

Requiem FOR a **JAZZ** Virtuoso

BY JIM FERGUSON

Bald, cigar-chomping Joe Pass hardly looked like a world-class musician. But when he picked up his guitar, you forgot about appearances. As a solo guitarist Joe redefined the instrument, spontaneously interweaving sleek chordal sequences, walking bass lines, and single notes into kaleidoscopic musical textures. In a group setting he could lay back and play spaciously with great elegance or spin out long phrases with commanding aggression. ■ Over the past quarter century many great players have approached the instrument in unforgettable ways, but none has epitomized the image of the jazz guitarist as completely as Joe Pass.



Pass at the beginning of his ascent, mid '60s.

1929 - 1994

JOE Pass

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His technique was astounding, his improvisational abilities awesome. Given his mastery of single-note and chord-melody improvisation, he easily qualifies as one of the instrument's towering figures. In all probability, Joe Pass is the most versatile, well-rounded mainstream guitarist in jazz history.

Although Pass' career was slow to start, once

underway it became unstoppable. From the mid '70s on he recorded more extensively than any other jazz guitarist of his time, producing over two dozen titles under his own name and gracing many titles by Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan, Stéphane Grappelli, Oscar Peterson, Milt Jackson, Zoot Sims, Ray Brown, and other jazz greats. Pass also toured extensively, appearing at venues ranging from small clubs to the world's great concert halls and festivals. He dazzled countless listeners and shared his wisdom with numerous aspiring players, many of whom discovered his person-

ality could range from sweet and generous to quirky and brash. While the exact forces that shaped Pass' life and music are open to speculation, certain aspects are the stuff of which legends are made.

The eldest of five children, Joseph Anthony Jacobi Passalacqua was born in Brunswick, New Jersey, on January 13, 1929. Shortly thereafter his family moved to Johnstown, Pennsylvania, where he was raised. He received his first guitar, a \$17 Harmony steel-string flat-top, at age nine. From the start, he took lessons and practiced six hours a day at the insistence of his stern fa-

Chord Melody Concepts

BY JOE PASS AS TOLD TO JIM FERGUSON

For over 25 years Joe Pass was a frequent contributor to *Guitar Player*. This chord-melody workshop originally appeared in our Sept. '84 issue.

This lesson features some of my favorite chord-melody devices: extended and altered voicings, chord substitutions, single-note fills, and moving lines. The most common progression in jazz moves from the dominant chord to the tonic (V to I). Most sequences either include, or are variations on, this resolution. The dominant chord is often preceded by the minor 7th chord whose root is a fourth lower, creating a II-V progression, which usually—but not always—resolves to the tonic. Ex. 1's II-V in the key of G shows one way you can sustain a chord while playing a simple melody on top. Notice how the line repeats for each chord.

Another easy way to add harmonic movement is to approach a chord

from a half-step above or below. Ex. 2 embellishes Ex. 1's melodic line by arriving at Am7 and D9 from chords a half-step above.

Using a common tone in the upper voice of a chord progression is one of the easiest ways to tie together a chord progression. Ex. 3 is a I-VI-II-V sequence in G that uses a second-string D as the common tone. The VI chord can either be minor, as shown here, or dominant. I often substitute some sort of B \flat dominant chord for the Em7 and approach the Am11 from a half-step above (see the chord in parentheses). Ex. 4, a variation on the same progression, introduces an upper-string melody.

A descending bass line can lend continuity, but I use the technique sparingly. Some players use many walking bass lines, but I prefer a simpler approach and mainly use chords that have the root in the bass. The progression in Ex. 5 appears in many tunes, including "A Foggy Day" and "I Got Rhythm." It connects I to IV and IV back to I.

Ex. 1 Am7 D7

Ex. 2 Am7 B \flat m7 Am7 D7 E \flat 9 D9

Ex. 3 Gmaj7 Em7 (B \flat 9) Am11 D7 \flat 5

Ex. 4 Gmaj7 E7 \sharp 5 \flat 9 Am7 D7 \flat 9

ther. When he was about 12, his father bought him a 00-42 Martin—a lavish instrument for the son of a steelworker—which Joe outfitted with a DeArmond pickup. By then Joe was playing tunes like “Body And Soul” and “Stardust” with older musicians, and he soon became fascinated by the work of Gypsy genius Django Reinhardt. By 14, he played so well that bandleader Tony Pastor put him onstage at a local concert and would have taken him on the road had he not still been in school. The following year Joe’s parents sent him to study with Harry Volpe, a well-known teacher and studio player in New York

City. When Volpe realized that the youth improvised better than he did, he directed the lessons toward sight-reading, which caused Joe to quit out of frustration and return home. At 16 Joe began using a Gibson ES-150 with a Charlie Christian-style pickup.

Joe dropped out of the tenth grade when his father became ill for an extended period. Eventually he toured with a few groups and began playing in New York. In 1949 he accepted a gig with bandleader Ray McKinley, but quit after finding the arrangements were beyond his reading ability. Enthralled with the bebop of Dizzy

Gillespie, Charlie Parker, and Bud Powell, Joe began using drugs. “I lived in the dark corners of society,” he later said of that period in his life, “and wasted time, going nowhere.” At one point he spent a year in the Marines.

During the early ’50s Pass gigned around Las Vegas, where John Collins, Nat “King” Cole’s sideman, met him. “He said he had heard a lot about me from a guy who was in the slammer,” Collins relates. “The next night he heard us at the El Rancho, and then came over to where I was staying. It was obvious that he was pretty out of it. When he laid down on my bed with his eyes half

Chord patterns that cycle through the circle of fifths are an important part of jazz harmony. Notice how the second bar of Ex. 6 echoes the first bar a whole-step lower. Ex. 7, meanwhile, cycles through a chain of dominant chords. Note the internal chromatic melody (*F#*, *F*, *E*, *F*).

Ex. 8, commonly used for intros and endings, features chords that descend chromatically beneath a common tone in the top voice.

Ex. 9 and Ex. 10 show how you might embellish a minor-key i-V-i progression. It’s common in jazz for a minor key’s V chord to contain the

raised or lowered 9th (the *D7b9* in both examples). Ex. 10 substitutes diminished-7th chords for the dominant. Rule: Substitute the diminished-7th harmony whose root is one half-step higher than that of the dominant chord it is replacing.

Finally, learn everything you know in all keys. If I don’t confuse myself by thinking about what I’m doing, on a good night I can spontaneously play just about every tune I know in any key. And remember, there’s no substitute for experience, so play, play, play. ■

Ex. 5 G6 G7#5#9 C6/9 Cm7 F9 G or Bm

Ex. 6 Am9 D7#5#9 Gm9 C7#5#9

Ex. 7 A13 D13 D7#5#9

Ex. 8 F#m7b5 Fm7 Cadd9 Ebm13 Dm7 Dbmaj7 Cadd9

Ex. 9 Gm9 D7b9 Gm7

Ex. 10 Gm9 D7b9 D#dim7 Gm7