

ADVANCED PIANO TECHNIQUES

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I. Getting Started: Some Definitions

- A. Chord: a combination of tones played together in order to produce a specific sound.
- B. Triad: a combination of three tones (tri) separated by specific intervals. The triad is the foundational chord for chord-based or guitar chart music.
- C. Intervals: distances between notes.
 - 1. Steps—Intervals are calculated by steps, a term of tonal distance in music. A half-step is the distance between two adjacent keys on the keyboard.
 - 2. Major third/minor Third: Two commonly used intervals are the major third and the minor third. A major third equals four half steps (four keys, black and white, on the keyboard. C to E is a major third. A minor third equals three half steps. E to G is a minor third.

II. Creating the Chords

- A. Types of Triads
 - 1. Major Triad—this triad begins with a root note (*from which the chord derives its name*) and adds first a major third and then a minor third.
 - 2. Minor Triad—This triad begins with a root note (*from which the chord derives its name*) and adds first a minor third and then a major Third.
 - 3. Diminished Triad—Often notated “dim” or by a degree symbol (D°), a diminished triad begins with a root note and adds a minor third and then adds another minor third.
- B. Inversions— the notes of a chord played in a different order.
 - 1. Notes in a chord can be played in any order and still be the same chord.
 - 2. Example: C chord:

ROOT POSITION (from bottom to top)	C – E – G
FIRST INVERSION	E – G – C
SECOND INVERSION	G – C – E

3. Why Use Inversions?

- a. The emphasis is on the “highest” note—helpful in creating melodic lines
- b. They help one to avoid “jumps” in range which can be awkward and distracting.
- c. They give freedom to create a variety of harmonic sounds for a single chord.

C. Knowing the Numbers

Seeing the Scale—Often the chords of guitar charts are accompanied by numbers that refer to specific tones in the scale of the root note. These numbers indicate that this specific tone is to be added to the triad. Often, the addition of this tone requires the subtraction of another normal tone.

Note: Beginning piano players may want to ignore these numbers for a while and simply focus on the basic triad. They can be added later for interest. Basic Scales:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
C scale	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
G scale	G	A	B	C	D	E	F#	G
D scale	D	E	F#	G	A	B	C#	D
A scale	A	B	C#	D	E	F#	G#	A
E scale	E	F#	G#	A	B	C#	D#	E
F scale	F	G	A	Bb	C	D	E	F

1. Four Chord/Suspended (Sus) Chord—Often used to “lead” the sound back (called resolving) to a triad. This chord consists of the tones 1, 4, and 5. Example C4 or Csus includes C, F, and G.
2. Two Chord—1, 2, and 5 tones in the scale. Example D2 includes D, E, and A.
3. Six Chord—1, 3, and 6 tones of the scale. Example A6 includes A, C#, and F#.
4. Major Seventh Chord—1, 3, 5, and 7 tones in the scale. Example Gmaj7 includes G, B, C, F#.
5. Dominant Seventh Chord—1, 3, 5, b7 (half step below a major seventh tone) in the scale. Example E7 includes E, G#, B, and D.
6. Minor chords with numbers, such as Am7, follow the same rules as do the major chords. Add the number based on the scale. Use your ears, however, as some informal chord charts can be notated incorrectly.

Note: Inversions can and should be used with “numbered” chords as well. The same rule applies. Once the tones of a chord are determined, they can be played in any order.

III. Performing a Song: Arrangement and Rhythmic Options

Definition: “Voicing” refers to the process of choosing the range and order of the notes in a chord that is played or sung.

A. Basic uses for the left hand

1. Can play octaves or single notes using the root note of the chord.
2. Can “roll” up a chord using the 1-5-8 or 1-5-9 or 1-5-8-9-10 patterns.
3. In “Slash chords” such as D/F# the left hand plays the note “under” the slash while the right hand plays the chord “over” the slash—thus the phrase “D over F#”.
4. The LH can create a solid rhythmic feel/grove for the song. Focus on learning several basic rhythmic patters by listening to the kick drum and bass guitar. Practice songs using only the left hand.
5. Avoid excessive “pounding” the left hand, especially when playing with drums and bass.

Note: After chord structures, rhythm is the most fundamental and vital skill for a keyboardist to master. Solid rhythm provides confidence for worshipers to sing boldly—which should be our primary musical goal.

B. Basic Uses for the right hand

1. Rhythmic Tools
 - a. Whole notes (excellent way for beginners to learn a song)
 - b. Quarter Notes
 - c. Rocking 8ths (Shout to the Lord)
 - d. Broken Chords (Breathe)
 - e. Melody
2. Improvisation

REMEMBER: LESS IS MORE!!!

C. More Tools and Techniques

1. Range—Donut Playing

The range of the guitars and drums in a band fill the tone space in the “middle” of the keyboard. Learn to play simultaneously at both ends—especially the high end of the keyboard in order to “fill out” the band sound.

2. Change the Range

Keyboardists can often become “married to the middle” and remain in the middle of the keyboard throughout the song. Changing the range (low to high, high to low, middle to extremes) during a song can add depth and power. This tool is very helpful when playing solo or with a limited band.

3. Improvisation

The ability to improvise should be a constantly increasing skill in a keyboardist’s repertoire. This ability includes playing spontaneous:

a. Melodies

Note: Learning to play the melody by ear is an excellent skill for every keyboardist to develop. The ability to sight-read a melody (as in a hymnbook) should also be pursued.

b. Harmonies

c. Full Chord Fills

All of these are for the purpose of adding beauty, power, and emotion—and they can often EMPHASIZE THE WORDS.

4. Listen, Listen, Listen!!!

- a. Make sure your practice time includes listening to skilled keyboardists and even solo artists of other instruments. Ideas will come automatically and disciplined listening will instill creative and spontaneous performance ability.
- b. Discipline yourself to listen to the fellow members of your band as well.

IV. Conclusion/Demonstrations/Class Participation

- A. “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” 1 Cor. 10:31 (ESV)
- B. Demonstration/Participation Songs