

Four-note voicings

These four-note rootless voicings, pioneered by Bill Evans, are the staple repertoire of jazz pianists and should be memorised and ‘played in’ until they become part of the subconscious. A thorough knowledge of these voicings is essential. If you are unfamiliar with them, it would be advisable to look no further in this guide until you have mastered them all. The advantages of these voicings should be obvious (see Fig. 4).

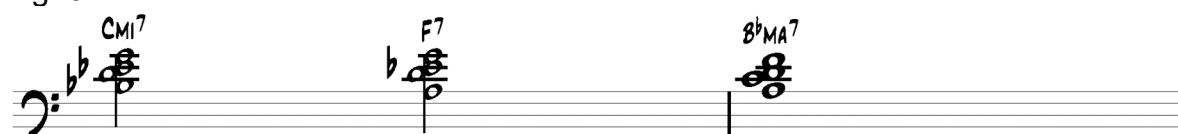
Fig. 4



By eliminating the root, we allow the left hand to explore more colour tones in each chord (as well as staying out of the bass player’s way). We have added the 9th to our minor 7 and major 7 chords and the 5th of the minor 7 chord is carried over to become the 9th in the dominant 7 voicing. However, notice that the 9th of Cm7 is also carried over and now gives us a lovely 13th tone in the F7. By simply lowering one note from the Cm7 (the 7th or leading tone as discussed earlier), we create a great-sounding F13 voicing.

Of course, just utilising these voicings as written will give us problems in some keys as they will have to be played too low or too high on the piano to be practical. Therefore we have the inversion shape of these chords as shown in Fig. 5.

Fig. 5



Notice that the bottom note of the II chord is a 7th, which becomes the 3rd of the V and then the 7th of I: (7 – 3 – 7), whereas in the Fig. 4 voicings, the bottom note progression is 3 – 7 – 3. This can be a useful way of remembering and differentiating between these inversions.

The minor and dominant chord shapes in Fig. 5 are great ‘cluster’ voicings due to the semitone interval in the middle of the chords.