



Chords Ancient and Modern

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Here are a few thoughts about chord voicings. I am showing these using fret number per string, low to high left to right. An 'X' means the string is either not played or is damped by the soft bit of an adjacent finger. If you are not sure how to do this, ask me on the next club night, and I will show you (I had to be shown!).

Firstly, here is a nice fat C7 at the eighth position, all strings sounding.

8 10 8 9 8 8 (R 5th 7th 3rd 5th R)

Great for Django-type comping but well OTT for any style much later than this, and certainly if you are playing with a bass and keyboard. You have the root and the 5th twice here.

For a more modern sound, reduce the chord to the minimum i.e. for C7, just root, 3rd and 7th.

8 X 8 9 X X (R X 7th 3rd X X)

If you are playing with a bass player, you can omit the root. Just the two essential notes of this chord on top of the bass player's root can sound really strong.

You can add more 'colour' by continuing to omit the root, and adding the 13th to the chord i.e.

X X 8 9 10 X (X X 7th 3rd 13 X)

A 'trick' I have grown fond of is to rethink this chord with the 7th (Bb) as the root i.e.

X X 8 9 10 X (X X R #4 maj7 X)

This 'converts' the chord to Bbmaj7#4. The #4 (same as b5) in this chord gives it a very contemporary feel, yet it still functions as a C7. I would then play this Bbmaj7#4 chord like so :

X X 8 7 5 5 (X X R 3rd #4 maj7)

A descending II/V sequence where you could use this voicing is as follows :

X X 5 7 6 6 (Gm7, X X R 5th 7th m3)
X X 8 7 5 5 (Bbmaj7#4 or C7, X X R 3rd #4 maj7)
X X 3 5 4 4 (Fm7, X X R 5th 7th m3)
X X 6 5 3 3 (Abmaj7#4 or Bb7, X X R 3rd #4 maj7)

Sounds amazingly Wes-like ! I think he used these simplified minimal voicing chords a lot.

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