

# Anatomy of a Tune – Take the A Train

Welcome to the Take the A Train quick guide.

Great to have you here!

When learning any jazz standard, you need to have an understanding of four main elements:

- Melody
- Form
- Soloing
- Comping

Because of copyright issues, this guide leaves out the melody and focuses on the other three elements.

By studying form, soloing techniques, and comping patterns, you give yourself everything you need to jam this tune on guitar.

From there, you can add the melody, learning it by ear or from a lead sheet such as you find in the Real Book.

Make sure to work each section in this guide to get the most out of your studies.

It's no use being able to rip a solo over a tune if you can't comp the chords, or you can comp great chords but get lost in the form.

It's the marriage of these three devices, form-soloing-comping, that provide the skills needed to jam this tune with confidence.

So, grab your guitar, turn up your amp, and learn how to play one of the most popular jazz guitar standards, Take the A Train.

## Harmonic Analysis

Before learning how to play Take the A Train, take a minute to understand how the chord progression and form are built.

Written in the key of C major, Take the A Train follows the 32-bar songbook standard form.

There are four sections in Take the A Train, outlining the AABA 32-bar jazz standard form.

Here are those sections and the bars that they cover on the tune.

- A Section = Bars 1-8
- A' Section = Bars 9-16
- B Section = Bars 17-24
- A Section = Bars 25-32

There are six chords in Take the A Train, all in or around the key of C major.

Here are those chords and their Roman numerals to check out and understand how these chords are related to the key and each other.

- Cmaj7 = Imaj7
- D7#11 = V7/V7 (Secondary Dominant)
- Dm7 = iim7
- G7 = V7
- C7 = V7/IVmaj7 (Secondary Dominant)
- Fmaj7 = IVmaj7

The term secondary dominant is used to describe a 7<sup>th</sup> chord that's not the V7 of the key, but the V7 of another chord in the key.

For example, D7 is the V7 of G. With A Train, you see D7#11 functioning as the V7 of G7.

This means that it's pulling towards G7, but you're not moving to the key of G.

Think of secondary dominant chords as a way for composers to highlight a diatonic chord without switching keys.

You also see this in the last bar of the 2<sup>nd</sup> A section, where C7 is the V7 of Fmaj7, the IVmaj7 chord.

As the bridge starts with 4 bars of Fmaj7, the C7 transitions the listener from the A section to the B section and the Fmaj7 chord.

If secondary dominant chords are a bit fuzzy at this point, not to worry.

Work on playing them in your comping and soloing workout, then with time the theory will become clearer.

Remember, you don't have to understand the theory behind a concept to use it in your playing.

In fact it's often better to get a concept in your ears and on the fretboard first, then go after the theory from there.

That way you already know how a concept like secondary dominant chords sounds and sits on the guitar before you dig into the theory.

Here's a chord sheet to see how the tune is laid out with the Roman numerals written below each chord in the tune.

**Cmaj7** **D7<sup>#11</sup>**

Imaj7 \_\_\_\_\_ V7/V \_\_\_\_\_

**Dm7** **G7** **Cmaj7** **Dm7** **G7** **C7**

1. 2.

iim7 \_\_\_\_\_ V7 \_\_\_\_\_ Imaj7 \_\_\_\_\_ iim7 V7\_ V7/IV \_\_\_\_\_

**Fmaj7**

IVmaj7 \_\_\_\_\_

**D7<sup>#11</sup>** **Dm7** **G7**

V7/V \_\_\_\_\_ iim7 \_\_\_\_\_ V7 \_\_\_\_\_

**Cmaj7** **D7<sup>#11</sup>**

Imaj7 \_\_\_\_\_ V7/V \_\_\_\_\_

**Dm7** **G7** **Cmaj7** **Dm7** **G7**

iim7 \_\_\_\_\_ V7 \_\_\_\_\_ Imaj7 \_\_\_\_\_ iim7\_ V7\_

## Scale Choices

Here's a chord chart with the modes used for each chord written below the changes.

Notice that you only need two modes to solo over every chord in Take the A Train, Dorian and harmonic minor.

Just watch that you need these two modes to line up with the chords in the progression

It's easy to memorize these mode shapes, it's a lot tougher to use them in the correct spot in your solos at all times.

Because of this, take your time, add one mode in at a time to begin, and build up to soloing over the entire form with modes when ready.

Check out this scale chart below to get started.

If you need a refresher on these scale and mode shapes, head to [www.mwgcourses.com](http://www.mwgcourses.com) and check out the scale library for multiple fingerings for each of these shapes.

**Cmaj7** **D7#11**

C Major \_\_\_\_\_ D Lyd Dom \_\_\_\_\_

**Dm7** **G7** **Cmaj7** **Dm7** **G7** **C7**

1. 2.

C Major \_\_\_\_\_ F Major \_\_\_\_\_

**Fmaj7**

\_\_\_\_\_

**D7#11** **Dm7** **G7**

D Lyd Dom \_\_\_\_\_ C Major \_\_\_\_\_

**Cmaj7** **D7#11**

\_\_\_\_\_ D Lyd Dom \_\_\_\_\_

**Dm7** **G7** **Cmaj7** **Dm7** **G7**

C Major \_\_\_\_\_

## Suggested Chords

Here are shell chords to get you started comping on Take the A Train.

Shell chords are built with two interval groups, 1-3-7 or 1-7-3.

The exception is over maj7 chords where you can also use 1-3-6 or 1-6-3, with the 6 replacing the 7 in these changes.

Start by learning the chords as written, then add in ornaments, picking patterns, and rhythms to expand them in your studies.

As well, there are a number of shell chords presented in the example below.

Don't feel like you have to play every chord in every bar when you use these shapes in a performance or jam situation.

You can pick and choose the shapes you like, and leave space when it makes sense in your playing.

The exercise features shell chords starting with 1-7-3 from the 6<sup>th</sup> string over Cmaj7 and moving through the tune from there.

**Cmaj7** **D7(#11)**

T	4	2	5	5
A	2	2	4	4
B	3	3	5	5

**Dm7** **G7** **Cmaj7** **Dm7** **G7**

T	5	4	4	5	4
A	3	3	2	3	3
B	5	3	3	5	3

**Cmaj7** **D7(#11)**

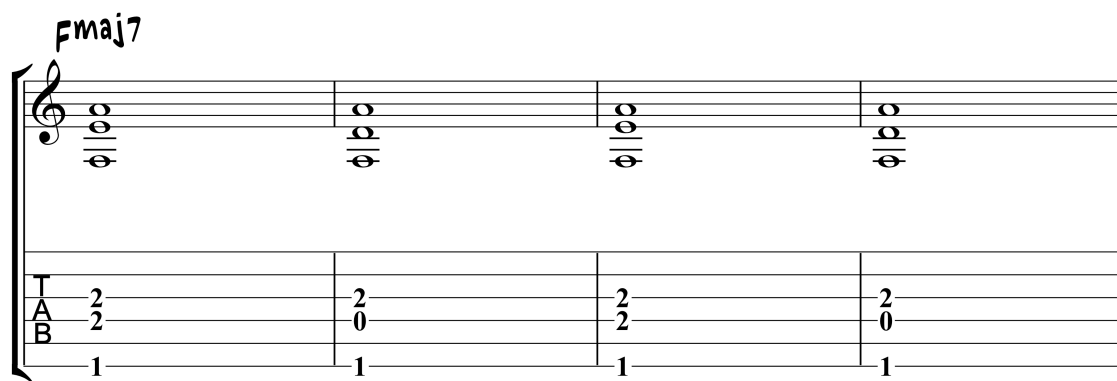
T	4	2	5	5
A	2	2	4	4
B	3	3	5	5

**Dm7** **G7** **Cmaj7** **C7**

T	5	4	4	3
A	3	3	2	2
B	5	3	3	3

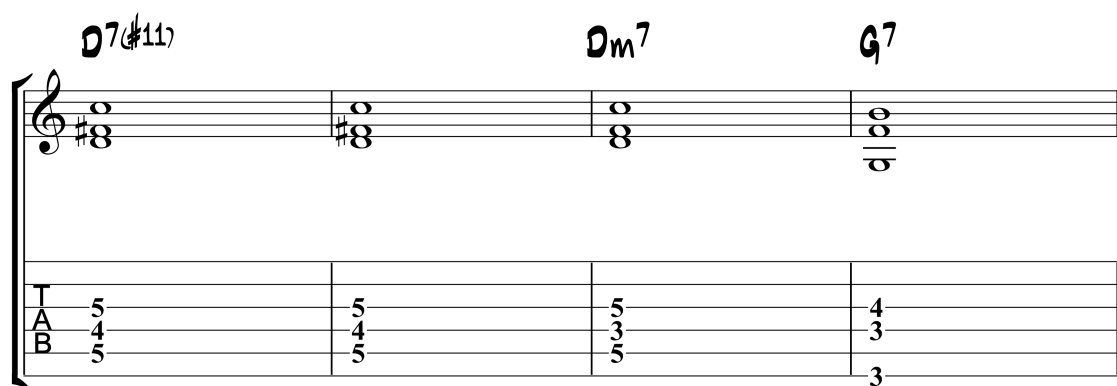


**Fmaj7**



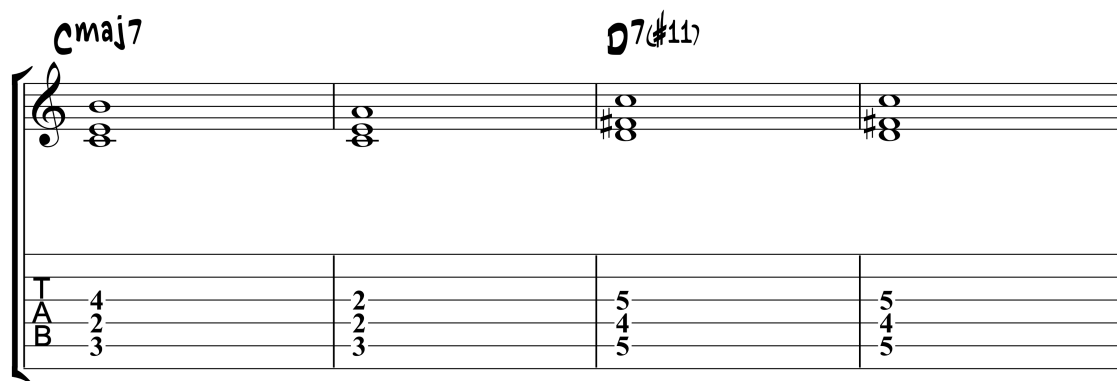
T	2	2	2	2
A	2	0	2	0
B	2	0	2	0
	1	1	1	1

**D7(♯11)**      **Dm7**      **G7**



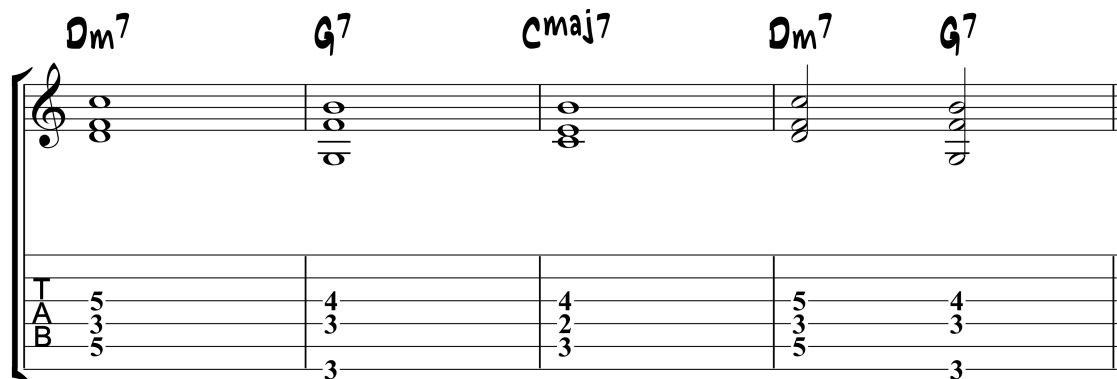
T	5	5	5	4
A	4	4	3	3
B	5	5	5	3
				3

**Cmaj7**      **D7(♯11)**



T	4	2	5	5
A	2	2	4	4
B	3	3	5	5

**Dm7**      **G7**      **Cmaj7**      **Dm7**      **G7**



T	5	4	4	5	4
A	3	3	2	3	3
B	5	3	3	5	3
		3			3

## Lead Sheet

To finish this Take the A Train quick guide, here's a lead sheet without the roman numerals to use as a reference.

Have fun learning and jamming over this classic jazz standard.

Not only will you learn a new jazz standard, you also prepare yourself to learn other, similar, jazz standards much more easily in future.

