

Icarus Chord Voicings

- the guy

I am often asked about chord voicings. My own approach is usually, very simple. In the tune Icarus, for example, there are hits after the B section (0:55sec.)

Icarus

0:55

Bmaj

B7 13 no 3rd

E:maj

T

A

B

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The first chord is a Bmaj root position triad with a 3rd (or maj10th) on top.

When dealing with chord voicings on this instrument you want to be mindful of the intervallic relationships within the particular voicings, not just from the root, but the relationships between each note.

Voicing: R maj3rd Perfect5th maj10th

From the 3rd: min3rd, octave

From the 5th: maj6th

(this is just from low to high voices, notice each interval from each voice)

You can analyze chords in such a way that a particular voicing can be labeled many different things. Much depends upon the context, or function of the chord, or the bass note (The Bass is playing an E on this second chord)

The second chord can be called: B7¹³ no 3rd or Emaj9/A or C#7sus4/A or if you have synesthesia it might evoke the smell of rose peddles, or the taste of chocolate covered peanuts, or some deep shade of purple. Perhaps you would call it Jasper or Linus...

What I mean to say is “I really don’t care what you call it. The voice leading into the next chord is appealing to me.”

B7 13 no 3rd

Maj2nd Maj6th Maj7th

Voicing (B713no3rd): b7 R Perfect 5th 13th

Intervallic relationships from the lowest note: maj2nd maj6th min7th

Voicing (Emaj9/A): 5th 9th maj3rd/ VI

Intervallic relationship is the same.

What is more important than which particular label one ascribes to this chord is how it voice-leads into the final chord.

The lowest note resolves down a min2nd.

The next highest voice stays the same.

The next highest voice resolves down a maj2nd

The highest voice resolves up a min 3rd.

The third chord is a first inversion Emaj triad with a 5th added on top. Much like the first voicing, the middle voice of the triad (G string) is doubled with an octave (on the high E string).

Emaj

min 3rd min 6th min 10th

Voicing Emaj/G#: 3rd 5th Root 5th

Intervallic relationship from the lowest note: min3rd, min6th, min10th

I studied with Jim Hall briefly before enrolling at Berklee. He used to say that he thought of chord voicings not as the Root, Quality, Tensions, Inversion, etc. but in shades of different colors. I do not think that he had a form of the very rare aforementioned disorder of mixed senses, but I know what he meant.

Personally I think of chords as textures. I like to mix very close and very wide intervals within my voicings. It is important to mention the difference in timbre when talking about guitar-specific voicings. On the piano there is one middle C (C4). On the guitar there are five. Depending on which string you play a particular note, the timbre can be drastically different. One need only compare the difference between C4 on the first fret B string and C4 on the 20th fret, Low E string, to understand the contrast. Mixing the timbre of open strings and pitches higher up on the fret board gives a rich sound.