

LESSON - JAZZ CHORD SYMBOLS

FROM THE MAKERS OF AURALIA & MUSITION MUSIC SOFTWARE

Introduction

Chord symbols are generally used within jazz and rock musical contexts to give musicians an abbreviated outline of the harmonic structure of a composition. Whilst these chords could be written out in full on a staff, they could be both difficult to read quickly, and time consuming to write.

Some chord symbols can be interpreted in many different ways, and depending on a musician's background or understanding of a particular musical style, he or she will respond in a certain way. The way that a musician chooses to 'voice' a chord can vary greatly. A good understanding of basic triads, plus both simple and compound intervals and scale degrees can be very useful in helping to understand chord symbols.

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Chord Symbol Structure

The first piece of information that a chord symbol provides us with is the tonic note of the chord. The information that comes after the tonic note tells us the quality of a chord and the extensions that are added. For example, the chord symbol below tells us that the tonic note of the chord is C, that the quality of the chord is minor and that the extension is a 7th.

Cm⁷ = Tonic Quality - Minor 3rd Extension - Minor 7th



The following examples show some of the most common chord symbol spellings, their variations, and their basic notated structure in a straight stacked chord.

3 Note Chords

Major Chords

C C^Δ CM CMaj

Minor Chords

C- Cmin C^{min}



Diminished Chords

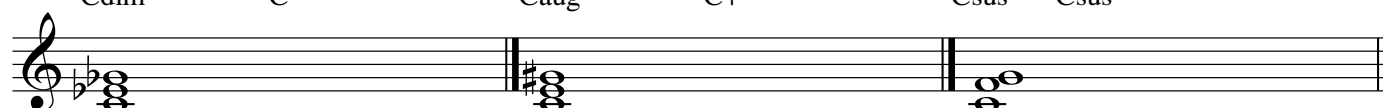
Cdim C^o

Augmented Chords

Caug C+

Suspended Chords

Csus⁴ Csus



Adding 7ths

Dominant 7th Chords

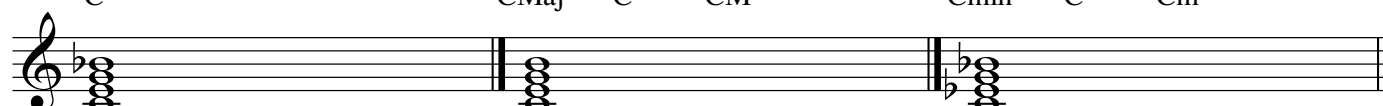
C⁷

Major 7th Chords

CMaj⁷ C^{Δ7} CM⁷

Minor 7th Chords

Cmin⁷ C⁻⁷ Cm⁷



Half Diminished 7th Chords

Diminished 7th Chords

Cmin7^{b5} C-7^{b5} Cm7^{b5} C^{ø7}

C^{o7} Cdim⁷

Musical notation for Half Diminished 7th Chords (Cmin7^{b5}, C-7^{b5}, Cm7^{b5}, C^{ø7}) and Diminished 7th Chords (C^{o7}, Cdim⁷) in C minor. The notes are shown on a treble clef staff with a key signature of two flats.

Adding 9ths, 11ths & 13ths

Dominant 9th Chords

Major 9th Chords

Minor 9th Chords

C⁹

CMaj⁹ C^{Δ9} CM⁹

Cmin⁹ C-⁹ Cm⁹

Musical notation for Dominant 9th (C⁹), Major 9th (CMaj⁹, C^{Δ9}, CM⁹), and Minor 9th (Cmin⁹, C-⁹, Cm⁹) chords in C minor. The notes are shown on a treble clef staff with a key signature of two flats.

Minor 11th Chords

Dominant 13th Chords

Cmin¹¹ C-¹¹ Cm¹¹

C¹³

Musical notation for Minor 11th (Cmin¹¹, C-¹¹, Cm¹¹) and Dominant 13th (C¹³) chords in C minor. The notes are shown on a treble clef staff with a key signature of two flats.

Altering Extensions

Dominant b9 Chords

Major 9th, #11 Chords

C^{7b9}

CMaj^{9#11} C^{Δ9#11} CM^{9#11}

Musical notation for Dominant b9 (C^{7b9}) and Major 9th, #11 (CMaj^{9#11}, C^{Δ9#11}, CM^{9#11}) chords in C minor. The notes are shown on a treble clef staff with a key signature of two flats.

Dominant 9th #11 Chords

Dominant b9, #11 Chords

C^{9#11}

C^{7#11}_{b9}

Musical notation for Dominant 9th #11 (C^{9#11}) and Dominant b9, #11 (C^{7#11}_{b9}) chords in C minor. The notes are shown on a treble clef staff with a key signature of two flats.

Dominant b9, b13 Chords

Altered Chords

C^{7b13}_{b9}

C^{7alt}

Musical notation for Dominant b9, b13 (C^{7b13}_{b9}) and Altered (C^{7alt}) chords in C minor. The notes are shown on a treble clef staff with a key signature of two flats.

Inversions - Slash Chords

Major Chord, 1st Inversion

C/E CMaj/E

Musical notation for Major Chord, 1st Inversion slash chords (C/E, CMaj/E) in C minor. The notes are shown on a treble clef staff with a key signature of two flats.

