

Tips for Practicing Systematic Inversions

Here are the kinds of suggestions that Ted might have made for practicing the systematic inversions on the Seven Basic Chord Qualities sheets:

Get a colored pen and highlight the roots of each chord. (Ted did this to some of my sheets and it's great for you to do for yourself.)

Consider "invisible roots." Look for root notes of the chord that you are NOT playing but that are nearby. Especially on the fifth and sixth strings. Mark these with a different color or with open circles. Consider visualizing the chord from these root notes. Sometimes they are better reference points than the root note you're playing in the chord. And if the chord is missing a root, this kind of visualization is essential. Ted called these nearby reference, non-played root notes, "invisible roots."

See how the chord tones move in systematic inversions as you read the grids left to right.

See the gradual changes of shape due to chord quality change as you read the grids top to bottom.

Transpose. Another way to say this is to play each chord or group of chords on many roots.

Practice moving quickly between a pair of adjacent inversions.

Practice moving between a pair of non-adjacent inversions.

Practice moving with a trio of adjacent inversions.

Practice moving with an entire quartet of adjacent inversions.

Once you are comfortable knowing where the root of each chord is as you play these, mentally follow the chord tone in the soprano as you play. Knowing chords by soprano can be a great help when you arrange or improvise with chords.

Similarly you can mentally follow the bass. Although inversions are traditionally named root position, first inversion, second inversion, and third inversion based on whether the root, third, fifth, or seventh is in the bass, Ted's attention in his later years turned increasing to the soprano. The melody is primary. The "other melody" down there in the bass is secondary.

---James