

What are Jazz Chords?

If you've read *Volume Two* of *Music Principles for the Skeptical Guitarist*, then you've probably got a pretty good feel for basic jazz chords. Here are some general categories:

- (1) **Quadrads:** 4-note Seventh chords that are based on Triads (Major, Minor, Dominant);
- (2) **Extended Chords:** **9th**, **11th** and **13th** chords that are based mainly on Quadrads;
- (3) **Altered Chords:** Dominant chords having **flatted** or **sharped 5ths** or **9ths**, or both; and
- (4) Any chord that sets your teeth on edge or unhinges the family pet. The deaf one.

Concerning this last category, I'm only half kidding. In jazz, you'll find a vast array of Chord Qualities ranging from the sweetly dissonant to the downright distressing, and everything in between. Even the simplest jazz chord, the Quadrad, sounds at least a little discordant, restless, unsettled, unresolved, edgy and itchy. And the practice of Extending and Altering these chords only serves to heighten the tension.

Well, one musician's meat is another one's poison. But I think it's true that the more you listen to jazz and play it, the more you *like* the more dissonant sounds. It's like wine: Novice wine drinkers normally prefer the sweeter white wines; then, over time, they begin to develop an appreciation for the drier red wines. Personally, I'm somewhere in the middle: I like the not-so-dry red wines and the not-so-dissonant jazz chords.

You'll find your own point of balance.

From *Volume One*, you know that there are 2 main types of jazz chord progressions:

1 - 6m - 2m - 5, known as the **Rhythm Changes** (from the song "I've Got Rhythm") and **2m - 5 - 1**, also known as the **Jazz Turnaround** (as in "turning around, heading home").

Technically, these progressions should be expressed in Roman numerals, as in **I - VI - II - V** and **II - V - I**, but I don't like 'em. Just don't.

So we'll stick with American numerals. (We invented them, didn't we?)

If you *do* prefer the Roman numerals, it is also valid, and perhaps more helpful, to express the *Minor* chords in the *lower case*: **I - vi - ii - V**. Some critics feel that I'm doing you a disservice by using Arabic numerals, that if you go on to read other jazz books that use Roman numerals, you'll get all bumfuzzled and peeved.

But I give you more credit than that.

Notice that the Jazz Turnaround and Rhythm Changes overlap to a great extent, differing from each other only by a **6m chord**, but there really *is* a good reason for maintaining the distinction between the two progressions, as you'll soon see.