

DROP TWO BLOCK CHORDS (ARPEGGIO PASSAGES)

Harmonizing melodies in block chords often involves playing four-note close position voicings in the right hand, with the melody note uppermost. George Shearing added a single note in the left hand, doubling the melody an octave below (see 'Exploring Jazz Piano' Vol 1, pp. 223-224).

A more modern, open sound is popular with many pianists, who adopt the arranger's technique of dropping the SECOND NOTE FROM THE TOP of a voicing down an octave - hence the term **DROP TWO**.

One of the easiest and most useful ways to get your head (and fingers) round this concept is to start practising simple arpeggios using drop two shapes. Here's how to approach this:

• MINOR SEVENTH CHORDS – round the cycle (up in 4ths)

Play root position arpeggios in the right hand (four notes - **R 3 5 7**). These are the melody notes we'll be harmonizing:



Now play 4-note close position shapes (inversions) with the above melody notes ON TOP:



Now omit the SECOND NOTE from the top of each chord and play it in the left hand, an octave lower. These are the **DROP TWO** voicings:



I recommend practising these two-handed shapes up and down each chord several times, until memorized. Don't move on to the next chord until you can find the shapes **WITHOUT READING** them. Make it your business to know the shapes for all 12 minor seventh chords.

• MAJOR SEVENTH CHORDS – round the cycle

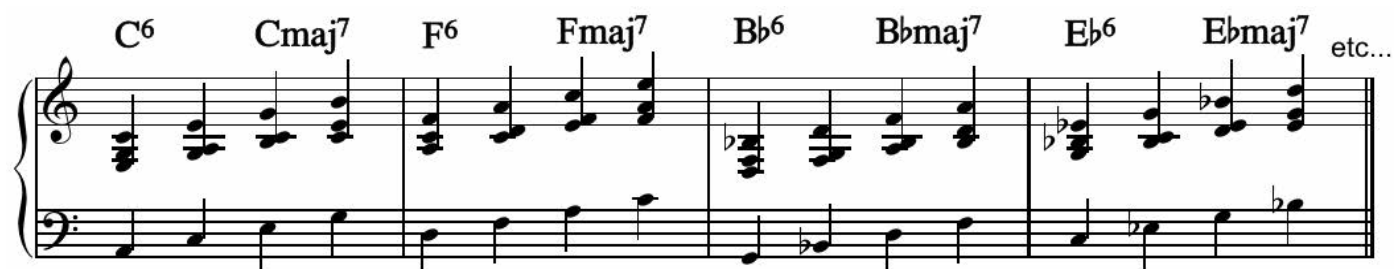
You can apply the same principle to any chord type. Here are some Root position major seventh arpeggios:



To harmonize these notes you can also use MAJOR SIXTH chords. This avoids the clash between the major 7th and the root (when they are a flat 9th apart):



Now omit the second note from the top and play it the left hand:



Once you've learn these shapes continue up in 4ths until you've covered all keys. No need to do all twelve in one go – spend time with each one to let your fingers get used to the shapes and their distinctive sound.

Drop Two voicings are especially useful when playing the MELODY, and you want a change from playing chords in the left hand, single notes in right. Look for passages that outline basic notes of the chord – perhaps even just a triad in the melody.

You can find some examples of this approach in my arrangement of 'In a Sentimental Mood' (Exploring Jazz Piano Vol 1, pp. 221 & 224) and in the bridge of 'Softly As In a Morning Sunrise' (Vol 2, pp. 236-238)

In the next section we'll apply the drop two method to SCALE PASSAGES.