

JAZZ GUITAR VOICINGS

VOL 1: THE **DROP 2** BOOK



BY RANDY VINCENT

Adapted from Mark Levine's Drop 2 Book

SHER MUSIC CO.

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(Adapted from Mark Levine's "The Drop 2 Book")

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Table of Contents

Dedication	i
Acknowledgements	i
About the Author	i
About this Book	ii
About Guitar Notation and Chord Diagrams	ii
CHAPTER I - Getting Started With Drop 2	1
Block Chords	1
Voicings and the Bebop Major Scale in 4-way Close, Shearing, and Drop 2	2
The Bebop Natural Minor Scale	5
The Bebop Melodic Minor Scale	6
The Bebop Dominant Scale	7
Voicing Tunes In Drop 2	8
CHAPTER II - Tweaking Drop 2	12
Tweaking Major Chords	12
Tweaking Diminished Chords	13
The Bebop Major Scale Tweaked	13
Tweaking Dominant Chords	15
Tweaking Minor 7 Chords	16
Tweaking Tonic Minor Chords	17
Tweaking Extension Voicings	20
CHAPTER III - Soloing And Comping In Drop 2	22
Enclosures	22
Chromatic Approach Chords	23
Elaborated Enclosures	25
The Altered Bebop Minor Scale	29
Problems With Drop 2	30
II-V-I Comp Lines in Drop 2	31
Modal Drop 2	34
CHAPTER IV - Practicing Drop 2	39
Bebop scales	39
Chords and Extensions	46
Enclosures and Chromatic Approach Chords	55
Modal Scales	57
Cycles	60
Appendix	64
Alternate Tweaked Chord and Extension Voicings	65

Dedication

To my teacher the late Park Hill, my guitar heroes including Jim Hall, Wes Montgomery, and George Benson among many others, and my harmonic inspirations Thelonious Monk, Barry Harris, Bill Evans, Herbie Hancock, Debussy, Stravinsky, etc. etc. etc.

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Chuck Sher, for his encouragement and for making this project possible.

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About the Author

Randy Vincent has had a long and illustrious career in jazz. He has performed, toured and/or recorded with Dizzy Gillespie, Joe Henderson, Bobby Hutcherson, Bebop And Beyond, The Turtle Island String Quartet, and many others.

Randy has taught jazz guitar at Sonoma State University since 1981 and has conducted clinics throughout the US and overseas. Some of his more well-known former students include Julian Lage, Dave MacNab, Chris Pimentel, and Liberty Ellmen. He currently teaches at Sonoma State University and privately.

He has performed at numerous jazz festivals including the Monterey Jazz Festival and Dizzy Gillespie's 75th birthday celebration at the Hollywood Bowl, as well as performing regularly with the Santa Rosa Symphony's Pops Concerts.

A selected discography of Randy's recordings:

Randy Vincent - "Nisha's Dream" and "Mirror Image"

Bobby Hutcherson - "Ambos Mundos"

Bebop And Beyond - "Bebop And Beyond Plays Dizzy Gillespie" (featuring Dizzy)
and "Bebop And Beyond Plays Thelonious Monk" (featuring Joe Henderson)

Stephanie Ozer - "O Comeco" (featuring Leny Andrade)

Larry Baskett Trio - "Chalice" and "Poor Boy Blue"

Mel Graves - "Emotion In Motion"

Turtle Island String Quartet - "Spider Dreams"

Peter Welker - "Para Peachy", "We'll Be Together Again" and "Shining Hour"

Vern Thompson - "Passions Of The Heart", "Sea Of Dreams" and "Convergence"
(featuring Bob Sheppard, Akira Tana, Tony Dumas and Billy Childs)

Mike Vax Big Band - "Alternate Route"

Dave Eshelman's Garden Big Band - "Milagro's Journey"

About This Book

I was practicing my guitar one day (just like every other day) when the phone rang. I answered thinking it might be a gig, but instead it was Chuck Sher saying he just got a call from Mark Levine, author of *The Jazz Piano Book*, *The Jazz Theory Book*, and *Jazz Piano Masterclass - The Drop 2 Book*. Mark said that a guitarist had called to report that he had learned more about harmony from Mark's Drop 2 book than he had from any guitar book. Well, I have to agree, as I've had the same experience with all of Mark's books. Mark and Chuck discussed the possibility of a guitar version of the Drop 2 book, and then Chuck gave me a call. He had been encouraging me to write something for a while, but I just kept practicing and playing. This time, however, with a specific concept in mind, I decided to take him up on his offer. Chuck gave me the freedom to borrow freely from Mark's work, as well as the freedom to expand on the concept and make it my own contribution.

This book focuses on drop 2 voicings for jazz guitar, and only uses examples of other types of voicings to clarify our understanding of the nature and usefulness of the drop 2 system. Therefore the "Vol.1" in the title, so we can cover many other equally interesting and useful concepts in the future. The chapter layout is roughly patterned after Mark's book, and like Mark's book the concept is explained and defined by examples in the body of the text. Like most things worth doing, this book will require a lot of hard work, but the results will be most rewarding.

About Guitar Notation and Chord Diagrams

This book uses standard guitar music notation supplemented with standard fingerboard diagrams to help make it easier for less experienced readers to determine where to finger the voicings. Guitar music sounds one octave lower than written (compared to piano music), enabling the music to be written entirely in treble clef. Occasionally (such as Example 1-1) the music will be marked 8va, making it sound an octave higher than standard guitar pitch. This is usually done to reduce the number of high ledger lines, making the voicings easier to read. In the fingerboard diagrams the vertical lines represent the strings (low E-A-D-G-B-high E left to right) while the horizontal lines represent the frets, with the lowest fingered fret numbered on the upper right side of each diagram. When a chord is played in the first or open position, the heavier horizontal line across the top of the diagram represents the nut. Fingerings are not given because many of the forms can only be played one way, while the others should be fingered the way that works best for you.

Definition of Drop 2

The term "drop 2" refers to a type of four-note chord voicing played by piano or guitar that is derived from a "four-way close voicing." A four-way close voicing is a four-note chord with the notes spanning less than the range of an octave, making them as close together in pitch as possible. The drop 2 voicings are derived from four-way close voicings by lowering the second highest note by one octave. This opens the voicing and makes it practical to play on four consecutive strings on the guitar.

CHAPTER 1 - GETTING STARTED WITH DROP 2

Play Example 1-1 (CD1 Track #1), the first four bars of Kenny Dorham's "Blue Bossa". This is the sound of drop 2.

Ex. 1-1

8va C_{MI}^7 F_{MI}^7

13 12 10 9 8 5 3 14 13

Play Ex. 1-2 (CD1 Track #2), the same four bars of "Blue Bossa", this time with drop 2 tweaked a bit to make it sound more interesting.

Ex. 1-2

8va $C_{MI}^{(MA7)}$ C_{MI}^6 F_{MI}^6

13 12 10 9 7 5 3 14 12

This book covers both the basic version of drop 2, demonstrated in Ex. 1-1 and the more advanced version shown in Ex. 1-2.

Block Chords

The previous fragments are examples of what arrangers and jazz musicians commonly refer to as "block chords". The term refers to having a similarly voiced "block" of harmony under each note of a melody. Notice I said "under each note of a melody". Block chords build the harmony from the top down, rather than from the bass note up, and are usually used in conjunction with another instrument supplying the bass line. This way the melody is the highest, or soprano, voice in the chord. The melody may be the melody of a tune, or part of an improvised solo line, or a background melody accompanying a tune or solo played by someone else.

You need to know at least a little jazz harmony to make sense of this book: chord construction (the notes that make up a given chord), and the II-V-I progression.

CHAPTER 1

Block chords frequently involve four voices, the melody note and three harmony notes, that move in approximate parallel motion, keeping the spacing between the notes roughly similar. However, the voicing types used may vary. For instance a block chord passage may use all 4-way close voicings, or all drop 2 voicings, or all Shearing Style, etc. A passage in drop 2, for instance, may have an occasional 4-way close or an occasional drop 3 without compromising the block chord effect, but in general it's best not to randomly mix a bunch of widely contrasting voicings.

This book is primarily about drop 2 voicings for jazz guitar. Let's take a look at the types of voicings.

Voicings

4-way close is four part harmony spanning less than the range of an octave. Play Ex. 1-3 (CD1 Track #3), close voicings as played on guitar by Johnny Smith on his famous recording of "Moonlight in Vermont" featuring Stan Getz. Notice the difficult left hand stretches required to play close harmonies on guitar.

Ex. 1-3 "Moonlight In Vermont" from Johnny Smith's version

Ex. 1-3 shows a sequence of chords in C major: C⁶, A_MI⁷, F_MA⁷, D_MI^{6/9}, and G¹³ (etc.). The notation is on a treble clef staff in C major. Below the staff are six guitar fretboard diagrams showing the fingerings for these chords. The diagrams are labeled with numbers 5, 3, 5, 3, 5, and 4, indicating the fret number of the highest note in each voicing.

Ex. 1-4 (CD1 Track #4) is the C Bebop Major Scale in 4-way close, worked out using open strings whenever possible to make it playable on guitar.

Ex. 1-4 C Bebop Major Scale in 4-way close

Ex. 1-4 shows the C Bebop Major Scale in 4-way close. The notation is on a treble clef staff in C major, with chords alternating between C⁶ and B^{o7}. The scale notes are C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C. Below the staff are nine guitar fretboard diagrams showing the fingerings for each note. The diagrams are labeled with numbers 10, 6, 5, 6, 3, 4, 5, 7, and 8, indicating the fret number of the note.

Still pretty tough isn't it? Try changing keys and you're in for some serious challenges.

By the way, the C Bebop Major Scale is a C Major scale with an added note (G# or Ab) making it an 8 note scale. Every other note, the first, third, fifth, and seventh notes spell out a C6 chord. The other notes, the second, fourth, sixth, and eighth notes spell out a diminished 7th chord, which being symmetrical, could be named Bdim7, Ddim7, Fdim7, or Abdim7. The Bdim7 chord can be analyzed as the 3rd, 5th, 7th, and b9th of a G7b9 chord. The harmonies we will be using treat the root, 3rd, 5th and 6th as chord tones and the 2nd, 4th, flat 6th and 7th as passing tones. The chord tones will be harmonized with a C6 chord and the passing tones harmonized with the diminished 7th chord that represents the V7b9 chord.

Shearing Style voicings are piano voicings named after pianist George Shearing, who popularized the style in the 1950s, although the voicings can be traced back to arrangers writing for 5-part sax sections. It was originally 4-way close with the fifth part being baritone sax doubling the melody played by the lead alto sax, but one octave lower. Obviously, considering the difficulty of 4-way close on the guitar, the Shearing voicings will be impossible. However, they can be simulated by leaving out one of the inner voices, as in Ex. 1-5 (CD1 Track #5). These are simulated Shearing Style voicings for guitar playing the C Bebop Major Scale.

Ex. 1-5 C Bebop Major Scale in simulated Shearing Style

Drop 2 voicings not only sound good on piano but are a great and practical solution to the close voicing problems on guitar. Drop 2 means lowering the 2nd voice from the top of a close voicing by one octave. This opens up the voicing and makes it easy to play on guitar.

Try Ex. 1-6 of the C Bebop Major Scale in drop 2 (CD1 Track #6).

Ex. 1-6 C Bebop Major Scale in Drop-2

CHAPTER 1

O.K., so like most things it's going to require a lot of practice, but you can see that all the voicings are quite playable. Notice that all but the first and last voicings in the example use the same fingers on the same strings, so don't lift the fingers off the strings, just slide and reconfigure their spacing as you go. This happens a lot with drop 2 voicings on the middle four strings of the guitar, but not so much on the top four or bottom four. Now try Ex. 1-7 (CD1 Track #7) from Wes Montgomery's recording of Dave Brubeck's "In Your Own Sweet Way" from *The Incredible Jazz Guitar of Wes Montgomery*.

Ex. 1-7 "In Your Own Sweet Way" from Wes Montgomery's version

The musical notation for Ex. 1-7 shows a sequence of chords in Gb Major: A^bM^7 , $G^{\circ 7}$, A^bM^7 , D^b13 , D^b9 , $D^b13(b^9)$, $D^b7(b^9)$, and G^bMA^7 . Below the notation are eight guitar fretboard diagrams illustrating the voicings for each chord, with fingerings indicated by numbers 1-4.

It starts at measure five of the A section of the melody. It's really just a II-V-I in Gb Major. Wes tweaked the dominant chord voicings, in addition to slipping in one close voiced chord (the D^b13b^9), but it's a good example of an actual application of drop 2. In fact most of the voicings Wes plays on the recording are drop 2.

Since close voicings are difficult on guitar it's not always practical to use them to create drop 2, but we can verify if any chord is drop 2 by mentally reversing the drop 2 process. You imagine that the lowest note of your chord is raised one octave. If it would now be the second highest note, it's drop 2. However, let's say it turns out to be the third highest note, that means it's actually drop 3. Many generic jazz guitar chords are actually drop 3. Typically drop 2 chords cover four adjacent strings while drop 3 are usually distributed across five strings with one string skipped.

Now play Ex. 1-8 (CD1 Track #8), the first bar of Duke Ellington's "What Am I Here For?", first in 4-way close, then in drop 2.

Ex. 1-8 "What Am I Here For?"

The musical notation for Ex. 1-8 shows two versions of the first bar of "What Am I Here For?". The first version is labeled "In 4-way close" and the second is labeled "In drop 2". Both versions show the chords C^6 , $dim.$, C^6 , $dim.$, and C^6 . Below the notation are ten guitar fretboard diagrams illustrating the voicings for each chord, with fingerings indicated by numbers 1-4.

If you were to continue the tune in 4-way close, or even change the key of the first bar, it would become evident that 4-way close is not very practical on guitar. Continue the tune in drop 2 and you'll see there is no problem. However, we'll first have to learn how to handle other chord types besides major. We'll get to that soon.

Ex. 1-9 (CD1 Track #9) shows the first four bars of Irving Berlin's classic "Always", shown in drop 2. Every note is a chord tone of Ab6, except for the Bb (the 9th), which is voiced as a diminished chord.

Ex. 1-9 "Always" in Drop-2

The musical notation for Ex. 1-9 shows a treble clef, key signature of three flats (Bb, Eb, Ab), and a 3/4 time signature. The melody consists of four bars. The first bar starts with an Ab6 chord. The second bar has a Bb note (the 9th) which is voiced as a diminished chord. The third and fourth bars continue the melody. Below the staff are seven guitar chord diagrams with fingerings: 2, 5, 3, 5, 6, 9, 6.

The Bebop Natural Minor Scale

Play Ex. 1-10 (CD1 Track #10), the A Bebop Natural Minor Scale in drop 2.

Ex. 1-10 A Bebop Natural Minor Scale in Drop-2

The musical notation for Ex. 1-10 shows a treble clef, key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 3/4 time signature. The melody consists of eight bars. The first bar starts with an Am7 chord. The second bar has a Bb note. The third and fourth bars continue the melody. The fifth bar has a G# note. The sixth, seventh, and eighth bars continue the melody. Below the staff are nine guitar chord diagrams with fingerings: 2, 3, 5, 6, 2, 4, 3, 5.

Notice that it contains the same notes as the C Bebop Major Scale and is harmonized with the same voicings. This happens because the C6 chord and the Am7 chord are identical, only with a different note functioning as the root. The two scales - C bebop major, and A bebop natural minor - have exactly the same intervallic relationship as do major and relative minor keys: the natural minor is a minor 3rd below the major. Note that the chromatic passing note (G#) is the same in both scales, except that it occurs between the seventh and eighth notes in the bebop natural minor scale, and between the fifth and sixth notes of the bebop major scale.

CHAPTER 1

As an example of the Bebop Natural Minor Scale, Ex. 1-11 (CD1 Track #11) shows the first few bars of George Gershwin's classic "Summertime" in drop 2.

Ex. 1-11 "Summertime" using Bebop Natural Minor in Drop-2

The musical notation for Ex. 1-11 shows the first few bars of "Summertime" in drop 2. The notation includes a treble clef, a common time signature, and a key signature of one flat. The melody is written on a single staff. Above the staff, the chord A_{MI}^7 is indicated. Below the staff, there are ten guitar chord diagrams with fret numbers 10, 7, 10, 9, 7, 9, 10, 7, 5, and 2.

Note that most of the melody notes are chord tones – the root, 3rd and 5th of the A_{MI}^7 chord. The two Ds are passing notes voiced as the same diminished chord. Note that the notes of the diminished chord are $G\#, B, D,$ and F - the 3rd, 5th, 7th, and $b9$ th of $E7b9$, the dominant chord resolving to A_{MI}^7 , the first chord of "Summertime".

The Bebop Melodic Minor Scale

In addition to the Bebop Natural Minor Scale some minor chords maybe be harmonized with the Bebop Melodic Minor Scale, a melodic minor scale with a chromatic passing note between the fifth and sixth scale steps. Let's look at C Bebop Melodic Minor since it's identical to the C bebop major scale except for the minor third, so to harmonize it we simply flat the E's making each $C6$ voicing a C_{MI}^6 . Play Ex. 1-12 (CD1 Track #12), the C bebop melodic minor scale voiced in drop 2. Many minor chords that are not part of a II-V progression may be analyzed as *tonic minor* chords and can be treated as C_{MI}^6 or even as C_{MI}^{Maj7} .

Ex. 1-12 C Bebop Melodic Minor in Drop-2

The musical notation for Ex. 1-12 shows the C Bebop Melodic Minor scale in drop 2. The notation includes a treble clef, a common time signature, and a key signature of one flat. The scale is written on a single staff. Above the staff, the chord C_{MI}^6 is indicated. Below the staff, there are ten guitar chord diagrams with fret numbers 0, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, and 12.