

Keyboard Voicings Study

by Russell Schmidt

"ii \emptyset - V⁷ - i's" in "Drop 2" format

(plus added bass pitch---*practice with and without the bass pitch*)

As a companion to the **Keyboard Voicings Study** document presenting “Drop 2” voicings on “ii - V⁷ - I” harmonic progressions (drawn from *major* keys), these materials provide pianists with examples of strong voicings for the similar progression found in *minor* keys: the “ii \emptyset - V⁷ - i” progression. These “Drop 2” chords---an open position type of voicing, with notes spanning more than one octave---are found in the grand staff. In addition, bass pitches have also been included (in a cued staff) for two reasons:

- 1) To provide harmonic context as one practices these voicings, and
- 2) To expand the usefulness of these voicings as one moves from combo performance to solo piano settings.

By the latter point, the implication is that the bass pitches are not necessary when one is working with a bassist, as in a combo. But in solo piano settings, being able to play the bass pitch *in addition to* the four-note, “Drop 2” voicings can be a great advantage.

To gain the full benefit from these materials, practice the voicings in two separate ways:

- 1) When practicing as four-voice, “Drop 2” chords, play only the notes presented in the grand staff, placing two in each hand.

- 2) When practicing with the added bass pitch, assign three notes to the right hand and two notes to the left. To be clear, this means your left hand will be playing the lowest note found in the grand staff as well as the bass pitch located on the cued staff. *[This differs greatly from the notational approach found in the document featuring “Drop 2” voicings on “ii - V⁷ - I” (major key) progressions. The decision to use a cued staff for bass notes in this document was made to maintain focus on the primary goal: introducing effective minor key “Drop 2” voicings. As these types of progressions require a substantial number of accidentals, attempting to also include the bass pitch in the grand staff appeared to present too much data in too limited a space.]*

There are a few other items worthy of mention. First, enharmonic spellings are occasionally used on the V⁷ chords to ease the readability of the document. For example, while a harmony might be listed as a chord with a raised 5th, it could be notated as having a lowered 13th, simply to improve the visual layout.

Additionally, pianists are strongly encouraged to play the four-voice, “Drop 2” chords and *sing* the bass pitches (as opposed to only ever *playing* the bass notes, as when moving on to practicing these with all five voices). Singing the bass pitches will help develop one's ear and the ability to hear harmonies more completely. Always feel free to move voicings up an octave (as necessary) to ensure one is singing *beneath* the voicings played.

Finally, please note that *every chord* in these progressions can be viewed as some form of half-diminished seventh chord: half-diminished harmonies serve convincingly as the upper structure for altered dominant ninth chords and when inverted, half-diminished harmonies also function as minor sixth chords. If this last piece of information is not particularly helpful, please see the separate “*Harmonic Equivalence*” hand-out to better understand the relevance of these sorts of cross-relationships between harmonies.

I. $B\flat\emptyset^7$ $E\flat^7(\sharp 5)$ $A\flat mi^6$ $G\sharp\emptyset^7$ $C\sharp^7(\sharp 5)$ $F\sharp mi^6$ $F\sharp\emptyset^7$ $B^7(\sharp 5)$ $E mi^6$

The musical notation shows a sequence of chords in a minor key progression. The grand staff (treble and bass clefs) displays four-voice chords. The cued bass staff (bass clef) shows the lowest note of each chord. The chords are: $B\flat\emptyset^7$, $E\flat^7(\sharp 5)$, $A\flat mi^6$, $G\sharp\emptyset^7$, $C\sharp^7(\sharp 5)$, $F\sharp mi^6$, $F\sharp\emptyset^7$, $B^7(\sharp 5)$, and $E mi^6$.

Drop 2 "ii^ø - V⁷ - i's" (page two)

E^ø7 A7(^b9[#]5) Dmi⁶ D^ø7 G7(^b9[#]5) Cmi⁶ C^ø7 F7(^b9[#]5) B^bmi⁶

Musical notation for the first system, showing chords and bass line for E^ø7, A7(^b9[#]5), Dmi⁶, D^ø7, G7(^b9[#]5), Cmi⁶, C^ø7, F7(^b9[#]5), and B^bmi⁶.

(...and again in the six remaining keys)

Ia. B^ø7 E7(^b9[#]5) Ami⁶ A^ø7 D7(^b9[#]5) Gmi⁶ G^ø7 C7(^b9[#]5) Fmi⁶

Musical notation for the second system, showing chords and bass line for B^ø7, E7(^b9[#]5), Ami⁶, A^ø7, D7(^b9[#]5), Gmi⁶, G^ø7, C7(^b9[#]5), and Fmi⁶.

F^ø7 B^b7(^b9[#]5) E^bmi⁶ D[#]^ø7 G[#]7(^b9[#]5) C[#]mi⁶ C[#]^ø7 F[#]7(^b9[#]5) Bmi⁶

Musical notation for the third system, showing chords and bass line for F^ø7, B^b7(^b9[#]5), E^bmi⁶, D[#]^ø7, G[#]7(^b9[#]5), C[#]mi⁶, C[#]^ø7, F[#]7(^b9[#]5), and Bmi⁶.

Drop 2 "ii^ø - V⁷ - i's" (page four)

B^ø7 E⁷(^b9_{#5}) A^{mi}6 A^ø7 D⁷(^b9_{#5}) G^{mi}6 G^ø7 C⁷(^b9_{#5}) F^{mi}6

The first system of music features a piano accompaniment with a grand staff. The right hand plays chords in the upper register, while the left hand plays chords in the lower register. A separate bass line is shown below the grand staff. The chords are: B^ø7, E⁷(^b9_{#5}), A^{mi}6, A^ø7, D⁷(^b9_{#5}), G^{mi}6, G^ø7, C⁷(^b9_{#5}), and F^{mi}6. The bass line consists of quarter notes: B, E, A, D, G, C, G, F.

Here is yet another inversion...

III. E^ø7 A⁷(^b9_{#5}) D^{mi}6 D^ø7 G⁷(^b9_{#5}) C^{mi}6 C^ø7 F⁷(^b9_{#5}) B^bmi6

The second system of music features a piano accompaniment with a grand staff. The right hand plays chords in the upper register, while the left hand plays chords in the lower register. A separate bass line is shown below the grand staff. The chords are: E^ø7, A⁷(^b9_{#5}), D^{mi}6, D^ø7, G⁷(^b9_{#5}), C^{mi}6, C^ø7, F⁷(^b9_{#5}), and B^bmi6. The bass line consists of quarter notes: E, A, D, G, C, F, C, B.

B^bø7 E^b7(^b9_{#5}) A^bmi6 G[#]ø7 C[#]7(^b9_{#5}) F[#]mi6 F[#]ø7 B⁷(^b9_{#5}) E^{mi}6

The third system of music features a piano accompaniment with a grand staff. The right hand plays chords in the upper register, while the left hand plays chords in the lower register. A separate bass line is shown below the grand staff. The chords are: B^bø7, E^b7(^b9_{#5}), A^bmi6, G[#]ø7, C[#]7(^b9_{#5}), F[#]mi6, F[#]ø7, B⁷(^b9_{#5}), and E^{mi}6. The bass line consists of quarter notes: B, E, A, G, C, F, F, B.

Drop 2 "ii[∅] - V⁷ - i's" (page five)

(...and again in the six remaining keys)

IIIa. F^{∅7} B^{b7}(^{b9}_{#5}) E^{bmi}⁶ D^{#∅7} G^{#7}(^{b9}_{#5}) C^{#mi}⁶ C^{#∅7} F^{#7}(^{b9}_{#5}) B^{mi}⁶

B^{∅7} E⁷(^{b9}_{#5}) A^{mi}⁶ A^{∅7} D⁷(^{b9}_{#5}) G^{mi}⁶ G^{∅7} C⁷(^{b9}_{#5}) F^{mi}⁶

Here is the final inversion...

IV. C^{∅7} F⁷(^{b9}_{#5}) B^{bmi}⁶ B^{b∅7} E^{b7}(^{b9}_{#5}) A^{bmi}⁶ G^{#∅7} C^{#7}(^{b9}_{#5}) F^{#mi}⁶

Drop 2 "ii^ø - V⁷ - i's" (page six)

F[♯]Ø⁷ B⁷(^b9_{♯5}) E^{mi}6 EØ⁷ A⁷(^b9_{♯5}) D^{mi}6 DØ⁷ G⁷(^b9_{♯5}) C^{mi}6

The first system of music shows a piano accompaniment for six chords. The chords are: F[♯]Ø⁷, B⁷(^b9_{♯5}), E^{mi}6, EØ⁷, A⁷(^b9_{♯5}), D^{mi}6, DØ⁷, G⁷(^b9_{♯5}), and C^{mi}6. The notation includes a grand staff with treble and bass clefs, and a separate bass line. The chords are represented by block chords with accidentals and extensions.

(...and again in the six remaining keys)

IVa. C[♯]Ø⁷ F[♯]7(^b9_{♯5}) B^{mi}6 BØ⁷ E⁷(^b9_{♯5}) A^{mi}6 AØ⁷ D⁷(^b9_{♯5}) G^{mi}6

The second system of music shows a piano accompaniment for six chords. The chords are: C[♯]Ø⁷, F[♯]7(^b9_{♯5}), B^{mi}6, BØ⁷, E⁷(^b9_{♯5}), A^{mi}6, AØ⁷, D⁷(^b9_{♯5}), and G^{mi}6. The notation includes a grand staff with treble and bass clefs, and a separate bass line. The chords are represented by block chords with accidentals and extensions.

GØ⁷ C⁷(^b9_{♯5}) F^{mi}6 FØ⁷ B^b7(^b9_{♯5}) E^bmi6 D[♯]Ø⁷ G[♯]7(^b9_{♯5}) C[♯]mi6

The third system of music shows a piano accompaniment for six chords. The chords are: GØ⁷, C⁷(^b9_{♯5}), F^{mi}6, FØ⁷, B^b7(^b9_{♯5}), E^bmi6, D[♯]Ø⁷, G[♯]7(^b9_{♯5}), and C[♯]mi6. The notation includes a grand staff with treble and bass clefs, and a separate bass line. The chords are represented by block chords with accidentals and extensions.

Drop 2 "ii[♭] - V⁷ - i's" (page seven)

*A final comment...*The preceding examples follow a particular system, identifying initial "Drop 2" voicings that work for the progression in question, then exploring them through each possible inversion. But that doesn't necessarily mean these are the best possible four-note voicings for a "ii[♭] - V⁷ - i" (minor key) progression. In fact, in the related handout featuring "ii - V⁷ - I" (major key) progressions, every voicing shown turned out to be some form of ninth chord. In these materials, only the (altered) dominants are presented as ninth chords.

So why not use some form of ninth chord for every harmony in this hand-out as well? Two main reasons:

- 1) These "ii[♭] - V⁷ - i's" hold to the vocabulary shown in the "Harmonic Equivalence" hand-out, using only voicings that can be reduced to one of the three harmonies presented there. In *these* materials, everything shown is some type of half-diminished seventh chord, often repurposed as *another* harmony (i.e., an altered dominant chord or a minor sixth chord). A similar, though more complicated relationship exists between the *major* key progressions hand-out and the "Harmonic Equivalence" sheet, with all "ii - V⁷ - I" voicings again limited to the vocabulary shown in latter document. *[The voicings presented below as alternative, sophisticated options, don't adhere to this system. As such, they are not the author's first choice to present to developing jazz pianists on this topic and aren't used in the previous six pages of this hand-out.]*
- 2) It is the nature of progressions in minor keys to have more harmonic complications. For example, the harmonies in each "ii[♭] - V⁷ - i" progression may come from a single key center ("X" minor), but the voicings are drawn from *multiple* scales: The "ii[♭]" and "V⁷" appear to come from "X" **harmonic** minor, while the "i" is taken from "X" **melodic** minor. When comparing this to the harmonies of the "ii - V⁷ - I" hand-out---where all voicings clearly come from the major key (and **scale**) in question---the greater complexity of minor key progressions becomes more evident.

Unfortunately, such complexity can sometimes lead to instability when creating open position voicings for these chords. Examples 1 & 2 feature ninth chords in "Drop 2" format on a sample "ii[♭] - V⁷ - i" (minor key) progression. These sound quite rich and complex, in part because each voicing is built with notes from a different source scale; there is no harmonic (or "chord/scale") commonality as one moves from one harmony to the next. And the voice leading is excellent, even surpassing in quality the voice leading found in the previous six pages. For each chord in the progression, the 3rd and 7th (or for the "i" chord, the 3rd and 6th) are situated beneath the 5th and 9th. This lends each of these voicings greater stability despite the harmonic complexity. (And a more advanced student might be encouraged to try these particular voicings in all twelve keys on the "ii[♭] - V⁷ - i" progression.)

However in Example 3, while the good voice leading remains evident, the verticalities do not consistently provide effective representations of the desired harmonies. (While the "V⁷" still sounds great, the "i" chord is quite muddy: a fairly weak representation of the intended harmony. As for the voicing shown for the "ii[♭]" chord, while the author certainly enjoys that sound, he recognizes its utility is often limited by context.) Because these voicings do not consistently provide solid representations of these harmonies at each inversion, there is less of a need for developing jazz pianists to practice these more complex voicings as systematically as the ones shown on the preceding pages.

Give these voicings (below) a try to see if you enjoy them. Perhaps these sounds will work their way into your playing, but preferably *after* you have mastered the voicings shown previously.

<p>Ex. 1</p> <p>D[♭]9 G⁷([♭]5) Cmi⁶</p>	<p>Ex. 2</p> <p>D[♭]9 G⁷([♭]5) Cmi⁶</p>	<p>Ex. 3</p> <p>D[♭]9 G⁷([♭]5) Cmi⁶</p>