



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

by Frank Singer

JAZZ GUITAR SOLLOING



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JAZZ GUITAR SOLOING Frequently Asked Questions

IMPROVISING ON CHORD CHANGES	4
SCALE / MODES PLAYING	7
CHORD / SCALE RELATIONSHIPS	11
PRACTICING & GENERAL	13
MELODIES	15
SUBSTITUTION DOMINANTS / TRITONE SUBSTITUTIONS.....	16
TENSIONS	17
PHRASING.....	17
POSITIONS / NECK / FRETBOARD	18
PLANNING A SOLO	20
TECHNIQUE	21
FEEL / INTANGIBLES	22
TUNINGS	24
LICKS / RIFFS.....	25
SOLOING IN THE STYLE OF.....	25
BLUES.....	26
SPEED	27
COMPING & SIGHT READING.....	28
INSTRUMENT	28
EDITOR'S SUMMARY.....	29
CONTACT.....	30
RECOMMENDED PRODUCTS.....	30



READ THIS FIRST!!!

(from the editor)

This eBook is a sampling of some of the questions recently received in a survey of jazz guitarists about their "biggest question concerning jazz guitar soloing."

The answers here are NOT meant to be comprehensive. Rather, they should be viewed as a quick "jumping off" point to give you direction and help you understand where to put your energy and continue your studies.

Frank received hundreds of questions... too many to go into great detail on each. Having said that, even though the answers are short and to the point, make sure not to overlook the wisdom contained in them. Guitarists are too often guilty of seeking the answer they want... rather than the answer they need.

Having followed Frank Singer's career over the last 30 years, I can tell you that he is an astonishingly accomplished performer, composer and educator. His listeners, fans and students often remark that Frank is blessed with an amazing talent. What many of them overlook is how hard Frank has worked to cultivate his talent, whether it be his deep knowledge of music theory, his jaw-dropping performance on his instrument, or his compositional skills.

If you are ever fortunate enough to have the opportunity to learn from this master, whether at a clinic, in a webinar, or through an online lesson... do NOT pass it up. It will transform your playing, and overall approach to music, forever.

To Inquire About Private Instruction With Frank Singer:
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IMPROVISING ON CHORD CHANGES

What's the easiest strategy for improvising off chord changes? If I look at the changes ahead of time, I'm fine. On unfamiliar chord changes, I get stuck!



The easiest way for you to move through a set of chord changes is to work with the chord tones, sometimes called arpeggios.

Every seventh chord has a Root, Third, Fifth and Seventh, and these four notes are the strongest and most clear notes you can play against any chord.

I usually run any set of changes I want to work with by playing the R-3-5-7 in an 8th note rhythm through the progression as my first exercise. Good jazz solos are often built from these.

How can I solo over a jazz piece and stay in key, and also be able to follow the chords within the piece?

Keys in jazz are most often organized into sub-sections referred to as "Key Of The Moment." These are harmonic areas that contain two or more chords before moving on to another harmonic area or back to the main key.

Satin Doll is a good example of a tune that is in the Key of C, but moves into D for the Em7 A7 before resolving back to C in each A Section.

Arpeggiating the Chord Tones throughout a piece and then adding in Passing Tones between 2 different Chord Tones by Scale Step and Scale Approaches from above can connect you with the Chords and Scales simultaneously.



How can I improvise jazz over moving chords?

Jazz musicians improvise harmonically in these situations.

That means their focus is much more on the Chord Tones and less on the surrounding Scales.

Learn any progression first in Chord Tones, then add scale tones, chromatic tones and Bebop techniques to the mix to create the traditional jazz sound.

To continue focus work on the tune, write some solos out in manuscript and learn to play them on your axe, and work out some solos on the same tune at the same time.

What are the very best core chords to learn when you begin to play Jazz?

The Root-Guide Tone voicings are the best place to start.

Learn them for Major 7 w/ b5, 5, #5, Major 6, Dom 7th w/ b5, 5, #5, Minor 7 & Minor 7 b5, Minor 6 & Diminished 7, Minor w Major 7 and 7 Suspended Fourth.

Once you know these I recommend the following:

- The Standard Comps are the guitar version of what piano players call Bill Evans Voicings, or Substitution Voicings. These chords are done on the guitar with the two Guide Tones on lower strings such as D and G or A and D, and Chord Tones or Tensions above. These can be done in 3-note or 4-note configurations.
- Chord-Melody Voicings (the piano equivalent being the Bud Powell Voicings) are usually created by adding melody notes and support tones above the Root-Guide Tone voicings.
- Drop Voicings, especially Drop 2's and Drop 3's are also recommended, and George Van Eps would tell you to know your Mighty Triads!

How can I improvise through changes, say, Giant Steps?

Most of us learn Giant Steps first with a set of Passing Tone exercises developed for tunes that have two-beat (four 8th-note) and four-beat (eight 8th-note) harmony division.



JAZZ GUITAR SOLOING

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

by Frank Singer

The exercises are organized in pairs and sequenced through the progression until smooth and flowing.

Reading and memorizing existing solos is also a great tool, as well as transcribing your own. Coltrane's solo on the original track is available and quite edifying.

I spent so much time practicing the progression my wife thought I wrote the tune for a while!

How can I more efficiently convert what I hear in my head on the fly into reality on the fretboard with fast changes coming at me?

Playing what you hear requires proficiency on the neck with all of your tools (chords, arpeggios, scales, approach techniques, passing tones, tensions etc.) and a good amount of time listening as you practice each kind of technique in different uses.

Working on your speed and accuracy helps make the hard seem easier and helps you flow more through the progression.

The simple answer is lots of practice, but make sure you are practicing things which challenge your ears and give you new sounds in your playing.

What is the best approach for soloing over more frequent chord and key changes in Jazz progressions?

Organize everything around the chord arpeggios or Chord Tones, and use them as strong components of your lines.

Also look for ways to follow the Guide Tone movement as the chords change. This can give you very strong movement through your lines.

How to play soloing into the right chord?

Playing with an anticipated feel (moving into the upcoming chord) can be worked on in two ways.

First, develop some phrases that fall straight against the harmony, and then shift them forward (earlier) in time by an 8th-note.

Next, practice thinking or visualizing the chord that's coming as soon as you land on the current chord. Start this at slow to medium tempos, then work your way up to faster ones as you get used to it.



JAZZ GUITAR SOLOING FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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How often should one "shift gears" while soloing using arpeggios? Keeping it smooth is tough when you go too fast or too slow. Every time there is a chord change, or continue soloing on the ii over the V?

Remember that there are no "shoulds" in improvising. Playing what you hear is the goal, so exploring your sound options is the best way to accomplish this.

The better you know your Chord Tones, the more you can follow the flow of the progression, so spend lots of time exploring different ways of expressing the chords melodically.

Scale / Modes playing

How does one play solos modally?

Certain tunes lend themselves more to a modal approach, such as Equinox or Passion Dance, but applying modes to jazz standards is more complex.

In my teaching I work with a harmonic approach first so there is a strong ability to follow the changes. Then applying modal techniques such as **Pentatonics, Hexatonics, Tetratonics and Intervallics** can be hinged off of the harmony. This is the best way to get flow with modes.





JAZZ GUITAR SOLOING

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

by Frank Singer

I find that a lot of practicing scale modes becomes mundane and much more technical than musical. What is the easiest way to practice different scale modes and make it fit contextually and musically into a song?

One way to work with scales is to pick a Rhythmic Resolution (Pulse X Subdivision, or Beat Count X 8th, 8th-triplet, 16th or 16th-triplet) and play the appropriate scale for each chord progressing first up the neck to the highest point and then back down to the lowest point, back and forth as long as you like.

Don't worry about the Melody-Harmony relationships yet, just stay in the Key of the Moment as you proceed through the progression.

What is the best way to choose the correct/easiest scale to follow a chord progression, and to make it sound like a musical phrase, instead of just running up and down a scale?

The jazz sound often hinges off of the notes from the chords. Scales are used to provide Passing Tones and Scale Approaches.

I suggest working first with the Chord Tones and then expanding your lines into scale tones that surround and move into the Chord Tones.

How can I make the transition from practicing patterns, scales, etc., to applying them in improvisation?

A good dual approach to this is to write some solos away from the instrument and at the same time work out some solos on the instrument.

The written solos should be simple 8th-note lines with the occasional rest, and keeping the range within a ledger line or two of the treble staff.

Use techniques you are studying or trying to master so you can get a feel for them. The worked out solos should not be written down, but memorized for the duration of your work with them.

I would get about three choruses of a tune worked out, then practice the solo for about three weeks before starting another one. These two techniques go very well together and complement each other.



JAZZ GUITAR SOLOING

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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Do you interplay diatonic scale theory and modes simultaneously (like hybrid patterns)? I guess I would like to know how to use the modes better over polytonal chordal theory...

Knowing your Chord Tones is the place to start with jazz soloing. Relating your Modal techniques to the chord notes helps you hinge your ideas around the movement in the harmony.

Modal techniques include **Pentatonics, Hexatonics, Tetratonics and Intervallics.**

How many scale forms are really necessary to know and which do you consider the most efficient?

I believe in total neck knowledge, so the big answer is All Of Them!

Typically players have six or seven scale forms for each type of scale that don't require as many reaches or awkward fingerings, and these are the best to use for reading as you will be less inclined to look at your hands.

What are the most commonly used scales and/or modes when soloing in "bebop" style on old standards?

Bebop lines are created by shaping the ideas around the notes in the chord. Beginning there and then applying the Passing and Approach techniques (Scale and Chromatic Approaches) creates the irregular movement in the lines.

Think about scales less and chords more and you will be on your way.



JAZZ GUITAR SOLOING

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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How can I master modes effectively in order to sharpen improvisational skills? At the moment it's hit and miss based on ear and feel. A more knowledgeable grip on modes might increase confidence in performing.

A good way to start with modes is to match them to the Pentatonic scales. The Major Pentatonic Scale (R-2-3-5-6) matches the Lydian, Ionian and Mixolydian modes, and the Minor Pentatonic Scale (R-b3-4-5-b7) matches the Dorian, Aeolian and Phrygian scale.

The Pentatonic notes form a very strong frame which helps you focus your playing around strong tones. Filling in the blanks, so to speak, with the modal notes adds the flavor and color of those modes to your playing, and helps your ear adapt to the different sounds.

What is a good way to figure out how to combine scales when improvising?

I always recommend using the Chord Tones as the frame for any harmonic improvising. The techniques that use scales are Passing Tones between 2 different Chord Tones by Scale Step, and Scale Approaches from Above to Chord Tone.

If you are trying to play more modally, breakdown progressions with ascending and descending sequences. Create these using Chord Scales, which are a combination of Chord Tones and Tensions collapsed into an octave.

Can you give me some ideas on how to know which tone to use as a focal point when making a modal motif?

Modal Motifs can move through scales and keys at any point as long as you are using Chord Scales that are a combination of Chord Tones and Tensions for each chord.

This alleviates the problem of "Avoid Notes" which might create non-harmonic tension, allowing ascending and descending sequences to be created from any point.



How do you quickly visualize modes over chord progressions and chord changes? Is there an easier method or formula?

Work your Chord Tones over any progressions you are working with, and keep making relationships in your practice between the Chord Tones and the different Scales that contain those Chord Tones.

Even when playing modally, the focus is typically on the Chord Tones for strength and flow of harmony.

Chord / Scale Relationships

How do you know which scale goes to what chord when improvising?



Chord-Scale relationships are the topic of study with instructors who play the music.

The basic requirement for scales is that they contain all four chord tones, and often three to six chords in the piece or section are from the same scale, which makes it the scale of choice / the Key Of the Moment.

How can I play good sounding chord comps and solo properly over them?

The jazz chording pivots around the Guide Tones, which are the Third (or Suspended Fourth) and Seventh (or Sixth) of the chord.

These are used to make most of the basic jazz chording structures, including the Root-Guide Tone voicings and Standard Comps, the guitar equivalent of Bill Evans voicings for the piano.

Soloing requires a knowledge of the Chord Tones and the notes surrounding and in between those Chord Tones.



JAZZ GUITAR SOLOING

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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Could I play relative minor blues scale or dorian to a piece? Let's say that my blues song or jazz piece is on C7...could I use the A blues or A dorian scale since A is relative minor to C?

The mode that is relative to C Mixolydian (one of the proper scale matches for C7) is A Phrygian, which is basically the same thing from a different note.

A dorian has a B natural in it which will clash with the Bb of the C7 chord. The Blues Scale would work because it jumps over any problem areas in the relationship between the scale and the chord.

How can I learn what scales to play over each chord of the song as the progression moves along?

My best advice here is to find a good teacher who can guide you through all the complex choices available to us as players.

This is the topic of much of the theoretical study of jazz music. There is a lot of information on the internet about this, but not all of it is correct and it can be confusing and overwhelming if you don't have a plan!

How can I easily understand chord/scale relationships?

Examination of the Harmonized Scale can elucidate the choices available to you. Scales that are used with chords must contain all four Chord Tones and have the proper color notes to help the chord move as it should with the proper energy.

Placement within the key/scale is also important to the chords function.



Practicing & General

What to practice in order to have great improvisation skills?

Jazz improvisers need to know the complete language of melody and harmony.

That includes all the scale types in all keys, all the arpeggio types in all keys, and all the Bebop and post-Bop techniques for improvising including Passing Tones, Approaches and True Chord Scale Modal techniques, including Pentatonics, Hexatonics, Tetratonics, Intervallics and Chord-on-Chord.

We also have to know the standard repertoire of Jazz and Latin tunes played by most players

How can I fit practice into everyday life?

Finding the time to practice is the biggest challenge of any musician. I have worked for many years to develop a way of making a living and getting my household and parental contributions in while still having time to be an artist and musician, which requires a lot of practice and preparation.

Making sure you have a practice space that is "play-ready" is a good start. It shouldn't be a hassle to sit down and play, just a quick stop and maybe opening a guitar case. Remember all practice time counts, even short sessions.

Also, make sure you are taking good care of yourself so you have lots of good energy and are awake and focused when you want to be.

How can we make it simple?

Singing your solos as you practice and work out your ideas can help you play more melodically, as can playing your ideas up and down one string or in octaves.

Melodic improvisation is another way, which entails using the melody as a jumping-off point for your ideas.



JAZZ GUITAR SOLOING

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

by Frank Singer

If the melody is created from a single scale or mostly so, using that scale in selective ways can keep your sound simple.

Stella By Starlight follows this idea, with only one or two notes outside the Bb Major Scale even though the chord changes move through a variety of keys and harmonic situations.

How do I use harmonic chord scales to transcribe tunes?

You will have much better luck transcribing tunes if you begin with the Root Motion or bass line.

Then get a sense of the Form by noting areas of repetition. Most jazz standards fall into a 32-bar breakdown, for example, though there are lots of exceptions. Next, get the flow of the Guide Tones so you narrow down the chord qualities/types.

This should get you close to finding the changes. I also find it's best to have the harmony and form before finding the Melody, as it helps you narrow down your melodic choices.

An excellent transcribing tool that lets you actually see & mark where you are in the tune is [Transcribe by Seventh String](#).

I just want know everything I can about jazz guitar

I recommend getting with a good teacher, either personally or online. More can be found about my online teaching at <http://www.onlinelessonswithfrank.com>

I'm a beginner. Is it hard to learn?

Learning any new skill is challenging and that's one of the best reasons to do it!

Take your time and be patient, and get good instruction. I coach my students that the hardest part of learning is getting yourself into the practice chair.

Make practice a part of your daily life and you will succeed!



JAZZ GUITAR SOLOING

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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Keeping track of all the modes, scales, chords, altered chords, and voicings useful for jazz, and where and when to use them to good effect is a daunting mountain of information, confusing and intimidating to learn. How can I simplify the theory down to the really useful stuff?

I suggest practical application to your jazz and Latin standards. In other words, learn your tunes and apply everything you know to each tune so you can explore the techniques in context.

What's the hardest thing to learn in jazz guitar and what's the best way to learn it?

The hardest thing is to play what you hear, and the best way to learn it is to practice everything a lot!

Melodies

What is the most effective method for memorizing melodies, and do melodic cells or building blocks play a role in this?



I believe the most effective way to memorize melodies is two-fold. First, sing them while you play them, perhaps even learning the words so you know the story the tune is telling with the melody.

Then, get as many different versions of the song as you can find and listen to them back-to-back for a while.

I think you will find that some melodies are cellular like Autumn Leaves, but some are more thematic, such as Stella By Starlight.



What are the elements of jazz melody lines?

Jazz lines are often constructed with Chord Tones, Passing Tones between Chord Tones by Scale Step, Scale Approaches from Above to Chord Tones, Chromatic Approaches from Below to Chord Tones, and Embellished Whole Step Scale Approaches from Above.

These techniques serve to outline the chord notes and create tension in the melodic line.



Substitution Dominants / Tritone Substitutions

When and how do you use b5 chord substitutions? When do they not work?

Substitute Dominants typically replace Dominant chords in a Cycle Of Fifths sequence, such as Dm7 G7 Cm7 F7 etc. being replaced by Dm7 Db7 Cm7 B7. This changes Cycle Of Fifths root motion to descending Half-Step root motion.

This is available in this circumstance at any time with the following restriction:

Any violation of the Melody-Harmony relationship should be avoided, so if there is a Passing Tone between or Scale Approach above the Third and Fifth of the chord that's a half-step above the Third it will clash with the root of the new Sub V7 Chord.

Of course, a guitarist should never do this if there is a bass player, as we should not be playing bass lines anyway, and the same Guide Tones and Voicings above the root can stay the same even if the bass note changes.



TENSIONS

How can I play solos that follow the chord progressions and land on key tensions that are important in that chord? I have a hard time playing outside of my comfort diatonic scale and landing on 7ths and 9ths.

I recommend a step-by-step set of exercises to gain comfort with your tensions.

First, arpeggiate each half-note chord in an 8th-note rhythm, R-3-5-7 (One-And-Two-And etc.).

Then, move through the progression again playing 3-5-7-9 in the same fashion.

You can continue with 5-7-9-11, 7-9-11-13, 9-11-13-Root, 11-13-Root-3, and 13-Root-3-5. This will give you a variety of sounds and relationships to exploit in your harmonic playing!

PHRASING

Since theoretic information is finite, does phrasing really separate jazz musicians from each other? So, what is a good approach to phrasing? I guess that's two questions!

The goal of American Music is to sound like yourself. If you pursue this goal you will find your own voice in your playing over time.

A couple of good ways to work on your phrasing are to sing your lines while you play them, and to play solos up and down one string, which forces you to be more conscious of melodic spacing and flow.



I'm interested in obtaining fluid, musical solos, not so much how to play them but how to think about soloing...

Here's a few thoughts that might guide you...

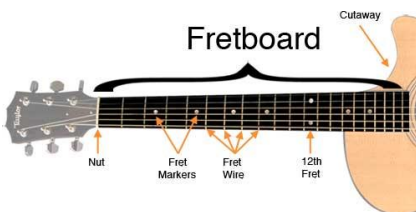
Many soloists describe the process as taking your listeners on a journey, or telling a story. These interpretations can lead to lots of ideas on how to play through an improvisation.

One way to connect your body to your playing is to sing your solos as you play them.

You can also play up and down one string to break the position trap many guitarists fall into.

Positions / Neck / Fretboard

How many positions do you use?



Scales on the guitar neck can be broken down three basic ways... horizontally on one string, vertically in one basic area and diagonally across the neck.

Most guitarists already work vertically in one basic area and play the range of the scale in that location.

However, playing the scale up and back each string helps see the length of the guitar neck and puts focus on the melodic aspect of the neck.

Those two motions come together to create a diagonal movement from the low point of the low string to the high point of the high string.

When you break down the neck in all three of these ways, positions become secondary to the total melodic movement on the neck.

Suffice it to say there are 12 positions for each type of scale, and an additional open position for many scales (there is no open Db Major scale for example), and I use them all.



How do you visualize the fretboard? Do you think note names, interval shapes, scale patterns or some combination?

I believe in exploring the neck in every way possible.

I recommend doing position work in second position, single string work up and back down each string and diagonal work, forward for scales and inverse (higher frets on lower strings to lower frets on higher strings) for triad block arpeggios.

Positions can be broken down in to strict lateral positions and floating positions (typically three notes on each string).

For note names, say it as you play it - use muscle memory to reinforce the note knowledge.

Breaking down scales and chords intervallically covers both the knowledge and sound of the intervals, and melodic phrases can be sequenced through scales and chords.

What are the best guitaristic shapes to use when soloing over a II V I (both minor and major)?

Explore multiple ways to arpeggiate the chords, keeping around a basic area of the neck and developing a path for the changes. Then move to another region of the neck and explore in the same way.

Having multiple fingerings in multiple places allows you to be more spontaneous in how you travel around the neck as you play.



Planning A Solo

How do you plan your solo?

Soloing can be outlined ahead of time, or as you go, but you can also play completely spontaneously, not knowing what is coming next until you play it!

Some schemes I like to use as outlines include the Wes Montgomery flow of starting with single note ideas, moving to octaves and finishing up with chord soloing. This follows the idea of building a solo from simpler ideas and thinner textures into more complex and thicker sounds.

I also like developing themes and using them throughout the solo.

Since the song already has a melody, how do I construct a similarly interesting melody to play overtop of the changes? When I hear really accomplished players go off on an extraordinary musical tangent over the tune's chord changes, I'm left wondering "where the heck did they get THAT from?"



You can begin by exploring melody-harmony relationships so you know what your possibilities are. Include Tensions in your selections as these are wonderful color-tones for jazz melodies.

One way of creating flow and movement is to work with a Line Motivator, which is simply a step-wise series of half-notes that move through the progression in one direction or the other.

This can guide your improvisation and create contrast and counterpoint with the movement of the harmony.



Technique

What is the best way to improvise a barre cord when you can't make the chord?

You can play parts of the chord that are easier to finger depending on what's required.

If you need a low, grounded or rooted sound concentrate on the lower-pitched parts of the chord.

If you need higher sounds, release some of the bass notes and find the pitches that get the job done for you.



What's a better approach to play linear (up & down the neck) instead of getting caught on the 5th fret, for example?

A good jazz approach to this is to begin with your chord tones and play them up and back down each string.

A good order for this might be Major Seventh, Seventh, Minor Seventh, Minor Seven Flat Five, Diminished Seven, and then the other six types.

Do the same thing with your scales, starting with Major, then Harmonic Minor, then Jazz Minor, then other scales you think you might use.

I recommend the Cycle of Fifths (C, F, Bb, Eb, Ab, Db, F#, B, E, A, D, G) as an order for moving through the keys.

Do you recommend performing improv with a guitar pick or without?

The decision to use a pick is a very personal one based on what kind of sound you want and how you like to play. The goal of American Music is to sound like you, so each decision you make about your sound should be personal and pleasing to you.



Feel / Intangibles

How do I play more effortlessly and with more soul?

Practice is the key to playing effortlessly. Having technical ability clears obstacles to playing what you hear.

Soul comes from living your life and having something to say when you play. This is beyond the scope of music study, having to do with your own personal development.

I keep thinking ahead and can't stay "in the moment". It makes my sound stale and my motivation difficult. What do you recommend?

I find that silencing the internal dialogue is the first step to avoiding this pitfall.

Focusing on all the music that is happening, your surrounding musicians, the music that was just played, the music that is playing now, and the music you are a split second away from playing keeps you centered in the moment.



To reinforce these techniques you can seek out instruction in some form of meditation, or a mind-body discipline like martial arts, dance or an athletic endeavor that requires physical discipline.

Is it following the chords religiously, or just feeling the sound and playing by ear, the most important thing to do when improvising?

The goal of American Music is to play what you hear. Much of the training methodology supports this approach.

The basic idea of study in jazz improvisation is to teach your ears the different possibilities by playing and practice, and then letting yourself play spontaneously.



JAZZ GUITAR SOLOING

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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How can I make my improvisations melodic and flow smoothly?

Melody combines a sense of linear connection and direction (horizontal) with the energy level of the melody note's relationship to the harmony (vertical).

Try creating a half-note line that moves up or down by step, staying in one direction for a long series of events. Make each note a Chord Tone or Tension and find a way to play the sound of the melody against the harmony so you have a sense of the tension level.

Then organize some solo ideas around these half-note lines, embellishing with 8th-notes and 8th-note triplets.

Remember that what most players call flow is being at ease with the knowledge of the music and the instrument, and the physical and musical ability to play the instrument. Make sure you know your stuff!

Do you have tips on playing improv jazz not just with superb technique, but also without losing the emotional aspect?

You have to find ways to stay connected to what you practice and make sure you are always listening to your playing so you "hear" what you play.

I like to work with what I call the Feedback Loop, or "Feeding the Kitty" for all you poker players out there.

First, I study theory and ideas that people use to practice, or create ways to practice.

Then I work out the different ways I am going to apply that idea to my instrument.

Then, I practice and while I play I listen to the sounds created by the idea.

I find that all human beings form subjective impressions of the sounds they play and hear, so we let those impressions into our sound library as feeling tones or associations much like memory.

Then when you feel something or are reminded of something, there's an organic association with the sound and you remain connected to the emotional side of the choices you make in sound selection.



What is the process that great jazz players do to write strong jazz lines?

In addition to knowing your language (music) most jazz musicians have transcribed solos and learned to play them as part of their studies.

In addition, focusing your work by making sure you listen to everything that you play so your ears are matched to your knowledge of music theory is vital.

How do you sustain a line, technically and conceptually, so that it tells a story, not just runs scales, however hip they may be?

Think about story-telling devices. You have protagonists and antagonists (themes and counter-themes), key players and peripheral characters (main notes and embellishments) and characters are put through various situations to develop their understanding in the story (playing through the changes.)

You can use literary devices such as the "Notion of Return" or coming back around to a thematic idea or riff in different parts of the solo.

Building from simple elements to more complex elements and climaxing towards the end of the solo are all ways of creating a kind of musical drama that can be very satisfying.

Mostly, try to follow the story yourself as you play!

Tunings

Why don't Jazz Guitarists use alternate tunings?

Some jazz guitarist do work with different tunings, but tuning your guitar to a chord can limit your ability to quickly change into the many chords and keys required in most jazz tunes.

A more generic tuning is more effective for multi-key playing.



Licks / Riffs

What is the best way to tie in several riffs in such a way that they sound natural and not just "one riff after the next?"

Rather than trying to plan sequences of riffs, I suggest a different way of working with them.

Take each riff that you are trying to work in and play it through the Cycle of Fifths (C, F, Bb, Eb, Ab, Db, F#, B, E, A, D, G) in different places on the neck until you can flow with it.

Get to know different ways of using the riff both rhythmically and melodically through experimentation.



Then, let the riff come into your playing naturally where you hear it. That will give you the natural sound you are looking for.

Soloing in the style of...

How to solo "in the style" of famous improv artists -- Wes Montgomery, Grant Green, Kenny Burrell, etc. over any (typical) chord changes?

The best way to gain knowledge of a player's style is to transcribe a number of their solos and learn to play them. Finding transcriptions by others is also helpful as a supplement to that quest.

Consider [Transcribe by Seventh String](#). It lets you see & mark where you are in the tune.



JAZZ GUITAR SOLOING

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

by Frank Singer

What are the best things and most efficient ways to practice in order to become a world class jazz guitar improviser, such as Pat Metheny, John McLaughlin, Larry Coryell etc.?

All the improvisers you mention know their instruments exceedingly well, so there is the place to start.

Working with Chord Tones, Scales, Ear Training, Theory and Transcription are all important here. Transcribing especially can help you unlock the secrets of your favorite players.

I transcribed John McLaughlin solos, Wes Montgomery solos, Duane Allman, Freddy Robinson, McCoy Tyner, John Coltrane, Cannonball Adderly, Sonny Rollins and Sonny Stitt, and many others and learned to play the solos along with the recordings.

Blues

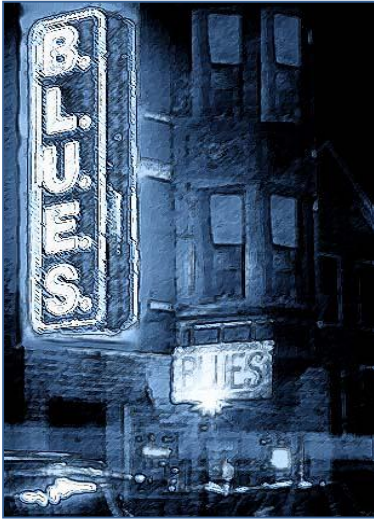
I am heavily blues based...is it possible to play jazz from this?

There are strategies for fitting different stylistic sounds together, but blues has less chord types in its standard repertoire, so you will encounter unfamiliar sounds and situations that will tax the use of blues techniques.

Use your ear to guide you, but accept that you will have to add to your sound palette to get the full range of color into your playing.



Why is it that blues tunes are notated in a Major key when a blues scale follows a minor pentatonic pattern?



The basic sound that is used to create the Blues can be defined as Minor over Major.

The chords in the typical Blues progression follow the I-IV-V Major Triad pattern of the typical Tonic-Sub Dominant-Dominant relationship in Diatonic Harmony. The Blues Scale contains the 7th of all 3 chords, and sets up the sound of dissonance as a basic melodic device.

The interval that stands out in this relationship is the Major Seventh Interval, found between the Third of the I and V chord and one of the notes of the Blues Scale, and between the Flat Five of the Blues Scale and the Fifth of the overall key which

is also the Fifth of the I Chord.

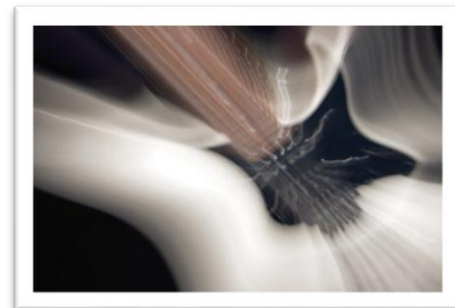
This interval, once defined as a dissonance in traditional harmony, is now a desirable addition to chord voicings in jazz.

By the way, [Playing Through The Blues](#) by Griff Hamlin is a decent resource for learning the blues... a nice start for, and addition to, your jazz playing.

Speed

How can I get faster at improvising?

The obvious answer of course - practice!
The more you know your playing tools the faster you will be able to react and play what you hear.





Comping & Sight Reading

Do you have any tips for comping and soloing for sight-reading charts?

When reading charts I recommend using Root-Guide Tone voicings for your chords. These are simple and can be organized into sets with Root on Low E & Guide Tones on D and G, and Root on A with Guide Tones on D and G.

Since these chords don't have Fifths, 14 chords can cover all harmonic situations (Major 7 w/ b5, 5, #5, Major 6, Dom 7th w/ b5, 5, #5, Minor 7 & Minor 7 b5, Minor 6 & Diminished 7, Minor w Major 7 and 7 Suspended Fourth).

Obviously these don't include tensions and inversions, so the system can be expanded as you get used to it.

For soloing, know your chord arpeggios inside and out and shape your solos first around these. They will sound very strong and you can build out of them as you get used to the progression.

Instrument

Is there a certain type of guitar that has to be used in jazz soloing?

American Music is at its best when the player has achieved his own recognizable sound. Each decision a player makes influences his sound, and is usually very personal and individual.

Certainly we imitate our favorite players for a time, and try different sounds and styles by experimentation. Eventually you find instruments that are comfortable, sound good to you and give you the sound and feeling you seek from your playing.

I find I have different sounds for different situations, like my Gibson 175 for straight-ahead and my Godin A6-Ultra for a more acoustic jazz sound, with the Fender Strat giving me a more modern electric guitar sound for fusion and modern playing.





Editor's Summary

I hope you found these Jazz Guitar Improvisation Q & A's beneficial. As a life-long musician myself, reading and organizing these questions and answers for Frank gave me countless "aha!" moments and clarity into issues I myself had been struggling with for years.

I recommend strongly that, if you have the opportunity to learn from Frank through seminars, webinars or online instruction, you take advantage of it.

Currently, Frank's online teaching schedule has few, if any openings. However, I suggest you contact him and, if there are no openings, **put yourself on his waiting list** so you can get some lessons when an opening becomes available.

I can guarantee your performance, musical knowledge and overall enjoyment of playing will reach new heights.





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Recommended Products

Private Online Instruction With Frank Singer

The smartest thing you can do for your playing. If there's no openings, get on his waiting list now.

Riff Master Pro

A simple transcribing tool for slowing the tune without changing pitch

Transcribe

An amazing, advanced transcribing tool that lets you see, mark & label where you are in the tune!

Playing Through The Blues

A good resource by Griff Hamlin for learning the blues... a great start to your jazz playing

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