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## Jazz Mandology

### Chord Commonalties: m6, m7b5, rootless 9th

by Ted Eschliman



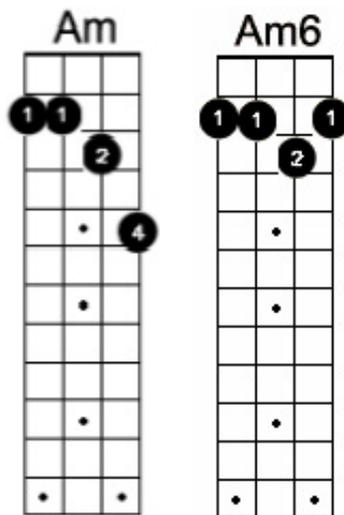
We've explored some melodic and linear ideas in jazz during the last few issues; let's go back and examine some shortcuts in voicing.

#### **Subjective thoughts about Chord Color:**

Think of your first days understanding the most elementary aspects of music theory. Remember the first time in music you heard the word "minor?" Most would describe "**minor**" in subjective terms as "sad," major as contrastingly "happy." Whether we are dealing with chords or scales, minor in its most elementary form is an arguably "unhappy" sound. At the risk of gross oversimplification, **major**, by contrast, is perceived as cheery...

A **minor triad chord** based on **A** would include the notes **A, C, and E**. On the mandolin, a common voicing is as follows, **A, E, C, A**, about as "pure" a voicing of minor as you can get. Now we are going to really get subjective and say if you add the note **F#** and spell out an **Am6** chord, you not only alter the chord, you inject a whole new personality (**A, E, C, F#**). Everyone may have their own prejudice about just what this character is, but you can't deny this is a more "playful" or "kittenish" color than a straight minor triad would be.

The **m6 (minor Six)** chord is a weapon of choice in Brazilian Choro, Western Swing, and many other colorful styles of music. It adds a delightful spice in this context, and is something you can easily add without looking up a chord chart all the time. If you have a long, stagnant section with a minor triad, you can slip in and out of it, varying from straight **minor** to **m6**, by moving from the **tonic** (one) down three notes, or the **fifth**, up one step. It adds a bit of "restlessness" and when we notice its relationship to the **m7b5** or "half diminished" chord we see why...



### **m7b5**

When you take a series of seventh chord progressions based on successive scale degrees of the minor scale, the 2nd scale degree spells a half-diminished chord, or what jazzers more commonly refer to as an **m7b5**. In the key of **E minor**, we stack all four notes starting on the second scale degree (**F#**), and we get **F#, A, C, and E**. (You will find this same seventh chord based on the 7th note of a major scale, too.) It's like a minor 7th chord, with the 5th scale degree lowered a half-step (b5).

The minor version of the '**ii V7 I**' cadence is '**ii7b5 V7 i**', that "**Preparation**" chord, based on the second scale degree, which sets us up for a V7 chord. It's a restless sound, wanting to move us to the next step in the progression, a **dominant** chord. Now notice the ingredients an Am6 and an F#m7b5 both share:

$$\mathbf{F\#m7b5 = F\# A C E * Am6 = A C E F\#}$$

The bottom note of each chord is different (bass), but they include the same identical notes, hence they will share a similar music character, even in different contexts. You also have to understand that the mandolin is rarely expected to play the bass note of a chord, we get all the juicy extensions and color harmonies because of this, and our register. For more thoughts on this, check our article on Chord Economics on the JazzMando Website.

Now, this brings up yet another harmonic opportunity, and hopefully introduces you to the inherent simplicity in jazz mandolin, that of duplicate chords in the jazz vocabulary. (Think about it now we actually have LESS to learn!)

### The "Rootless" Dominant 9th chord.

You may already be ahead of us on this one, but let's spell it out. If you played a D9 chord, the chances are pretty good that you wouldn't be including a D, as this five-note chord can't be played in its entirety on a mandolin. Though we have eight strings, there are only four voices (expressed in double course).

**Tonic: Am6**

(An A minor chord with an embellishing note, F#) **A C E F#**, this will stand by itself. (Hint: Play the E7 chord to allow your ear to establish the key of A minor for yourself.)

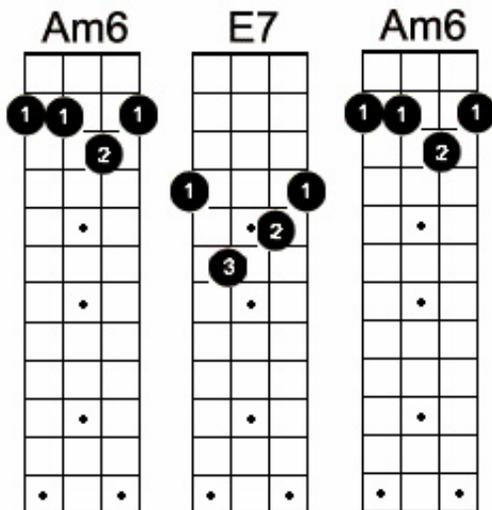
**KEY OF A MINOR**

So we are going to voice a D9 chord as D, F#, A, C, E. However, if we drop the D and leave it for the bass or guitar player to voice it, we are going to have these four notes:

**D9 (rootless 9th) = F# A C E**

### Déjà vu all over again

Yes, it's the same chord all over again, and its inherent restlessness gives us the forward motion of a dominant functioning chord! In our first Jazz Mandology articles we explored the three functions, **Tonic, Dominant, and Dominant Preparation**. You may want to go back and read this article from **Dec '03 Mandolin Sessions: Understanding the 'ii V7 I' Progression**. Taking what we've just unraveled, we take the same four set of notes **F# A C E**, and can actually assign each of those functions, depending on context.

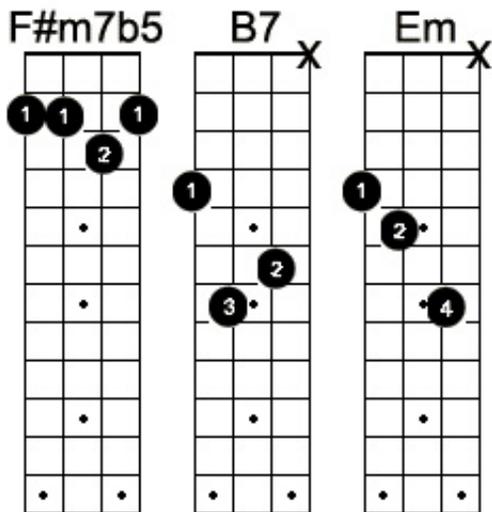


**Tonic: Am6**

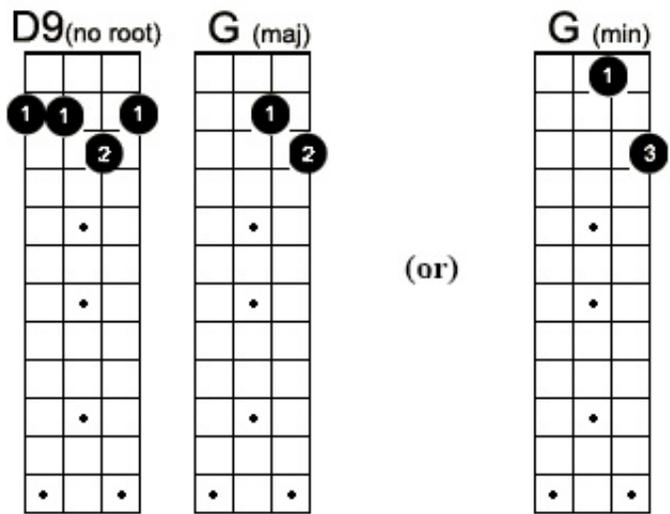
(An A minor chord with an embellishing note, F#) **A C E F#**, this will stand by itself. (Hint: Play the E7 chord to allow your ear to establish the key of A minor for yourself.)

**KEY OF A MINOR**

**Remember that the first chord of each set is comprised of the same notes, despite the fact that they have a different label and function!**



**Dominant Preparation: F#m7b5**  
**F# A C E**, these chords usually prepare for a dominant, in this case, likely followed up by a B7 chord, and resolve to an Em. (*Hint: Play entire 'ii7b5 V7 i' to allow your ear to establish the key of E minor for yourself.*)  
**KEY OF E MINOR**



**Dominant: D9 (no root) F# A C E (no D)**, this will resolve to tonic G in the key of G major (or minor). (*Hint: Play the G chord, either major or minor, to allow your ear to establish the key of G for yourself.*)  
**KEY OF G MAJOR**  
**or G MINOR**

Notice the importance of knowing the relationships; this in essence cuts down on the number of chords you need to learn. By a factor of three!!! We can explore some fingering possibilities, and tap into the beautiful symmetrical power at our fingertips, simply by moving these up and down the fretboard.

To help you uncover these for yourself, I've created a chart for accessing the "commonalties."

Chord Commonality Reference Chart:							
ROOT	m6 chord	=	ROOT	m7b5	=	ROOT	9 (no root)
A	Am6	=	F#/Gb	F#m7b5	=	D	D9
Bb	Bbm6	=	G	Gm7b5	=	Eb/D#	Eb/D#9
B	Bm6	=	Ab/G#	G#m7b5	=	E	E9
C	Cm6	=	A	Am7b5	=	F	F9
C#/Db	C#m6	=	Bb	Bbm7b5	=	F#/Gb	F#/G#9
D	Dm6	=	B/Cb	Bm7b5	=	G	F9
Eb/D#	Ebm6	=	C	Cm7b5	=	Ab/G#	Ab/G#9
E	Em6	=	C#/Db	C#m7b5	=	A	A9
F	Fm6	=	D	Dm7b5	=	Bb	Bb9
F#/Gb	F#m6	=	Eb/D#	Ebm7b5	=	B/Cb	B/Cb9
G	Gm6	=	E	Em7b5	=	C	C9
Ab/G#	Abm6	=	F	Fm7b5	=	C#/Db	C#/Db9

Our goal is not to make jazz more complex. We want to make it more accessible. As you explore these possibilities, it may very well be that your fingers are ahead of your brain in unraveling these chords. They will get to stance before you even know where they are. The next step is to find them in context, and be able to anticipate what chords come after. For example, knowing an **Em7b5** (dominant prep) more often precedes its dominant partner, A7 (or some lush extension), or knowing an Eb9 often precedes an Ab (tonic). Knowing harmonic function makes learning these easier, and, ultimately, more intuitive.

Take the time to review the stock major '**ii V7 I**' and minor '**ii7b5 V7 i**' we explored in an earlier Jazz Mandology article, these will help develop your chord intuition even more!

Speaking of back issues, are you new to Mandolin Sessions? If so, take the time to browse some of the excellent Back Issue articles by clicking the link at the top of the page, or click here: <http://mandolinsessions.com/backissues.html>.

As always, we covet your feedback so weigh in at [www.jazzmando.com](http://www.jazzmando.com), or email me at [ted@jazzmando.com](mailto:ted@jazzmando.com).

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