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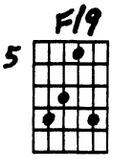
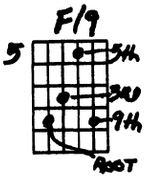
DIATONIC CHORD PROGRESSIONS IN MAJOR KEYS

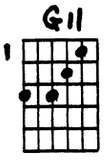
Some of the most common chord progressions are those using only chords derived from a major scale. Because of their beauty and the bright, happy sound they produce, thousands and thousands of musicians have been attracted to these progressions. Also, from a theoretical standpoint, they are very important because they form the foundations for many of the advanced sounds that arise out of certain substitution principles.

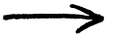
The following information is given to make sure that you, first of all, know just what chords can be built using only the notes of a major scale (the Key of C will be used for demonstration purposes but the information can be transposed to all other keys too). In other words, every chord in the following list contains only notes that are found in the C major scale. These chords are said to be DIATONIC to the key of C (in this book, diatonic means: using only notes of the scale). You will already know much of this information (remember this book assumes that you understand the basic fundamentals of music theory – see the Introduction if you missed this point), but if there are some chords in this list that perplex you as to their construction, rest assured that if you analyze the chord forms (chord form here means the same thing as chord diagram) you will meet in this book, you will understand the construction of virtually any chord.

Analyze, as used here, means to find out what tones of the chord are present and accounted for (many chord forms leave out 5ths or roots or even other tones sometimes).

Examples: Given 


Analysis:


Given 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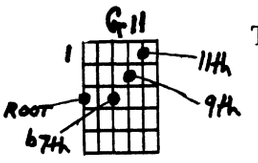

The 3rd and 5th are missing

Two questions you might have at this point: 1) "How do I know what tones are supposed to be in an 11th chord (or any other chord, for that matter) to begin with?" and 2) "How do I know what tones can be left out of any chord?"

The answers to the first question can be gotten from, you guessed it . . . a good teacher; or from my first book, CHORD CATASTROPHE (also known as CHORD CHEMISTRY), amongst other books. However, if you cannot afford either of these alternatives at the moment, just remember that chords are built in 3rd intervals (if you are still asking "What's a 3rd interval?", I'm afraid that you will have to get a teacher and/or some basic theory books, as explained in the Introduction).

CHORDS BY 3rd INTERVALS

Triads – 1 3 5
7ths – 1 3 5 7
9ths – 1 3 5 7 9
11ths – 1 3 5 7 9 11
13ths – 1 3 5 7 9 11 13
– Very general view

The answer to the second question can be found through sheer observation. As you progress through this book, you will see many chords with "missing" tones; many chords that have missing tones are used to create smooth VOICE LEADING (voice leading is the art of connecting each note of a given chord with each note in a following chord. See CHORD CHEMISTRY – Section 13.)