

# The Fundamental Triad System

A chord-first approach to jazz theory and practice

Guitar Player's Edition

## VOLUME ONE

Creating Improvised Lines

Pete Pancrazi

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# Introduction

## The Chord-First Approach

Any jazz guitar method must address the challenge of presenting a **central view** of the fretboard. In a conventional scale-first approach, the fretboard is broken down into positional major scale fingerings. These patterns usually have a span of two octaves. Students learn to identify chord progressions that originate from specific keys and use these scales as their first improvisational device.

Eventually, these patterns are reduced to modal and arpeggio fingerings, which serve as a more specific view of the structure and functionality of each chord in the progression. In time, a player may also come to see smaller subsets, chord inversions, within these scale blocks, which would help him or her understand in greater detail the components that make up chords and scales. In any event, two octave scale patterns become the central view of the fretboard.

In contrast, the central view of a chord-first approach is the chord itself. Scale forms are seen as extensions to chords. In this book, we'll use the smallest chord structure in music, the **triad**, to create a central view of the fretboard. At the center of any song melody, improvised line or chord voicing will be one of four "fundamental triads." Thus, a chord-first system starts with a small note field and works up to larger forms, whereas a scale-first system starts with a large note field and works down to smaller forms.

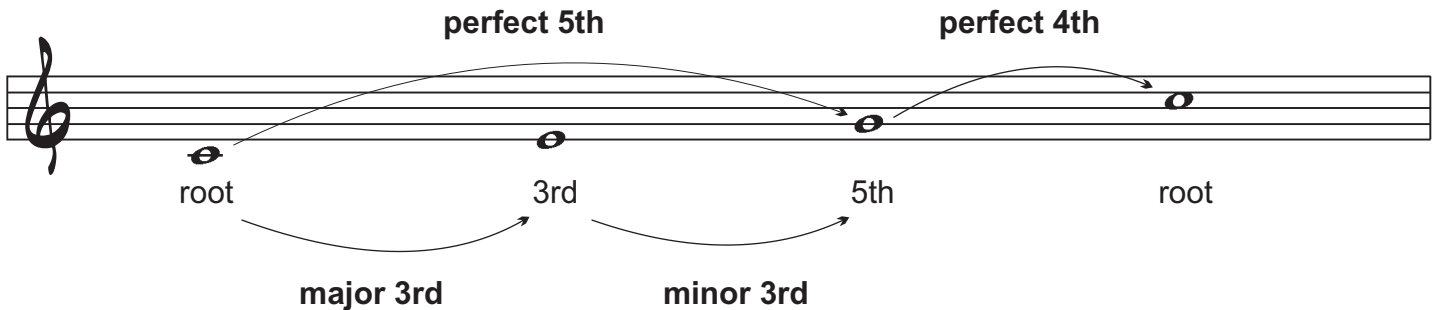
The important question here isn't which approach offers a more accurate view of the fretboard; in theory, both systems ultimately lead to the same place. Rather, the compelling question is: **Which system allows us to focus on real musical concepts sooner?** Our central view of the fretboard shouldn't inhibit us from being musical; on the contrary, it should facilitate the process. It's my hope that the information presented in this book will help you to make the musical discoveries necessary for developing your own voice as a jazz guitarist sooner rather than later.

*Pete Pancrazi*

# Chapter 4 Putting the Triads on the Guitar

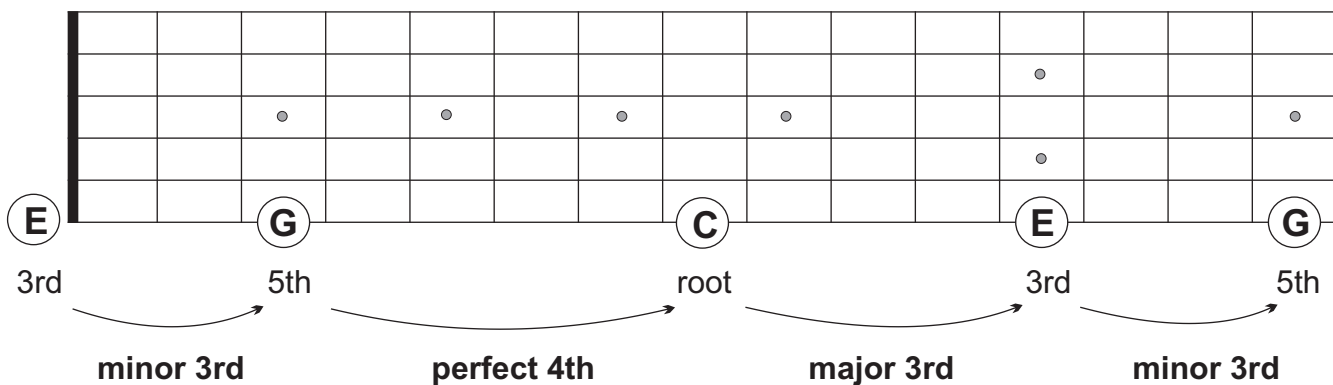
It's time to see the fundamental triads on the guitar. First, we'll take a closer look at the major triad and its inversions in close-voicing.

## C major triad



Remember, the distance from the root up to the 5th is a perfect 5th. That means that the distance from the 5th up to the root an octave higher must be a perfect 4th, a perfect 5th inverted. This interval will be important for constructing close-voicing triads on the guitar.

Here's how the notes of a C major triad will look on the **6th string**.

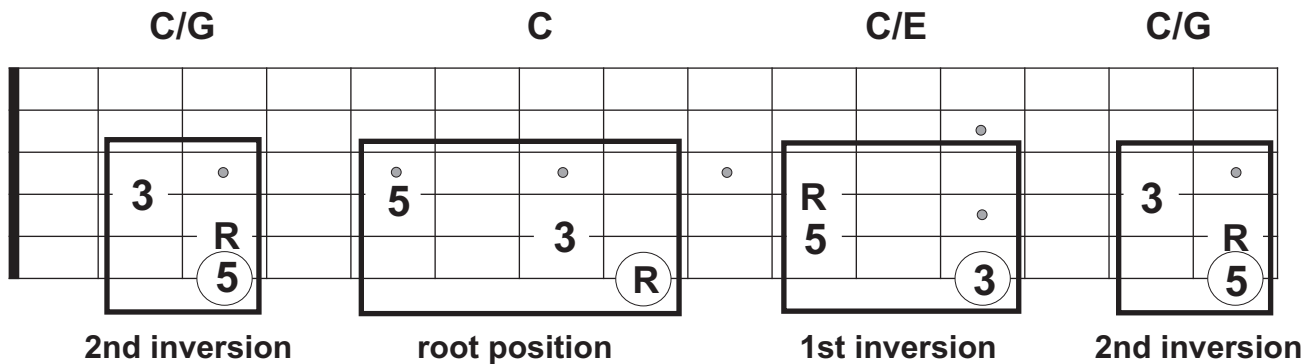


Make sure that you understand these interval relationships before moving on. These notes will become the lowest notes of three-string, close-voicing, C major triads.

## Creating Three-String, Close-Voicing, C Major Triads

First, locate the note **G** on the 6th string, the 5th of the chord. The next chord tone will be **C**, the root; it's located on the 5th string, a perfect 4th above G. The next chord tone will be **E**, the 3rd; it's located on the 4th string, a major 3rd above the root. This gives us a 2nd inversion, C major triad.

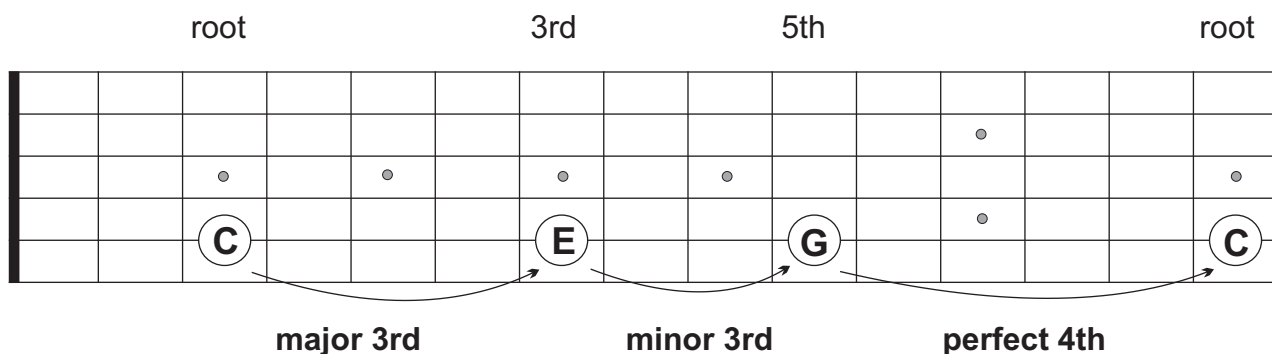
These symbols apply in the following diagram. (**R** = root **3** = 3rd **5** = 5th)



Now, from **C** on the 6th string, we'll build a root position triad. The next chord tone will be **E**, the 3rd; it's located on the 5th string, a major 3rd above C. The next chord tone will be **G**; it's located on the 4th string, a minor 3rd above E.

Now from **E** on the 6th string, we can build a 1st inversion triad. The 5th is on the 5th string, a minor 3rd above E. The root is on the 4th string, a perfect 4th above G. 2nd inversion can be restated an octave higher with G now located on the 6th string, 15th fret.

The entire process can be repeated by locating the chord tones on the 5th string; they now become the lowest notes for close-voicing, C major triads.



# Chapter 13

## The Major II-V-I Progression

Probably the single most important progression in jazz is the **II-V-I** progression: II-7 progressing to V7, which resolves to Imaj7. The function of the chord movement is **subdominant - dominant - tonic**. The IV chord is replaced by II-7 which is a subdominant-quality chord. Using the II-7 chord creates root motion of 5ths throughout the progression.

### Guide Tone Line for II-V-I

The 7th of II-7 will be a half step above the 3rd of V7, and the 7th of V7 will be a half step above the 3rd of Imaj7. Learn the following II-V-I guide tone line. When you're ready, start expanding upon the line by using other notes from the chords.

Musical notation showing the guide tone line for a II-V-I progression in G major. The progression is D-7 (II-7), G7 (V7), and CMaj7 (Imaj7). The notes are: D-7 (F#7), G7 (B3), G7 (F#7), CMaj7 (B3). Arrows indicate the half-step resolution from F#7 to B3 and from F#7 to B3. Fingering is indicated as b7 and 3 for the first two notes, and b7 and 3 for the last two notes.

Blueprint: Analyze and learn the following line.

Musical notation showing the blueprint line for a II-V-I progression in G major. The progression is D-7 (D-/A), G7 (G/B), and CMaj7 (C/G). The notes are: D-7 (F#7), G7 (B3), G7 (F#7), CMaj7 (B3). Fingering is indicated as b7 and 3 for the first two notes, and b7 and 3 for the last two notes.

Variation: Notice the transitional anticipations used in this variation.

Musical notation showing the variation line for a II-V-I progression in G major. The progression is D-7 (D-/A), G7 (D-/F), G7 (G/B), and CMaj7. The notes are: D-7 (F#7), G7 (D-/F), G7 (B3), G7 (F#7), CMaj7 (B3). Fingering is indicated as b7 and 3 for the first two notes, and b7 and 3 for the last two notes.

# Chapter 16

## Modes of the Major Scale

All the chords in the major scale can be extended with a 9th, 11th, and 13th. Those extensions also form a triad. The seven-note structures that now reside on each degree can be broken down into three components: a **primary triad** (consisting of the root, 3rd, and 5th), the **7th** and a **secondary triad** (which represents the 9th, 11th, and 13th).

The secondary triad to any chord is simply the triad built on the next scale degree. For example, in the key of C major, the secondary triad to **Cmaj7** would be **D-**, (II-). The specific value of the 9th, 11th and 13th will depend on the type of secondary triad and its distance from the root of the primary triad.

(I major)

D F A = D minor

I (9, 11, 13)

C major major 7th D minor D minor

Primary triad 7th Secondary triad Secondary triad an octave lower

**C major** is the primary triad. The note **B** is the major 7th. **D-** is the secondary triad representing 9, 11 and 13. Notice that the major 6th and the 13th are the same note.

**Rule:** A minor triad a whole step above the root of any chord will function as the 9, 11 and 13 of that chord.



# Chapter 20

## The Minor II-V-I Progression

Unlike the major II-V-I, in which the chords originate from a single scale source, all three parallel minor scales are used to create the variations of a minor II-V-I.

**The II chord:** The most common II is **II-7<sup>b5</sup>**, which is derived from either natural minor or harmonic minor. Less common is **II-7**, derived from melodic minor.

**The V chord:** The V chord is **V7**, which is derived from either harmonic or melodic minor and is used (because of its dominant function) for strong resolution to I.

**The I chord:** The I chord can be **I-**, **I-maj7**, **I-7** or **I-6**. **I-7** is derived from natural minor. **I-maj7** comes from harmonic or melodic minor, and **I-6** comes from jazz melodic minor.

**Summary:** (II-7<sup>b5</sup> or II-7) → (V7) → (I-, I-maj7, I-7 or I-6)

### Guide Tone Lines for the Minor II-V-I

The guide tone connections that we learned for the major II-V-I are also present in the minor II-V-I. When the **I-7** is present, the 3rd of **V7** will move a half step down to the <sup>b</sup>7 of **I-7**. Create lines over the following minor II-V-I progression using chord tones and guide tone connections.

Major II-V-I blueprint line adapted to minor: