

# Introduction

Ever since Bill Evans, Herbie Hancock, Chick Corea, and McCoy Tyner began to usher in the era of modern jazz piano, the left hand voicing underwent a remarkable transformation. Not only did the content (the actual chord voicings) change, but the context (the way that the voicings were used and the forms within which they appeared) was also dramatically altered.

First, the music moved from being *tonal* to being also *modal*. Most of what pianists played in the harmony up until that point consisted mainly of chord progressions, or changes, that outlined chord function such as II7-V7-I7, or V7/VI-VI-II-V, and so forth. A particular chord was expected at a particular place in the form of the piece. Further, there was a particular chord called the *tonic* that defined a point of departure and to which the music returned. With the advent of modern jazz, and Miles Davis and John Coltrane, much improvisation became modal: harmonies and improvisations were based on scales of various types, and the sense of particular chords coming at particular places in the form was blurred. Instead, a scale—as opposed to a chord progression—dictated the harmonic and melodic direction the music took. The harmony became more open, and—in some ways—more ambiguous.

Second, the content of chord voicings changed as well. Up until that point, chord voicings, were oriented toward basic seventh chords with little alteration. As time went on, voicings added dissonance reflecting the alterations in harmony that bop introduced. The basic chord voicing, consisting of thirds (*tertian*) while remaining in place, became supplemented by voicings that were constructed primarily in fourths (*quartal*).

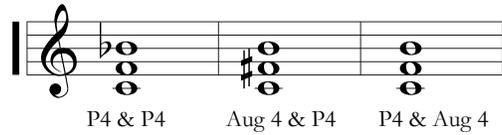
This book is a look at the use of quartal voicings with respect to tunes that consist of chord changes in the more traditional sense. Why quartal voicings? Quartal voicings have a unique sound. Words like "open," "pure," "clear" come to mind when hearing and describing them. The spacing is quite effective when it comes to voicing chords on the piano. When you listen to chords voiced by a great jazz guitarist, they tend to sound really good. The instrument lends itself naturally to these kinds of spacings given the way the strings are tuned. These kinds of voicings are easy to play on the piano, but they come a little less naturally than more commonly used voicings, so you have to work on them to master the technique.

What is a quartal chord voicing? A quartal voicing refers to a voicing constructed in fourths. The term "fourth" refers to the spelling of an interval consisting of four steps in the diatonic (major or minor) scale. Simply stated, play a note in the scale, skip two notes, and play the note after that. A fourth could be C to F, or Eb to A, for example. The perfect fourth and the augmented fourth intervals are given below (Example 1):



**Example 1: Perfect Fourth and Augmented Fourth Intervals**

The term "quartal voicing" is used somewhat loosely in this book to refer to a voicing of two perfect fourths, or a voicing of a perfect fourth and an augmented fourth (Example 2):



### Example 2: Voicings with Perfect Augmented Fourths

The term "fourth" is used somewhat arbitrarily in that these same intervals could also be labeled or spelled differently. For example, the perfect fourth is identical in sound to the augmented third, while the augmented fourth is identical in sound to the diminished fifth. Moreover, in some scales, such as the diminished scale, the fourth sometimes appears between scale tones that are five steps apart. In this book, the terms "perfect fourth" and "augmented fourth" are each used generically to refer to an interval consisting of five half steps and six half steps apart, respectively.

The voicings explored herein consist mainly of *three* notes played by the left hand. Three note quartal voicings are not as complete as other types of voicings, and, as a result, sometimes require more than one voicing to reflect a particular chord quality. Left hand voicings, however, can be extended by adding one, two, or three additional notes played by the right hand. Moreover, a single chord (or chord progression) may be realized as a set of voicings from a scale that generates many possibilities. As a result, important chord tones missing from one voicing may appear in another voicing before the chord changes. Finally, although the examples and arrangements below include intervals other than the fourth, the fourth is the principal interval in our discussion.