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Modern Jazz Voicings
Arranging for Small and Medium Ensembles
Ted Pease and Ken Pullig

3-2 Five-Part Spreads

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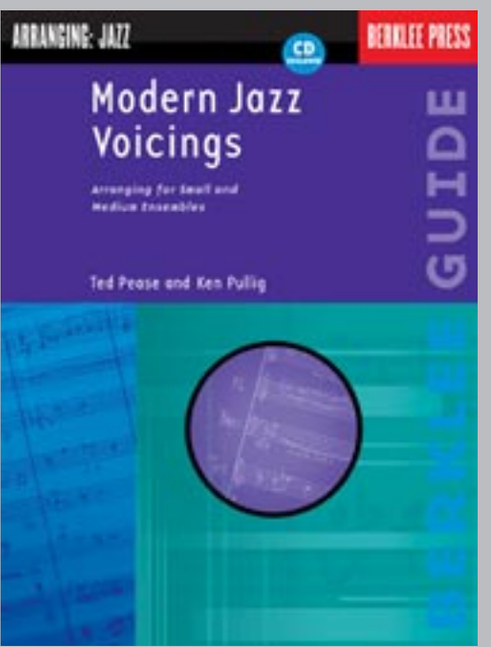

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3-2 Five-Part Spreads

Spread voicings, sometimes referred to as pads, add "bottom" to the sound of the ensemble. They are voicings with the root of the chord on the bottom. Rather than "hanging" chord sounds below the lead note as in the standard mechanical voicing methods (four-way close, drop 2, drop 3, and drop 2 + 4), with spreads you start at the bottom and work up. In choosing notes, your primary concerns should be spacing and a balance of chord sound. Spreads can be used to harmonize inactive or percussive melodies; they also make effective backgrounds. Where possible, use voice leading with spreads, connecting each inner voice to the next through stepwise movement or common tones.

Characteristics

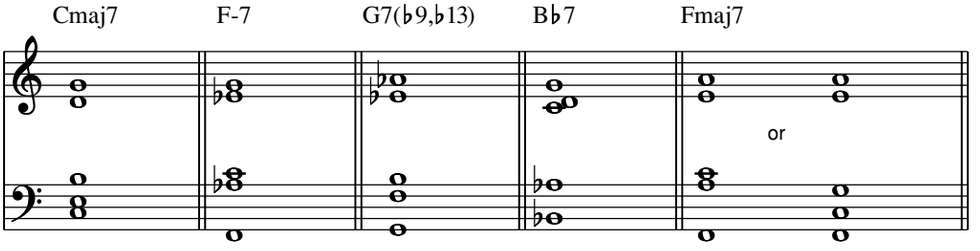
Five-part spread voicings generally consist of the following notes, reading from top to bottom voice:

1st part	The melody or lead note (a chord tone or tension)
2nd part	Supporting chord tone or harmonic tension
3rd part	Guide tones 3 or 7 (or 5) or, in some cases, a harmonic tension
4th part	Guide tones 3 or 7 (or 5)
5th part	Root

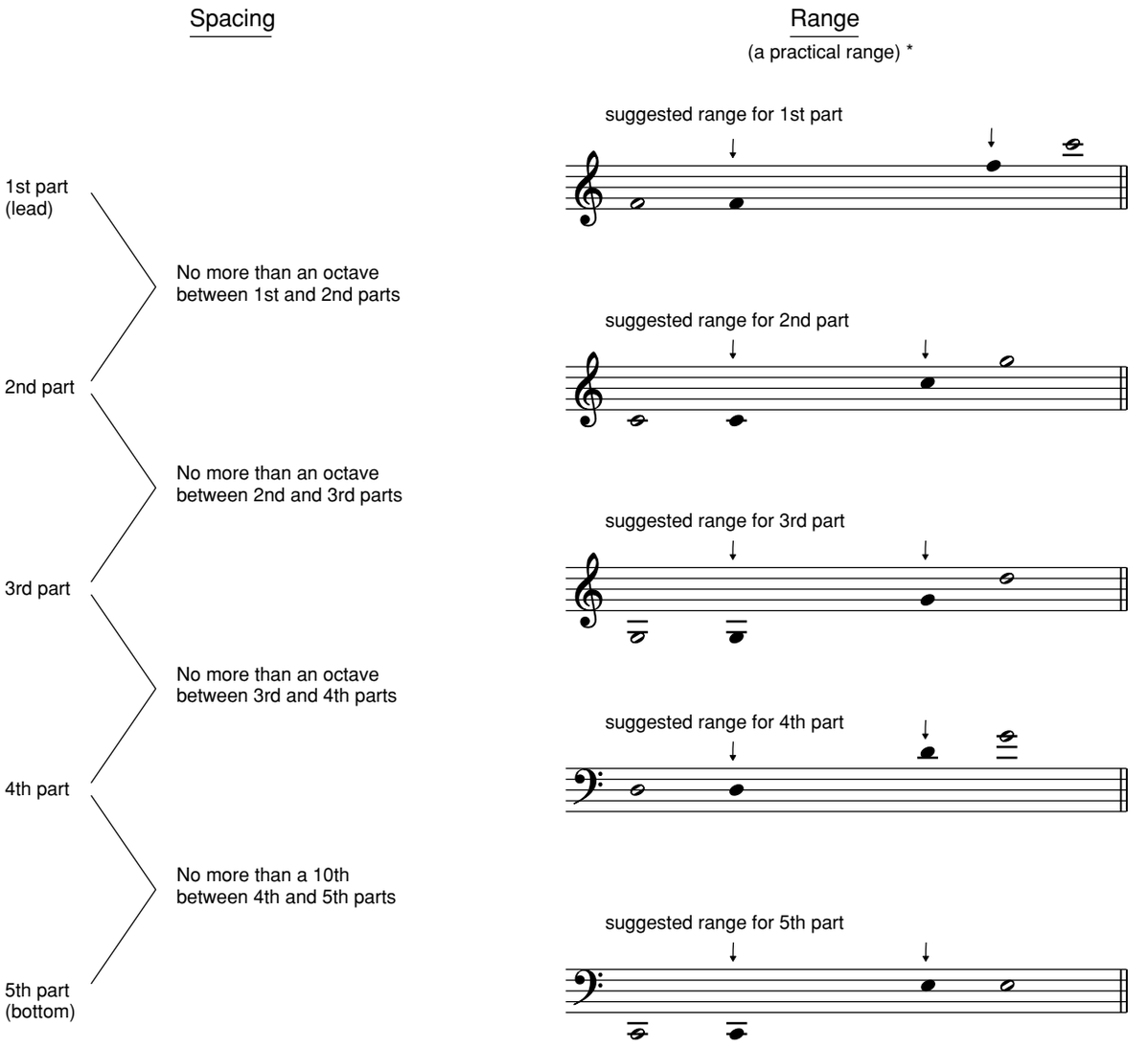
The middle voices should play both the third and the seventh, the strongest guide tones, which define the chord quality (major, minor, dominant seventh, etc.). The top voices enhance the chord sound with additional chord tones or tensions. Although a spread may include a doubling, it is preferable to use five different notes.

When scoring spreads, be sure that the root is assigned to a bass clef-sounding instrument such as baritone saxophone, bass trombone, or any other instrument that can play comfortably in the bottom of the bass-clef range. As "bottom" is the fundamental effect of spreads, the root must be delivered with conviction and full control.

Here are some typical five-part spreads:



Adjacent Note Spacing and Suggested Ranges for Spreads

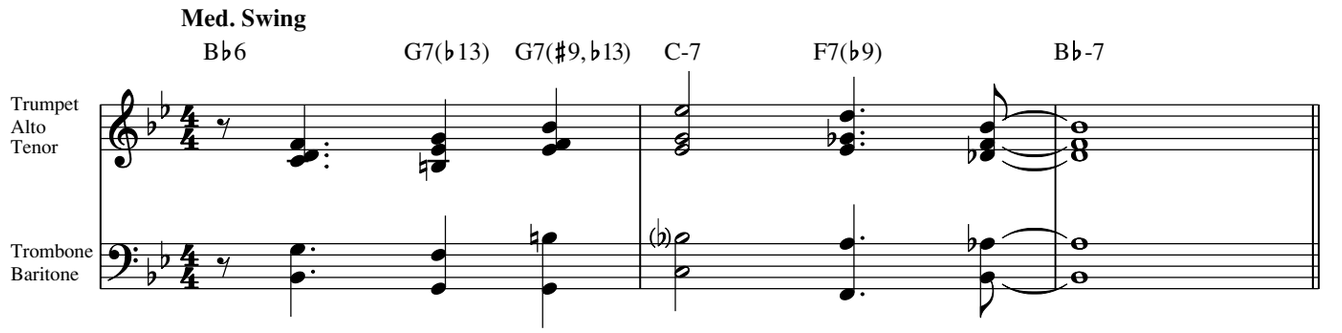


* To avoid potential balance problems, don't exceed the practical range unless you are writing for pros.

Uses of Spread Voicings

1. To harmonize sustained or percussive melody notes:

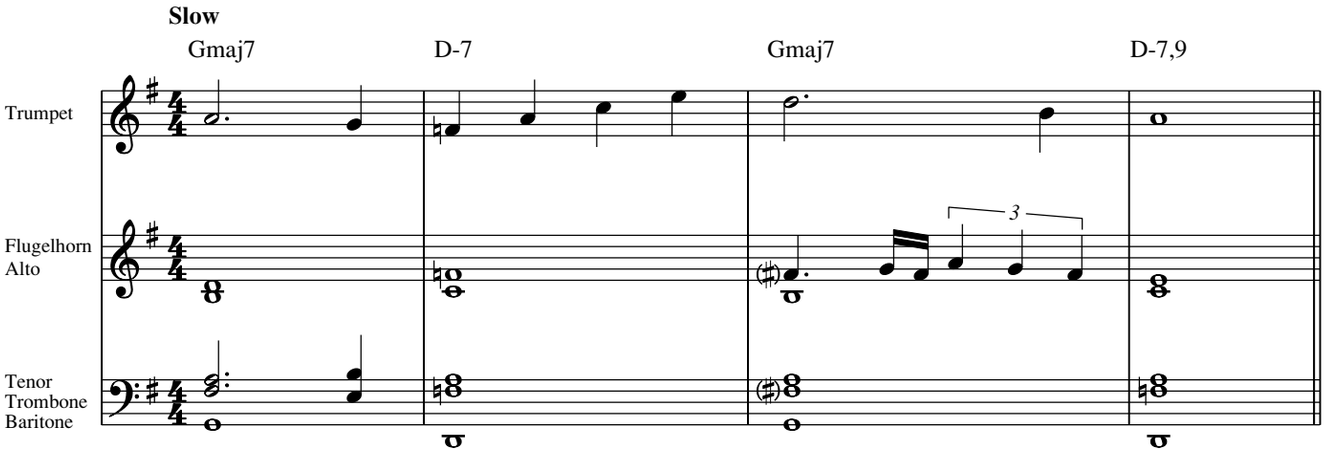
16



2. For backgrounds: To avoid the weight and monotony of a series of whole-note spread voicings, embellish the sustained pitches of inner voices. As in the two examples below, this creates a more animated texture.

17

a. Five-part spread background



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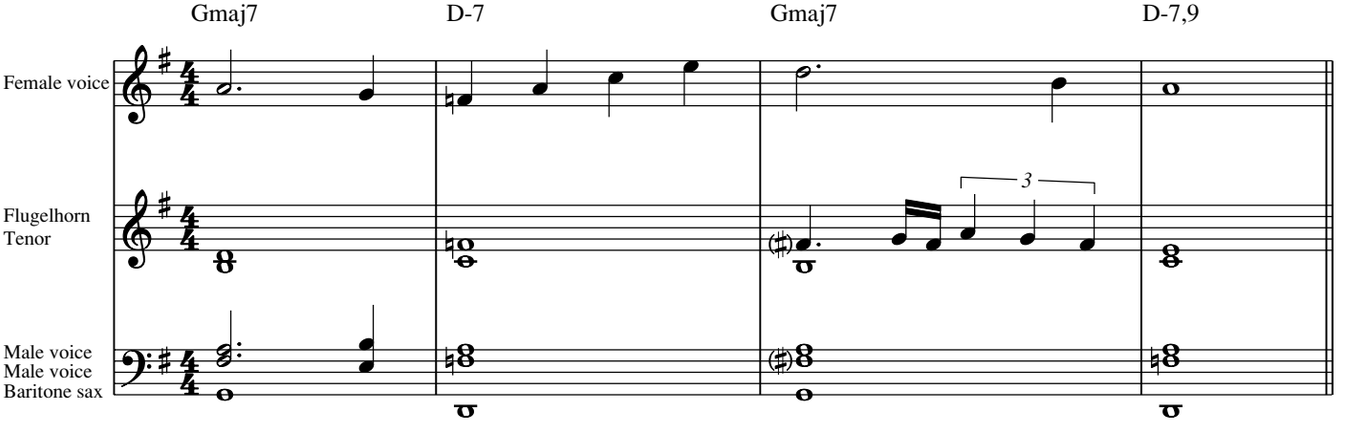

b. Four-part spread background

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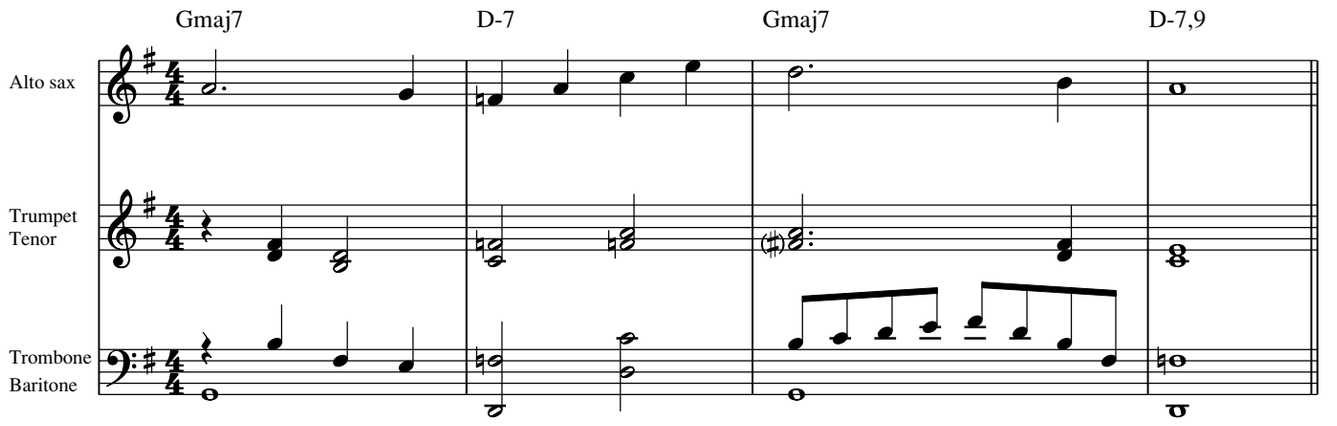

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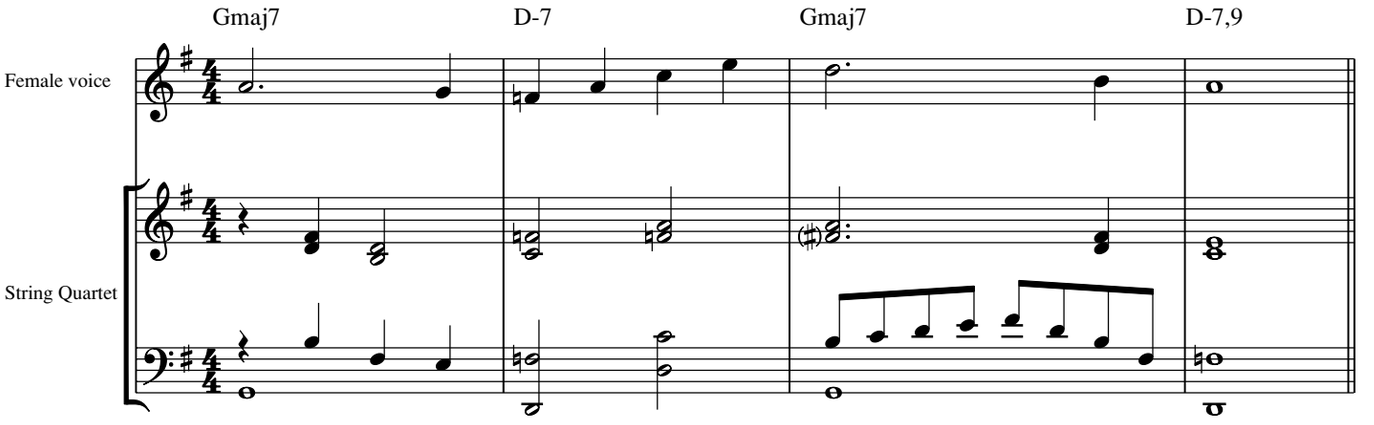
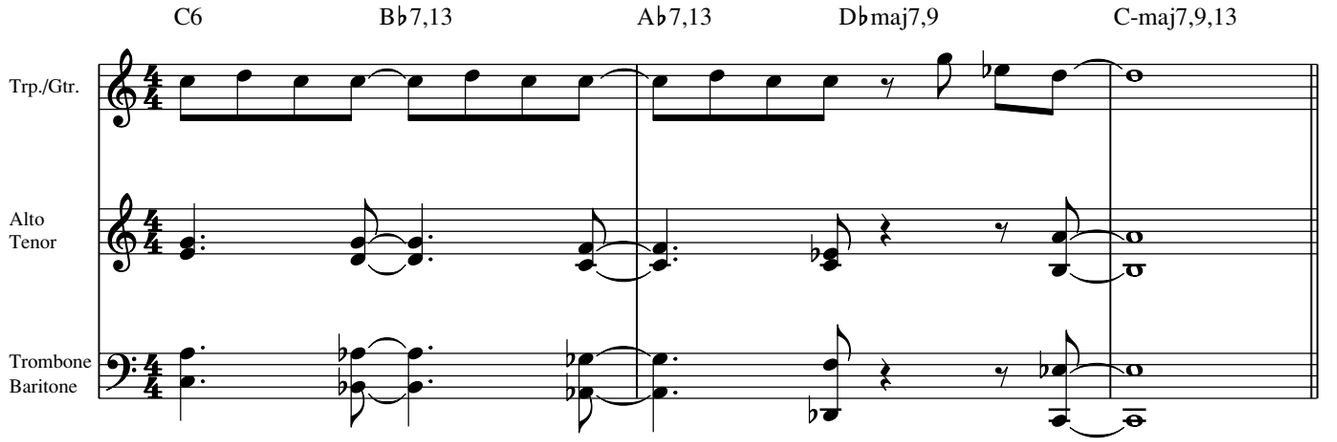


3. In a five-part tutti:

21



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