



# Voice Leading on a 7 String Guitar

by Steve Herberman

In this article we'll examine useful ii-V-I voicings which utilize smooth voice leading. It is wise to know many ways to voice this progression as it occurs so frequently in

jazz/pop music.

In Example 1, notice how the top three notes in the Cmi7 move down 1/2 step to the F13b9.

1.

Example 1 shows a ii-V-I progression in C minor: Cmi7, F13b9 or D/F#, and Bbma7. The top three notes of the Cmi7 chord (Bb, Eb, Gb) move down a half step to become the top three notes of the F13b9 chord (Eb, Ab, Cb). The guitar notation below shows the following fret numbers for strings E, B, G, D, A, A: Cmi7 (4, 3, 5, 5, 3, 3), F13b9 or D/F# (3, 2, 4, 4, 1, 1), and Bbma7 (3, 2, 3, 3, 1, 1).

All three chord voicings in Example 2 are very common, but usually seen with the roots dropped one octave on the first two chords. The Gma7 remains unchanged from the standard six-string voicing. It's worthwhile to play the Gma7 on string sets 7, 5, 4 and 3 in addition to what is written below. In fact, it would be most beneficial to run through all of these examples in different positions and fingerings.

2.

Example 2 shows a ii-V-I progression in A minor: Ami7, D7b9, and Gma7. The guitar notation below shows the following fret numbers for strings E, B, G, D, A, A: Ami7 (0, 2, 2, 2, 0, 0), D7b9 (4, 4, 4, 4, 5, 5), and Gma7 (3, 4, 4, 4, 3, 3).

In Example 3 the root of the standard Dmi9 voicing has been dropped by 1 octave. The V chord (G7) was replaced with its tri-tone substitute Db7, in this case Db9#11.

Another name for the Db9#11 is G+7 with the flat 5 (or #11) in the bass. The tritone substitute is especially useful for 7-string guitarists when the roots can remain on the low 7<sup>th</sup> string

3.

Example 3 shows three chords in a 7-string guitar voicing. The first chord is Dmi<sup>9</sup> with a root on the 7th string (D), fingerings 2-3-1-2-3-2-1, and a bass staff fingering of 5-3-5. The second chord is Db<sup>9</sup>#11 with a root on the 7th string (Bb), fingerings 1-1-2-1-2-1-2, and a bass staff fingering of 3-4-3-4-3-4-3. The third chord is C<sup>9</sup>/b<sup>9</sup> with a root on the 7th string (C), fingerings 1-2-1-2-1-2-1, and a bass staff fingering of 3-2-3-2-3-2-3.

In Example 4 the Fmi7 voicing is in root position with its root dropped one octave. With closed root position chords like this, there is often a stretch involved.

4.

Example 4 shows three chords in a 7-string guitar voicing. The first chord is Fmi<sup>7</sup> with a root on the 7th string (F), fingerings 2-1-2-1-2-1-2, and a bass staff fingering of 4-5-4-5-4-5-4. The second chord is Bb<sup>7</sup>sus<sup>b</sup>9 (Abmi/Bb) with a root on the 7th string (Bb), fingerings 1-1-2-1-2-1-2, and a bass staff fingering of 4-4-6-4-6-4-6. The third chord is Eb<sup>9</sup>ma<sup>9</sup> with a root on the 7th string (Eb), fingerings 1-2-1-2-1-2-1, and a bass staff fingering of 3-3-3-3-3-3-3.

In Example 5 notice how wide the outside intervals are. These open voicings are perfect for the 7-string as no big stretches are required to play them. Note the upper pedal tone "D" in all three chords. Fingerstyle technique is best with these types of voicings since most of the notes are on non-adjacent strings.

Another solution is to play the bass note just before the upper notes in the chord to accommodate pick -style technique. The left-hand fingering is the same on all three chords. In

5.

Example 5 shows three chords in the key of E-flat major: Gmi7, Gb+7, and Fma13. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of two flats, and a common time signature. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4 on the strings. The guitar fretboard is shown below with fingerings: Gmi7 (10-10-8-10), Gb+7 (10-9-8-9), and Fma13 (10-9-7-8).

Barre chords are tough to play across all seven strings as well as being inflexible in contrapuntal styles of guitar playing, particularly when improvising. Certain things can be only played with a barré but given a choice, I believe it's best to use multiple fingers. The Db major 13 presents quite a stretch but is playable with some work. The element of contrary motion makes it a desirable, though physically tough, choice.

6.

Example 6 shows three chords in the key of E-flat major: Ebmi7, D13, and Dbma13. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of two flats, and a common time signature. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4. The guitar fretboard is shown below with fingerings: Ebmi7 (6-7-6-6), D13 (7-7-5-7), and Dbma13 (8-6-8-4).

The next few examples are minor two-five-one (ii-V-i) voicings. The top three notes of the Bbmi7b5 chord are made up of a Db minor triad which moves up a minor 3<sup>rd</sup> interval to become part of the A13.

7.

Example 7 shows three chords in the key of E-flat major: Bbmi7b5, A13, and Abmi6. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of two flats, and a common time signature. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4. The guitar fretboard is shown below with fingerings: Bbmi7b5 (2-1-2-1), A13 (2-5-5-0), and Abmi6 (4-4-3-4).

In Example 8, notice the minor 2<sup>nd</sup> intervals in the first two voicings. The D+b9 is missing its 7th, but the minor 2nd interval in the voicing more than makes up for the omission.

8.

Example 8 shows three chords on a 7-string guitar. The first chord is  $A_{mi}7^{b5}$  with a treble clef voicing of G4 (4), A4 (4), B4 (3), C5 (2), D5 (0) and a bass clef voicing of G2 (8), A2 (4), B2 (5), C3 (0), D3 (0). The second chord is  $D+b9$  with a treble clef voicing of D4 (3), E4 (1), F4 (4), G4 (2), A4 (0) and a bass clef voicing of D2 (6), E2 (4), F2 (7), G2 (4), A2 (5). The third chord is  $G_{mi}(ma^9)$  with a treble clef voicing of G4 (4), A4 (3), B4 (2), C5 (1), D5 (0) and a bass clef voicing of G2 (5), A2 (3), B2 (3), C3 (4), D3 (3).

Between its range and note density, the  $A+7\#9$  is certainly a big chord, a real "7-string special". Since this chord contains 6 notes, it can either be strummed or the bass note can be sounded just before the upper notes are played with all five right-hand fingers. Another option is to arpeggiate the chord. It's a good idea to apply various right-hand techniques to these studies once you have played them as written.

9.

Example 9 shows three chords on a 7-string guitar. The first chord is  $E_{mi}7^{b5}$  with a treble clef voicing of G4 (4), A4 (1), B4 (2), C5 (0), D5 (0) and a bass clef voicing of E2 (3), F2 (2), G2 (3), A2 (0), B2 (0). The second chord is  $A+7\#9$  with a treble clef voicing of G4 (3), A4 (1), B4 (2), C5 (0), D5 (0) and a bass clef voicing of A2 (5), B2 (4), C3 (0), D3 (0), E3 (0). The third chord is  $D_{mi}(ma^{13})$  with a treble clef voicing of G4 (0), A4 (2), B4 (1), C5 (0), D5 (0) and a bass clef voicing of D2 (4), E2 (2), F2 (3), G2 (0), A2 (5).

It doesn't get much lower than this for a 7-string player! Example 10 is also quite easy to play. Learning these patterns is not only fun but extremely practical.

10.

Example 10 shows three chords on a 7-string guitar. The first chord is  $B_{mi}^{11}$  with a treble clef voicing of G4 (0), A4 (2), B4 (1), C5 (0), D5 (0) and a bass clef voicing of B2 (2), C3 (0), D3 (0), E3 (0), F3 (0). The second chord is  $B^{b9}\#11$  with a treble clef voicing of G4 (0), A4 (2), B4 (1), C5 (0), D5 (0) and a bass clef voicing of B2 (1), C3 (0), D3 (0), E3 (0), F3 (0). The third chord is  $A_{ma}^{13}$  with a treble clef voicing of G4 (4), A4 (3), B4 (2), C5 (1), D5 (0) and a bass clef voicing of A2 (4), B2 (2), C3 (4), D3 (4), E3 (0).

Once these types of voicings are second nature, I recommend working on inner-line motion for each chord voicing. I've gone into this topic in detail in my previous columns for *Guitar Sessions*. Please see the archives to view and listen to these past articles. Enjoy your practicing and playing!

Best wishes,  
Steve Herberman

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#### **About the Author:**

Steve Herberman is a graduate of Berklee College of Music and adopted the 7-string guitar in 1993. He has performed at venues such as Birdland in NYC, Spazio in Los Angeles, the NAMM shows in Anaheim and Nashville, Blues Alley, The Smithsonian Jazz Cafe, and the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

Steve has taught at Towson University near Baltimore since 1999 as an adjunct faculty member. At Towson he directs several jazz ensembles, teaches private guitar lessons and performs in the faculty jazz ensemble featuring original compositions of new music. Steve has taken his workshops to various schools, most recently Virginia Commonwealth University and has written instructional material for *Downbeat* magazine. He is on the faculty of the Levine School of Music in MD/DC and has recently become an online instructor for [www.mikesmasterclasses.com](http://www.mikesmasterclasses.com). He performed at the First World Guitar Congress in Baltimore and moderated symposiums with panelists and guitar greats Jim Hall, John Scofield, Ralph Towner, Jimmy Bruno, Howard Alden, Eric Johnson and Martin Taylor. Steve has been featured in concerts with guitar great John Pisano across the US.

Steve has recorded two CD's as a leader; *Thoughtlines* (2001) and *Action: Reaction* (2006). Regarding the latter recording, jazz guitar great Gene Bertoncini writes: *Action: Reaction* is everything its title suggests and is truly something out of the ordinary. His compositions put a smile on your face and they feel "at home" right from the first listening. Each one has a mind of its own; all of this a major achievement for an album of original music. Steve's improvising is uniquely fresh with melodic ideas that twist and turn and perk your interest with occasional elements of humor as well. There is a constant groove in his solo lines. He shows prowess harmonically and linearly with an abundance of chops and with an exceptional clarity to it all. His fellow players Drew Gress and Mark Ferber are also brilliant soloists and display the same kind of ingenuity, creativity, freshness and response at all times. The trio maintains a general "cooking" quality throughout the entire recording.