

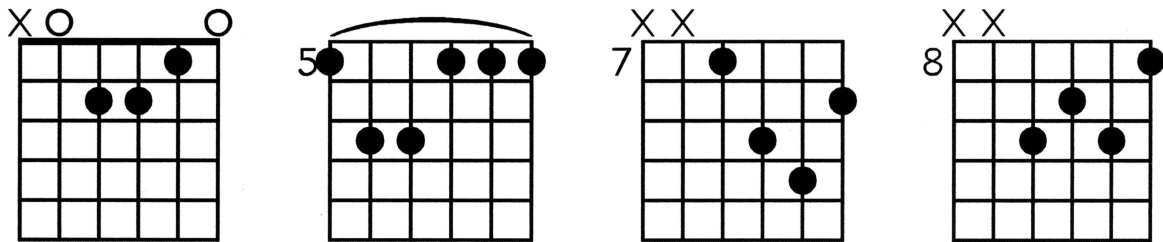
Guitar

The Basics

Column #2

This installment will be focusing on another aspect of chord usage, namely, alternative voices, even positions. This is particularly useful when there are two or more guitar players involved. Instead of playing the same chord at the same fret, basically doubling the sound (which has a benefit when used properly), and which is used to create the 'wall of sound' you hear on so many, many, many records these days, one of the guitar players should look at playing a different version of the given chord, either higher or lower on the fret board.

Say you're playing in the key of A and your root chord is an A minor. Depending on the sound you're going for, you will be playing it in first position with the low A open, or you will be fretting the whole thing at the fifth fret. This is pretty typical. But what if one guitar player decided to play the A minor way up at the ninth fret? There's an A minor up there? You bet! You can find chords all over the fret board if you know what you're doing. Here are four versions of the A minor chord:



You probably know at least the first two of these. And you can repeat the first position A minor at the twelfth fret, too, for number 5. But pulling a simple octave version won't give you quite the diversity you might want, or find appealing.

Even if you're the only guitar player in the band, there may be a keyboard player. You should sit with them and find out how many fingerings they have for any given chord. You can omit some intervals and play some pretty sparse versions of chords, too. It isn't required to play every note of a given chord. But, the more notes in a chord, the more options you have.

And if you're playing in a three piece band, it's all that much more important you learn what we are addressing in this article. There's a whole lot of weight and pressure on you to be really good. Believe me, the more versatile you are, the more full you are going to sound, especially if you rely less on solos and place more focus on textures (ala Andy Summers of the Police). Chords are what give you different textures.

The main thing here is that you should look for different ways to play any given chord. And, with that in mind, we're going to reveal a big secret to really getting some interesting flavour into your 'interpretation' of a progression.

Let's pick a simple chord progression to use as our example: A, G, D and A.



Pretty easy and typical for a Rock progression, even a Country tune.

Now, you can play this pretty straight in first position, and have a good sound, too. But what if you took these chords and altered them just a little to create more colour, more complexity in how they sound? Maybe something like this:



We only changed the A major to an **Amaj7**, but that makes quite a difference. Played in first position, it begins to sound a little different. Now try playing everything Barred, the Amaj7 at the fifth fret; the G at the third; the D at the fifth. You'll notice it now sounds really full. And we only altered one chord type.

Here's the deal: you can play any version of a major chord where a simple major is called out. So that A major can be altered to be a **maj7**, **maj6**, **maj9**, even a **maj13** variation of the simple major chord. So using the above basic progression, start to replace, or *substitute*, other versions of the major chord in place of the basic forms.

What's true of majors, is also true of minor chords, too. Here's the same basic progression, now made minor.



Notice we left the G chord alone, but altered the A to an **Am7**. You could also just play a plain Am. We took the D and kept it a simple minor, but we could also choose a **Dm7** for more colour. Play this in first position and you get the jangly sound of more modern, Alternative Pop music. Barre everything and you get a richer and more full sound, more akin to Progressive Rock or Blues (and when cranked to 11, Metal).

As before, look at substituting the minor 9, 11, 13, even the minor 6 chord form, in the different positions to see how they sound.

And once you figure out which versions you'll play for each chord you use, remember to try playing them all over the fret board to find that unique and slightly different voicing you may be hunting for. "Voicing" is basically how you choose to arrange the notes of the chord in different order, *including inversions*, which swerves away from always having the root on the bottom. You probably already do this a little. You should experiment with this as you get better at finding different chord variations, swapping out the 3, the 5, the 7 and other intervals, on the bottom.

It could simply be this exercise that puts you on to a whole new approach to writing, or even arranging songs you didn't write. I do this all the time with cover tunes, trying to see if I can make them a little more interesting.

But, be careful. Sometimes it doesn't work. Sometimes a progression should be simple and basic. That's the heart of a lot of Rock and Roll, right? Simple, basic, sweaty and straight-ahead and uncomplicated.

The possibilities are so varied and can help to open up a basic idea and make it sound more complex, simply by adding a 7, 9, 11 or 13 extension. You can do the same with dominant chords, too. There is no limit here.

The more you know about chords and how they are put together, the more variety you will have available at your disposal. And that means, whether arranging a cover tune or in writing your own tunes, you have the power to choose just how it is going to sound.

Knowledge is power. You've heard it before. And here you are learning how it applies to your knowledge of music. It is why Music Theory is so important.

Remember this, too: Anyone who tells you Theory is a waste of time is someone who doesn't know what they are talking about because they do not know Theory, and so are unqualified to render a judgment about the value - or lack of value - Theory has in your growth as a musician.

If you are learning music, you are learning Theory, whether you are aware of it or not. For me, I'd rather understand what I'm doing than to stumble blindly forward without knowing what I'm doing - even if it sounds good in the process. I've been on the blind side of the argument. Believe me when I tell you, I learn more when my eyes and ears are open, and my mind is receptive.

But, then, that's just me.