

## PERFORMANCE 4

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# KEYBOARD PERFORMANCE 4

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## Chapter 1: Notation, Structure and Concepts

### Multi-Tiered Keyboard Rig and the Modern Hip-Hop Ballad

Today's powerful workstation keyboards with their impressive polyphony, vast sound palette and split/layer functions, can sometimes replace the need for the multiple keyboard rigs. There are times, however, when multi-keyboard rigs are desirable and/or necessary. For instance, you might need the full key range of 88 keys for some sounds as well as a smaller keyboard range for others.

Although a multi-tier rig would accommodate such needs, it can be inconvenient. In addition to the cost of the keyboards, you'll need extra stands, pedals, cables, and amplification. You'll take up more room on stage (and in your vehicle). It may not be worth it for the neighborhood club gig; however, when the right sounds and combinations are of critical importance, you may want all of your favorite instruments at your fingertips. In this unit, we will explore multi-tier rigs and the modern hip-hop ballad.

From its probable beginning in 1987 with LL Cool J's "I Need Love," the hip-hop ballad has had a long life in the pop, rap and R&B charts. Its combination of hip-hop edge with often lush arrangements, fortified with samples and sometimes nostalgic elements, still make it compelling today.

Some common characteristics of hip-hop ballads:

- Distinctive, active bass lines, some of which the keyboardist may be called upon to play.
- Classic roots and soul keyboard instruments like Rhodes, Hammond B3 and Clavinet .
- Percussive guitar comping patterns on beats 2 and 4, sometimes with a wah-wah pedal.
- Fancy production gimmicks like string sweeps and harp glisses keeping things sonically interesting.
- An insistent 16th-note hi-hat beat (which keeps a ballad from dragging).
- A colorful, jazzy harmonic landscape, frequently utilizing ninth chords.

#### A Quick Ninth Chord Refresher:

Recall that a *major ninth* chord results when you add a minor third to the top note of a root position *major 7* chord. *Dmaj9*, for example, would be (bottom to top) D F# A C# E (the E is a minor third above the C#).

A *minor ninth* chord is constructed by adding a major third to the top note of a root position *minor 7* chord. *Emin9* therefore would be E G B D F#.

Ex. 1.1

The image shows four measures of music on a single staff in 4/4 time, with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The chords are:
 

- Measure 1: **Dmaj9** (root position)
- Measure 2: **Em9** (root position)
- Measure 3: **Dmaj9 (rootless)** (voicing: F# A C# E)
- Measure 4: **Em9 (rootless)** (voicing: G B D F#)

Our hip-hop ballad this week is built around ninth chords. These voicings, however, are tough to play with one hand, as you will need to do. As a practical solution, you can leave the root to the bass player and play the chord from the third up (as in Ex 1.1, above). Another way to look at it is that you can build a rootless *maj9* chord by creating a *m7* chord on the third degree of the target chord. If you look at the example above, in bar 3, the rootless *Dmaj9* looks exactly like an *F#m7*. Similarly, create a rootless *m9* chord by building a *maj7* chord on the third degree of the target chord. In bar 4 of the above example, the rootless *Em9* appears as a *Gmaj7*.

## Chapter 2: Chart Talk-Down

Our chart this week is written for a two-tier setup. As you'll see below, the parts are written on two staves. As is often the case, the simpler part has been given to the left hand. Make sure to watch the chart for any patch changes or instrumental directions.

### Song Form

The eight-bar intro of the tune features a harp glissando in the right hand and Rhodes in the left.

Glissandos are typically played on the white keys, with the backs of the fingers or fingernails sweeping up the keyboard. However, as we will see later, making this harp glissando work will require a black key glissando.

Harmonically, the chords alternate between two bars of Em9 and two bars of Dmaj7. In Roman numerals, this would be iim9—Imaj7.

Ex. 1.2

The musical notation for Ex. 1.2 is presented in a two-staff format. The top staff is in treble clef, and the bottom staff is in bass clef. Both staves are in the key of D major (two sharps) and 4/4 time. The piece begins with a repeat sign. The right hand (RH) part, labeled 'Harp glisses:', consists of four measures of eighth-note patterns. Each measure starts with a quarter rest, followed by an eighth note, then a glissando symbol (a vertical line with a horizontal bar at the top) that sweeps up the keyboard, and ends with another eighth note. The left hand (LH) part, labeled 'Rhodes:', consists of four measures of a continuous eighth-note glissando pattern. The first two measures are labeled 'Em9' and the last two are labeled 'Dmaj7'. The notation ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

The 16-bar verse begins at letter A. The harp glissandos continue, and the Rhodes part begins a specified descending arpeggiated part. The harmonic material remains the same, but the Em9 is elongated: six bars of Em9 to one of Dmaj7. In bar 12, the left hand notation "ETC" is used to indicate that the arpeggiated pattern should continue in bar 13 and beyond, even though it is not specifically notated. Bars 13-20 are otherwise identical to bars 5-12, except for the brass riff in bar 20 which leads to the next section.

Ex 1.3

A

At letter B we have an eight-bar chorus. This uses the same Em9—Dmaj7 harmonic material, this time apportioned into two bars each, as in the intro. The brass part replaces the harp glissandos. For a good brass performance, pay attention to the articulations and observe the full value of all rests scrupulously.

Ex. 1.4

**B**

We then repeat the intro, verse (letter A) and chorus (letter B), which brings us to the bridge at letter C.

The bridge makes use of the familiar Em9—Dmaj7 chords, this time apportioned in a different way: four bars of each. This part of the tune is in half-time feel. (In other words, the groove expands to encompass two measures rather than one; the backbeat will be on beat 3 of each measure instead of on 2 and 4.) Note some simple roadmap business in bars 35–38: a first and second ending. If you have a chart like this on a gig, it never hurts to use a highlighter on these types of markings.

Ex. 1.5

**C** Half-time feel  
(backbeat on 3)

In letter D, we go back to the original feel with a reprise of the chorus. The familiar Em9 and Dmaj7 chords get two bars each. Again there is a first and second ending; in this case the first ending is repeated for improvisation. In a performance, either the soloist or the band leader would give a visual signal to take the second ending, which ends the song.

Ex. 1.6

**D** Original feel

1. (Rpt. for improv.)

2. (Last X)

Em9

Dmaj7

# Chapter 3: Performance Notes and Sound

## Sounds of the Day: Harp Gliss, Rhodes/String Layer, Brass

This unit's chart features a two-tiered keyboard part with harp glissando (right hand), a Rhodes/string layer (left hand) and a brass sound, with both legato and staccato articulations (left hand).

You'll probably want to have the harp on the top tiered keyboard and the Rhodes/strings and Brass on the lower keyboard (via a split patch). If you do not have access to two keyboards, this chart can be played on one keyboard via patch switching.

Ex. 1.7



### The Harp Glissando Part

Due to the amount of pressure required, glissandos can be painful on a weighted keyboard. A semi-weighted keyboard or controller would be ideal.

By transposing the harp patch down a major third, you can make use of the naturally pentatonic layout of the black keys to do a true pentatonic glissando.

Another option for this glissando part would be to record it into recording software such as Pro Tools, Ableton, Logic or Reason.

1. Play back your recorded part at speed of song.
2. Convert to audio file, WAV or AIFF. This file you have created is called a sample; it's just a recording that can be triggered from a single key.
3. Load your recording into your keyboard as a sample with the following settings: looping: off, key follow: off.
4. Assign the sound to all keys and create a patch with it.
5. Then change to a split patch containing the Rhodes/strings combo in the lower half of the keyboard and at least one key of the harp glissando sample in the upper register.

## The Rhodes/Strings Part

You'll want to layer a Rhodes with a string sound for this tune. *Layering* simply means you have both sounds active on the same keyboard simultaneously, saved together as a single patch (sometimes in this context referred to as a *performance*, *combi*, or *multi*). If possible, disable the sustain pedal for the string part of the layer (but not for the Rhodes), as the sustain pedal potentially can make a string part rather muddy.

## The Brass Part

The brass part consists of the following three riffs:

This percussive chordal riff precedes letter B (Chorus) and is to be played quite staccato:

Ex. 1.8

to Brass:

This percussive melody occurs at letter B (chorus) and letter D (outro). Again, observe all articulation markings and the full values of rests.

Ex. 1.9

**B**

Em9

This legato melody line occurs at letter C (Bridge).

Ex. 1.10

Dmaj7