

Intro to “Freddy Green Style” Swing Rhythm Chords

Freddy Green, longtime rhythm guitarist for Count Basie, was a master of the kind of Swing rhythm guitar most often associated with big bands. His approach became so iconic, in fact, that now his name serves as a kind of shorthand for that style. While the many nuances that made him such an icon are far beyond the scope of this introduction, we can nevertheless touch on some of the basics. These alone will open up whole new worlds of jazzy chord voicings to the uninitiated.

“Freddy Green style” chord voicings have two essential features:

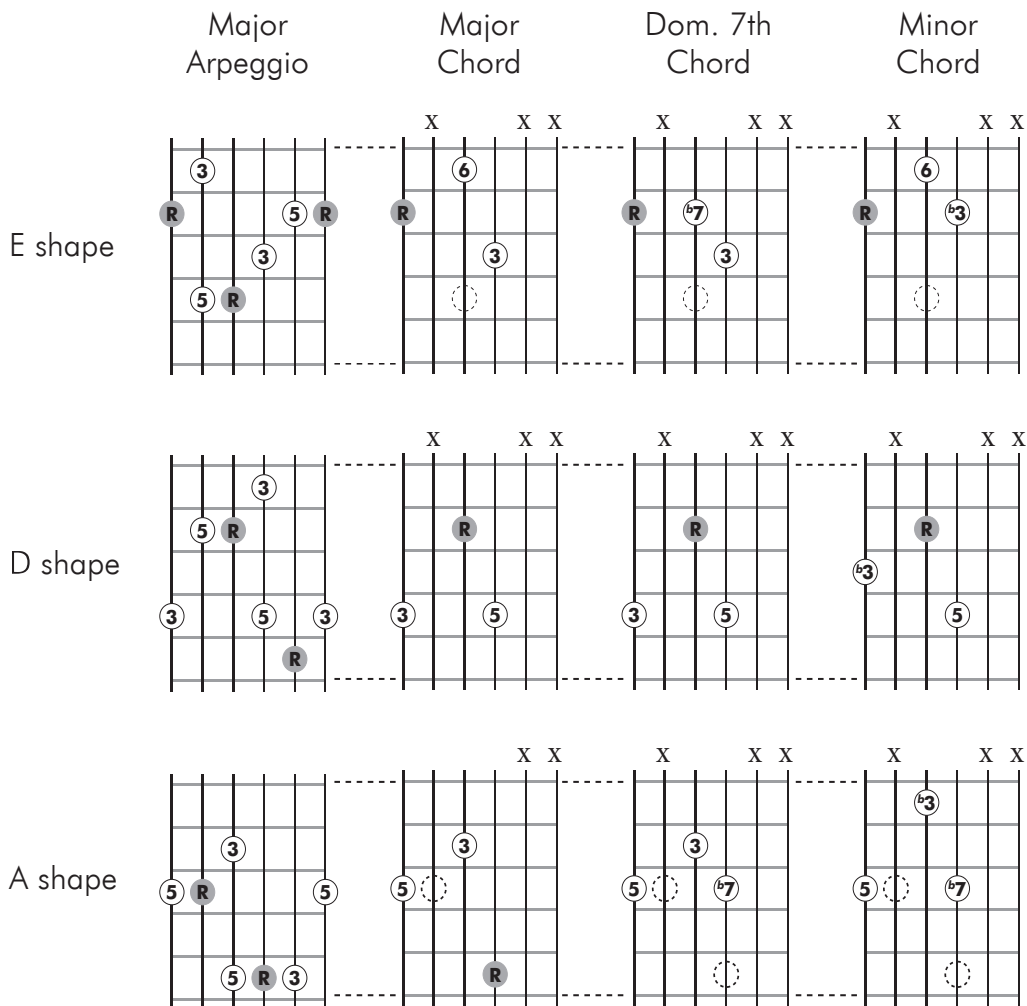
- They have only three notes, all of which are fretted.
- These notes fall on the 6th, 4th and 3rd strings.

The diagrams below are not meant to be an exhaustive (or even extensive) collection of these three-note voicings. They are intended rather to give you (1) a few chord voicings to use now for immediate gratification and (2) a window on the logic of the approach so you can explore further on your own.

The three columns farthest to the right show typical major, dominant 7th and minor chord voicings in this style. In the left hand column you have a major arpeggio (based on the E, D or A shape) that may help you better see the derivation of the sparser chord voicings.

Reading from left to right along a row of diagrams, notice that the root stays in the same position. (You can try these voicings anywhere on the fingerboard and name them by the root.) The dotted circles show the location of roots that are not included in the voicing, but that may help you stay oriented.

Moving from top to bottom down any column of chord diagrams, notice that we start with the root on the 6th string, then the 3rd, then the 5th. This is a good way to organize these voicings in your mind.



When you have some of these voicings under your fingers and you understand how they are constructed you can start playing with variations by changing any of the non-essential notes. For example, the E shape-based major chord shown above is actually a major 6th. Move the 6th up one whole step and the chord becomes a major 7th. Another example: in the diagram of the A shape-based major chord, the root is on the 3rd string. Keeping the other notes of the voicing constant, move that note down by one half step to create a major 7th voicing, then down another whole step to give you a major 6th chord. Many of the voicings shown above offer similar possibilities. The next area to explore is how to move elegantly between these voicings, again in the classic style of the master, Freddy Green. But that’s a topic for another day!