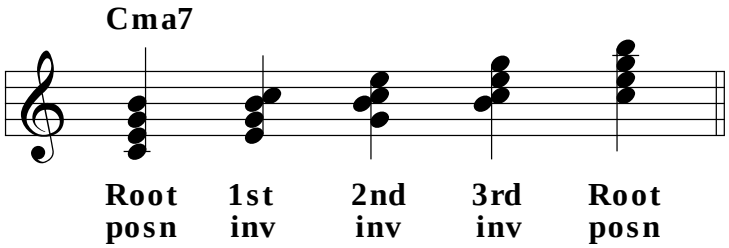
Inversions of four-part chords

In a similar manner to our work on triads, we will now look at **inversions** of these four-part chords. Again we should say that all of the four-part chords studied so far have been built in '**root position**', meaning that the root of each chord has always been the lowest note, and we have then 'built up' from the root to add the 3rd, 5th, and 7th (or 6th) of each chord. We can however **change the order** in which the notes of a four-part chord occur (from bottom to top on the staff), so that the root of the chord is now no longer the lowest note on the staff, as in the following example of a **C major seventh** chord:-

Figure 6.9. C major seventh chord and inversions



We can analyze the inversions in this example as follows:-

- The first and last **C major seventh** chords are in **root position**. The root of the chord (**C**) is the **lowest note**. The sequence of notes from lowest to highest is:- **C**, **E**, **G** and **B**.
- The second **C major seventh** chord is in **first inversion**. The root of the chord (**C**) is the **highest note**. The sequence of notes from lowest to highest is:- **E**, **G**, **B** and **C**.
- The third **C major seventh** chord is in **second inversion**. The root of the chord (**C**) is the **second note from the top**. The sequence of notes from lowest to highest is:- **G**, **B**, **C**, and **E**.
- The fourth **C major seventh** chord is in **third inversion**. The root of the chord (**C**) is the **second note from the bottom**. The sequence of notes from lowest to highest is:- **B**, **C**, **E** and **G**.

As we move from left to right through this example, each successive inversion can be derived by taking the lowest note in each case and **moving it up by one octave** (i.e. to the next highest occurence of the same note on the staff) as follows:-

- Starting with the first **root position** chord, if we take the lowest note (**C**) and move it up by an octave, we derive the following **first inversion** chord.
- Similarly, if we then take the lowest note of the **first inversion** chord (**E**) and move that up by an octave, we derive the following **second inversion** chord.
- Similarly, if we then take the lowest note of the **second inversion** chord (**G**) and move that up by an octave, we derive the following **third inversion** chord.