

Fresh Comp'n

Part 1: Bottom of the (Minor) 9ths

By Ted Eschliman

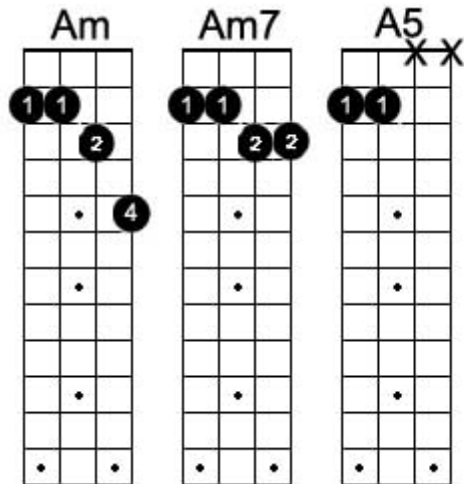


A new Series

We spend a lot of energy working on melodies and improvisation, but to be a truly valuable asset to your band or playing partners, you need to provide accompaniment or "comping" that doesn't sound sterile or tired. We'll start the series off by looking at some options for the minor key. Think a bit about the modal jazz music, like **Miles Davis "Milestones,"** or "**So What,**" the jamming that's an important part of "**My Favorite Things,**" or the oft Hip Hop "**Cantaloupe Island.**" How about **Herbie Hancock's "Maiden Voyage?"** When you tackle these tunes, it's good to know how to do something interesting besides four-to-a-bar Minor Minor Minor Minor. Even if it's backbeat-driven Minor MINOR Minor MINOR....

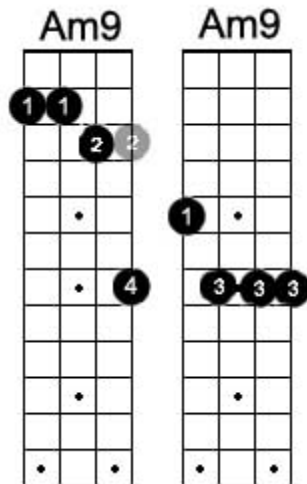
Some basics

Let's take a straight **A minor** chord, spell out a common variation and already we have an opportunity to freshen the background. Simply adding a minor7 can give some seasoning. You can also make it more basic by voicing just the **Root** and **Dominant** (A and E), altering the timbre with a variety of muting by lifting your fingers after the attack. This would give you some percussive options, say lay back during a few choruses so as to make the rest of your comping more interesting.



Minor 9ths

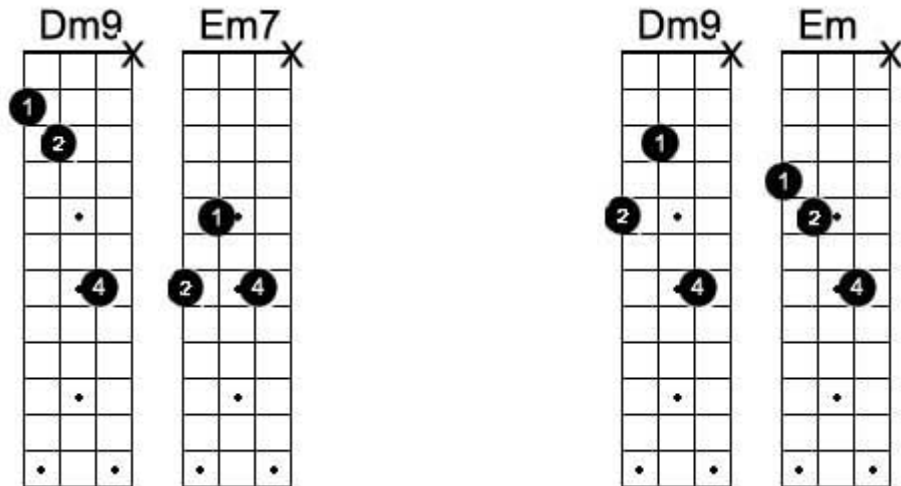
Another sound we want to dwell on is the addition of the **9th** to the minor chord. In the case of **A minor**, we're adding a **B**: A C E B (often the 7th note, G is implied, but not always necessarily voiced). Even if you don't understand the higher music theory, you can hear restlessness, a sort of vague stability this chord tone lends to the character of the music. It's not terribly dissonant, but it's not a calming sound either. Below are a couple of ways to voice the **Am9**:



You'll notice the semi-transparent 2nd finger on the **E** string. Since you've got a pretty healthy stretch when extending the pinky up to the **B**, leaning on the first string gives you some better leverage. If you've never played this chord before, it can feel somewhat awkward, but it's a terrific, bold sound. The second chord is another way to voice it. Keep in mind, with these closed chord fingerings, you can also transpose them easily up and down the fretboard. Up a fret would be a **Bbm9**, up another **Bm9**, up another **Cm9**, and so on.

3-note Minor 9ths

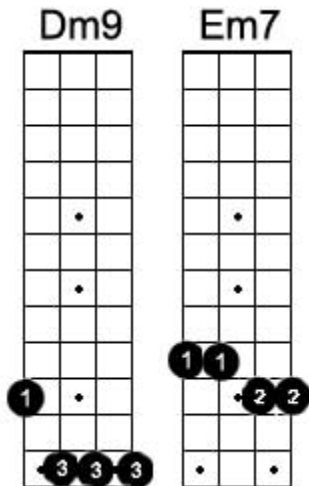
You really don't even need all four voices to communicate the **m9**. Take the **Dm9** voiced below in the lower four strings, **A**, **F**, **E**. Note you don't have the **D** (root), but since it's either being voiced by another instrument (bass, for example) or implied in the melody, you are free to leave it out.



We've placed the **Em7** next to the **Dm9** to introduce you to some interesting pairing. In modal music you can add a sense of motion by using the **ii**m7 chord (the **Em7**) in tandem, shifting back and forth between the chords during long passages of **D minor**, or more likely, **D Dorian** spelled out melodically (D, E, F, G, A, B, C, D). You can think of them in pairs, playing the first pair for four measures, the second for four measures, or any other mixture; the idea is to eliminate the chord stagnation that can make for a very bland accompanying experience, not only in your own ear, but the audience's as well. You've heard of a passing tone, how about a passing chord?

Up to new heights

Another variation is to take this up higher:



These voicings should be familiar to you, if you've been hanging around a while. We first brought them up in an inaugural **Jazz Mandology** session, the stock voicings of 'ii V7 I' four years ago. See:

Understanding the 'ii V7 I' Progression <http://mandolinsessions.com/dec03/ted.html>. Remember, we mentioned you can also move these all up and down the fingerboard and transpose them to other keys, too!

Fresh Comp'n

Variety is the spice of life, and the zest in interesting and supportive comping with chords. The more "intuitive" these become to your fingers, the more capable you will be in playing, sitting back and enjoying the rest of the ensemble. We have an MP3 link to an audio track that demonstrates what you can do with the above voicings, moving through the **Circle of Fifths**. (Starts in D Minor) Note that the majority of the

measures played are only 3-note chords; they sound pretty complete, especially if you were to add a bass part. Incidentally, this raw file is from the accompaniment CD of "**Getting Into Jazz Mandolin**," in the final engraving stages and soon to be released by **Mel Bay**.

Stay Tuned!

Minor 9 Chord Audio File (MP3): <http://jazzmando.com/sound/m9.mp3>



About the audio, the example was recorded on a 4-string Mandola, the Old Wave **Solocomp JM**, built by New Mexico legendary craftsman, Bill Bussmann. More information on this incredible instrument here:

http://jazzmando.com/bill_bussman_jm.shtml



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