

# A Pro's Approach To Playing Piano Chords



by Dave Longo

*SIMPLE YET EFFECTIVE IDEAS TO ENHANCE YOUR PIANO PLAYING CREATIVITY*

In my years (about 30) of coaching people one-on-one on piano, the one common interest they share is the desire to master playing chords on the piano. After all, mastering piano chords leads to a certain level of freedom of expression that opens the doors wide open to musical creativity.

There are different levels of this "mastery" that I refer to, as well. The student who is exposed to his or her first chord may not feel a genuine sense of accomplishment - being able to play a C Major triad is a stepping stone, of course, but if learning that chord is approached in a way where it opens the door to learn 48 of them, then this person is onto something. In the event that you are a novice reading this, I demonstrate clearly how this level of understanding can be attained within a matter of minutes in my [Piano Chords 101](#) program (you will not only know the major, minor, augmented, and diminished triads, but you will be the one who actually creates them, thus leaving you with more confidence with them).

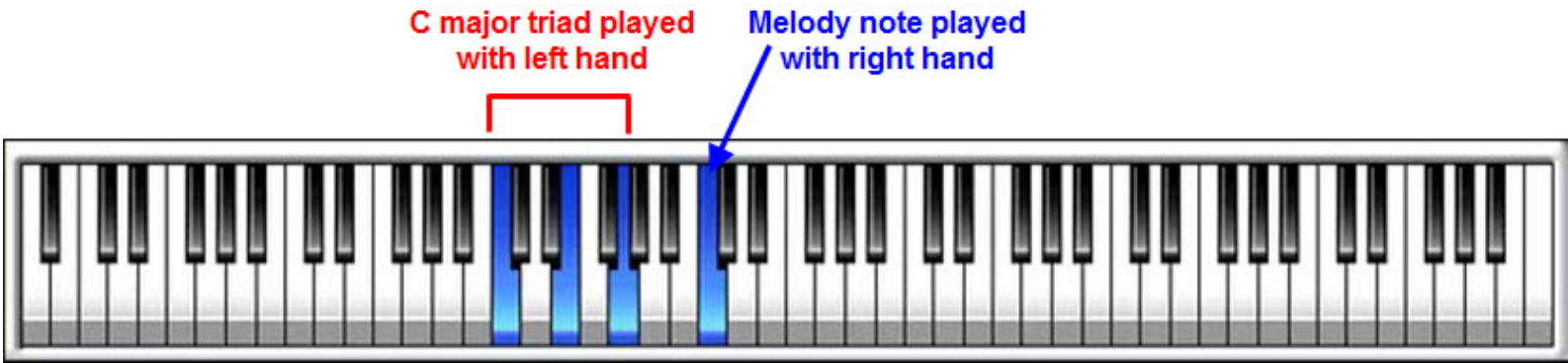
So let's say that you have attained this understanding. In addition, you are having fun applying what you've learned. You know your major, minor, augmented, and diminished triads...

For example, you know how to play a C Major triad... the notes are:

C E G

Let's say that you are playing a standard tune such as Somewhere Over The Rainbow by Harold Arlen and Edgar Harburg... if playing this song in the key of C Major, the first two melody notes are both C, the second one octave higher than the other. In addition, the chord is C Major...

Well, most people when they are in the early stages of learning, will play the melody in single note fashion in the right hand, and with the left hand will simply play the C Major triad (triad is a three note chord) in their left hand in its basic form, C E G:



So, in this case, you'd have the left hand playing three notes and the right hand playing the melody in single-note fashion. Now, there's nothing wrong with this - actually, at certain times, it's preferred. But if this approach to playing "chord piano" remains limited to playing in this fashion, the player is missing out on some very creative possibilities...

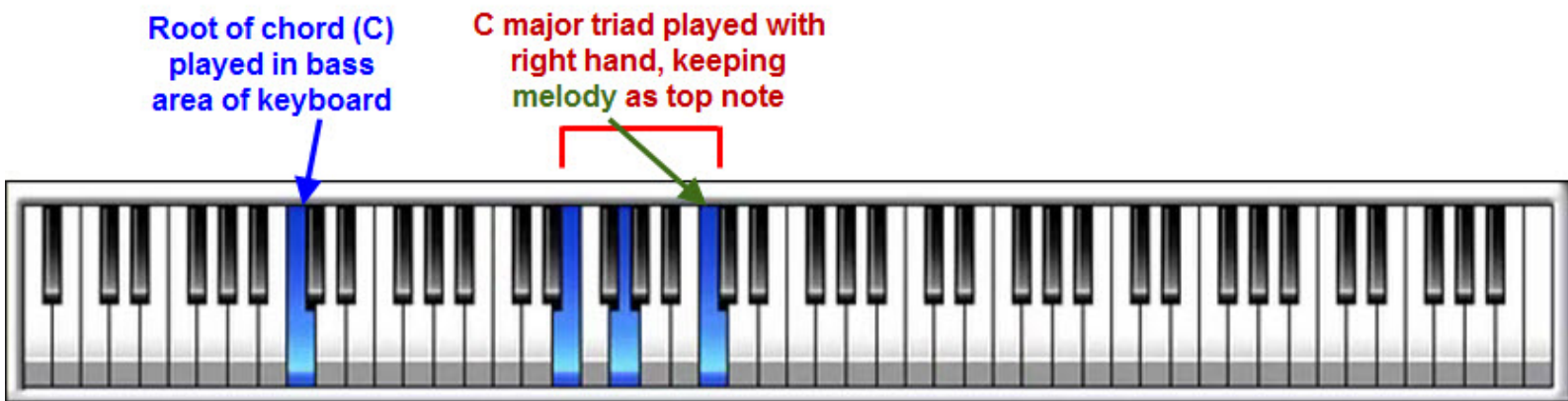
For one, how about taking that chord and playing it in the right hand instead? Again, take a look at that melody note... it is a C. C is in the chord of C Major, of course. What are the other notes in the C Major chord? Yes, they are E and G....

Look again at the melody... now find the closest E and G below it. You will easily see that playing E G C (in that order from left to right) results in two things:

- 1) You are playing the C Major chord in your right hand (playing the notes in a different order, resulting in what we call an "inversion" of the chord)
- 2) You are playing the melody on top (furthest to the right).

What about the left hand? Well, rather than playing the C E G below middle C, how about playing that C and octave lower than you were originally? You don't

need to play the whole chord with your left hand at this point because your right hand has taken over the role! Playing the chord in your right hand with the melody note on top in this range of the piano, and playing the C (which is the "Root" or name of the chord) in the bass area of the piano results in a nice full sound that you initially did not enjoy before.



You see, a pro player thinks "outside the box" you might say... naturally, there is lots more that can be done than what we just presented, but it's certainly a start...

Let's say that you have a pretty good handle on playing triads... your next step would be to have fun learning those 7th chords... this can be a relatively easy task, since you already know the triads which form the foundation for these chords. If you would like to get your hands on a clearly illustrated chart of 7th chords (major 7ths, minor 7ths, dominant 7ths, and diminished 7ths), [a very affordable one is here](#).

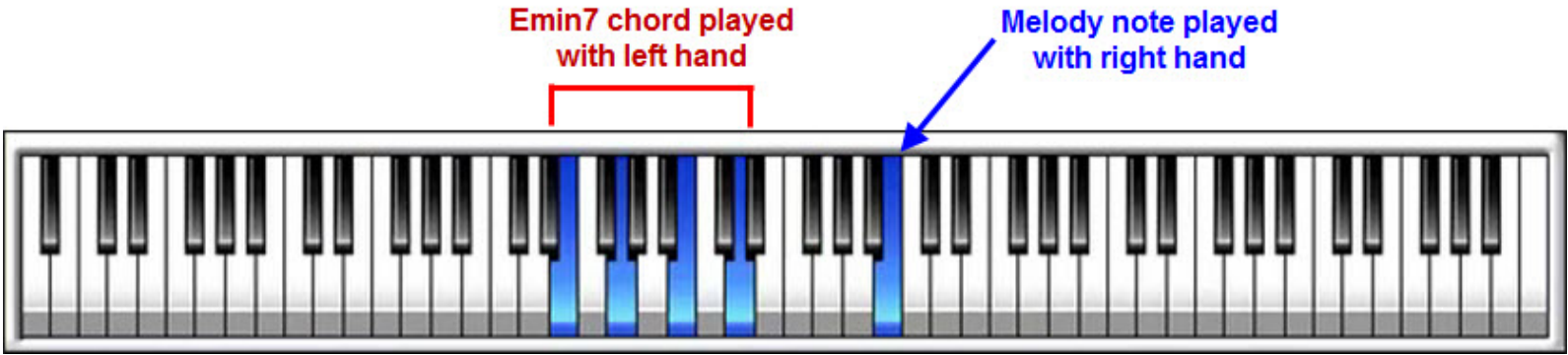
Okay, let's just say that you have some decent familiarity with these 7th chords... let's look at one...

The Emin7 chord (pronounced "E minor seventh")...

In addition, let's take a look at that next melody note (the third one) of Somewhere Over The Rainbow, which is a B...

The chord that is generally played with this melody note B is an Emin7 chord...

Again, the beginning player would likely approach playing this in this simple fashion:

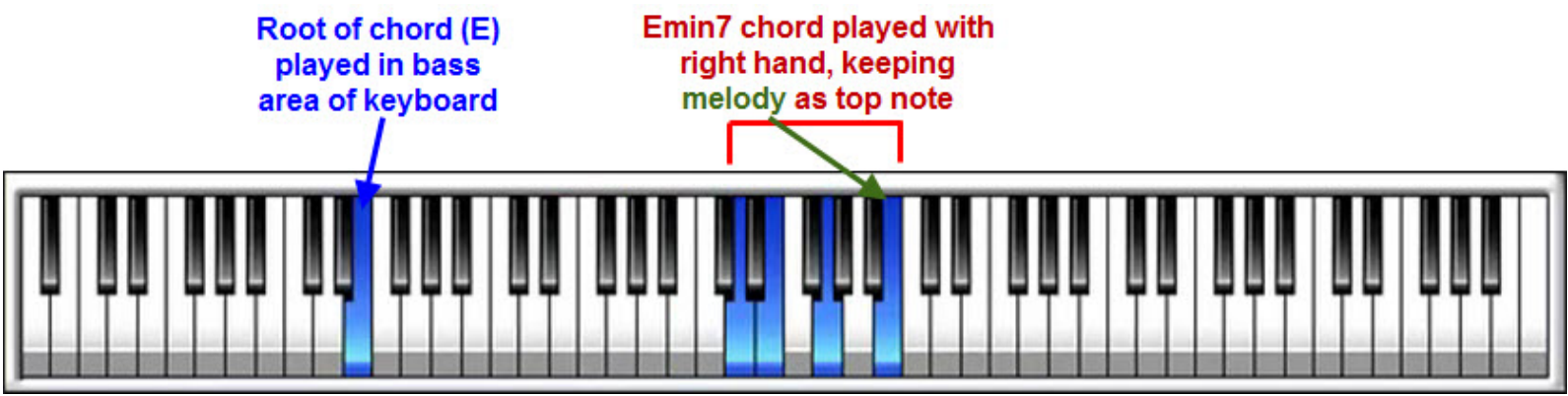


Well, a pro player will definitely take a more creative approach in this scenario. Knowing that the notes in the chord are E G B D, he or she will also make it a priority to keep that melody note on top - that melody note is B in this case. Is B in the chord of Emin7? It sure is!

One option is to treat this musical scenario as we did with the earlier one... below that melody note B, we can put the remaining chord tones, resulting in playing the chord tones in this order:

D E G B

In addition, we could play the Root in the bass area of the piano with the left hand:



But there are so many more other choices... a pro player will often decide to "open" the chord, or play a Shearing block chord at this point in the song... you see, once you know your 7th chords, choices really present themselves to you, provided you take the initiative to explore the possibilities. Chances are, since you have read this far, learning more about piano styling is likely of interest to you... for a great way to introduce yourself to these special "pro-like" chord concepts, please consider looking into ProProach, a program designed to take people who are beginner/intermediate level and lead them toward "pro-like" thinking when it comes to piano chords. The rewards for getting involved are astounding. The program consists of textual explanations, graphics and supporting video demonstrations which are especially encouraging and motivating.

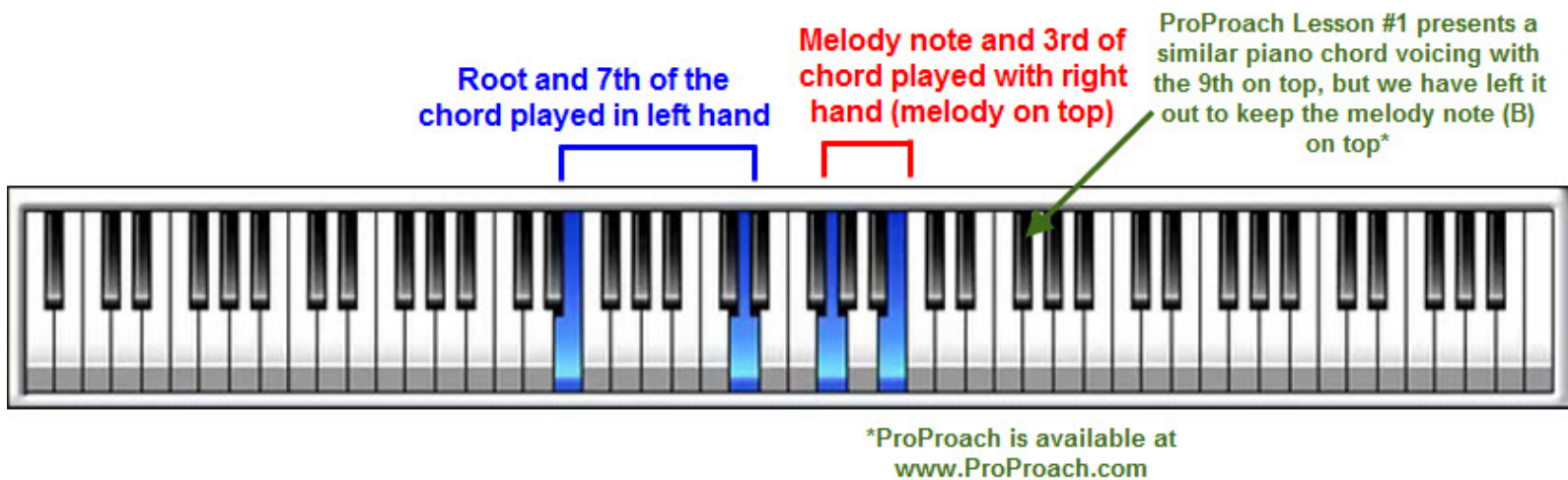
Keep in mind that we've only considered a couple of melody notes for one song... but what about the rest of the song? What about the songs you like to play? Just imagine what you are capable of with the right "chord know-how!" You see, as a developing piano stylist, this is one of the things you will learn: the more choices you have available to you, the more creative you can be and the more confidence you will have!

There are many angles to playing "chord piano" that you can look forward to once you make a commitment to learning about them.

In Lesson #1 of ProProach, you are introduced to the 1-7-3-5-9 formula... so, if you were to apply this concept to that B melody note above, the result would be:

- 1) Your left hand would play E and D, outline the Emin7 chord (leaving out the G and B)
- 2) Your right hand would play G and B - notice that the B is at the top and also the melody note of the tune! We haven't played the 9, the F#, because we want to keep the melody (B) on the top.

This looks like this:



By the way, that initial lesson of ProProach mentioned above (Lesson #1) is yours free... simply visit [www.ProProach.com](http://www.ProProach.com) and sign up to receive it. If you are truly serious about having some fun with more interesting chord strategies, then by all means enroll in ProProach – long before you’ve taken yourself through the entire program, you’ll sound like a different piano player!

I encourage you to take any of the above techniques and to make use of them in any song(s) you happen to be already familiar with. Apply them to the various chords you are using... you might be surprised how just one technique, when used tastefully, can really add dimension to your piano playing.

If these techniques are new for you - or if you are new at applying them on a regular basis - you are in for some enlightenment. You see, you are accomplishing more than learning a couple of chord strategies... you are really opening your mind up to thinking about these otherwise familiar chords from different angles. The benefits that result from this can only be truly appreciated by the one engaged in the process... so please have fun with all this. The rewards await you!

Now consider this...

We've covered:

1) Playing the chord in the left hand with the melody in the right

2) Playing the chord in the right hand, keeping the melody note on top

3) Playing the 1-7-3-5 chord voicing

Take one song that you like to have fun with and use each of these three concepts throughout the song and see what interesting sounds you discover! Alternate between the three ideas...

This will have a very powerful effect: in addition to the obvious interesting sounds you will create, your mind is being trained to be more "flexible" and creative. *This is how a pro is trained to think.* You see, you have more choices and you are exercising the use of them!

Remember, we have only touched the surface!

**Important Note: To gain more benefit from this lesson, please visit the [ProProach Video Room](#) and obtain Video #3... it has been created specifically for you so that you can see these concepts put into actual use!**

As you explore your personal potential when it comes to having more and more fun making music, please remember...

Always...

ALWAYS...

PLAY WITH PASSION!



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