Two Note Shell Voicings on the 2-5-1 Progression

The 2-5-1 progression is a great place to practice voice leading the 2 note shell voicings. Since the 2-5-1 progression is so commonly used, learning this strategy will make playing standard jazz repertoire very simple to do.

(I have attached a handy 2-5-1 sheet that lists the progressions in different orders so that you are not tempted to read the voicings.)

Ex #1: Starting with the 3rd on the bottom and the 7th on top

Have a look at the way the voices move in this progression. These movements will be exactly the same in every key, since the function of the chords stays the same in every major key.

When we move from Dmi7 to G7, you’ll notice the top note moves down by a half step. When moving from G7 to Cma7, the bottom note moves down by a half step. When moving from Cma7 to C6, the top note moves down by a whole step.

Practice these voicings in all 12 keys!

Ex #2: Starting With the 7th on the Bottom

Since we have inverted the voicing, we also invert the “rules” of voice leading. When moving from Dmi7 to G7, the bottom note moves down by a half step. When moving from G7 to Cma7, the top note moves down by a half step. When moving from Cma7 to C6, the bottom note moves down by a whole step.

Practice these voicings in all 12 keys!
Ex #3: Applying two note shell voices to a song.

Some people see this as the “scary part”, so I am going to show you how to approach voicing chords in a song in a very simple way. It is what I call the “paint by numbers” approach to jazz voicings.

**Step 1:** Identify and mark all the 2-5-1’s and/or 2-5’s
**Step 2:** Practice the voicings on the marked 2-5-1’s and 2-5’s using whatever voice leading seems simplest.
**Step 3:** Voice the rest of the chords, trying to get them to move smoothly to the 2-5-1’s.

When you practice in 12 keys, you can work on them via the circle of 5ths, up and down by half steps or down by whole steps. By practicing them in different ways, you are ensuring true mastery and you’re keeping your practice routine interesting!
Brenda Earle Stokes is an award-winning pianist, vocalist, composer and educator. Her performance career as a leader and side musician has taken her across the US, Canada, New Zealand and Australia. A passionate educator, she has worked as a clinician, adjudicator and panelist at high schools, colleges and festivals all over the world. She teaches at Fordham University and runs a busy private studio in New York City. Brenda is the owner and creator of Piano and Voice with Brenda; a suite of online courses that cover piano, jazz improvisation and musicianship and has a bustling YouTube channel.

Follow me on Instagram: @BrendaEarleStokes | Subscribe to my YouTube Channel: /PianoAndVoiceWithBrenda