



# Chords in Passing

## Exploring Diatonic Chord Progressions

by Ted Eschliman

### Eliminating static cling...

As good jazzers, we continually seek creative ways to goose up "static" chord patterns. We looked at some tricks in our harmonization article, "Taking the Harm out of Reharmon," <http://mandolinlessons.com/feb06/jazz.html> that included adding some extra chords through a higher level application of music

theory. How about this time we take a step back and borrow some ideas from our Folk/Bluegrass friends and exploit chords that stay within the key, specifically "**Diatonic Chords**."

Let's say you have a set of 2 or 4 measures of just one chord. It's not uncommon at the beginning or the end of a phrase, even in a good jazz standard. After 27 chorus on the same melody, you'll want to inject a little motion (hopefully sooner than that), and this is an easy way to do it...

	A <sup>b</sup> Maj7 B <sup>b</sup> m7		Cm7 D <sup>b</sup> Maj7		A <sup>b</sup> Maj7 B <sup>b</sup> m7		Cm7 D <sup>b</sup> Maj7	
	Diatonic 7th Chords				Diatonic 7ths, no 5th			
Mandolin								
TAB	I Maj7	ii m7	iii m7	IV Maj7	I Maj7	ii m7	iii m7	IV Maj7

### A tiny bit of theory, please...

Discussing an obligatory bit of music theory (if this bores you, just read the chords toward the end and start playing...), we want to understand that "**Diatonic Chords**" are simply chords based on notes of the scale. Above, we take the first for notes of the **Ab Major Scale** (Ab, Bb, C, Db) and stack **7<sup>th</sup> chords** above them. Notice, there are no accidentals outside of the key.

### 3-note Chords

In the last two measures, notice we eliminate the **5<sup>th</sup>** note of the key. There will be two good reasons for this: 1.) this note is "aurally" implied (you really don't miss it), and 2.), the chord economics of the mandolin make it necessary to start eliminating notes to free up the fingers in more complex extended chords later (9ths, 11ths, 13ths) for the crucial chord tones. Now let's spread these out on the fretboard so they work in context. Note we have the same set of notes, we've just reordered them to fit the capabilities of mandolin **5<sup>th</sup>s tuning**.

	A <sup>b</sup> Maj7	B <sup>b</sup> m7	Cm7	D <sup>b</sup> Maj7
	Diatonic 7ths, 3 Note Chord Fingerings			
	3	4	6	8
	5	6	8	10
	1	3	5	6

As you play these, take note as you progress, you don't leave the key, but there is some aural sense of movement. If a song called for a straight **AbMaj7** chord for several measures, it would be appropriate to fill in with the other **Diatonic Chords**. It can add a sense of dynamic motion, without disrupting the inherent harmonic integrity or simplicity of the music. In melody, you've heard of **Passing Notes** (notes that connect one to the next but aren't part of the chord)? These are **Passing Chords**.

**A one, a two... a one, two, three four!**

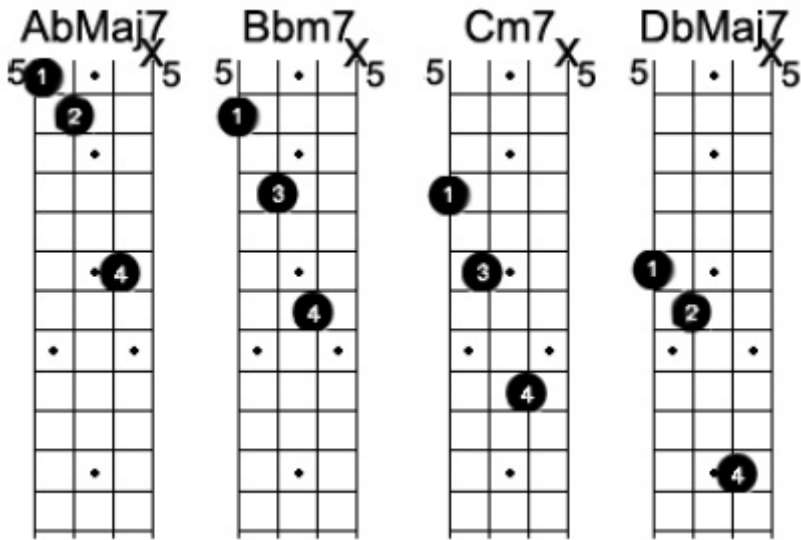
Play the following measures and note the flexibility. Labeling by scale degree function, we have I, ii7, iii7, ii7 in the first two measures, and we expand the progression with the IV7 chord. (Roman Numerals are generally used in harmonic analysis, if you haven't noticed before.)

You can transpose this up the fretboard. Try it up a step in the key of A, and mess around with other keys. Since this is a three note chord, you can also move it up a string and play in the key of **Eb Major** and work your way up for more keys. This is a great, complete sound, with the chord **Root** note of each chord in the bass, or lowest sounding note.

Here's a better look at the same progression:  
**AbMaj7 series**

**Move it, move it, move it!** These work fine, but let's expand our vocabulary by using a different **Inversion** of the chord and putting the **3<sup>rd</sup>** in the bass. Note we move this up the fretboard and start with a **C** in the Bass. Again, with an accompanying bass or guitar playing the **3-note** chord sounds very complete (observe, the fret board diagram starts on the **5<sup>th</sup> fret**):

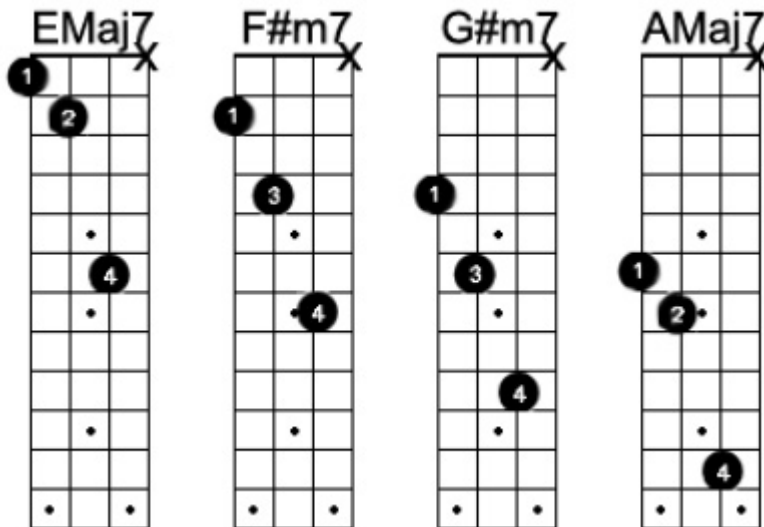
**AbMaj7\_3<sup>rd</sup> in the Bass**



Let's think about taking these same inversion or chord tone relationships (**3<sup>rd</sup>** in the bass) and transpose to the **key of E**

**Shift keys**

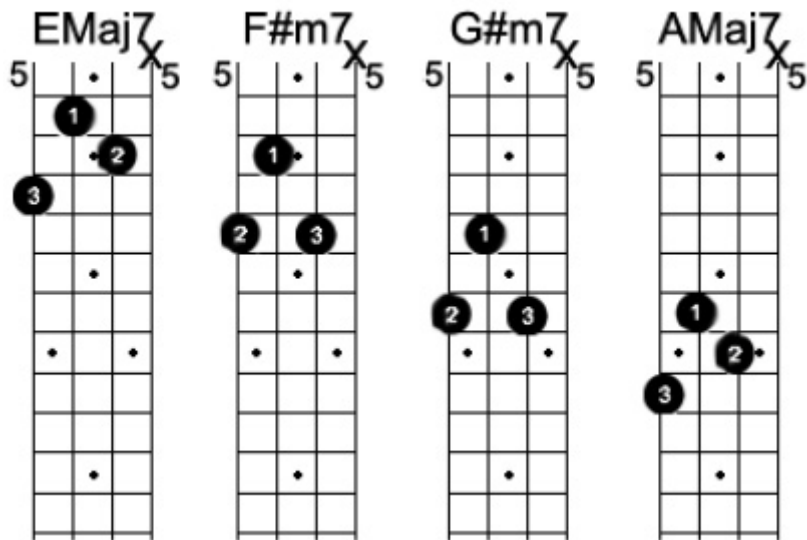
**Emaj7\_3<sup>rd</sup> in the Bass**



**A new Bass**

In this same key, let's work on a different inversion, remaining in the same key, but putting the 7<sup>th</sup> of each chord in the bass:

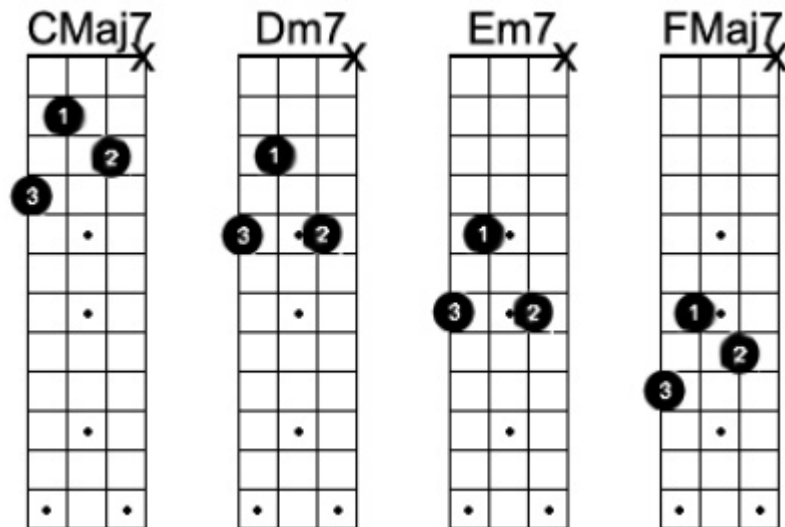
### Emaj7\_7<sup>th</sup> in bass



### Now at C level

It might sound funny stark all by itself, but in an ensemble context this can be a rich sound, even just playing in the 3-note chord fingering. We'll take this same inversion and transpose it to the key of C:

### Cmaj7 7<sup>th</sup> in the Bass



If you've studied music theory, you already know we've just been exploring **Inversions**. These would be labeled **Root**, **1<sup>st</sup>**, and **3<sup>rd</sup>** **Inversions**. We skipped the **2<sup>nd</sup>** **Inversion**, as for now we are leaving the 5th out of the chord for this discussion.

We've done something pretty remarkable here in that we've set up some home patterns you can transpose up and down the fretboard at will. It's about the coolest thing the mandolin can do, movable patterns accessed simply by moving across strings or frets.

If you can't transpose these in your head yet, take the time to jot them down on some blank fretboard paper. We have a template here you can use to create your own blank fretboard: <http://jazzmando.com/FretboardTemplate.pdf> Blow through some of the following changes to the following well known jazz standards. Notice how these measures that might not have been all that static come alive even more!

### Examples of Application:

All of Me (Simon & Marks, Key of C) 1<sup>st</sup> Measures

CMaj7  
/ / / / | / / / /

Sub:

CMaj7 Dm7 Em7 FMaj7  
/ / / / | / / / /

Night and Day (Cole Porter, Key of C) Bridge

EbMaj7 CMaj7  
/ / / / | / / / / | / / / / | / / / /

Sub:

EbMaj7 Fm7 Gm7 AbMaj7 CMaj7 Dm7 Em7 FMaj7  
/ / / / | / / / / | / / / / | / / / /

How High the Moon (Morgan Lewis, Key of G) 1<sup>st</sup> Measures

GMaj7  
/ / / / | / / / /

Sub:

GMaj7 Am7 Bm7 CMaj7  
/ / / / | / / / /



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