

CHAPTER 10

Upper-Structure Triads

A triad that contains one or more tensions is called an *upper-structure triad*.

Dominant-7th chords can be voiced using upper-structure triads, in addition to upper-structure fourth voicings.

Upper-structure triads can be played by the right hand. Generally, the left hand plays the tritone (3rd and 7th) of the chord. The right hand plays a triad, avoiding triads that include the chord's 4th or major 7th. You can also overlap the triads and tritones, creating less open voicings. To enhance, replace the third with the fourth, making more triads available (36). The upper-structure triads remain; just avoid the flat-9th interval. (If it occurs, interchange the voices.)

There are 48 possible triads in all (twelve roots times four qualities). Avoiding the 4th and major 7th degrees leaves 26 triads available for C7:

The figure displays 48 triads for 12 roots, arranged in six rows. Each row contains four triads for a specific root. Triads that are unavailable are marked with an 'X' over the chord symbol. The roots and their available triads are:

- C:** C, C-, C+, C°, Db, Db-, Db+, Db°
- D:** D, D-, D+, D°, Eb, Eb-, Eb+, Eb°
- E:** E, E-, E+, E°, F, F-, F+, F°
- F#:** F#, F#-, F#+, F#°, G, G-, G+, G°
- A^b:** A^b, A^b-, A^b+, A^b°, A, A-, A+, A°
- B^b:** B^b, B^b-, B^b+, B^b°, B, B-, B+, B°

Unavailable triads (marked with X) include: C⁺, C[°], D^b, D^b-, D^b+, D^b°, D⁻, D⁺, D[°], E⁻, E⁺, E[°], F, F-, F+, F°, F[#], F[#]-, F[#]+, F[#]°, G, G-, G+, G°, A^b-, A^b+, A^b°, A, A-, A+, A°, B^b-, B^b+, B^b°, B, B-, B+, B°.

Fig. 10.1. Triads

Here are examples of a dominant-7th chord with upper-structure triads.

Fig. 10.2. Dominant-7th Chord with No Tension

For diatonic dominant-7th chords, all altered tensions can be used.

Fig. 10.3. Upper-Structure Triad from Altered Tensions

For non-diatonic dominant-7th chords \flat II7, II7, IV7, \flat VI7, and \flat VII7, choose upper-structure triads that contain $\sharp 9$, $\sharp 13$, or $\flat 5$. Here is II7 in the key of G major.

Fig. 10.4. II7 with Upper-Structure Triad

The III7, VI7, and VII7 take upper-structure triads that contain $\flat 9$ or $\flat 13$. Here is III7 in the key of B \flat major.

Fig. 10.5. III7 with Upper-Structure Triad

UPPER-STRUCTURE FOURTH VOICINGS

Upper-structure fourth voicings can be used if the root, $\flat 9$, $\sharp 9$, $\flat 5$, $\sharp 5$, or $\flat 13$ appear in the melody. The left hand plays the chord's tritone (3rd and 7th). The right hand plays chord tones or tensions that create an interval of a fourth. As with upper-structure triads, fourths may overlap. Perfect fourths with the tritone can also be altered. Upper-structure fourths are based (from the bottom up) on the 9-5-1 (perfect fourths), $\sharp 9-\flat 13-\flat 9$, 3-13-9, $\flat 13-\flat 9-\flat 5$, 13-9-5, and $\flat 7-\sharp 9-\flat 13$. Any low degree may be altered.

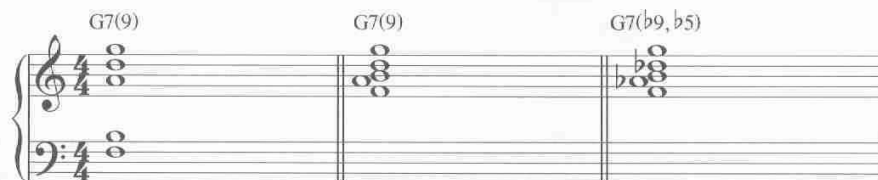


Fig. 10.6. Upper-Structure Fourth Voicing

DOMINANT 7 CONVERTED TO SUS4

Upper-structure triads may be converted into sus4 chords by replacing the left-hand tritone's 3rd with the 4th. To the left hand's interval of the 4 and $\flat 7$, apply all available upper-structure triads. Avoid the major 7th in any triad. The 3rd and sus4 may appear in the same chord if the 3rd is above the 4th. Avoid $\flat 9$ intervals by exchanging the parts. For example, if you have a C diminished triad above the 4 and $\flat 7$ interval, a $\flat 9$ interval will result between the F and $G\flat$, so exchange the parts so that it becomes a major 7th. Some of these result in standard voicings.

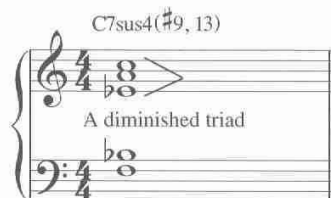


Fig. 10.7. Dominant-7th Chord Converted to Sus4

PRACTICE

Exercise 10.1. Upper-Structure Triad Practice

Choose one possible upper-structure triad for a dominant-7th chord, and practice it in all keys, using cycle 5. For example, play C7 in the left hand with a C minor triad in the right hand, then F7 with an F minor triad, then $B\flat 7$ with a $B\flat$ minor triad, etc.

Exercise 10.2. Voice-Leading Upper-Structure Triads



TRACK 26

Play the left hand dominant-7th chords through cycle 5 starting on any key. Voice lead in the right hand, and try using the same triad from one chord to the next. For example, in cycle 5, the C minor triad would work on C7 and the next chord, F7.