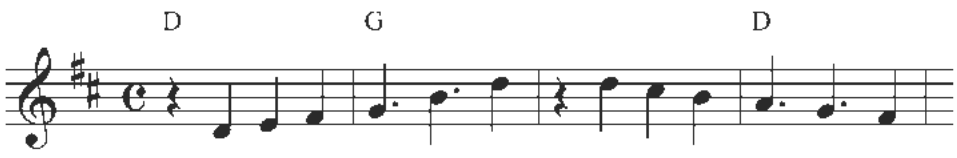
Lead sheet example, melody, measures 7+8 (Page 11)

Practical example from solo version, measures 11+12 (page 12)



Rests at the beginning of a measure

Frequently we´ll encounter a melody that has a rest at the beginning of a measure. As a rule, we can play the indicated chord during this rest. The chord shouldn´t be played loudly because we want to emphasize the melody which follows. Measures 1+3 from the lead sheet to "Wonderful Day" (page 87) show an example of a melody with a rest at the beginning of the measure:



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