

# Leading Off Third Base

The benefits of third position fingering

By Ted Eschliman



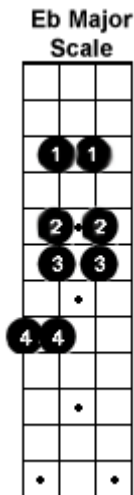
## Moving on up...

We've long advocated liberating your playing from total dependence on open strings. It's understandable for a beginning mandolinist to stay within the first six frets, and of course certain folk styles of music bear a legitimate dependence on the drone of open fifths one can only accomplish with open strings.

If you seek the chromatic finger fluency demanded by jazz or classical music, that step out of 1<sup>st</sup> position safety requires an ability to leave this comfort. At the JazzMando website, we offer the **FFcP** systematic approach to developing your proficiency, and if you've never seen this, spend some quality time exploring this helpful closed position system. Getting around the fretboard opens up a whole new fertile ground of improvisation territory, and this will help. See: <http://www.jazzmando.com/ffcp.shtml>

## Calling in the Substitute

Have you ever tried in songs you already know well, replacing all open strings with a 7th fret pinky fingering? This is a great exercise, but let's move this substitution a few frets north and attempt to reap the fruits of a new sonic paradise... Move your hand up two frets: the 3<sup>rd</sup> through 9<sup>th</sup> frets, otherwise known as "**3<sup>rd</sup> Position.**"



**Example: Eb Scale "Homebase."**

Why call this "Sonic Paradise?" Several reasons...

**First**, the higher up the fretboard, the closer the frets to each other, so you're slightly shortening the distance from note to note in a difficult passage. **Second**, you're really in a prime, wealthy tonal area of the instrument. You get more string "fundamental" here than if you strayed into higher frets, so your melodic playing will sound richer, and you have more left hand finger control in slower passages. (Save the upper frets for gymnastics and interesting contrast during your soloing.) Bowed string musicians are known to avoid open strings because of the more dramatic timbre disparity between open and fingered strings on their instruments, let alone finger vibrato expression.

But there's a **Third** issue we want to explore in this article, the ability to open up chording opportunities efficiently when bouncing quickly between chord and melody.

Let's start with the fingering for the **Jazz Standard** favorite, "*There Will Never Be Another You*."

**There Will Never Be Another You** (Mack Gordon/Harry Warren)

Mandolin

TAB

Notice in the above example the **D** is played with the pinky here, but let's move the hand up a couple frets and base our playing with the **1<sup>st</sup> finger** on the **3<sup>rd</sup> fret**. You'll eventually discover this is a more comfortable way to finger this; play it a few times, and practice playing a few **E<sup>b</sup> scales** here (the home key) just to make this position more familiar to you.

E<sup>b</sup>Maj7

Dm7

G7

Cmin

B<sup>b</sup>m7

E<sup>b</sup>7

## Chording fun!

Here's where we can have some enjoyment injecting some chords, and adding a little harmonic definition, maturity, and sophistication to the song. Note that with your hand based in a little higher fret position, you open yourself up for chords both above and below. Chords based in the 7<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> frets are just that much closer! Smaller leaps mean smoother voicing to both ear and hand.

E<sup>b</sup>Maj7

Dm7

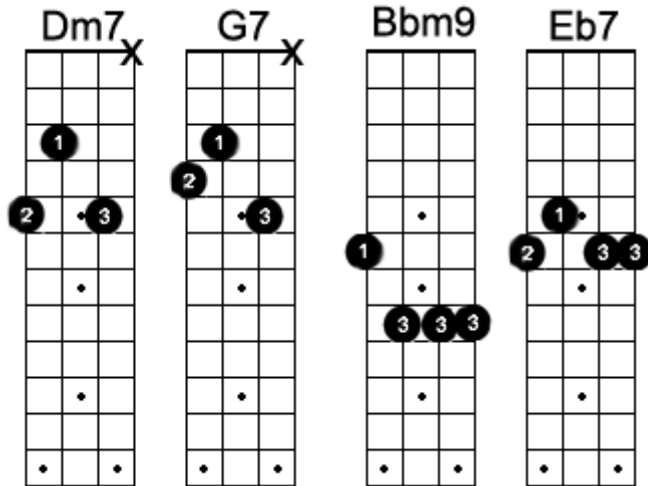
G7

Cmin

B<sup>b</sup>m7

E<sup>b</sup>7

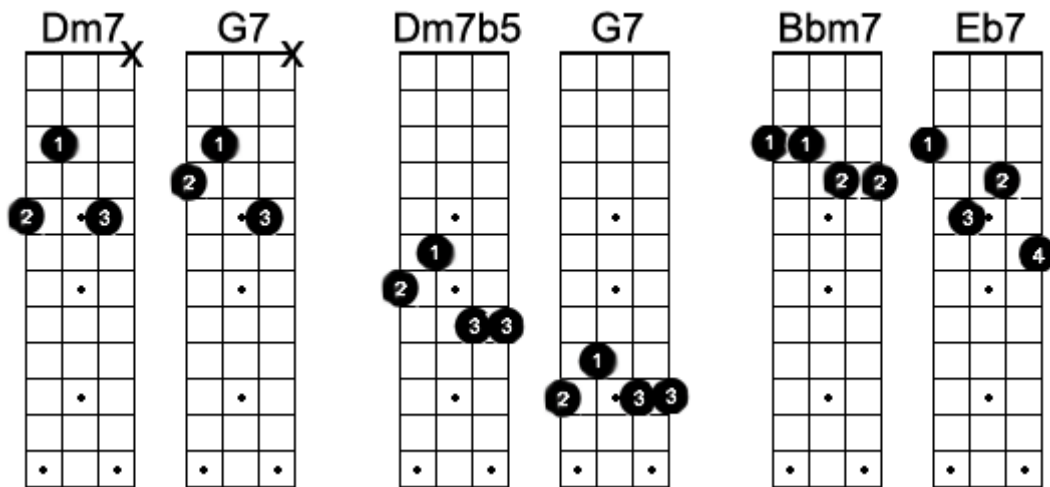
A closer look at the insert chord fingering:



Again, when you are playing a long and slow melody, especially if you're being featured, you want as much tone color as your mandolin can muster; this range is where the instrument shines. You set yourself up to be consistently closer to a wider variety of chord options as well, both higher and lower.

### More chord options...

Try subbing these variations from different areas of the fingerboard. With your "home base" at the 3<sup>rd</sup> position, you have significantly less jumping around:



### More "Real World" practice.

We suggest going through a good jazz "Real Book" or some of your favorite lead sheets and song books, sight-reading down melodies all in this 3<sup>rd</sup> position. Once you get comfortable with this and your melodies become second nature, you can make a habit of occasionally inserting chords at points where your melody slows to half or whole notes.

This will put you on the golden path of chord melody playing and add a whole new level of sophistication to your playing style!



Have you been enjoying the great resources at **Mel Bay's MandolinSessions.com**? If you're new here, be sure to click on the **Back Issues** button above. You might want to go back to our June 2006 issue in particular if you're intrigued by the concept of Chord Melody playing. This is a slight different take, "**Scratching the Surface of Chord Melody on the Mandolin**" at <http://mandolinsessions.com/jun06/chord.html>.

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