

How To Get That "Gospel Feeling" Using Jazz Chords

Contributed by Webmaster

By Duane Shinn

Does the cold, cerebral feel of modern jazz leave you cold? Maybe you'd like to have a little bit of "gospel" in your jazz? Maybe you just want to take an old hymn and give it some updating. Then you'll need to load yourself with an arsenal of gospel jazz chords.

Gospel jazz chords involve extending the dominant seventh chord with additional tones. The ninth, 11th and 13th chords are all used in gospel jazz. These are extensions of the basic dominant seventh chord. If you don't know how to form a dominant seventh, here's the rundown.

The dominant seventh is formed by taking a basic triad, which is 1-3-5, and adding a b7. In the key of C, you would play the notes C, E, G and Bb. The C chord is formed by the C, E and G. The major seventh is B, so you would lower it a half-step to get Bb. Play this chord and notice how it brings to mind some great blues and jazz. The C dominant seventh chord is written as C7.

Now you're going

to learn a bit more theory to understand gospel jazz chords. Since the notes of a major scale are numbered 1-7, where does the ninth tone come from? It comes from extending the scale beyond one octave. After the seventh tone of the scale comes the root, which is considered the eighth tone of the scale. So the ninth tone is the second, only an octave higher. To form a ninth chord, take a dominant seventh and add the ninth.

The 11th and 13th chords are formed in a similar fashion. The 11th tone of the scale is just an octave above the fourth, while the 13th is an octave above the sixth. The 13th is one of the most used gospel jazz chords. By extending chords to these extremes, you'll hear some interesting tonalities and overtones develop in a well-tuned instrument.

Since every note of these chords is easily played on a piano, the resulting sound may get a little muddy. Some of the tones create a clash with other tones. A clash is when two notes that are a half step apart are played together. Sometimes a clash is useful, while at other times it isn't. For these reasons, less important tones are often left out of extended gospel jazz chords. Take the ninth chord, for example. The fifth is often dropped from the chord to create a cleaner emphasis on the third, seventh and ninth tones of the chord. Try it and hear the difference.

Though it all seems a bit complex at first, the simple theory of gospel jazz chords comes naturally with a little practice. Try these chords in different keys, leave out different chord tones, and find out what gospel jazz chords sound best to you. These chords are useful in other jazz styles, as well. Even popular music today makes slick use of extended gospel jazz chords. Tasteful use of these chords can spice up even the most ordinary of hymns and gospel songs.

Duane Shinn is the author of the popular online newsletter on piano chords, available free at "Exciting Piano Chords & Chord Progressions!"