

USING NINTH CHORDS TO ADD RICHNESS TO YOUR MUSIC



By Patrice Fisher

Many of us have used a variety of chord shapes in our evolution as musicians. We might start with a single note left hand accompaniment pattern, playing only the root (the name of the chord). After we master that left hand pattern, we might go on to add a fifth (five notes above the root of the chord), a triad (adding a third to our chord), an octave (adding a note eight steps above), and so on.

We might start out with a block chord pattern (playing all notes at the same time) and progress on to using arpeggios (separating chord notes and playing consecutively) and rolled chords (playing chord notes in quick succession, usually from the bottom note up). All these tools give us a left-hand vocabulary that we can use in improvising or to make our own musical arrangement. We can shape our arrangement from simple to complex, just by varying what our left hand does.

The ninth chord is a useful tool that we can add to our harmonic vocabulary, which will add richness to our music. If you count up the strings, calling the name of the chord the first degree, then the ninth degree is the note nine steps above the root of the chord. This is a mysterious sound, which comes from its position in the upper range of the overtone series (frequencies which vibrate sympathetically when you pluck any harp string). I will use the beginning section of my composition, "Spirit of Tatiana," to show you different ways of adding variation to your left hand. See the illustration on the next page.

An easy way to make a ninth chord is to set your fingers in the shape of a triad (1-3-5). Then simply move your second finger from the note three steps above the root of the chord down to the note two steps above the root. This gives you a three note chord, with the richness of the ninth. I call this the "ninth as a second" pattern.

A second way to add a ninth chord to your left hand is to use the "wandering thumb" technique. Place your fingers in the 4-2-1 (root, fifth, octave) arpeggio pattern. Play your fourth and second finger going up, but before you play your thumb, cross your second finger under your thumb and play the note a step above the octave (the ninth degree of the scale). Follow through and play your thumb on the note a step above the ninth. This will end your left-hand pattern with a chord note, on the strong beat of the measure. This pattern makes the interval of the ninth fall on a weak beat, as a passing note.

A third way to add a ninth is to play either a two, three, or four note chord, with the octave included, but instead of placing your thumb on the octave note (eight notes above the root), place your thumb on the ninth (nine notes above the root).

A very popular way to end many Jazz pieces is to add both a sixth and a ninth to the final chord of a piece. This is called a six nine chord.

All of these ninth chord patterns can be played as block chords, arpeggios, or rolled chords.

The wandering thumb pattern is especially effective at the end of a section, when there is a long note in the melody, because it is long and it takes at least three beats to complete the pattern.

The ninth as a second pattern is good when you want to add variety to an arpeggio pattern in your left hand, because it is shorter and it only takes two beats to complete the pattern.

The block ninth chord is especially useful when you want to add rhythmic variety to your accompaniment, because it is short. You can play this pattern on a combination of strong beats and weak beats, to give a syncopated feeling to your arrangement.

Use your own creativity to find your own ways to add ninth chords to enrich your music. Let me know what you come up with. You can write to me at ecoslatinos@gmail.com or watch my online classes on Patrice Fisher and Arpa YouTube Channel.

Spirit of Tatiana Ninth Chord Workshop Illustration

Single Note Accompaniment **Fifth Accompaniment**

Triad Accompaniment **Octave Accompaniment**

Ninth as a Second Accompaniment

Ninth Block Chord Accompaniment **Ninth Block Chord Syncopated Accompaniment**

4 2 1 Ninth Chord Accompaniment

Wandering Thumb Ninth Accompaniment **6 9 Chord Accompaniment**

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