

Multifunctional Shell Shapes #1

In some situations it is not appropriate to play full-on six string chords for accompaniment. This is especially so when playing gypsy jazz rhythm guitar, or big band rhythm guitar, where chordal sparseness can be a virtue, and sometimes is a necessity, so as not to ‘crowd-out’ other band members.

(EDITOR – I would endorse this idea for most types of jazz, especially when playing with a bass and/or a piano).

In these situations it is handy to know a variety of shell chords. A shell chord is played on the bottom four strings and often omits the 5th of the chord. One shape in particular can be used to cover a variety of chord types. The shape, which is played on strings 3, 4, 5 and 6, is as follows. We will call it a minor 6th shape. It is shown below at the 5th fret: -

String	Fret	Fingering	Chord Tones For Am6	Chord Tones For D7/A
E	-	Not played	-	-
B	-	Not played	-	-
G	5	3	b3	b7
D	4	1	6	3
A	-	Muted	-	-
E	5	2	R	5

The fingering for this is shown on the right hand side of the diagram (EDITOR – Simon’s original diagram would not fit in this column, so I changed it the table shown above).

Note that the 5th string is muted with the underside of the 2nd finger.

This shape also functions as a dominant 7th - D7/A (D7 with the 5th in the bass) in this case.

So a minor blues can be played by moving just this one chord shape around. The following is based on John Coltrane's “Mr. PC”. I'll let you work out the fret positions!

4/4 | Am6 | Am6 | Am6 | Am6 | Dm6 | Dm6 |
Am6 | Am6 | F7/C | E7/B | Am6 | Am6 |

The shape can also be used as a Diminished 7th, and is used extensively by gypsy jazz/hot club guitarists.

(EDITOR – a diminished 7th has the dominant 7th chord tone of a b7, flattened once more, and this chord tone is written bb7, therefore. The 3rd and the 5th are also flattened compared to the dominant 7th chord. For example, C7 contains the notes C E G Bb. The C diminished 7th chord, usually written C dim or C^o for short, therefore contains the notes C Eb Gb A).

In this case, from 6th string to 3rd string, the chord tones for the C# diminished are - Root, bb7, b3. Note that this inversion has no b5.

It is often used for linking chords in sequences, like the one which follows, and is great for creating momentum in rhythm guitar playing.

4/4 | Am6 | Am6 | Am6 / Bm6 / | Am/C /
C#dim7 / | Dm6 | etc.

String	Fret For Am/C	Fret For C#dim
E	-	-
B	-	-
G	9	9
D	7	8
A	Muted	Muted
E	8	9

Diminished chords become inversions of themselves with a different root every minor third. So, for example, A diminished 7th would also be C diminished 7th, D#/Eb diminished 7th, and F#/Gb diminished 7th.

That's not where the fun ends! This shape also functions as a dominant 7th with a flattened 9th.

So, Am6 becomes Ab7b9 (Ab7/A), as in the following II V I sequence in Db:-

Ebm7/Bb	Ab7/A	DbMajor7/Ab	
II	V	I	
String	Fret	Fret	Fret
	For	For	For
	Ebm7/Bb	Ab7/A	DbMaj7/Ab
E	-	-	-
B	-	-	-
G	6	5	5
D	4	4	3
A	Muted	Muted	Muted
E	6	5	4

Finally, the same shape can also be viewed as a m7b5 chord a minor third lower than the root.

So Am6 becomes F#m7b5/A, or a dominant 13b5 a minor 3rd higher, so Am6 becomes C13b5/A.

To sum up, so far we have discovered that this single 3 note shape can become a minor 6th, a dominant 7th, a diminished 7th, an altered dominant 7th or a m7b5 chord. There may even be others which I may not have thought of !

With a bit of lateral thinking this leads to many improvisational possibilities, but that will have to be the subject of another article.

- **Simon Newton**

'No Third' Chords

Simon and I have often banged-on in these technical articles about the importance of the interval of the 3rd in chords and scales. This is because it determines whether the chord or scale is 'major' or 'minor'.

It is not always essential to have a 3rd, however. This was recently brought home to me whilst learning a new piece for a quartet I play in. The piece is by the veteran Canadian trumpeter, Kenny Wheeler, who has lived in the UK for many years.

I play a few of his pieces with this quartet, and they are all really unusual harmonically. This one is called 'Double Double You' or 'WW'!

I am just showing the chord sequence here, but it has a nice melody too. Contact me if you would like a copy of the dots.

The first two chords consist of the root, the 5th, and the 9th. So what, you rockers will say – we've been playing root/5 chords for years!

That's true, of course, but these are usually a pair of notes an octave apart, with the 5th dropped in between them.

The chord I want to show you here is a little different. I'll call it G5/9. Note that the string order below is the other way around from that in Simon's article.

String	Fret	Fingering	Chord Notes	Chord Tones
E	-	-	-	-
A	-	-	-	-
D	5	3	G	R
G	-	-	-	-
B	3	1	D	5
E	5	4	A	9

It sounds nice, as do all the chords in this progression, played as an arpeggio up and down the fretted strings.

The next chord is Eb5/9.

String	Fret	Fingering	Chord Notes	Chord Tones
E	-	-	-	-
A	6	3	Eb	R
D	-	-	-	-
G	3	1	Bb	5
B	6	4	F	9
E	-	-	-	-

Now the progression continues to an F#7+.

String	Fret	Fingering	Chord Notes	Chord Tones
E	2	1	F#	R
A	-	-	-	-
D	2	2	E	b7
G	3	3	A#	3
B	3	4	D	#5
E	-	-	-	-

Next we get another chord with no 3rd. In fact, it's a chord built up of 4^{ths} instead of 3^{rds}, and is very common in contemporary jazz. It's Gmaj7+4/D, and is derived from a scale of D major harmonised in 4^{ths}.

String	Fret	Fingering	Chord Notes	Chord Tones
E	-	-	-	-
A	5	1	D	5
D	5	1	G	R
G	6	2	C#	#4
B	7	4	F#	(maj)7
E	-	-	-	-

Next, it stays with G major chord, but a G major chord with a quite different voicing, and there is also a clear root movement from the D of the previous chord to the G here.

This chord is Gmaj6. This is different from G6, since it contains both the major 7th and major 6th intervals.

String	Fret	Fingering	Chord Notes	Chord Tones
E	3	1	G	R
A	-	-	-	-
D	4	2	F#	(maj)7
G	4	3	B	3
B	5	4	E	6
E	-	-	-	-

Next this chord just moves up a major 3rd to become Bmaj6.

String	Fret	Fingering	Chord Notes	Chord Tones
E	7	1	B	R
A	-	-	-	-
D	8	2	A#	(maj)7
G	8	3	D#	3
B	9	4	G#	6
E	-	-	-	-

Just a couple more chords, now, to bring this lovely sequence to a conclusion.

The first is another maj7+4 chord, but this time the voicing has a 3rd as well the augmented 4th.

It's Emaj7+4.

String	Fret	Fingering	Chord Notes	Chord Tones
E	-	-	-	-
A	-	-	-	-
D	14	4	E	R
G	13	3	G#	3
B	11	1	A#	+4
E	11	1	D#	(maj)7

And then the progression ends with another of these difficult to name chords built on 4th. I call it G#m7sus4.

String	Fret	Fingering	Chord Notes	Chord Tones
E	-	-	-	-
A	11	1	G#	R
D	11	1	C#	sus4
G	11	1	F#	b7
B	12	2	B	m3
E	11	1	D#	5

There's no obvious conventional harmonic logic to this progression, but when you play it, it has its own logic. That's what I like about Kenny Wheeler's tunes!

Hope you like this rather different chord sequence, and the unusual chord voicings.

- John Clarke

