

Techniques: Chord Inversions

National Standards: 1, 7-9, 10

The technique whereby different chord “voicings” are created by using notes from different octaves, or inversions, is useful in that doing so allows a chord progression to more easily carry a melody. This then introduces the concept of arranging music.

Prepare

Play each of the audio tracks included in the In Tune story on chord inversions and listen to how the chords stay the same but sound different.

Inspire a discussion about voicings are important to songs, and how they change fingering.

Key points in the article:

- Notation for some forms of music including jazz and rock only provide chord names, leaving the inversion to the player.
- Choosing certain voicings can help players stay within the sonic range of their instruments.
- Choosing certain chord inversions can help musicians play melodies more easily.

Begin

Choose one of the story’s chord inversion examples.

- Ask students why a writer or player would choose one voicing over another.
- Ask your students how choosing certain voicings can help musicians

Review vocabulary words from the article below:

- POLYPHONIC– the ability of an instrument to play multiple sounds at the same time.
- PROGRESSION: in music, a series of notes or chords written or played within a formula.
- INTERPRETING: translating the meaning of words or expressing a same or similar sound in a different way.
- ARPEGGIATE: play a chord as a series of ascending or descending notes.
- TRIAD: in three parts; in music, a chord with three notes.

Discuss

Play a familiar song on a piano or guitar using its written or performed inversions. Then change the inversions and ask students how they change the song, and why the originals were chosen.

Q&A

1. What is the purpose of a chord inversions?
2. How can a monophonic instrument play a chord?
3. Doesn’t sheet music dictate chord voicings?

4. What is a three-note chord called?
5. Other than to better carry a melody, why would a symphonic composer invert a chord?
6. What is a chord's root?

Answers

1. To make playing the melody easier and more natural.
2. By arpeggiating the chord, or playing its notes in succession, one at a time
3. Yes, but jazz and some pop/rock notation only offers symbols and/or chord names leaving the voicings up to the player.
4. A triad.
5. To keep it within the range of a particular instrument, or section of instruments.
6. The lowest note in a chord is its root. For example, an F major triad in root position will have an F as its lowest note.