

(Book 5) Lesson 7a.

Introduction to the Interchangeable Chord Concept

A rhythmical orchestral type situation holds few problems for the guitar. It can easily supply an authoritative and comprehensive background to any type of music. The guitar presents inversions and alterations of chords on demand, but, it cannot, over a given bass note, supply all chords in all positions with the ease of a piano. The guitar is not a piano. To compensate for this, a guitarist is required to learn a rather lengthy and sometimes complicated set of rules called interchangeable (or substitute) chords. In anything over a four part chord (and even then sometimes) the guitarist is required to omit the Root, 3rd or 5th and sometimes, a combination of these notes. In these instances, some other instrument must supply the missing note and particularly, the Root. When we omit notes like the Root, 3rd or 5th etc., the remaining notes will be called "upper partials." In the pages that follow, we will try to explain their derivation and a reasonable way to assess their resolution or progression.

Tower of Thirds

re: Major 6th Chords

The chord in question: C6 (C-E-G-A)

This four note group will be related to the towers of thirds in the "Key of C."

Notice that the notes "C-E-G-A" or "A-C-E-G" occur in six of the seven towers of thirds in the "C" scale. Notice also that on each degree of the scale, these chords are equipt with a different bass note. The addition of these different bass notes changes the quality and sound of that same four note group "C-E-G-A" or "A-C-E-G" and are referred to as "Interchangeable Chords." (Some guitarists refer to them as chord substitutes.) On the guitar, some of these chords can be played using their own bass notes, but for the most part, the "interchangeable chords" must have some other instrument supplying the missing bass note.

What follows is a chart of the chord spellings. Study these chords well. They are important!!!!

C6 Chord Spelling = 6th
5th
3rd
Root

D11 Chord Spelling = 11th
9th
b7th
5th
omit 3rd
omit Root

The "Eleventh Chord" is commonly referred to as the "sus4" chord. The 11th and fourth degrees of any scale are the same note. The 11th or 4th degree is a semitone above the 3rd of the major chord. The sus4 is not compatible with the 3rd of the major chord. Subsequently, when playing a sus4 or 11th chord, definitely omit the major 3rd from the basic triad. A fourth superimposed against a minor triad does not have the same problem because the minor 3rd is a full tone lower in pitch than the 4th. Remember that the 3rd of any major or minor chord is the "colour" note of the chord. A harmonic duel with the colour note generally results in the death of the chord.