



# Voice Leading

By Jason Kokoszka

Good voice leading is the key to changing chords smoothly and creating cohesive accompaniment figures. In this issue, we'll use a jazzy 16-bar example with ample syncopation to illustrate this concept in a musical context. To learn more about voice leading, see the Theory Corner for an excerpt from Noah Baerman's book, *The Complete Jazz Keyboard Method: Beginning Jazz Keyboard*, available through Alfred Publishing.

There are complementary parts for guitar, keyboard, bass and drums below. Please note that the chords above each part reflect the overall harmony when all four instruments are taken into account. Try playing this with your friends at your next jam session, and have fun!

## Guitar

This part focuses on partial chords and smooth voice leading. Count measures 1 and 2 carefully; the same two-bar rhythmic phrase repeats in measures 3 and 5. The chords in measures 7, 8, 15 and 16 should be played staccato to contrast with the phrasing in the other measures. The tempo should be 156 beats per minute.

Chords for measures 1-8: Amin7, D7, Amin7, D7, Gmin7, C7, Gmin7, C7

Chords for measures 9-16: F7, Gmin7, F7, C7, F6, D7b9, C, E9

9 Amin7 D7 Amin7 D7 Gmin7 C7 Gmin7 F#7

9 2 3 1

T  
A  
B

13 Eb Fmin Bbmin7 A7 D7 G7 Bmin11 E9 Amin

13 3 1 2 1 3 4 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 4 1 2 3 1 2 4

T  
A  
B

# Keyboard

This part consists of three-note voicings in the right hand and single bass notes in the left hand. To illustrate good voice leading, the notes in these chords shift by step and common tones are held where possible. Pay close attention to the ties in the left-hand part and use a metronome to ensure these notes are held for their full values. Try to play this piece at 156 beats per minute.

The musical score is written in 4/4 time and consists of four systems of music. Each system shows a right-hand part with three-note voicings and a left-hand part with single bass notes. The chords and their voicings are as follows:

- System 1:**
  - Measures 1-2: Amin7 (5, 2, 1), D7 (5, 3, 2)
  - Measures 3-4: Amin7 (5, 2, 1), D7 (5, 3, 1)
  - Measures 5-6: Gmin7 (5, 2, 1), C7 (5, 3, 1)
  - Measures 7-8: Gmin7 (5, 2, 1), C7 (5, 3, 1)
- System 2:**
  - Measures 9-10: F7 (5, 3, 1), Gmin7 (5, 3, 1)
  - Measures 11-12: F7 (5, 3, 1), C7 (5, 3, 1)
  - Measures 13-14: F6 (5, 2, 1), D7b9 (4, 2, 1)
  - Measures 15-16: C (5, 2, 1), E9 (5, 2, 1)
- System 3:**
  - Measures 17-18: Amin7 (5, 2, 1), D7 (5, 3, 2)
  - Measures 19-20: Amin7 (5, 2, 1), D7 (5, 3, 1)
  - Measures 21-22: Gmin7 (5, 2, 1), C7 (5, 3, 1)
  - Measures 23-24: Gmin7 (5, 2, 1), F#7 (5, 2, 1)
- System 4:**
  - Measures 25-26: Eb (4, 2, 1), Fmin (5, 2, 1)
  - Measures 27-28: Bbm7 (5, 2, 1), A7 (5, 2, 1)
  - Measures 29-30: D7 (5, 2, 1), G7 (5, 4, 2, 1)
  - Measures 31-32: Bmin11 (4, 2, 1), E9 (5, 3, 1)
  - Measures 33-34: Amin (5, 3, 1)

# Bass

Voice leading is an important concept for bassists to understand, even though most basslines consist of single notes. This bassline combines both leaps and stepwise motion, which is very common in jazz. Watch for notes tied over the barline in measures 1, 9, 11 and 13; be sure to hold these notes for their full values. The target tempo for this piece is 156 beats per minute. Work with a metronome and gradually increase the tempo until you can play it perfectly at the target tempo.

Amin7 D7 Amin7 D7 Gmin7 C7 Gmin7 C7

3 1 3 2 4 2 1 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 1

T 4  
A 4  
B 4

5 3 5 5 (5) 3 5 5 4 5 3 2 3 5 3 5 3 5 3 2

5 F7 Gmin7 F7 C7 F6 D7b9 C E9

5 1 4 3 1 1 4 2 4 2 1 2 4 1 2 4 2 2 1 4 1 3

T 4  
A 4  
B 4

3 6 5 3 2 5 3 5 5 3 5 2 3 7 4 5 7 5 3 2 5 2 4

9 Amin7 D7 Amin7 D7 Gmin7 C7 Gmin7 F#7

9 4 1 4 4 1 2 4 1 2 3 4 2 1 4 3 1

T 4  
A 4  
B 4

5 3 5 5 (5) 3 4 5 2 3 4 5 4 3 5 (5) 5 4 2

13 Eb Fmin Bbmin7 A7 D7 G7 Bmin11 E9 Amin

13 1 2 3 1 3 1 4 1 4 3 4 4 1 4 1 4 1 3 3

T 4  
A 4  
B 4

1 2 3 1 3 (3) 1 0 4 2 5 4 5 5 3 5 2 2 5 2 0 4 5

# Drums

This drum part supports the other instruments with a basic quarter- and eighth-note pattern on the hi-hat and bass drum, with accents on the snare and floor tom. Notice that the snare is played with a cross stick except for measures 7, 8, 15 and 16, where the feel changes slightly. As you become comfortable with this part, try playing it at 156 beats per minute, the target tempo for this piece.

The drum notation is presented in four systems, each with a 4/4 time signature. The first system includes the instruction '+ + + + simile' above the first measure. The notation uses standard drum symbols: 'x' for hi-hat, 'o' for snare, and 'f' for floor tom. The bass drum part is indicated by stems with flags. The pattern consists of a steady eighth-note hi-hat and bass drum accompaniment, with snare and floor tom accents on the second and fourth beats of each measure. The second system starts at measure 5, the third at measure 9, and the fourth at measure 13. The notation ends with a double bar line at the end of measure 16.

## Conclusion

For more information on voice leading, be sure to check out the Theory Corner for an excerpt from Noah Baerman's book, *The Complete Jazz Keyboard Method: Beginning Jazz Keyboard*, available at [www.alfred.com](http://www.alfred.com). In addition, be sure to check out his jazz seminar lessons on [www.WorkshopLive.com](http://www.WorkshopLive.com) today!

To learn more about voice leading, guitarists will want to check out any lesson where the focus is 7th chord arpeggios or progressions using 7th chords. Keep in mind that most lessons beyond the beginner skill level focus on teaching good voice leading when dealing with chord progressions, although it's also important to keep the style you're studying in mind, as all styles employ different musical language and tendencies.

Not a guitarist? Keyboardists should check out Noah Baerman's lessons "Voice Leading" and "Voice Leading with 7th Chords." Also, any lessons focusing on inversions will help you make smoother connections between your chords.

Bassists should look into lessons focusing on 7th chord arpeggios and inversions.

Take your time and have fun with this concept—see you in a couple short weeks!