

HEALTH WARNING

Sudden increased piano practice can cause repetitive strain injury RSI. To minimise the chance of this happening:

- Increase practice times gradually
- Stop and relax hands and arms every 10 minutes
- Stop at the first signs of tension in forearm muscles or fingers
- Stop at the slightest pain
- Check your posture

If you are unlucky and get RSI you may have to stop altogether for 6-9 months, so don't risk it. I did and really regretted it, and so did one of my students.

Lesson One

Shells and Dominant 7th Scales

In the first lesson I will show you just 3 chords, the scales that go with them and teach you the basics of playing the 12-bar blues in C. We start with the chord of G7. It is written out below, first in the closed voicing, i.e. the notes are as close together as possible.

The term '**shell**' is the name we give to the two most important notes of a dominant 7 chord, i.e. the 3rd and 7th. Below is the G7 chord followed by a 'voicing' that uses the root (the G) and the shell (3rd and 7th). The closed version of G7 uses every other note of the G7 scale, the root, 3rd, 5th and 7th. Get used to thinking of the number in the scale not the note names. The 3rd happens to be a B natural but the sound it makes in the chord is more important – how does the chord sound without a B or an F? Play the G7 chord in as many ways as you can, I have given just two versions of G7, the closed and root-3rd-7th. The scale that goes with it is like the scale of G major but the F natural is a whole tone lower than G – try F sharp over the G7, it doesn't work does it? Try the G7 shell but play the B up an octave so you have a root-7th-3rd voicing.

G7 closed, root + shell G7 scale, G with an F natural

The image shows musical notation for a G7 chord and its scale. The top staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The bottom staff is in bass clef. The G7 chord is shown in two voicings: a closed voicing (G, Bb, D, F) and a root-shell voicing (G, Bb, F). The G7 scale is shown in two parts: the first part is the G7 scale (G, A, Bb, C, D, Eb, F) with fingerings 1-4 for the first four notes and 5-8 for the last four notes; the second part is the G7 scale with an F natural (G, A, B, C, D, E, F).

Now learn the closed and shell voicings for C7 and F7

The image shows two musical staves. The first staff is for C7. It shows a closed voicing (root, 3rd, 7th) and a shell voicing (root+7th, 3rd) in the treble clef. Below these are the C7 scale notes: C, D, E, F, G, A, Bb, C. The second staff is for F7. It shows a closed voicing (root, 3rd, 7th) and a shell voicing (root+7th, 3rd) in the treble clef. Below these are the F7 scale notes: F, G, Ab, Bb, C, D, Eb, F.

Now, cover up this page and really learn G, C and F. Don't continue until you can play quickly through any random selection of G7, C7 and F7. Can you play this?

C7, C7, F7, C7, C7, F7, F7, C7, C7, G7, F7, C7, G7.

If you can, you have learnt the 12 bar blues, but more of that later.

Now, memorise the scales and play games with the notes. Play the notes going up 9 notes, now down two octaves, now miss every other one, don't stop until you can do it blind-fold. Muck about, change the rhythm, play it slow, fast, jerky, smooth, make up sequences like, 1-2-3, 2-3-4, 3-4-5, 4-5-6, 5-6-7, 6-7-8, 7-8-9. These numbers show you the note number in the scale not the fingering; this is jazz, I don't care which fingers you use! One pattern which is difficult to finger is the broken thirds, 1-3-2-4-3-5 etc. if you can play that smoothly you have good technique. Here're sequences to start you off:

The image shows a musical staff with a treble clef. The title is "Having fun with C7". The notes are: C, D, E, F, G, A, Bb, C, D, E, F, G, A, Bb, C, D, E, F, G, A, Bb, C. A note in the sequence is marked with a flat and the text "watch out for Bb".

Don't just learn my notes, make up your own, please. Start with C7 and then add F7 and G7.

Harmonic Patterns for the bass rising a 4th

Now I want you to play me a chord sequence using your root, + shell voicings for:

| G7 | C7 | F7 |

How does the bass move? Is there a pattern?

Here's an arrangement that I like:

The image shows two musical examples. The first example is for the chord sequence G7 | C7 | F7. The bass line starts on G, moves up a 4th to C, and then down a 5th to F. The right hand shells for G7 (G3-B3-D3) move down by a semitone to F7 (F3-A3-G3), and then down another semitone to C7 (C3-E3-F3). The second example is for the chord sequence F7 | C7 | G7. The bass line starts on F, moves up a 4th to C, and then down a 5th to G. The right hand shells for F7 (F3-A3-C3) move down by a semitone to C7 (C3-E3-F3), and then down another semitone to G7 (G3-B3-D3). Labels 'falls by 1 semitone' and 'rises by 4th' are placed between the bass and treble staves to indicate these movements.

When in jazz the bass of chords move up by 4ths and down 5ths, like in this example, the shells for the chords fall by a semitone, get used to these arrangements because I want you to always look for ways to get the right hand shells moving by small steps when the bass goes up a 4th or down a 5th. Tones that move smoothly like this have a special name, they are called **guide tones** because they guide your ears to hear a smooth sequence that feels like it is going somewhere.

Summary and Assignment 1

We have learnt to play the dominant 7th chord and its scale for C, F and G and looked at how the root and shell voicings work when you move from one chord to the next with the bass rising a 4th. For the assignment I want you to learn to play from some chords a simple 12 bar blues using your root and shell harmonies for your 3 chords. You can tap your feet loudly or run a metronome for a beat, or if your keyboard has a 4 beat swing drum pattern use that. The last track on the CD has about 4 minutes of swing drums for you to play along with. Each bar is represented by a chord symbol, the 12 bar blues is as follows:

| C7 | F7 | C7 | C7 | F7 | F7 | C7 | C7 | G7 | F7 | C7 | G7 |

Listen to my version on the CD if you get stuck. When you have it worked out repeat it 8 times, each time see if you can vary the rhythm pattern, listen to my examples on the audio lesson.

I am looking for smooth root and shell changes when the bass moves by a 4th or down a 5th. Once you have a version that uses say root + 3,7 try starting with the root + 7,3.

When you can play it off by heart, use the drum track on the CD and tape it for me. The most important thing to get out of this is some fun and you can only enjoy playing when you stop worrying about where the notes are – so keep at it! If it takes you weeks to get it right don't lose heart, it is normal. The good news is that a great many jazz tunes are based on this 12 bar sequence.

CD to Listen To This Week

Miles Davis: Kind of Blue, Columbia COL460603

Can you spot any tunes on this CD that are based on a 12-bar blues?

CD Contents List

Track	Description	Time
1	Introduction to the course	3m26
2	Dominant 7th chord for G, closed position	1m57
3	G7 Root and shell	2m20
4	G7 scale	1m57
5	C7 chord, closed, root and shell and scale	2m10
6	F7 chord plus scale	3m07
7	Scales and finger technique using G, F and C	2m04
8	Shell movement when the bass rises a 4th, guide tones	2m24
9	Assignment – 12 bar blues using root, shells and melodies	4m22
10	Swing drum track for assignment	5m10
11	Doodle blues, my C blues using material from the lesson, root, shells plus simple improvised melodies.	1m44
	Total CD playing time	31 m