

Chapter 1 - Three-Note “Shell” Voicings

CYCLES

Play Ex. 1-1, the first four measures of the bridge to Duke Jordan’s “Jordu.” This is the sound of what many musicians refer to as “shell” voicings, which are 3-note voicings for seventh chords consisting of the root, 3rd and 7th of each chord. Notice the clear uncluttered sound and streamlined voice leading, as well as the ease with which they can be played on the guitar. This makes them a practical foundation for creating a system of generic voicings for jazz guitar.

Ex. 1-1

Now play Ex. 1-2, a “jazzed-up” (literally) version of the first couple of bars of the same progression using a device called tritone substitution to create a more interesting bass line. More on this later.

Ex. 1-2

ROOT MOVEMENT

Let’s do a bit of analysis on the first example. The chords are moving counter-clockwise around the circle of 5ths. This means, in theory, that each new chord root is a 5th lower than the previous chord root. If we tried to do this literally, we’d very quickly “run out of guitar”. Fortunately there’s an easy solution. The inversion of down-a-5th is up-a-4th, so we merely alternate down-a-5th from the fifth string to the sixth string with up-a-4th from the sixth string back to the fifth string. This is shown in Ex. 1-3.

Ex. 1-3