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Jazz Guitar: The History, The Players

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The guitar is a relative newcomer to the genre of jazz music. Due to its design, the guitar has tremendous potential for different sounds, textures, and styles within the jazz idiom. However, it has always been slow to develop, and never seems to be exactly on the cutting edge of jazz. Through the examination of key players, their styles, and their personal history, an acceptable picture of the development of the jazz guitar may be formed. This historical recount, while incomplete, hopefully will help to increase appreciation for the fine art of jazz guitar.

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Introduction

When one hears the word "jazz," it is almost natural to think of such instruments as the saxophone, trumpet, clarinet, or upright bass. As with any form of sophisticated music, jazz has never been limited to only these instruments. In many cases it is the interaction between players in the ensemble in addition to the rich ideas and techniques of the soloist that produce the wide range of styles and moods reflected in the jazz repertoire.

The guitar, in particular, is an interesting example due to its ability to perform as both an ensemble and solo instrument. Guitarist George Van Eps perhaps made the most poignant observation, saying that the guitar is an orchestra within itself.[1] Surprisingly, relatively little has been written in regards to the role of the guitar in the development of jazz. Most documentation of guitarists may be found in jazz magazines such as *down beat* and *Guitar Player*, or in scattered references.

When examining the evolution of the jazz guitar style, it is easiest to examine the influential players during the various jazz periods. These periods are generally accepted to be the Chicago, Swing, Kansas City, Cool, Bebop and Fusion.[2] These periods are more stylistic periods, and therefore are not exclusive in timeframe. For example, it is common for Cool period ideas to turn up in Bebop period songs, because these two styles overlapped during the 1950's. Through the examination of the major innovators during these stylistic periods, it is possible to form an acceptable idea of jazz-style guitar evolution.

Lonnie Johnson circa 1917

A formal picture of Eddie Lang

The Chicago Period

It was during the Chicago Period that Jazz underwent its first of many transformations. During this time, groups moved beyond the confines of the New Orleans instrumentation to produce a more contemporary setup that most would recognize today. Among these changes in instrumentation was the introduction of stringed instruments into the jazz group. While the banjo had been used to some extent in New Orleans, its use was not particularly widespread because it could not compete in volume with the horns. The Chicago Period characterized a more sweet sounding "refined" music, without the raucousness that was evident in New Orleans players. This allowed for instruments such as the banjo, guitar, and string bass become more widespread in rhythm sections.

It was in Chicago that a traveling bluesman, named Lonnie Johnson, stepped into the jazz scene. Johnson had come from New Orleans where he was raised in a poor rural family. Lonnie's father was a violinist, and Lonnie's first step in music was playing violin in a New Orleans "spasm" band. He also picked up the guitar, and began touring in London with a musician stock company to make money. While he was in London, Johnson developed his unique style that showcased genuine musical insight as well as skillful blues playing.

His polished guitar style was first noticed by other musicians when Johnson took part in a blues guitar contest in Kansas City. He was awarded a seven year recording contract with Okeh Records. For the next few years, he contented himself recording notably successful records.[1]

His music was soon noticed by several of jazz's most important innovators, most notably Duke Ellington. Johnson started to record with Ellington at the Cotton Club in New York. He gained prominence as a solo guitarist with his parts in "The Mooche," and "Misty Morning." It was with these recordings that solo jazz guitar was exposed to the masses.

Johnson's skillful solos influenced many aspiring guitarists. In particular, Johnson was not what was considered the typical blues player. His playing was much more refined than that of his fellow Delta guitarists. His music did not have the rough edges that were predominant in most of the blues at the time. The most significant of these players whom Johnson influenced was a young man whose name was Salvatore Massaro. His preferred name on-stage, however, was Eddie Lang.

Lang was born to an instrument builder. Like Johnson, he also picked up violin at a very early age. It is surmised by many that the classical training that Johnson and Lang shared was a cornerstone to their innovations with jazz.[2] This idea may not be far off when Lang's influences and training are examined.

Lonnie Johnson performing onstage.

There is an Italian method to learning music. A beginner is first taught the basics of music through a series of exercises known as *solfeggio*. Solfeggio is a form of sight singing, however it is used to express

musical fundamentals to blooming

Eddie Lang playing with the Mound City Blue Blowers

musicians before they even pick up an instrument.[3] Lang had this training when he was about 5 or 6 years old.

When Lang was in high school, he began playing with a violinist named John Venuti. Venuti recalled his first few times with Lang, "We used to play a lot of mazurkas and polkas. Just for fun, we started to play them in 4/4. I guess we just liked the rhythm of the guitar. Then we started to slip in some improvised passages. I'd slip something in, Eddie would pick it up with a variation. Then I'd come back with a variation. We'd just sit there and knock each other out."[4]

Lang's improvisational skills were developed at an early age while playing violin and guitar with Venuti. He and Venuti worked in the Northeast, and they began to be admired by popular acts of the day as Red Nichols, the Dorsey Brothers and Russ Morgan.

It was when Lang began to sit in on sessions with the Mound City Blue Blowers that he finally had his break. The Blue Blowers had been described as a "rickety group"[5] however, Lang's guitar sound helped give them a more full and harmonic sound. It was from this point on, that Lang began to become *the* guitarist in jazz.

As the Blue Blowers began to gain a larger and larger audience, primarily due to Lang's expertise, it became obvious that Lang needed to move on. Starting in 1925, when he left the Blue Blowers, Lang was the most in demand musician in jazz.[6]

It was Lang's approach to music that separated him from the other guitarists of the day. Many of his abilities can be traced back to his early training. It is no doubt that his solfeggio work helped him to easily recognize and learn new patterns almost quickly. Lang also had a near photographic memory for pitches.

"He had the best ear of any musician I knew. He could go into another room and hit 'A' and come back and play cards for 15 minutes and then tune his instrument perfectly," said fellow Blue Blowers bandmate Jack Bland.[7] Such skills as these make a sound basis for jazz improvisation. Lang, however, brought something additional to the table. His early training on violin gave him a sense of phrasing and harmony. This skill shows greatly in his ensemble work. Lang was known for going beyond the typical four beats to a bar strum pattern that guitarists and banjoists often used. He could play four chords of different inversions in the bar, as well as embellish with passing tones, chromatic scales, and use single string arpeggios.[8] These abilities were technically beyond any guitarist in this time, except for Lonnie Johnson.

It was only natural for Eddie Lang and Lonnie Johnson to record and perform together. In November of 1928, it finally happened. Lang and Johnson went into Okeh studios together as separate accompanists to the blues singer Texas Alexander. As an experiment the producer, Tommy Rockwell, had them play duet style. Thus the two guitar sound was born.[9]

This meeting prompted Lang and Johnson to collaborate and produce a recording. While these two guitarists were of similar skill levels, they were both from different worlds. Johnson was a blues singer and guitarist. His style was steeped in the southern sound, only with musical refinement. Lang was more of a classical school. Andres Segovia was more of an apt influence than blues guitarists.

These completely different approaches, however, blended masterfully with these two musicians. "Eddie could lay down rhythm and bass parts just like a piano. He was the finest guitarist I ever heard in 1928 and 1929. I think he could play anything he felt like," said Johnson of his experience with Lang.[10] Lang and Johnson, together, demonstrated many musical techniques that, up until that time, had never been used on guitar. Chordal solos, masterful accompaniment, and much more had typically been reserved for larger groups, mainly those with a piano.

Many have said that Eddie Lang is the sole reason for guitar to come to prominence in jazz. In fact, it was more of the Lang-Johnson tandem that brought this prominence to reality. It was Lonnie Johnson who first demonstrated that the singing power of blues guitar could hold a place in jazz. It was Lang that showed how guitar did not merely have to be played in the blues idiom. The skills of both players help to expand jazz by the introduction of an instrument that could do more than just keeping rhythm. The guitar could be a versatile solo instrument, also. It could punch out lines like a trumpet, or it could create the smooth flowing melodies like clarinets. The only other instrument in jazz with this versatility was the piano.

It was due to Lang and Johnson that the banjo lost its place in jazz bands. After hearing these two guitarists on their recordings, many banjo players immediately began the transition to guitar playing. Johnson and Lang however, were not entirely unlimited in their abilities. There was a new sound coming out of Chicago during the late twenties. This style had been dubbed "swing." Neither Lang, nor Johnson, was able to make a clean transition to this sound. It was up to another guitarist to pick up the mantle and carry it on. This man's name was Charlie Christian.

The Swing Era

One of the most definitive sounds to come out of the Chicago era was that of Swing. Swing ushered in a new form of band called the Big Band. These bands had the musical force — and volume — of a locomotive when they were playing well. This was mostly due to the increase in instrumentation. A typical big band had around 15-17 players, most of which were horns. Most other bands during the Chicago era were around half this size. It is of no surprise that an instrument as soft as the guitar could barely be heard in this arrangement, even with the aid of a microphone.

It was an enterprising electrician, named Leo Fender, who changed this imbalance. Fender created the first electronic "pick-up," which could translate the vibrations of a guitar string into an amplifiable electronic signal. Oddly, few jazz guitarists utilized this new technology, which was also being used by the Gibson guitar company. One guitarist who did, however, was to change the way solo guitar was regarded amongst Swing bands, and influence nearly every guitarist who followed.

Charlie Christian wasn't the only guitarist at this time to play the electric guitar, nor was he the first. What set him apart from Eddie Durham, George Barnes, and Bus Etri, was that Christian could *play* the electric guitar. It is said that Christian was the first musician to give the electric guitar and "authentic existence in jazz."[1]

It is mostly consensus that Christian had always been a talented player. Said Ralph Ellison, "I can recall no time when he was not admired for his skillful playing of fretted instruments."[2] Christian's musical roots were being formed when he started playing in a group with his family at a very young age. This group would wander up and down the streets playing requests to passers-by. In this manner, Christian became familiar with a vast repertoire including opera, blues, and ballads, something that is an absolute necessity for a jazz musician to be successful.

Christian was not well versed in jazz during his childhood. He came from a well-respected black family, and, as such, was told that jazz was a lower form of music. It chanced, however, that one day he happened to hear the sound and style of the great saxophone player, Lester Young. It was at this point that Christian embraced jazz and never looked back.

When Christian was 17 years old, he easily outplayed some of the most talented guitarists in Kansas City during a contest at the Roseland Ballroom. After this amazing feat, Christian set out to form is own group.

Charlie Christian Playing with the Goodman Orchestra.

In 1938 Christian began to tour with Al Trent's Sextet. It was at this time that he was handed an electric guitar. It only took him a year to master the instrument, which is handled quite differently than an acoustic guitar. In fact most guitarists looked down on the electric guitar as a useless invention. Christian, on the other hand, utilized it to produce new tones and sustain notes like a wind instrument.[3]

His invigorating style brought Christian much critical acclaim as a great guitarist. Word soon reached the ears of John Hammond, perhaps

the most influential recruiter in the history of popular music (not just jazz). Hammond booked a flight for Oklahoma City and listened to a concert. His words about Christian: "Charlie, of course, had put a pickup on a regular Spanish guitar and hooked it up to a primitive amp and a 12-inch speaker. He used amplification sparingly when playing rhythm but turned it up for his solos, which were as exciting improvisations as I had ever heard on any instrument, let alone the guitar."[4]

Hammond allowed for Christian's huge break into the jazz scene. Through a trickery of some sorts, Hammond had garnered Christian a place in Benny Goodman's Orchestra, perhaps the biggest swing band besides that of Duke Ellington.

Christian's next innovation came not with Benny Goodman's band, but during an offhand jam session at Minton's Bar in Harlem. It was in Minton's that a few of the more astute young jazz musicians began to look for a new style that went beyond the horizons of swing. These musicians included Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonius Monk, Charlie Parker and Charles Mingus, among others. Christian was to play a vital role in the new sound that was coming out of Minton's.

Christian utilized his immense harmonic knowledge to restructure chord patterns of many popular songs of the day. This new use of reharmonizing was to become a stable of the forthcoming "bebop" sound.[5]

"Charlie contributed and infinite amount to [bebop]. He was always firm about a beat, and we made it our business to swing all the time," said Kenny Clarke, one of the figures of Minton's. In fact, Christian's approach not only fueled future guitarists for even greater styles, but also set the direction for a new style in jazz itself. He utilized long solo passages. He was able to stretch out an improvisation and still make it have melodic sense. He was a master of reharmonization. The quick chord changes that he employed were to become a staple of the east coast sound.

Kansas City

During the 1930's, the Kansas City style showed a contrast to the popular Big Band/Swing craze that had gripped the United States. Such bands at this time, most notably the band of Count Basie, focused their style on the old ragtime sound and the blues. These styles, coupled with an even larger instrumentation, produced a new sound that would lead jazz into the modern eras. The guitar, particularly the electric guitar, found a new voice in the Kansas City era. It was during this time, that one of the most influential guitarists ever reached his prominence.

Django Reinhardt was born in Belgium around the year 1910. His family was a tribe of gypsies who traveled across mainland Europe. Django was exposed to music early in his life. He received a banjo/guitar from a neighbor when he was 12 years old. Everyone was mesmerized by the fact that he learned to play the instrument in so little time. By the age of thirteen, Django was playing professionally in musical groups in Paris. He continued his playing in France until he was 20 years old.

When Django was 20, he was caught in a fire that started in his caravan. He was lucky to get out alive, and his only injuries were severe burns over his left

Django Reinhardt playing guitar. His maimed two fingers can be seen at the bottom of his left hand.

hand and on his lower leg. The burns to his hand, however, cost him the use of two fingers. Many thought that he would never play guitar again. Django was determined, though, and much to the astonishment of everyone, he developed his now-famous two-fingered style of playing.[1]

Django could not read music, so classical music was not a route that he could take. Said fellow musician Stephane Grapelly, "You could go with Django to a performance of a most complex symphony and he would point out any mistakes that might occur ... yet [*sic*] it was stunning when he would not even know what a scale was."[2] Jazz, however, lent itself nicely to his love of improvisation. Initially taken by the likes of Eddie Lang and Duke Ellington, Django sought to establish himself as a jazz musician.

It wasn't simply Django's amazing technique that made him such an influential guitarist. It was the new approaches to style that he brought into jazz. Jazz, up until Django, had primarily been based on the blues and classical music. Django seamlessly integrated these sounds with the gypsy style of playing. His solos are decorated with tremolos and glissandi, techniques that were typically used in flamenco music, but not in jazz, "...his instrumental technique was so unorthodox and his music so brilliant that guitar players the world over stood in amazement."[3]

Django also injected life into his rhythm parts. He was able to bring out a variety of different ideas in a piece while still keeping a coherent main idea. Taking, for example, his recording of "St. Louis Blues," one can hear Django's solo approach in the beginning. When the

second section begins, one hears Django's accompaniment style, which provokes a different feel from previous artists' recordings, yet keeps the integrity of the piece. One could easily argue that Django's way was the way it should have been played.

Though worldwide popularity did not come to Django until he formed his group Quintet du Hot Club de France, he was a legend among jazz musicians for a long amount of time. Some say that Charlie Christian even heard some of Django's music and incorporated it into his own.[4] Many bebop era guitarists, including Barney Kessel, cite Django as a leading influence in their improvisations. Kessel even said "I'm convinced that [Reinhardt] would have altered the course of contemporary jazz guitar playing – perhaps even the course of music itself" had he stayed in the United States.[5]

Lead Guitar styles were not the only development during this period. Guitarists were beginning to make new innovations in the form of accompaniment, or rhythm, guitar. First and foremost of these players

Freddie Green playing his unamplified guitar.

was Freddie Green, who was the rhythm player for the Count Basie Band.

Heretofore, most rhythm guitar parts had merely consisted of chords played on the downbeats of each bar (a steady 1-2-3-4 strumming pattern). Following the example of some lead players, Charlie Christian in particular, some rhythm players learned to make the guitar more than just a chord strumming device. In fact the new approach to rhythm included subtle ornamentation that, when used with the "chunking" of chords became the impetus for a band and could give a piece the much needed swing feeling.

Freddie Green in the Studio with the Basie Band.

Freddie Green could do all of these things. He embodied the heart and soul of rhythm guitar. In all of his years of playing, Green has never touched an electric guitar, nor has he ever taken a solo. It's not that he doesn't have the skill to do so, it is just counterproductive to his approach. In fact it is said that he is the main part of the "Basie Sound." If Green's guitar would be omitted, say in "Jive at Five," one would immediately recognize the difference.[6]

Very little has been written on the contributions of Freddie Green, though many of the people whom he influenced were quite prominent players. Steve Jordan was the first and foremost among the Green followers.

The Kansas City Sound for which Green provided the rhythmic fuel was the foundation for the next step in jazz sound. It carried jazz over into the modern eras.

Bebop: The Modern Era

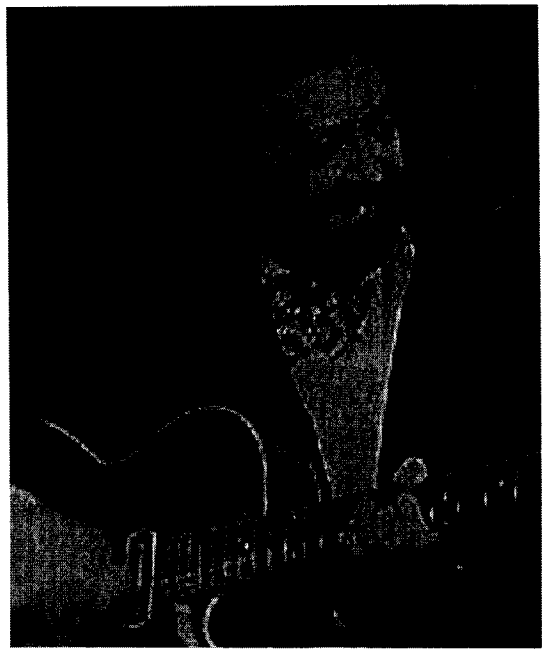
Until the late 1940's, Jazz to many had been defined through the popular sound of the Swing period. Unbeknownst to the general public, jazz was undergoing an intense change within the confines of Minton's Bar. It was here that such industrious musicians as Thelonius Monk, Charlie "Bird" Parker, Jo Jones, and Charlie Christian were crafting a new approach to music based on restructuring and reharmonizing well known chord progressions. The new progressions typically added new chords to an arrangement. In the minds of the musicians, the less alike the chords were, the better the piece. This approach resulted in complex arrangements that could only be successfully improvised upon by the most advanced and technical musicians. The name given to this style was taken from Christian's and Monk's way of counting off bars, "be-bop."

Bebop would not become generally popular amongst the population for a variety of reasons. However, despite this, many of the outstanding musicians that dedicated themselves to this style were well known and well emulated during the later periods of jazz. The same was true for guitarists. The bebop period

Barney Kessel in 1954.

popularized two guitarists, in particular, who would be almost as influential as Charlie Christian to the younger generation.

The jazz world lost a hero when Charlie Christian died at such a young age. It is unfortunate that he never was able to see the fruits of his work at Minton's. However, many guitarists took Christian's style to heart and integrated it into work of their own. Among these guitarists was Barney Kessel. Kessel had been following and emulating Christian since he was a teenager in High School. Following his studies at the University of Oklahoma, Kessel moved to Los Angeles to begin his work as a professional musician. It was during this time in the 40's that Kessel began to become the most popular guitarist of the times. He had recorded with nearly everyone who was anyone in modern jazz. Almost every person in America had heard him play also, whether or not they realized it. One could not hear a modern album, see a movie, or listen to the radio without hearing his guitar.[1]



Barney Kessel in the '70s.

Kessel was a master at integrating old styles and synthesizing them into a new unique sound. Kessel did not limit himself to bebop, or even jazz for that matter.

He was equally adept at the demanding technique of bebop as he was at the smooth melody-driven approach of the West coast style, called 'Cool Jazz.'[2] He also played with many blues and rock 'n roll stars such as T-bone Walker and Duane Eddy. It was almost a foreshadowing of the Fusion period, where jazz and rock/funk would meet and gel. Kessel was the most sought after guitarist for recording during this time period. He had great command of the guitar, and could easily play rhythm as well as lead parts. His harmonic knowledge allowed for him to play along and improvise with the complex chord progressions being written by the composers of this period.

In addition to his outstanding playing ability, Kessel was also widely known as an impeccable teacher. Many students have the proud claim to have been personally instructed by Barney Kessel. He also collaborated with many publishers to produce books on the techniques of jazz guitar for the public.[3] Some of these books have become the immutable guide of playing for many burgeoning guitarists. Kessel was easily one of the most popular guitarists ever. Says Howard Alden, "As far as I'm concerned, in the dictionary under Jazz Guitar, there should simply be a picture of Barney Kessel.[4] These words are strong, and illustrate the contribution that Kessel gave to jazz.

One other guitarist also made great contributions to jazz. Tal Farlow did not fit the typical definition of a jazz guitarist. Most jazz musicians were exposed to multiple instruments in their youth, and played them constantly. Farlow did not do this. During his childhood, he went to school and helped out as a hand in his father's shop. His profession of choice when he was 20 was actually that of a sign painter. It was then that he decided to learn how to play guitar, influenced by the recordings of Charlie Christian and Django Reinhardt.[5]

Despite his apparent status as a late bloomer, Farlow still was able to create his own style, albeit at a later age than most of his contemporaries. He still made as much, if not more, of an impact on

jazz. It was said that Tal Farlow was

Tal Farlow

one of the most imaginative guitarists to play the instrument since Charlie Christian.

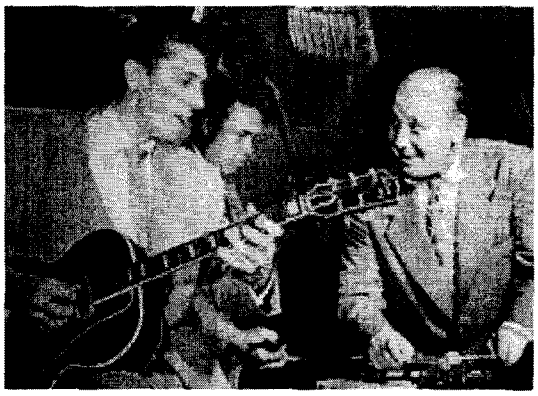
Tal's learning period consisted entirely of him learning, note for note, all of Charlie Christian's recorded solos with Benny Goodman. It was Christians style that would influence Farlow's particular technique to phrasing and melody.

Farlow created a new approach to playing the guitar. He was able to play notes not only with his left hand, but simultaneously with his right. This allowed him to play with an amazing speed, and to play complex scales that would otherwise be unreachable by typical means. Such an approach garnered him the nickname "The Octopus."[6] Farlow also had an uncanny ability for solo improvisation. It can be heard in some of his earlier recordings, particularly on the album, *Autumn in New York* that Farlow had an amazing sense of melody, and was a talented impressionist. He was able to create lines that made melodic sense, and conveyed a message, even within the complicated framework of bebop.

Tal Farlow never became a household name like Barney Kessel. He decided in the mid-50's that he did not want to associate with the business moguls who controlled music, and went back into his old career of painting signs in North Carolina. This early retirement more or less insured that he would not be known by anyone outside of the jazz "fraternity." Due to this retirement, it is nearly impossible to locate any of Farlow's early records, thus hampering his longevity.

Thirty years later, Farlow was to return to music, much to the

pleasure of other jazz aficionados. He



Tal Farlow playing with Red Norvo

released a final series of recordings all of which were as impressive as his initial offerings.[7] These were the albums that would become the blueprint for aspiring guitarists. One can hear a glimpse of Tal Farlow's approach in most every style that followed from the '50s onward. As was said at his funeral, perhaps without too much exaggeration, "... he was the most creative, most vital, most innovative, most influential, most daring genius to ever put hands to guitar fingerboard."[8]

The Cool Period

While the East Coast musicians were pushing the limits of harmony with the new style of bebop, a whole new idea was being developed on the West Coast. This style went under the moniker of "cool," due to its seemingly subdued nature in comparison to bebop. "Cool" jazz was for the musicians who had no interest in learning songs that had hundreds of chord changes, but was by no means inferior to bebop. The approach in this style relied heavily on the artists' melodic creativity. Miles Davis, perhaps the most famous artist from this period, said that Cool was a return to melody.

The singing lines so predominant in Cool jazz seemed to lend themselves greatly to the nature of the guitar. Oddly, the guitar was not as predominant during this period as one might have thought. Several guitarists were well known for this style of playing, however, two were to become the more influential players of the time. These guitarists were Wes Montgomery and Joe Pass.

Wes's full name was John Leslie Montgomery. He started to play guitar at an early age, and was said to be quite good even as a teenager. He seriously began to learn guitar after he had started a family. As so many before him had done,

Wes Montgomery onstage. Note his technique of plucking with his thumb.

Montgomery learned almost all of Charlie Christian's solos. Several years later, he was noticed and signed on by Lionel Hampton, who had played with Christian in Benny Goodman's band. From here, Wes began his career in jazz.

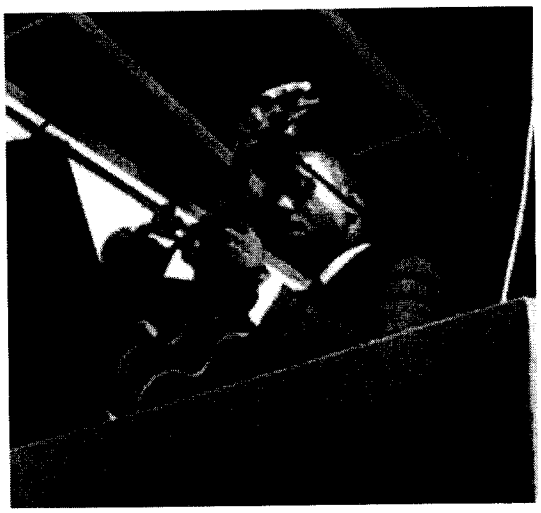
Wes was said to be a flawless improviser. He had command over most every aspect of jazz and had a mind for melody. In particular, Montgomery experimented with the use of octaves regularly in his solos. "With the octaves, that was just a coincidence, going into octaves. It's such a challenge, yet you know, a lot can be done with it..." he said.[1] Wes was also known for the unique, full tone that he used. He accomplished this by not using a pick. Instead he used the fat part of his thumb, which made the string vibrate deeply.

Because he didn't use a pick, Montgomery seldom is heard playing very fast. "You don't *have* to play fast, but being able to play fast can cause you to phrase better."[2] Montgomery had an obsession with phrasing and melody, but he also liked the deep mellow tone, which led him into the Cool style of playing.

Wes was unusual in his approach to jazz, in that he would integrate melodies from pop tunes into his improvisations and recordings. This was considered to be heretical to many of the jazz purists. Despite being chastised for his "audacity," he still was able to reach commercial acclaim and inspire many developing musicians.

Montgomery said that he started his "pop-Jazz" approach as a way to branch out to the younger generation and expose them to jazz music.[3] Jazz was not particularly popular to the younger crowd at the time. Thus it is easy to see that Wes Montgomery, with his commercial success, was to become the new

blueprint for guitarists interested in



Wes Montgomery recording in the studio.

jazz, when heretofore it had been Charlie Christian.

Montgomery also broke jazz ground by incorporating one of the first all electric groups. While he did not play what is now referred to as "fusion," (He decided to stick with his style, because his guitar playing is so subdued) he still used the instrumentation. His trio consisted of an electric guitar, electric bass, and electric organ. The group's style of playing was not that distinctive, but they had the skills that allowed them to be reasonably popular, and furthered Montgomery's name. In fact, Montgomery is only behind Barney Kessel and Charlie Christian in *down beat*'s polls for best jazz guitarist.[4]

Wes Montgomery contributed a new, full sound to guitar playing technique. He championed a return to melodic playing, rather than bogging himself down with complex chord transitions. It was traits such as these that would be the major influence for the younger generations of guitarists.

Joe Pass was a guitarist who didn't fall into only one genre. Many cite him as a bebop guitarist, however, he was to make equally as many contributions to the cool sound. Like many bop musicians, Pass borrowed heavily from the approach of Charlie Parker. However, it is odd that he did not play with the same style as Charlie Christian. He did not consider Christian to be one of his main influences.[5]

It is probably due to lack of influence that made Joe Pass sound so different. His smooth melodic lines didn't entirely evoke the sound of Wes Montgomery. He seemed to take a trumpeter's approach to guitar playing. His lines were snappy, succinct and tuneful. It was for this reason that guitarists took almost as

much notice of Joe Pass as of Jimi Hendrix.[6]

It was not only Pass' ideas of melody that made him a model guitarist, but also his approach to harmony, particularly with his use of chords. Some have described Pass to be one of the most influential chordal geniuses of the time, Thelonius Monk notwithstanding.[7] Pass easily integrated harmonies within his solo lines, giving himself the sound of a lead and accompaniment section in one instrument. Such was a technique employed by classical guitarists, but very few jazz guitarists up to this point.

This great knowledge and ability with harmony made Joe Pass the model bebop guitarist, but also gave new standards to the west coast sound. Songs like "Summertime" evoke more of a melodic feel than bop. It is primarily his use of melody that set Pass apart from other bop players of the time and allowed his work to translate more into the cool sound.

Joe Pass' sound, along with that of Montgomery was to help define the approach to jazz guitar for later periods, particularly the fusion

Joe Pass Playing Guitar.

period, in jazz. Pass' style seamlessly integrated the melodic, laid back feel of cool jazz with the quick, chord-filled approach of bebop, resulting in music which was as exciting as it was beautiful.

Fusion

Jazz players were always known for their abilities to synthesize other musical styles into their own playing. In the late 1960's trumpeter Miles Davis was to alter the course of jazz again by taking inspiration from the vast repertoire of rock music, and incorporating it into jazz ideas. The resulting album, *Bitches Brew*, is claimed to be one of the cornerstones in the modern jazz movement. The 1970's were known as the fusion movement. The term fusion comes from the fusing of jazz with rock and funk. Fusion provided a great opportunity for guitarists to come into the limelight, and be noticed. During this time, guitar became the key instrument in many bands.

Many guitarists were to become bandleaders, and achieve popularity with their groups. Several of these guitarists would also be named most influential in *down beat* polls. However, one guitarist consistently found himself at the top. This was the man who helped start it all with Miles Davis. This was John McLaughlin.

McLaughlin was a natural to be the leading man in fusion. He was born in England, and by the time he was a teenager, he had already made a name for

himself as a guitarist during the British blues revival. He had garnered performances with such names as Ginger Baker, Graham Bond, and Alexis Korner.[1] In his twenties he was tempted by the sound of free jazz musician Ornette Coleman, and thus veered into jazz.

McLaughlin moved to New York to further his career, and he met up with drummer Tony Williams. Tony Williams had been the drummer for one of Miles Davis' most powerful rhythm sections. McLaughlin was drafted into Williams' groundbreaking band, The Tony Williams Lifetime. Lifetime was a pre-fusion band that definitely set the stage for the next step. McLaughlin, being a blues oriented guitarist, had no qualms with experimenting with wah-pedals and fuzz tone. Such effects were popular in the rock arena, but were mostly taboo amongst other jazz guitarists, who tended to want a clean sound.[2]

It was through Tony Williams that McLaughlin was introduced to Miles Davis. Davis was interested in the sound that rock offered, and he was more than impressed with

John McLaughlin in the studio recording Bitches Brew with Miles Davis.

McLaughlin's use of effects to produce textures that had not been heard in modern jazz. McLaughlin's playing can be heard on every track of the *Bitches Brew* sessions.

What made John McLaughlin unique at the time was his confusingly conventional and non-conventional approach to the guitar. His jazz technique was masterful. He had the ability to improvise lines that were purely melodic, and exceedingly technical. His speed on the guitar was rivaled only by that of Tal Farlow.[3] In addition, McLaughlin used the electric guitar, and analog effects, to produce swirling textures

of sounds akin to Jimi Hendrix's

John McLaughlin onstage with the Mahavishnu Orchestra.

approach. McLaughlin was more refined, and slightly less experimental, than Hendrix in making these textures, thus being more successful at using them in a jazz idiom.

While he broke musical ground with Miles Davis on *Bitches Brew*, McLaughlin was to change the popular vision of jazz with the band that he formed in 1970. The Mahavishnu Orchestra is probably still one of the most well known groups in modern jazz. The Mahavishnu Orchestra mixed a variety of sounds. Their instrumentation included guitar, bass, drums, piano, and violin in their earliest incarnation. It was Mahavishnu who opened the doors for such fusion acts as Weather Report.

Listening to Mahavishnu Orchestra's first album, *The Inner Mounting Flame*, it becomes readily why they were such a popular group. The music is exceedingly complex, much like typical jazz music. However, the group, instead of improvising over chord changes like traditional bop, or experimenting with free form textures like free jazz, places the jazz idiom into a rock format. McLaughlin's solos, particularly on songs like "Birds of Fire" and "Awakening" reminisce of guitarists such as Jimmy Page and Eric Clapton more so than previous jazz guitarists.

McLaughlin helped to pave the way for future guitarists. He helped to reconcile jazz with the format of rock. His incorporation of popular styles helped jazz to move onward and achieve new creative heights. Most every guitarist after 1970 owes some inspiration to John McLaughlin.

Afterword

The guitar has typically lagged slightly behind other instruments in jazz. Sometimes this can be credited to exacting bandleaders who only liked their guitarists to play unplugged and on the beat. It was only through the effort of several key guitarists that the full melodic and harmonic abilities of the instrument could be developed. Naturally, there were a great deal of guitarists who contributed to the cause, however, not all of them can be discussed. Instead, by examining the most well known guitarists of each period in the history of jazz, a reasonable picture of the guitar's development may be painted.

Historians always clash over some specific pieces of information, and jazz history is no different. Many historians will claim that Jazz guitar, while having its roots in banjo/guitar players such as Johnny St. Cyr, never was really played until Eddie Lang made his recordings with Venuti. However, one can easily argue that the advent of Lonnie Johnson was of equal importance to the guitar as Lang's playing. While Johnson was a blues player and singer, he did not play with the typical Delta Blues style. He was very exacting and tight with his rhythm and technique. His solos are very clean and have the swing feeling reminiscent of

Louis Armstrong's trumpet playing. Lang was an avid listener of Johnson's style and it is easy to wonder how much of Lang's playing is influenced by Johnson. The contributions of both men, particularly with solo style and melody, were invaluable in the initial development of the guitar in jazz.

Charlie Christian was indisputably the most important guitarist. For 50 years, he was the main influence for almost any guitarist who learned to play jazz. Christian gave guitar soloing a new depth. He was primarily influenced by greats such as Louis Armstrong and Lester Young. However, Christian's amazing skill with his melodies does not entirely stem from jazz. As a young child his exposure to many styles of music such as blues, classical, and country were to be invaluable to his development. Knowledge of other styles helped to keep him from being locked in by the current approach to phrasing and melody.

Christian not only helped in the development of the guitar, but for the first time a guitarist helped to further the development of jazz itself. Christian always attended the jam sessions held at Minton's bar. Along with Thelonius Monk and Roy Eldridge, Christian helped to develop bebop, which required knowledge of much more complex melodies from musicians. Christian further helped to develop early concepts of reharmonization, or the art of changing chords to harmonize with the melody but evoke a different feeling.

Other guitarists were to make an impact beyond Christian, though in lesser degrees. Django Reinhardt was, more or less, an underground hero on the guitar. He was revered for his mixture of staple jazz melodies and flamenco guitar style. His erratic rhythm playing was also an influence in redefining how a guitar could "swing." Django never reached extreme popularity as some jazz musicians. However, many people, particularly famous jazz musicians, cite him as an influence in their melodic playing.

Later guitarists such as Tal Farlow and Barney Kessel were to take Christian's style and further advance it. Tal Farlow was a master of melody. He was only to gain great popularity among musicians, however he is often cited with the same gift of melody as Christian. Some have said that they never heard Farlow play a wrong note, and they never heard any of his lines played before. His melodic ideas were to influence musicians in all genres. Tal also had a unique

form of playing. Known as "The Octopus," he employed many unconventional approaches to playing the guitar, which was to open doors for later players such as John McLaughlin.

Barney Kessel and Wes Montgomery were not as influential in guitar playing style as previous players. They did, however, bring more attention to the use of the guitar in jazz. Kessel was one of the more prolific musicians of the 1950s and 1960s. Nearly every person, whether they knew it or not, had listened to his playing. He was one of the first guitarists to demonstrate musical skills in all forms of jazz. Musicians of all genres would visit him in hopes of jamming or recording.

Wes Montgomery was significant because he defined jazz guitar for young musicians after the 1960s. At the time, jazz was considered to be old and boring by the younger generation. Montgomery, a devout follower of Charlie Christian's style, released recordings of reworked popular singles of the day. While he received much criticism, he was the only liaison between jazz music and young people. As such, Montgomery is more often cited as an influence by younger players than is Charlie Christian. Montgomery also redefined the art of phrasing in improvised passages. His thumb playing technique produced a much more full tone than most other players had achieved. He also pioneered full electric groups with his trio. Montgomery, while not particularly inventive in guitar playing style, pointed the direction for jazz in the 1970's.

Joe Pass is traditionally considered to be a bebop guitarist in the same vein as Tal Farlow. However, most of his contributions to jazz were from his melodic approach, and his blending with classical guitar technique. Pass would play fast and use many chords in his playing, much like a bop musician. However, he used a style of melody that was uncommon to that period, except amongst cool musicians. Pass accomplished sounding so different due to his major influence being early bop horn players such as Charlie Parker and Roy Eldridge, with less emphasis on the styles of Charlie Christian.

Following Miles Davis' invention of fusion in 1969 with the album *Bitches Brew*, guitarist John McLaughlin was to be the mainstay guitarist. McLaughlin diverged from typical jazz guitar by incorporating audio effects, commonly used

in rock music, into his improvisations. McLaughlin began to bring musical textures into the vocabulary of the guitar. This was not a new technique in jazz. Such Free Jazz players as Ornette Coleman had been experimenting with such textures before McLaughlin appeared. However, McLaughlin was the first to popularize their use on the guitar. McLaughlin and his group, the Mahavishnu Orchestra, also broke jazz barriers by uniting both the jazz and rock audience. No previous jazz group had enjoyed the success of the Orchestra, who were frequently selling out stadiums on their tours.

The development of the guitar was a step by step process involving many players. It is possible to get a general picture of its timeline through the examination of the popular players in each period of jazz. Unfortunately, there are several guitarists who are not considered in this way who made equally great contributions. Many guitarists came after the fusion period, who continue to develop new styles and further add to the role of the guitar in jazz. Pat Metheny, for example has given new forms of melody for the guitar, as well as incorporated the use of a 12-string guitar into jazz music. Regretfully, such guitarists as Charlie Byrd, Pat Metheny, John Scofield, and many others could not be included. Including them into a much more thorough work would even more illustrated the changing role of the guitar. For now the general picture painted by these key players helps to illustrate the stepwise maturation of the guitar in jazz, and shows that great change is still to come.

Picture Credits

The Chicago Period

1. *Formal Picture of Eddie Lang*. Taken from The Jazz Guitar by Maurice Summerfield, pg. 128.
2. *Lonnie Johnson circa 1917*. Taken from RedHotJazz.com (http://www.redhotjazz.com/LJohnson.html)
3. *Lonnie Johnson performs onstage*. Taken from jazzpix.com (http://www.jazzpix.com/Artist_Listing/JamKen/JJJohnson/Lonnie_Johnson/lonnie_johnson.html)
4. *Eddie Lang with the Mound City Blue Blowers*. Taken from stellaguitars.com. (http://www.stellaguitars.com/ eddie_lang.htm).

The Swing Era

1. *Charlie Christian with the Benny Goodman Orchestra*. Taken from pbs.org (www.pbs.org/jazz/biography/ artist_id_christian_charlie.htm)

Kansas City

1. *Django Reinhardt playing Guitar*. Taken from Library of Congress, William Gottlieb Collection (http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/wghtml/wgpres11.html).
2. *Freddie Green playing Guitar*. Taken from Guitar Masters (http://guitar-masters.com/Masters/ Freddie.html).
3. *Freddie Green in the Studio*. Taken from the Jazz Institute of Chicago (http://www.jazzinstituteofchicago.org/bronzeville/galloway.asp).

Bebop: The Modern Era

1. *Barney Kessel in 1954*. Taken from Classic Jazz Guitar Webpage. (http://www.classicjazzguitar.com/artists/)
2. *Barney Kessel in the '70s*, Taken from Northeastern State University Jazz History Pages. (http://www.nsuok.edu/jazzlab/ barneykessel.htm).
3. *Tal Farlow*. Taken from Petillo Guitars. (http:// www.petilloguitars.com/ tal.gif).
4. *Tal Farlow playing with Red Norvo*. Taken from Jazzhall.org. (http://jazzhall.org).

The Cool Period

1. *Wes Montgomery onstage*. Taken from Duke University. (http://www.duke.edu/~mjs4/wes/).
2. *Wes Montgomery in the studio*. Taken from cmgww.com. (http://www.cmgww.com/music/montgomery/ photos/monw006.html).
3. *Joe Pass Playing Guitar*. Taken from Just Jazz Guitar. (http://justjazzguitar.com).

Fusion

1. *John McLaughlin in the Studio for Bitches Brew.* Taken from *Bitches Brew* liner notes.
2. *John McLaughlin onstage with Mahavishnu Orchestra.* Taken from *The Inner Mounting Flame* liner notes.

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2. Summerfield, Maurice J. The Jazz Guitar: Its Evolution and its Players. Ashley Mark Publishing, England, 1979. pg. 12.

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1. Mongan, Norman. The History of the Jazz Guitar. Pg. 21-22.

2. Mongan, Norman. The History of the Jazz Guitar. Pg. 25-26.

3. Hadlock, Richard B. "Eddie Lang." Down beat. August 1, 1963. pg. 16

4. Hadlock, Richard B. Down beat. Pg. 16.

5. Hadlock, Richard B. Down beat. Pg. 16.

6. Hadlock, Richard B. Down beat. Pg. 16.

7. Mongan, Norman. The History of the Jazz Guitar. Pg. 26.

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9. Mongan, Norman. The History of the Jazz Guitar. Pg. 29.

10. Hadlock, Richard B. Down beat. Pg. 17.

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5. Dyson, Ernest F. "On with Charlie Christian." Down beat. June 11, 1970. pg. 47.

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2. Hoefer, George. "The Magnificent Gypsy." Down beat. July 14, 1966. pg. 21.

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4. Tynan, John. "The Unforgotten Gypsy." Down beat. June 25,1959. pg. 20.

5. Tynan, John. Down beat. pg. 20.

6. Scanlan, Tom. "The Tough Straight Art." Down beat. July 1, 1965. pg. 18.

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2. Tynan, John. "Barney's Tune," Down beat. July 24,1958. pg 15,47.

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