



# Approaching Chord Melody

By Eric Divito

The following exercise is to help the developing guitar player utilize more chord choices and voicings, as well as to help them approach playing chord melodies. Just as we build triads (3 note chords) by taking the appropriate scale, (e.g. C major triad = C, E, G, or Root, 3rd, and 5th, from the C major scale) we can do the same thing to build chords with more extensions, such as 7ths, 9ths, 11ths, and 13ths. These types of chords are more commonly found in jazz and popular music.

The following examples start with a scale and then harmonize that scale with a chord, where each note of the scale is the top note of the chord. This gives the player a chord choice for any melody note they see in a tune as well as giving them more options to create different voicings in their playing or comping.

Example # 1 is the C Lydian scale, which is one good scale choice for the key of C major. The sharp 4th scale degree is used here, because we usually don't want to use a major chord voicing with the 4th in it, except in some special cases which will not be discussed here. This scale provides the notes we will use when approaching a C major chord.

Example # 2 takes the C Lydian scale and harmonizes each note as some sort of C major type chord. Notice how the chord changes depending on which note is in the melody. Despite the many different names, the general sound of all these chords is that of C major. In jazz, we usually don't want to use simply a triad, but instead use extensions such as the 7th, 9th, 11th, and 13th, which add color. The chords in example # 2 give one possible chord choice for a C major voicing (there are of course others) with each note of the C Lydian scale as the melody. It also provides a way to play C major with out just playing one voicing, but instead adding variety, and linear movement. Practice playing example # 1 followed by example # 2, try to bring out the top note of each chord and listen to hear the scale. Also try making your own melodies using the scale and playing the appropriate voicings for those melody notes.

Examples # 3 is an introduction to "Drop 2 voicings" a common way to create voicings for guitar. Example # 3a show closed position voicings for a Cmajor 7 chord. Closed position means that each note is as close as possible to the next note in the voicing. Notice how the chord is in all the possible inversions, meaning the root is in the bass, then the 3rd, then the 5th, and then the 7th. These closed position voicings can be hard or even impossible to play on the guitar in some cases, due to the tuning of the instrument. Sometimes, they sound great however, as they convey a very tight, compact sound.

Example # 3b shows how to take these closed position voicings and turn them into "Drop 2 voicings" by simply taking the 2nd note from the top, and simply dropping it down to the bottom of the chord. This makes the chord sound fuller, richer, and provides a more open sound, which contrasts a closed position chord.

Examples # 4 and #5 are the same concept as 1 and 2, only the chord scale used here is the C dorian scale, a good choice for the key of C minor.

Example # 6 offers some different choices than example # 5, making every voicing a C minor 6 chord. Try mixing some of these voicings with the C minor 7 voicings and notice the difference in sound with the presence of the 6th (A natural).

Example #7a and 7b simply give some different voicings for a major and minor sound. The whole steps and half steps found in them provides a more dissonant, darker sound which have a lot of color and bite to them.

Be sure to transpose these scales and voicings to all 12 keys, since most tunes where we would apply these concepts do not have just one tonality.

Example #8 applies the concepts we learned to a real life example, the first A section to Antonio Carlos

Jobim's standard tune, Dindi. #8a shows just the melody, while #8b harmonizes the melody using voicings we have discussed, and a few we haven't.

First off, notice how the melody has been transposed up the octave, this is common when playing a tune on guitar, since the guitar is actually a transposing instrument that sounds down an octave from concert key. It also puts the melody in a more workable range to be harmonized underneath.

Bar 1 is a standard voicing for Ebmaj7 with the fifth in the melody, it is the sixth chord of example 2. The Db major chord on beat 4 is from the third chord of example 2, and the third chord from the drop position examples. Notice that you have to transpose the voicings from the examples.

The next chord in bar 3, although originally an Ebmaj7, has been changed to an Eb6/9 to add some variety in voicing (fifth chord from example # 2). It then changes back to an Ebmaj7 followed by an Ebmaj13 voicing (sixth and seventh chords from example # 2).

The Bb-7 in the next bar comes from the third chord in example # 5, (but with the lowest note on the 4th string) and then is followed by another voicing, although not discussed, for a Bb-7 chord with the 9th in the melody. Notice how the 7th, not the root, is the lowest note.

Although dominant chords haven't been discussed yet either, The Eb7 on beat 3 of bar 4 also has the 7th as the lowest note. Notice how it is only a 3 note chord, containing the 7th, the 9th, and the third. It is then followed by an Eb9, which is the same voicing type as an Eb6/9 (second chord from example # 2), only the b7th has replaced the 6th to make it a dominant chord. Also notice how this chord is displaced rhythmically, and comes on the second half of beat 3. This adds some rhythmic interest.

The Abmaj7 in the next bar is harmonized with two different voicings. The first, a closed position voicing (first chord in example # 3a, again, lowest note on the 4th string) and the second, a more open voicing (sixth chord from example # 2 again).

The Db7#11 has not been discussed, but since the # 11 is in the melody, it has been harmonized as a four note voicing with the 9th, 7th, and 3rd underneath it. Notice again the absence of the root. When the melody changes to the 9th (F) the same dominant voicing for the Eb9 from bar 4 is used.

The Ebmaj7 in the next bar comes from the third chord in example # 2 and the next one has been changed to an Eb6 and utilizes the first chord from example # 2. This was done to avoid the clashing of the major 7th (D) and the root (Eb) which is in the melody.

The next bar, although has no melody in it, has a standard Bb-7 voicing (fifth chord from example # 5) and a Bb7(b9) (not discussed) has been added to add some tension to bring us back to the top for the second 'A' section.

Try playing this example and use it get some ideas from harmonizing melodies and choosing voicings, Notice the different choices to make when deciding on things such as closed position vs. drop 2 position, how many notes to put in a voicing, what beats to play the harmony and also adding appropriate harmony (sometimes referred to as "Arrangers Harmony").

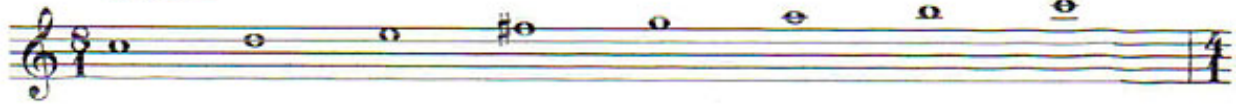
Remember that this is an exercise and there are many other correct choices that will provide good results. This example just provides some options, and hopefully will put some new sounds in your ears. The more you try and play them, the more you will decide which you like, don't like, and what works where and why, as you find your own voice. Remember that it is important to transpose these examples to all 12 keys, so they can be helpful in a "real life" situation.

# Chord Melody Exercise # 1

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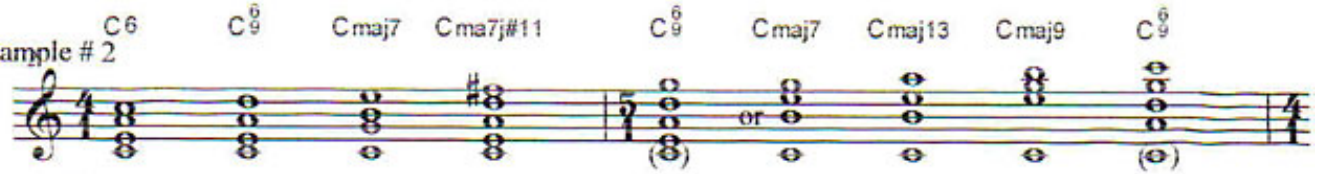
Example # 1

C Lydian



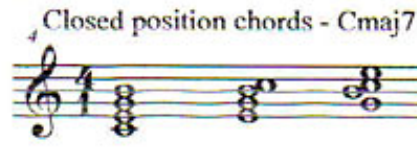
Example # 2

C<sup>6</sup> C<sup>9</sup> Cmaj7 Cmaj7#11 C<sup>9</sup> Cmaj7 Cmaj13 Cmaj9 C<sup>9</sup>



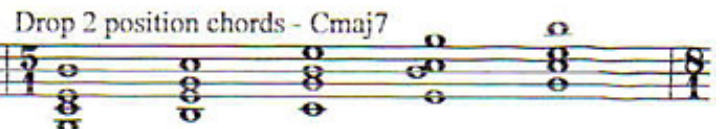
Example # 3a

4 Closed position chords - Cmaj7



Example # 3b

Drop 2 position chords - Cmaj7



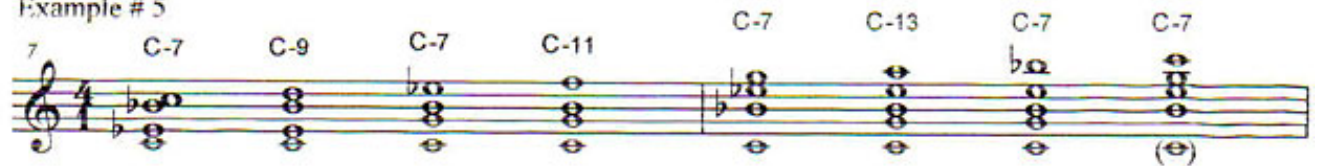
Example # 4

6 C Dorian



Example # 5

7 C-7 C-9 C-7 C-11 C-7 C-13 C-7 C-7



Example # 6

9 C-6



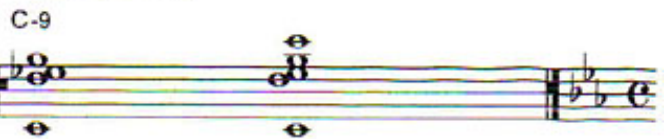
Example # 7a

11 Cmaj9



Example # 7b

C-9



Example # 8a - Dindi

13 Ebmaj7 Dbmaj7 Ebmaj7 Bb-7 Eb7



## Example # 8b - Dindi, chord melody

**About the author**

Eric DiVito is a guitarist and instructor in the NYC area who has been performing and teaching students of all different skill levels. He holds a Bachelors degree in classical guitar performance and music education from the Crane School of Music, and is currently attaining his Masters degree in Jazz performance from The Aaron Copland School of Music at Queens College. Mr. DiVito teaches not only classical and jazz guitar techniques, but also theory, composition, and ear training as well. He performs in many different groups including duos, trios, quartets, and big bands, and as a soloist at various festivals, clubs, and private venues around the NYC area. He currently resides in Astoria, Queens. You can e-mail Eric at [ericdivito@yahoo.com](mailto:ericdivito@yahoo.com).

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