

Alternate Fingerings Part 1

New ways to get around the fretboard

By Ted Eschliman



Getting out of a rut

You most likely started off learning how to get around on the mandolin in the lower 6 frets of the fingerboard. You had that "comfort zone" of familiar open strings to fall back on, and probably worked off keys based around them: **A, D, G**. Maybe you've already taken that liberating leap of using your pinky on the **7th fret** as a substitute for the next open string, and if you're no stranger around the **Jazz Mandology** section the past four years, you know we advocate using this tactile skill as a base for moving past the first seven frets.

We introduced you to the **FFcP** closed position approach referenced on the JazzMando website (and soon in the book "Getting Into Jazz Mandolin") <http://jazzmando.com/ffcp.shtml> and explained that if you want to move confidently into the higher frets this is a comfortably friendly way to do it. We've also advocated this for getting cozy with some rougher keys, like **Bb, Eb, Ab**, all those "horn keys" if you've ever had the opportunity to play outside of the string band ensemble realm. What we want to do this time is introduce you to a very specific application of this principle in the Clifford Brown Standard "**Joy Spring**," move you comfortably up into **3rd Position**, and hopefully in **Part 2**, apply some of the more advanced **Pentatonic Scale** resources for improvising. For now, let's just take a look at the first 8 measures of the song:

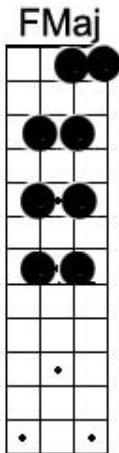
Swing Joy Spring Clifford Brown

1st Position (4th finger 7th fret) F Maj7 Dm7 Gm7 C7 F Maj7 Dm7

Mandolin

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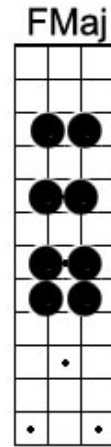
B \flat m7 E \flat 7 Am7 A \flat 7 Gm7 C7 F



For simplicity's sake, we've taken out some of the turns and trills commonly used in the song. Of course you can add these later, but for now, notice we've closed up the open string **D** and **A**, voicing them in the **7th fret** of the string below, using the **4th finger** pinky.

Other than this, we've stayed in "Safe Mode," and even though there is nothing wrong with playing in this section of the fretboard, it's time to venture up the neck and learn some alternate fingerings.

Here we want to start with the second finger on the **5th fret** of your **G string**. This sets up your first finger on the **5th fret** of the next, and since we're in the **key of F**, and this is your **tonic**, you'll want to think of the whole related **FFcP** pattern based here.



3rd Position (1st Finger on Tonic) FMaj7 Dm7 Gm7 C7 FMaj7 Dm7

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Bbm7 Eb7 Am7 Ab7 Gm7 C7 F

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A Third Helping

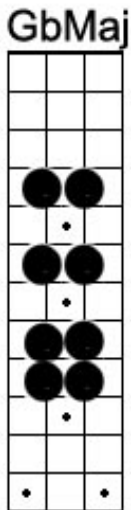
We referred to this as "**Third Position**" (a designation used in violin pedagogy) in the February Jazz Mandology <http://mandolinsessions.com/feb07/Eschliman.html>, and explained the versatility you gain by having access to chords you might choose to intersperse around this melody. Play this until it feels comfortable, and when you're ready to move on you can play the next eight measures of the song.

3rd Position (Move it all up one fret)

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Bm7 E7 Bbm7 A7 Abm7 Db7 Gb

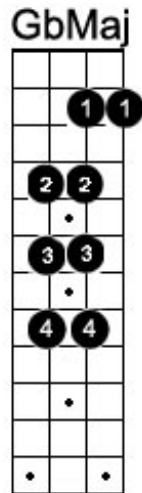
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Notice virtually everything (except the added first "introductory" four notes) can be fingered identically. You just move everything up one fret and you find yourself playing in the key of **Gb**. Who'd a thunk it!

This benefit is very apparent, breaking out of a dependency on open strings. Moving the entire scale up one fret in establishes a dramatically different, fresh aural key center, dynamically aural in this very tune. Without having to struggle mentally about going from one flat to six flats (because even though your key signature does not say so, you have moved temporarily into **Gb** or six flats), you simply move the operation up a fret.

All that said, there is still another dimension to closed position playing well worth exploring. We mentioned the ability not only to move a scale up the neck and across string, but also to start the pattern on a different finger. The next option here is to base the tonic **Gb** on your **2nd finger**, instead of the first. This may seem awkward at first but as you expand your horizons and move around to exploring and using all **12 keys**, you'll find this ability invaluable. For now, try playing the same section, but move the pattern to one based on your second finger, or **2nd FFcP**. Note you'll also be moving the **10th fret F** over to the **3rd fret** on your **D string**:



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3rd Position (Tonic on the 2nd Finger)

AbM7 D7 GbMaj7 Ebm7 Abm7 D7 GbMaj7 Ebm7

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Bm7 E7 Bbm7 A7 Abm7 D7 Gb

This may take some time to become second nature for you, but there are big payoffs when you can shift the scales, modes, and arpeggios in a similar fashion. Not that simply moving the same fingering up a fret is wrong, this alternative just adds another dimension to your fretboard familiarity. Remember, in the **FFcP** system, there are only 4 options, anyway.

Having a tune that repeats melodic nuggets transposed in this way really drives the point home about getting comfortable with key centers through a *tactile* sense of the key. When you eventually improvise over "Joy Spring" changes, having a sense of "F-ness" followed by an aesthetic sense of "Gb-ness" can bring a higher degree of security to the improvisation you'll explore. Using two different **FFcP** fingerings can distinguish the sections for you mental, physically, and artistically.

Two other popular jazz songs come to mind that would be good for you to explore, "**In A Mellow Tone**" (Ellington) has melodic motif that simply moves to another key. The same with Miles Davis' "**Four**." If you have a Fake Book (a legal one, of course), look these tunes up and see for yourself.

Looking ahead to the next time

There's some fun up ahead in **5th** and **6th** measures of the above examples we haven't mentioned yet. Note in the first one, we don't stay in the **key of F**. We actually venture briefly into another key center (Ab Major), and we'll want to talk about how you can take advantage not only of **FFcP** patterns to fit, but also of some of the tactics we mentioned in the last article for using Pentatonic Scales.

Until then, work these through and if you haven't already downloaded the Jazz Pentatonic PDF from last time, be sure to do that and get more intimate with the fingerings:

<http://mandolinsessions.com/aug07/Eschliman.html>

Two Page Exercise: <http://www.jazzmando.com/print/FFcPPentatonic.pdf>



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