The ii–V–I in C Major

Dm7 – G7 – Cmaj7: three chords, two guide tones, one loop
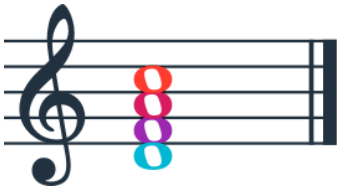
LISTEN
Scan to hear every example

The ii–V–I is a staple progression of jazz. In C major: **Dm7** → **G7** → **Cmaj7** — away, tension, home, each chord a stack of four thirds. Strip each chord down to its 3rd and 7th and the whole progression becomes two voices barely moving. Each note wears its job in the chord:

root · 3rd · 5th · 7th

1 · THE THREE CHORDS, STACKED IN THIRDS

ii7 Dm7



D · F · A · C

minor 7th · Handout 224

V7 G7



G · B · D · F

dominant 7th · Handout 212
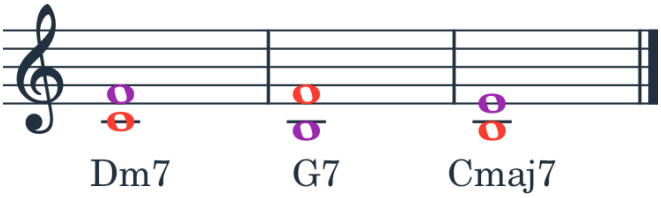
Imaj7 Cmaj7



C · E · G · B

major 7th · Handout 223

2 · GUIDE TONES — 3RDS AND 7THS ONLY



C → B Dm7's 7th steps down to G7's 3rd.

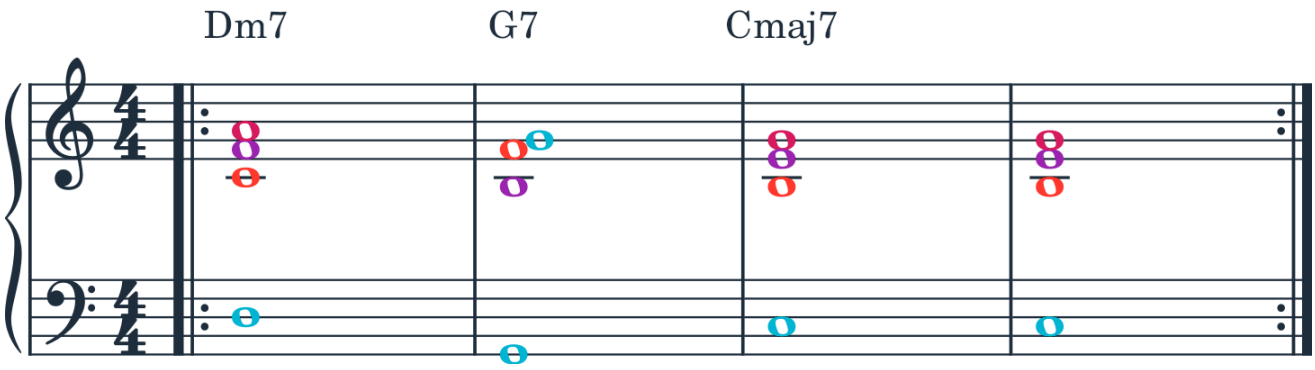
F holds the 3rd of Dm7 becomes the 7th of G7.

F → E G7's 7th steps down to Cmaj7's 3rd.

B holds the 3rd of G7 becomes the 7th of Cmaj7.

3 · BOTH HANDS — LOOP IT

L.H. ROOT · R.H. GUIDE TONES + ONE NOTE ON TOP



LEFT HAND
just the roots: **D → G → C** — down a 5th, up a 4th.

RIGHT HAND
the guide tones + one note on top: **C–F–A → B–F–G → B–E–G**.

THE TOP NOTE
A (5th), G (root), G (5th). No finger moves more than a step.

Try it Play the guide tones alone first, one hand, slowly: feel the 7th drop into the next 3rd. Then add the left-hand roots and the top note and loop the four bars until the changes happen without looking. **Next:** read it as a lead sheet (Handout 229) and fit it beside the four chords of C major (Handout 78).

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