mDecks Series

Upper Structure Quartals Piano Voicings Vol. 1
All possible USQs over IIIm7 and V7

Jazz & Improvisation

Ariel J. Ramos
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Prerequisites

To take full advantage of these books the student needs a good understanding of basic harmony, chord notation, harmonic progressions, intervals and functional harmony.

Also, you need to be able to play at an intermediate level, understand chord symbols and how to play basic voicings from a lead sheet and also be able to read regular music notation (notes and rhythms).

Evaluation Quiz.
If you know the answer to the following questions you are probably ready to embark in the study of Upper Structure Triads over the IIm7 and V7 chords.

1. What is a Triad?
2. When is a Triad Major or Minor?
3. Do you understand enharmonic spelling?
4. Which note is the Prefect 4\textsuperscript{th} above C?
5. Which notes is the #11 of F?
6. Secondary functions. What is the II of IIm7?
7. How do you construct the Major Scale?
8. How do you construct the Dorian Scale?
9. Which is the dominant chord in A major?
10. Why is the progression IIm7 V7 so important in Jazz?
11. Can you play any triad in any inversion in all twelve keys?
12. Can you play a simple accompaniment for the progression Am7 D7 Ab7 G7 Cmaj7?
13. What is a tritone?
14. What is the order of notes in the circle of fifths
Infinite Possibilities? No Voicing left behind!

Ideally, practicing and learning a certain skill implies the study of all possibilities, to unlock all secrets and to leave nothing behind, untouched, in the dark.

As I have said in the previous Upper Structure Triads (UST) voicings volumes: when a jazz player first encounter the USQ (upper structure quartals) concept, the possibilities seem to be almost infinite. Students usually ask: What USQ can I play on top of this C7 chord? Or, what USQ sounds cool here, which ones are redundant or do not add anything interesting to the color of the base chord? How should I practice them?

Every player (or teacher) has its favorites. But how do you find them? Most teachers (or jazz musicians) will give you a few they like and use, and will tell you to practice them in all twelve keys until you get a feeling for them and then choose the ones you like best and work in integrating them in your playing, which is an excellent way of learning USQs and is the driving idea in this collection of books.

Nonetheless, there is still the question: How do I know I am not leaving a great sounding USQ behind? How could I try them all and then decide the ones I like the most? The biggest problem with this question is not the amount of possibilities but the inescapable nature of our musical perception, which, through time, will certainly make us change our judgment of what sounds cool and what is boring or uninteresting.

What sounds cool to our ears today, will most probably sound boring and uninteresting in a few years. (except if it’s Miles!)

The goal in this USQ book is, not only to give you access to all possible USQs over the IIm7 and V7 but also, to let you keep track of your practice routine and aural perception of each voicing they have practiced.

This will allow you to incorporate USQ voicings you currently like into your playing and to review and/or look for new ones later on. Remember: Voicings you discard today might be the ones you prefer in a few months.

In later pages, we will tackle the apparently infinite number of USQ combinations and possibilities.
Analysis and Scope of the Book

It is most important that we organize and analyze the way we think about USQs.

Imposed Rules.
The following rules will help us narrow results, excluding unwanted or out-of-scope possibilities.

1. Only the previously defined perfect and altered Quartals will be considered as USQ candidates. We will not study other types of structures in this book. This is an arbitrary decision to make our task achievable.

2. Only quartals with at least one tension (9,11,13 or any alteration of these) will be considered as USQ candidates.

3. No Quartals with “avoid” notes will be included as a USQ candidate.

Avoid notes.
Avoid notes are notes that do not belong to the current chord scale or clash with a chord tone of the current chord.

For the IIm7 we will consider Dorian as the Chord Scale. There are no avoid notes in the Dorian Scale. (this means that all and only notes in the Dorian Scale are available for building a USQ on top of the IIm7 chord)

For example: in Dm7 (D Dorian Scale) the notes D E F G A B C are all available

For the V7 we will consider all notes available for USQ building except the 11th and the Major 7th of the V7 which will be avoid notes.

For example G7: All available except: C and F# which are Avoid notes.

This will give us all altered tensions in the Dominant Function chord which is a common practice among jazz players. We want to avoid the major 7th and the 11th of the chord since they actually create the tritone that defines the V7 as a I (as the tonic, not a dominant… think about that!)

Scope of the books in this collection
It is crucial to understand that although quartal harmony is of great significance in modern jazz, quartal structures will not be considered as a harmonic source in this book but only as upper structures superimposed on top of tonal/standard harmonic progressions (harmony based on 3rds).
Available Altered $\text{maj7#4}$ Upper Structures Quartals over V7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>USQ View from V7</th>
<th>Resulting Chord Symbol</th>
<th>UST Chord Tones Tensions</th>
<th>Tension Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I $\text{maj7#4}$</td>
<td>Avoid Notes</td>
<td>1 7 #11 X X</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bII $\text{maj7#4}$</td>
<td>V7 (b9)</td>
<td>1 b9 5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II $\text{maj7#4}$</td>
<td>Avoid</td>
<td>b9 9 b13 X X</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bIII $\text{maj7#4}$</td>
<td>Avoid</td>
<td>9 #9 13 X X</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III $\text{maj7#4}$</td>
<td>V7 (#9)</td>
<td>3 b7 #9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV $\text{maj7#4}$</td>
<td>Avoid Notes</td>
<td>3 7 11 X X</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#IV $\text{maj7#4}$</td>
<td>Avoid Notes</td>
<td>1 11 #11 X</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V $\text{maj7#4}$</td>
<td>V7 (b9 #11)</td>
<td>5 b9 #11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bV $\text{maj7#4}$</td>
<td>V7 (9 b13)</td>
<td>5 9 b13</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V $\text{maj7#4}$</td>
<td>Avoid</td>
<td>#9 13 b13 X X</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bVII $\text{maj7#4}$</td>
<td>V7 (13)</td>
<td>3 b7 13</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII $\text{maj7#4}$</td>
<td>Avoid Notes</td>
<td>b7 7 11 X X</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are only 5 $\text{maj74}$ altered Quartals over the V7 with at least 1 tension and no avoid notes or avoid combinations (such as 9 and #9)

bII $\text{maj74}/V7$  III $\text{maj74}/V7$  V $\text{maj74}/V7$  bV $\text{maj74}/V7$  bVII $\text{maj74}/V7$
Preparing Perfect Quartal 47
Quartal by stacking two perfect 4ths

\[ \text{Tempo = 90-140} \]

\[
\begin{align*}
C_7 & \quad D_7 & \quad D_7 & \quad E_7 & \quad E_7 & \quad F_©7 \\
F_©7 & \quad A¨7 & \quad A¨7 & \quad B¨7 & \quad B¨7 & \quad C_7 \\
G_7 & \quad A7 & \quad A7 & \quad B7 & \quad B7 & \quad C©7
\end{align*}
\]
V47 of IIIm7
Quartal by stacking two perfect 4ths over the V of IIIm7

\[ \text{Tempo: 90-140} \]

1. \( D^7\text{sus}_4 \) over \( G^m_7 \)

2. \( G^#7\text{sus}_4 \) over \( C^#m_7 \)

3. \( E^b7\text{sus}_4 \) over \( A^b_m_7 \)

4. \( A^7\text{sus}_4 \) over \( D_m^7 \)

5. \( E^7\text{sus}_4 \) over \( A_m^7 \)

6. \( B^b7\text{sus}_4 \) over \( E^b_m^7 \)