

# *The Guitarist's Introduction to Jazz*

*by Randy Vincent*

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**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Asterisks in the text (\*) signify that additional explanatory material on the subject at hand can be found in the “Further Notes” section in the back of the book.

# Introduction

This book is for guitarists who are new to jazz, but not beginners on guitar. Some familiarity with playing the instrument and the basics of music notation will be most helpful. It is designed to introduce guitarists who play rock, blues, country, folk, and classical into the realm of playing jazz guitar, especially in combo situations such as school jazz ensembles and big bands, adult rehearsal bands, jam sessions with friends or in actual professional situations. I frequently encounter students who can play blazing heavy metal solos and know a few chords, or perhaps can read and memorize classical pieces, but want to play in a jazz ensemble and are totally puzzled as to what to do in that situation. This book is for them, and for anyone who wants a “refresher” course or even just some alternate ways of looking at things.

The book has four main parts. Part One deals with the first puzzling thing encountered by guitarists new to jazz at their initial combo or big band rehearsal: jazz band rhythm guitar. Part Two deals with a style of accompaniment called “comping” by jazz musicians. Part Three is a somewhat novel way of beginning to improvise single note jazz solos, which involves using melodies to develop a “vocabulary” for jazz improvisation (actually it is the “old fashioned” way that jazz musicians originally used to do), rather than just learning a bunch of scales and modes and hoping for the best. Finally, Part Four gets to the scales, arpeggios, modes, and left and right hand technical studies that really are necessary to becoming a well-rounded jazz musician. This way of ordering is based on the way we learn to speak as infants (imitating sounds first, reading and writing later). Of course you can study the book in any order that is useful for you, such as skipping directly to something that may help you prepare for an upcoming rehearsal or performance.

After the four main parts is some preparatory material including a non-alphabetical glossary called “Some Definitions” (Appendix A), a primer on chord names and chord symbols (Appendix B), and a primer on chord types (Appendix C) which is important for understanding how to use the chord variations in real life. If any terms or chord names are unclear to you as you begin working through the book, please take a few minutes to check out these Appendices for clarification.

The notation is standard (the only kind you’ll ever see in your jazz band charts, never tab) supplemented with fingering numbers (below the staff) and string numbers (circled above the staff), and frequently fingerboard diagrams (standard vertical for chords and horizontal for scales and arpeggios). Once a circled string number appears, stay on that string until a new string number appears. Picking symbols are only shown on technical studies in Chapter 12, where they are explained. Slurs are notes that are not picked, but use hammer-ons, pull-offs, and left hand finger slides. You can always feel free to look ahead to Chapter 12 for technical help whenever you feel you might need it while working on examples earlier in the book.

The chord symbols currently being used here are a commonly used set of “shortcut” symbols similar to those recommended by Mark Levine in *The Jazz Piano Book* and in *The Jazz Theory Book* (both published by Sher Music Co.) using “Δ” to symbolize “major” and “-” to symbolize “minor”, “ø” to symbolize “half diminished” and “o” to symbolize “diminished.” In real life charts, a variety of different systems of chord notation are in common use. Please refer to Appendix B, *Chord Names and Chord Symbols Primer*, for a complete explanation. You’ll need to be familiar with them when you use charts and fake books.

# Part One: RHYTHM GUITAR VOICINGS

Frequently our first experiences playing jazz with other musicians involves using the guitar as part of the rhythm section, often with a piano or other keyboard present. For this reason it is important to be familiar with what we call “rhythm guitar voicings.” These are voicings that are “streamlined” in such a way as to have their own place in the total rhythm section sound without adding “clutter.” What we call “bar chords” (from the French “barre”), so prevalent in rock, country, and pop, are rarely used in jazz guitar playing, although partial bars are fairly common. Arrangers often include complete harmonic information in their chord symbols for guitarists so that any extensions and/or alterations used will be compatible with what the rest of the band is playing (this is especially true in big band charts). The guitar should rarely play everything in such a symbol, so it is important to understand the chord types listed in Appendix C, *Chord Types Primer*. This way the guitar voicings can be properly reduced to the more streamlined rhythm voicings.

## Chapter 1 - Three-note ‘shell’ voicings

The “safest” most usable rhythm voicings are three-note chords consisting of just the root, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> (or 6<sup>th</sup>). These are commonly called ‘shell’ voicings. Since there are no 5<sup>ths</sup>, 9<sup>ths</sup>, 11<sup>ths</sup> or 13<sup>ths</sup>, any alterations and/or extensions in the symbols become irrelevant. Knowing how to use these not only sounds great, it also can make some pretty intimidating looking charts much easier to play. For example, if you see the following (Fig. 1-A):

Fig.1-A



You could actually play (Fig. 1-B):

Fig.1-B



This works with the root, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> shells because they have no 5<sup>ths</sup> (or 9<sup>ths</sup>, etc.) to clash with the indicated alterations and/or extensions.\*

Example 1-1 shows how to derive a C<sup>Δ</sup>7 shell voicing with the root on the 5<sup>th</sup> string from the first seven notes of a C major scale. Knowing where the root, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> are located on the fingerboard makes conversion into the other common chord types easy.

Ex.1-1

Ex. 1-2 shows the chord diagrams for the shell voicings with the roots on the 5<sup>th</sup> string for C<sup>Δ</sup>7, C7, C-7 (also used for C<sup>∅</sup>7 since there is no 5<sup>th</sup>), C6 and C-6 (also used for C<sup>∅</sup>7 since there is no 5<sup>th</sup>). Fingerings and optional fingerings are shown by the numbers under each diagram. Having optional fingerings available is important since different contexts make some variations more efficient, and later note additions on higher strings may require a change in how the basic shape is fingered.

Ex.1-2

Ex. 1-3 (on the following page) shows how to derive a G<sup>Δ</sup>7 shell voicing with the root on the 6<sup>th</sup> string from the first ten notes of a G major scale. Since the 8<sup>th</sup> step is the octave it is the same note (G) as the root, so we can count eight, nine, and ten as one, two, and three to find the octave higher version of the 3<sup>rd</sup>. This places the 7<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> on the middle two strings. Again, knowing the locations for root, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> makes conversion easy.

Ex.1-40

Ex. 1-40 shows a sequence of chords in the key of B $\flat$  major. The first line contains: Eb, Eb<sup>+</sup>, Eb<sup>6</sup>, and Eb<sup>7</sup>. The second line contains: Ab, Ab<sup>-</sup>, Eb, and Bb<sup>7</sup>. Each chord is accompanied by a guitar diagram showing fingerings and fret numbers.

- E $\flat$** : Diagram with fingerings 4, 3, 1. Frets: 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.
- E $\flat$ <sup>+</sup>**: Diagram with fingerings 4, 3, 2. Frets: 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.
- E $\flat$ <sup>6</sup>**: Diagram with fingerings 2, 1, 1. Frets: 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.
- E $\flat$ <sup>7</sup>**: Diagram with fingerings 2, 1, 3. Frets: 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.
- A $\flat$** : Diagram with fingerings 3, 4, 2. Frets: 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.
- A $\flat$ <sup>-</sup>**: Diagram with fingerings 3, 4, 1. Frets: 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.
- E $\flat$** : Diagram with fingerings 4, 3, 1. Frets: 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.
- B $\flat$ <sup>7</sup>**: Diagram with fingerings 3, 4, 1. Frets: 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.

Ex. 1-41 demonstrates in the key of B $\flat$  major. There are new forms again with diagrams and fingerings. Notice that the final F7 (literally F7/A no 5<sup>th</sup>) has the 7<sup>th</sup> on the B string instead of the G string. This makes it practical to play in the context of this progression.

Ex.1-41

Ex. 1-41 shows a sequence of chords in the key of B $\flat$  major. The first line contains: B $\flat$ , B $\flat$ <sup>+</sup>, B $\flat$ <sup>6</sup>, and B $\flat$ <sup>7</sup>. The second line contains: E $\flat$ , E $\flat$ <sup>-</sup>, B $\flat$ , and F<sup>7</sup>. Each chord is accompanied by a guitar diagram showing fingerings and fret numbers.

- B $\flat$** : Diagram with fingerings 3, 1, 4. Frets: 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.
- B $\flat$ <sup>+</sup>**: Diagram with fingerings 3, 1, 4. Frets: 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.
- B $\flat$ <sup>6</sup>**: Diagram with fingerings 3, 2, 4. Frets: 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.
- B $\flat$ <sup>7</sup>**: Diagram with fingerings 2, 3, 4. Frets: 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.
- E $\flat$** : Diagram with fingerings 2, 1, 4. Frets: 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.
- E $\flat$ <sup>-</sup>**: Diagram with fingerings 2, 1, 4. Frets: 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.
- B $\flat$** : Diagram with fingerings 3, 1, 4. Frets: 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.
- F<sup>7</sup>**: Diagram with fingerings 3, 1, 2. Frets: 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.

Ex. 4-6 shows another F minor blues and introduces some new adapted forms in the first four measures.

Ex.4-6

The image displays a 12-measure blues progression in F minor. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of two flats (Bb and Eb), and a common time signature (C). The progression is as follows:

- Measure 1: F- (chord diagram 3114)
- Measure 2: F-add9 (chord diagram 3124)
- Measure 3: F-add9#5 (chord diagram 2134)
- Measure 4: F-6 (chord diagram 2134)
- Measure 5: Bb- (chord diagram 1111)
- Measure 6: Bb-7 (chord diagram 1222)
- Measure 7: Gø7 (chord diagram 1222)
- Measure 8: C+7b9 (chord diagram 1324)
- Measure 9: F- (chord diagram 1113)
- Measure 10: Ab-9 (chord diagram 1222)
- Measure 11: Db9 (chord diagram 2314)
- Measure 12: C7 (chord diagram 1324)

Now let's leave the 12 bar blues form and take a brief look at the "A" section of what musicians call "Rhythm changes." The name comes from the fact that the changes and form are based on George Gershwin's "I've Got Rhythm." They are usually played in the key of Bb. In the previous four examples the given chords were used as a basis to create more complex harmonic motion, but the following example will somewhat reverse the procedure by forming a simple repetitive "bluesy" background in place of a set of fast moving changes.

Ex. 4-7 shows the likely set of changes given in a chart above what we're actually going to play in our sample comp. The top note of the voicings forms a type of melody called a "riff" (probably from "refrain") which has a simple repeated phrase with a variation at the end. We will be returning to the subject of riffs when we move on to the topic of playing improvised solos.

Ex.4-7

B $\flat$  B $^{\circ}7$  C $^{-}7$  C $\sharp^{\circ}7$  D $^{-}7$  G $^7$  C $^{-}7$  F $^7$

B $\flat^{13}$  A $\flat^9$  A $^7\flat^9$  B $\flat^{13}$  D $\flat^9$  C $^{-}9$  F $^{13}\flat^9$

F $^{-}7$  B $\flat^7$  E $\flat$  E $^{\circ}7$  B $\flat$  G $^7$  C $^7$  F $^7$

5 B $\flat^{13}$  A $\flat^9$  A $^7\flat^9$  B $\flat^{13}$  G $^{13}\flat^9$  C $^7\sharp^9$  F $^{13}\flat^9$

Ex. 4-8 shows a series of voicings that can be used for comping on the first eight bars of Jerome Kern's classic standard "All the Things You Are." Here is shown a series of three-note voicings that mix in some voicings previously shown as rhythm guitar voicings. Notice that there are two voicings for each chord forming a compound melody that alternates between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> strings. Make up your own comp rhythms.

Ex.4-8

F $^{-}7$  B $\flat^{-}7$  E $\flat^7$  E $\flat^7\flat^9$  A $\flat^{\Delta}7$

D $\flat^{\Delta}7$  G $^7$  C $^{\Delta}7$  C $^6$



Ex. 8-34 shows a modified version of the main A-A-B-A melody of "Room 608." It has been adapted for guitar with some changed octaves and suggested strings and fingerings shown.

Ex.8-34

# Room 608

Horace Silver

The musical score for "Room 608" is written in 4/4 time and consists of eight staves of music. The key signature has two flats (Bb and Eb). The chords and fingerings are as follows:

- Staff 1:** Chords: Bb<sup>6</sup>, G<sup>7</sup>, C<sup>-7</sup>, F<sup>7</sup>, D<sup>-7</sup>, G<sup>7</sup>. Fingerings: 3 4 1 3, 4 1 2 1, 3 2 3 1, 2 4 1 4, 1 2 1 3 2 1.
- Staff 2:** Chords: C<sup>-7</sup>, F<sup>7</sup>, Bb<sup>7</sup>, Eb<sup>6</sup>, E<sup>o7</sup>. Fingerings: 3 4 2 1, 1, 4 2 1 1, 1 2 2 1-1 2 4 1.
- Staff 3:** Chords: 1. D<sup>-7</sup>, G<sup>7</sup>, C<sup>-7</sup>, F<sup>7</sup>; 2. Bb<sup>6</sup>. Fingerings: 2 3, 3 4 1 4, 2 4 2 1, 2 3, 2 3 1 2, 2 2 1 2, 1.
- Staff 4:** Chords: F<sup>-7</sup>, Bb<sup>+7#9</sup>, Eb<sup>6</sup>. Fingerings: 1, 4 3 4 1, 1 4 3 4 1, 1 3 1 1 2 4 1 2, 2 2 1 2, 1.
- Staff 5:** Chords: Ab<sup>-7</sup>, Db<sup>+7#9</sup>, Gb<sup>9</sup>, F<sup>+7#9</sup>. Fingerings: 1 4 3 3 1, 1 4 3 3 1, 1 4 3 3 1, 4 1 2 1 1 4 -.
- Staff 6:** Chords: Bb<sup>6</sup>, G<sup>7</sup>, C<sup>-7</sup>, F<sup>7</sup>, Bb<sup>6</sup>/D, G<sup>+7b9</sup>, C<sup>9</sup>, F<sup>+7</sup>. Fingerings: 5 4 3, 2 3 4 1, 2 1 2 3, 1, 1 3 1 1 4 2 2 4, 1 1 3 1 1, 1.
- Staff 7:** Chords: Bb<sup>7</sup>, Eb<sup>6</sup>, E<sup>o7</sup>, Bb<sup>6</sup>. Fingerings: 4 2 1 1, 1 2 2 1-1 2 4 1, 2 3, 2 3 1 2, 2 2 1 2.

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