

4 Ways to Spice Up Your Chord Progressions



Song writer series 2/4
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Video Tutorial: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ZM-ac9-TGs>

Connect Chords with Scale Runs

So let's examine a chord progression in the key of G

|G//// |D//// |G//// |D////
|G//// |D//// |G//// |C//D//

Let's examine a very basic strum pattern with this progression.

1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & |
G D D D D D D D D D D D D D D D
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & |
G D D D D D D D D D D D C D D D

The next thing to know is the G major scale.

G Major Scale	Notes of G Chord	Notes of D Chord
A -----0-2-3-	-----0-2-3-	-----0-2-3-
E ----0-2-3-----	---0-2-3-----	---0-2-3-----
C 0-2-----	0-2-----	0-2-----
G -----	-----	-----

So the idea is to compare the chord tones with the scale, and see how you can go from one chord to the next using the scale. I came up with this little riff. Notice it starts on a G chord tone, but finishes on a D chord tone.

A|2-0-----|
E|----3-2-----|
C|-----|
G|-----|

I like to work backwards to see how these connect, so let's put the first note in the D chord on the first beat to see if we can give the riff some timing.

```

    1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & |
    G                D
A|-----2p0-----|-----|
E|-----3-----|2-----|
C|-----|-----|
G|-----|-----|

```

After experimenting with a couple ideas, the basic fill I came up with is this, by knowing the timing and where the change is we are able to fill in the rest with a strum pattern. On the first beat of the D chord strum with your thumb through the first three strings, that way you will make the F# note pop out more. Down strums on the numbers, up strums on the &s

```

    1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & |
    G                D                G                D
A|---2---2p0-----|---0-0---0-0---|-----|-----|
E|---3-----3---|2---2-2---2-2---|-----|-----|
C|---2-----|2---2-2---2-2---|-----|-----|
G|0---0-----|2---2-2---2-2---|-----|-----|

```

Let's fill out the rest of the song, we will connect G to the C chord with the same riff, but we will finish on the E note instead of the F# as it is in the scale of G major and the chord of C major.

```

    1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & |
    G                D                G                D
A|---2---2p0-----|---0-0---0-0---|---2---2p0-----|---0-0---0-0---|
E|---3-----3---|2---2-2---2-2---|---3-----3---|2---2-2---2-2---|
C|---2-----|2---2-2---2-2---|---2-----|2---2-2---2-2---|
G|0---0-----|2---2-2---2-2---|0---0-----|2---2-2---2-2---|

```

```

    1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & |
    G                D                G                C                D
A|---2---2p0-----|---0-0---0-0---|---2---2p0-----|---3-----0---|
E|---3-----3---|2---2-2---2-2---|---3-----3---|0---0---2---2---|
C|---2-----|2---2-2---2-2---|---2-----|0---0---2---2---|
G|0---0-----|2---2-2---2-2---|0---0-----|0---0---2---2---|

```

To do the same to your progressions you will need to identify your key, learn the corresponding scale, examine the note of the chords in your progression and look at how to tie notes from the chords together using the scale.

Learn Your Progression in Barre Chords

A simple way to be the extra Ukulele, jam with other people, or mix up your progression is by using different shapes of the same chord, to do that you'll need to know how to move them.

Let's start with the F shape, look at the root and how to move it. Root note in Red.

```
F
A|-0-|
E|-1-|
C|-0-|
G|-2-|
```

To move this chord you just have to identify the root note and build the same shape around the route. Note the shape of these chords is the same because the distance between the notes, or the intervals, are the same. That is why these chord shapes are moveable.

```
F G A B C
A|-0--2--4--6--7--|
E|-1--3--5--7--8--|
C|-0--2--4--6--7--|
G|-2--4--6--8--9--|
```

Let's replicate this exercise with two other chord shapes.

C Shape

```
C D E F G
A|-3--5--7--8--10--|
E|-0--2--4--5--7--|
C|-0--2--4--5--7--|
G|-0--2--4--5--7--|
```

A Shape

```
A B C D E
A|-0--2--3--5--7--|
E|-0--2--3--5--7--|
C|-1--3--4--6--8--|
G|-2--4--5--7--9--|
```

Using these shapes I can change the way I play my G - C - D progression, but this works for all progressions and all chords! Some shapes will just be very uncomfortable, for example the G shape, so find the barre shapes that you comfortable with, it doesn't have to be all, get used to moving them and then apply this information to chord progressions you are familiar with.

Use Chord Fragments to Create New Rhythm

We will now look at the chord progression from last week that I created and how I used chord fragments to create an intro. The progression in the key of F was

F - A7 - Gm7 - C7

When using chord fragments you will need to know the notes of the chord, and then choose smaller pieces, I usually just use two of the three notes to imply the sound of the chord.

Notes of an F chord

F - Root

A - 3rd

C - 5th

I can use two of these notes to create, or imply, an F chord. (5th fret of the E string is an A note, 3rd fret is a C note.)

	1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &	1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &	1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &	1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &	
F					
A	---3---3---3-		-----		-----
E	5---5---5---		-----		-----
C	-----		-----		-----
G	-----		-----		-----

Let's examine the next chord in our progression, the A7. Even though this chord has 4 notes, we can still do the same thing and choose two notes. We have stayed with the A note, but moved the C to a C sharp, same rhythm.

A - Root

C# - 3rd

E - 5th

G - b7th

	1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &	1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &	1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &	1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &	
F		A7	Gm7		
A	---3---3---3-	---4---4---4-		-----	
E	5---5---5---	5---5---5---		-----	
C	-----		-----		-----
G	-----		-----		-----

Let's repeat with the G minor 7, we will use the Bb and D note in our riff, note the same shape and minimal movement.

G - Root

Bb - b3rd

D - 5th

F - b7th

	1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &	1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &	1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &	1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &	
F		A7	Gm7		

```

A|----3-----3---3-|----4-----4---4-|----5-----5---5-|-----|
E|5-----5-----5---|5-----5-----5---|6-----6-----6---|-----|
C|-----|-----|-----|-----|
G|-----|-----|-----|-----|

```

Only one more chord, the C7, let's examine the notes. For this last example we will use one additional note from the scale that is note actually in the C7, to create a little variety and movement, essentially doing what we did in the first example, but only with one note

C - Root
E - 3rd
G - 5th
Bb - b7th

```

1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & |
F           A7           Gm7           C7
A|----3-----3---3-|----4-----4---4-|----5-----5---5-|-----3-----3---|
E|5-----5-----5---|5-----5-----5---|6-----6-----6---|5---3---3-----|
C|-----|-----|-----|-----|
G|-----|-----|-----|-----|

```

This is just one example of how to use chord fragments, think about some of your favorite riffs that you have learned with tenthumbs, do they use chord fragments in their harmony? How so? What can you learn from your favorite rockers? Every song has something unique to offer.

Fill Space With Pentatonic Licks - One more trick up the sleeve, let's remember my chord progression and let's take a look at the F major Pentatonic scale (note this works with the F major scale as well, but the pentatonic feels a little more rock and roll, as well as it is more forgiving.)

F major pentatonic - Remember there are F shapes to the pentatonic, this is only one, learn all five shapes here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GBURg0RYij4>

```

A|-----0-3-|
E|----1-3-----|
C|0-2-----|
G|-----|

```

```

1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & |
F           A7           Gm7           C7
D   D U   U D U   D   D U   U D U   D   D U   U D U   D   D U   U D U

```

So the idea here is to fill out that strum pattern with some fills. It is nice to understand the timing, let's look at where we are going to put our fill.

1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & |
 F A7 Gm7 C7
 D D U U D U D D U U D U D D U U D U D D Fill

So that means the fill here is two beats, the second half of the last bar, you can use the pentatonic anyway you want in that space.

1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 e & a |
 F A7 Gm7 C7

A ----- ----- ----- ----- -----3p0-----
E ----- ----- ----- ----- -----1h3-----3p1-
C ----- ----- ----- ----- -----
G ----- ----- ----- ----- -----

Note that in those two beats I made a riff using only notes from the F major pentatonic. You can recreate this exercise any way you want, I tend to do it in the spaces of my songs that don't have lyrics to help fill empty space, but the only limitation here is your creativity. It can be 4 beats or 4 bars! Whatever you want.

