

Nomenclature

Chord Symbol Usage In Jazz



By J. B. Dyas

Chord symbols are simply abbreviations for musical information. And, like any abbreviation, the more you know about what it represents, the more meaningful it becomes. For instance, someone's name can be considered an "abbreviation" or a "symbol" for the person himself or herself. The more you know about a particular person, the deeper you can relate to that person when confronted with his or her name. The same is true for chord symbols: the more you know about what a particular chord symbol represents, the more you can do with it. To one less educated, for example, the symbol "C" might suggest just one note or perhaps a triad (C E G), while to a more erudite player the same symbol can suggest a myriad of chord voicings replete with color tones (extensions). Simple chord symbols also can elicit various chord substitutions, chordal approaches, and copious creative melodic ideas for improvisation for the versed jazz musician.

TWO KINDS OF CHORD SYMBOLS

For the most part jazz players use two kinds of chord symbols:

specific symbols and basic symbols. The former, found in written arrangements and accurate fake books, such as Chuck Sher's *New Real Book Volumes I and II*, indicates the

specific notes to be included in the chord. Basic symbols, on the other hand, leave the choice of notes up to the player. As used in such tune sources as *Pocket Changes* and the Jamey Aebersold play-along books, basic symbols represent distinct scales from which keyboardists or guitarists may select notes to include in the chord, using the particular musical situation in conjunction with their own experience, education, and taste as guidelines. Both types of symbols also represent scales that may be used, although not exclusively, for improvisation. And while both types of symbols indicate a group of notes, neither suggests specific voicings (note order), which, once again, is left up to each individual composer's experience, education, and taste.

The extensions 9, 11, and 13 are synonymous with the 2nd, 4th and 6th notes of the major scale, respectively, and may be played in

any octave. The 9th, for instance, does not have to be exactly the interval of a 9th above the root. Indeed, it could be a major 2nd, 9th, 16th, or 23rd above the root, just as long as it is the right note; it could be the lowest or highest tone of the voicing or somewhere in the middle. Again, this is left up to the composer's discretion.

SPECIFIC CHORD SYMBOLS

A letter alone refers to the major triad, that is the 1st, 3rd, and 5th notes of the major scale ("C" = C E G). The term "major," or any symbol representing it (major = maj=ma=M= Δ), refers to the seventh degree of the major scale. For any chord symbol that includes "major" plus a number 7 or higher, the major 7th should be included in the chord; if major is not indicated, then the lowered 7th should be included. For instance, Cma7 = C E G B, and Cma9 = C E G B D, while C7 = C E G Bb, and C9 = C E G Bb D. For numbers higher than 7 (9, 11, 13) in a symbol, the lower extensions should be included up to the given number, unless the note is considered an "avoid tone" in the chord's related scale (see Basic Symbols chart). Cma13, therefore, will include the major triad plus the 7th, 9th, and 13th (C E G B D A), but not the 11th (F) as it is the avoid tone in its corresponding scale, the major scale. Likewise, C13 will include the major triad plus the b7th, 9th, and 13th (C E

G Bb D A), but not the 11th (F) as it is the avoid tone in its corresponding scale, the mixolydian scale.

The term "minor," or any symbol representing it in the following terms (minor=min=mi=m=-) refers to the lowered 3rd of the major scale. Therefore, Cmi=C Eb G. When followed by "major" (or not) and a number, the aforementioned rules regarding the 7th and lowered 7th still apply. For instance, Cmi^(ma7) = C Eb G B while Cmi7=C Eb G Bb. Similarly, Cmi^(ma9)=C Eb G B D, Cmi9=C Eb G Bb D; Cmi^(ma11)=C Eb G B D F, Cmi11=C Eb G Bb D F; and Cmi^(ma13)=C Eb G B D F A, Cmi13=C Eb G Bb D F A. Notice that the 9th is included in the mi^(ma11) and mi11 chords and that both the 9th and 11th are included in the mi^(ma13) and mi13 chords. This is because of the aforementioned "include the lower extensions" rule; also, their corresponding scales, melodic minor and dorian, have no avoid tones.

The term "add" is used to denote a departure from the "include the lower extensions" rule. For instance, while C9=C E G Bb D, C^(add9)=C E G D. In other words, C^(add9) is merely a C triad with the 9th added (no 7th). Anytime the term "add" precedes a number, simply include that note with whatever the rest of the symbol indicates. For example, while Cm13(C Eb G Bb D F A) includes the lower extensions up to the 13th, that is, the 9th (D) and 11th (F), Cm7^(add13) (C Eb G Bb A) does not. Cm7^(add13) is simply a Cmi7 chord (C Eb G Bb) with the 13th (A) added.

The term "diminished," or any symbol representing it (diminished=dim=o), refers to the lowered 3rd and lowered 5th of the major scale. Therefore, C^o=C Eb

Gb. When a 7 is added to the diminished symbol, it refers to the double flatted 7th of the major scale, which, for practical purposes, is the 6th. Therefore, C^{o7} = C Eb Gb A. The term "augmented," or any symbol representing it (augmented =aug=#5=+5=+), refers to the raised 5th of the major scale. Therefore, C+=C E G#, C7^(#5)=C E G# Bb, C9^(#5)=C E G# Bb D, etc.

Besides the 5th, the 9th, 11th, and 13th also can be altered as represented by the chord symbol. For instance, C7^{b9#5}=C E G# Bb

Db. The term "sus," short for suspended, indicates that the 4th of the scale should be used instead of the 3rd. Csus, then, is comprised of C, F, and G rather than C, E, and G; C7sus = C F G Bb, C9sus = C F G Bb D, and so forth.

A diagonal slash mark indicates a different bass note than the chord's root. For example, Bb/C = C Bb D F, that is, a Bb triad with a C in the bass. A horizontal slash mark indicates two chords one on top of the other, also known as a polychord. D/C, for example, indicates a D triad over a C triad

BASIC CHORD SYMBOLS

Basic Symbol	Scale Name	Scale	Complete Symbol	Specific Symbols
C	Major	C D E(F)G A B C avoid tone: 4th (F)	C ^Δ 9 13	C, C ⁶ , C ^{6/9} , C ^(add9) , Cma ⁷ , Cma ^{7(add13)} , Cma ⁹ , Cma ¹³
C7	Mixolydian (5th mode of major)	C D E(F)G A Bb C avoid tone: 4th (F)	C7 9 13	C7, C ⁹ , C ¹³
C-	Dorian (2nd mode of major)	C D Eb F G A Bb C	C-7 9 11 13	Cmi, Cmi ⁷ , Cmi ^{7(add11)} , Cmi ^{7(add13)} , Cmi ⁹ , Cmi ¹¹ , Cmi ¹³
C-Δ	Melodic Minor	C D E b F G A B C	C-Δ 9 11 13	Cmi ⁶ , Cmi ^{6/9} , Cmi ^(add9) , Cmi ^(ma7) , Cmi ^{9(ma7)}
C ^o	Locrian (7th mode of major)	C(Db)Eb F Gb Ab Bb C avoid tone: b2nd (Db)	C ^o 11 b13	Cmi7b5
C ^{o9}	Locrian #2 (5th mode of mel min)	C D Eb F Gb Ab Bb C	C ^{o9} 9 11 b13	Cmi9b5, Cmi11b5
C ^o	Diminished (whole-half)	C D Eb F Gb Ab A B C	<u>D_o</u> C _o	C ^{dim} , C ^{o7} , C ^{o7(add ma7)} , C ^{o9}
C7 ^{sus4} or G [/] C	Mixolydian (5th mode of major)	C D(E)F G A Bb C avoid tone: 3rd (E)	C7 9 11 13	Csus, C ^{7sus} , C ^{9sus} , C ^{13sus} , G [/] C, Bb [/] C
C ^Δ +4	Lydian (4th mode of major)	C D E F# G A B C	C ^Δ 9 #11 13	Cma7(b5), Cma7(#11), Cma9(#11), Cma13(#11)
C7+5	Whole Tone	C D E F# G# Bb C	C7 #5 9 #11	C ⁺ , C7(b5), C ⁹ (b5), C7(#5), C ⁹ (#5)
C7 ^{b9}	Diminished (half-whole)	C Db Eb E F# G A Bb C	C7 ^{b9} #9 #11 13	C7 ^(b9) , C7 ^(#9) , C7 ^(b9 b5) , C7 ^(b9 #11) , C7 ^(#9 #11) , C ¹³ (b9)
C7 ^{alt} or C7 ⁺⁹	Super Locrian (7th mode of mel min)	C Db Eb Fb Gb Ab Bb C	C7 ^{b9} #9 #11 b13	C7 ^{alt} , C7 ⁺⁹ , C7 ^(#9 #5) , C7 ^(b9 #5)
C7+4	Lydian Dominant (4th mode of mel min)	C D E F# G A Bb C	C7 9 #11 13	C7 ^(#11) , C ⁹ (#11), C ¹³ (b5), C ¹³ (#11)
C ^Δ +4+5	Lydian Augmented (3rd mode of mel min)	C D E F# G# A B C	C ^Δ #5 9 #11 13	Cma7(#5)

(C E G D F# A).

BASIC CHORD SYMBOLS

Basic symbols, used most frequently by the jazz player as they allow the most freedom, are merely abbreviations for particular scales. They are the general horizontal sounds of the symbols from which the player may select notes to construct chords and/or improvise. These scales are by no means the only ones that can be used for improvisation; however, they are the symbols' most representative sounds. The most common basic symbols are C, C7, C-, C^ø, C^o, C7^{b9} and C7^{alt}, representing the general sounds of major, dominant, dorian minor, half-diminished, diminished, dominant 7 flat 9, and dominant 7 altered, respectively. Most specific symbols fit into one of these categories. Indeed, each basic chord symbol actually represents the general sound of several specific chord symbols (see Basic Symbols chart).

The 3rd and 7th are the most representative notes of any chord or scale and "should" be included in every voicing (except for a "sus" chord where the 4th is substituted for the 3rd). Common voicings usually contain at least one other chord tone, extension, and/or alteration as well. Moreover, any or all notes from the related scale, except for "avoid" tones, may be used in the pianist's and guitarist's chord voicing, depending on the player and the musical situation. A typical C7 piano voicing, for instance, might be constructed Bb E A D G (b7 3 6 9 5) if the player is looking for a relatively evenly spread two-handed chord or, perhaps, E A Bb D (3 6 b7 9) if looking for a left-handed close voicing. Notice that all these notes come from C mixolydian, C7's related chord scale. Also notice that the root is not included. As the root is primarily the bassist's responsibility,

pianists and guitarists often omit the root when comping to avoid redundancy. For unaccompanied solo piano playing, however, the root is included much more often and generally voiced as the lowest note of the chord.

"Alt," short for altered, refers to the raised and/or lowered 5th and 9th. In other words, the dominant 7 altered chord contains no regular 5th and no regular 9th, but instead, a flat and/or sharp 5th and a flat and/or sharp 9th. The difference between the dominant 7 flat 9 sound and the dominant 7 altered sound is that the former includes the natural 5th and 6th while the latter does not. The related scale for C7^{b9}, half-whole diminished, is comprised of the root, b9, #9, 3 #4, 5, 6, and b7: C Db D# E F# G A Bb C; the related scale for C7^{alt}, super-locrian is comprised of the root, b9, #9, 3 #4, #5, and b7: C Db D# E F# G# Bb C (this scale is often enharmonically spelled C Db Eb Fb Gb Ab Bb C, using the note names from its parent scale, Db melodic

minor, of which C super-locrian is the seventh mode). A C7^{b9} might be voiced Bb E G Db (b7 3 5 b9), while its C7^{alt} counterpart would be voiced Bb E G# Db (b7 3 #5 b9). Again, exactly which notes to use from these scales when constructing the chord is left up to the player.

Whether a symbol such as "C7^{b9}" is specific, indicating exactly C E G Bb Db, or basic, representing any dominant 7 flat 9 sounding chord constructed from its related scale (C half-whole diminished), usually can be determined by considering the source. If the symbol is found in a piano and/or guitar part in a big band arrangement, published sheet music, or an accurate fake book, chances are it is specific. Basic symbols are found in *Pocket Changes*, on jazz lead sheets, and on cocktail napkins scribbled on between sets.

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ALTERNATIVE LINGO AND SYMBOLS

major 7 = maj7 = ma7 = M7 = 7 = Δ

mixolydian = dominant scale

∅ = mi7^{b5}; mi(ma7) = mi+7

change(s) = chord(s) = harmony

Major Modes (parent scale: C major)

1. ionian (major): C D E F G A B C
2. dorian: D E F G A B C D
3. phrygian: E F G A B C D E
4. lydian: F G A B C D E F
5. mixolydian: G A B C D E F G
6. aeolian (natural minor; pure minor): A B C D E F G A
7. locrian: B C D E F G A B

super locrian = diminished whole tone scale = altered dominant scale = ionian raised root = ionian raised one

augmented = raised 5th = #5 = +5; lydian = raised 4th = #4 = +4; dominant = lowered 7th = b7

"lydian dominant" is a chord/scale with a raised 4th and lowered 7th (C D E F# G A Bb C)

"lydian augmented" is a chord/scale with a raised 4th and a raised 5th (C D E F# G# A B C)

C7⁺⁹ (in the Jamey Aebersold play-a-long books and *Pocket Changes*) = C7^{alt} = C7^{b9} #9 #11 b13 (C7^{b9} #9 b5 #5)

C7^{b9} (in the Jamey Aebersold play-a-long books and *Pocket Changes*) = C7^{b9} #9 #11 13 (natural 5th)

Other common scales heard in standard jazz literature that do not have a particular representative symbol include:

- blues scale (C Eb F F# G Bb C) -- mainly used for dominant and minor chords (but is used everywhere)
- major pentatonic (C D E G A) -- used for several different chord qualities from various degrees
- minor pentatonic (C Eb F G Bb) -- used for several different chord qualities from various degrees
- major bebop (C D E F G G# A B C) -- usually used for major chords
- dominant bebop (C D E F G A Bb B C) -- usually used for dominant chords
- harmonic minor (C D Eb F G Ab B C) -- usually used for minor ma7 chords

NOMENCLATURE

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The "complete" chord symbol, used theoretically but rarely for practical purposes, contains all the usable notes from the scale for chord construction. $C7^{b9 \#9 \#11 13}$, for example, represents the entire half-whole diminished scale. "C" represents the triad (C E G), the "7" represents the b7 (Bb), and each extension is indicated: b9, (Db), #9 (D#), #11 (F#), and 13 (A). When learning tunes, however, assuming you know what each basic symbol represents, simplify the thought process: memorize the basic chords only as to what you do with them in a musical situation: whether it be voice a chord, improvise a melody, or walk a bass line; this is to be determined on the spur of the moment, for this is the jazz way. As you become more educated, gain experience, and progress as a musician throughout your career, the ways in which you realize these symbols will become more sophisticated, musical, intuitive, and tasteful. §