

THE DEVELOPING JAZZ GUITARIST

Out With The Old, In With The New by Gerry Garcia

AUTHOR'S NOTE: If you are viewing this document electronically (i.e., as an MS Word or Adobe Acrobat file online), you may notice some irregularities in how the lyrics line up with their associated notes and chords in the music notation. The irregularities do not show up in hardcopy form, so I recommend printing this file in order to see an accurate representation of the accompaniment against the lyrics.

Prelude

Hello fellow guitarists, and welcome to my first JJG article on the adventures, frustrations, and joys of developing a jazz voice on your instrument. I'll be writing to apprentice jazz guitarists or intermediate guitarists of other genres who have a fair working knowledge of the fingerboard. The main thing is that it will be geared for players with a new found or rekindled interest in jazz harmony, and allow them to exercise that interest right away in some practical examples. As I write each installment, I hope to ask and answer some of the same questions as you might while we traverse the six-string sonic universe.

I'm at a point now in my ability where I've got most of the standard jazz guitar chords under my fingers and wish to start using them to create more modern and colorful sounding passages or chord melodies. The word "passages" is important here because I want to be careful not to try to voice a lengthy piece at the outset for fear of encountering the F-word ("frustration," that is). Above all, we want to maintain a nurturing pace and a positive outlook on our abilities, so let's begin with something short and easy.

"Auld Lang Syne"

Gmaj7		Gmaj6		Amin7		D7b9		G		Gmaj7		Gmaj6/9		C6/9	
3	3	2	3	5	3	5	7	5	3	3	7	10	12		12
3	3	3	3	5	4	4	4	3	3	7	10	13			
4	4	4	4	5	5	5	5	4	4	7	9	12			
4	2	5	4	5	4	5	9	5	5	9	12				
		0										12			

Should auld ac - quain - tance be for - got, a - nd ne - ver brought to mind? Should

Gmaj6/9		Gmaj7/D		C6		D7/9		Amin7		Dsus7/9		G	
10	10	12	12	8	10	8	10	10	8	5	5	3	3
10	11	8	10	10	8	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	12
9	9	9	9	7	9	10	9	5	5	5	5	5	
9	9	10	9	9	9	9	5	5	5	5	5	5	
	10	8		5									

ould ac - quain - tance be for - got, a - nd days of auld lang syne? And

Gmaj6/9	Gmaj7/D	C6	D7/9	Gmaj6/9	Dsus7/9	C6/9
10				12		
10	12 12 8	10 8 10		10 12	12 10	12
9	11	9 8	9	9	11 9	13
9	9	7	10	9		12
			9		10	12
	10	8				

days of auld lang syne, my dear, and days of auld lang syne. Should

Gmaj6/9	Gmaj7/D	C6	B7	Amin7	Dsus7/9	D7/9	D7	Gmaj9
10			7					3
10	12 12 8	10 8 10	10 10	8	5 5	5 5	3	3
9	11	9 8	8	5	5 5	5 5	5	4
9	9	7		5	5 5	4 4	4	7
			9		5 5	5 5	5	5
	10	8	7	5				3

auld ac- quain - tance be for - got, a - nd days of auld lang syne.

“Jeez, Auld Lang Syne?” you quip with eye-rolling sarcasm. Well, let’s just categorize it as another one of those Utility Songs (along with “Happy Birthday,” “The Stripper,” and other classic ditties) that you’re sure to find handy at some future event. It’s a nice traditional piece that was well conceived by 18th century British poet Robert Burns. The manner in which he used companionship and the past to stir the emotions in simple folk verse was truly insightful, giving us a timeless paradigm for change. I celebrated the New Year at least a dozen times the past week as I tried different chord forms, and this is the basic arrangement I settled on. The tune is typically done “in two,” and to keep things simple we’re going to do this in the key of G for now. Later, you’re going to transpose it to every key in your quest to become the next Pat Metheny, right? Yeah, right.

Digging In

Let’s start our analysis at the top then, which begins by stating the first note of the melody with the D on the third fret, second string. Being a ballad lover, my tendency is to do the piece rubato when I play it by myself, so I’ll occasionally draw out the end of measures, add or detract notes at whim, and use slides and hammer-ons in my phrasing. The point is to make sure you add interest at various points throughout the piece using your own sense of musical tension and release, as well as the devices that make the guitar the unique sounding instrument it is. Nevertheless, during New Year or other festive galas, things will be more rigid as partygoers launch into the song with its standard meter. Consequently, it’s advisable to practice the piece at least a couple times with that in mind.

The second melody note is sounded at the top of the G chord form I’ve chosen. In this piece, there are only a few more places where single notes state the melody, the remainder taken care of by the top of the fingerings I use. It’s a nice approach that begins to illustrate some of the harmonic devices we as jazz guitarists have at our disposal. I composed this fingerstyle on an acoustic guitar; you can always try to play it on a classical or electric guitar, add riffs or different substitutions, or use other inventions that further define your style. After all, that’s the whole idea.

As always, we want to use appropriate movement and lead our vocalists properly. So, as we go into the end of the first phrase, I wanted to make sure the pitch went up accordingly with the lyrics. Hence the mix of forms in the upper fingerboard. The chords that follow work the melody up and down in pitch along with the lyrics, ending with the extended Gmaj9 in the third fret, which is used more as a pleasant finish for all your fervent vocalists than to state the final melody note with its top G. Good musicians know the value of listening to as many vocal interpretations of a tune as possible as they work their own style into the melody and harmony. The importance of the lyrics will become greater as my series progresses to voicing more modern songs like rock and jazz standards.

Finale

This song was chosen for a reason, and it was primarily to avoid having to go into an analytical discourse in the previous section. (Call me lazy or efficient, either one works for me.) We could dissect the piece beyond all recognition, but everyone knows the words and melody by heart, so this first exercise is just a matter of playing the chord forms with your own feeling. We can get more technical and notationally correct in upcoming articles.

Okay, I won't remind you to transpose it to all keys, but I will ask you to please experiment with the harmony I laid down and see what you can come up with. I'll be back next issue with something a little more involved. Hope you enjoyed this maiden voyage and stay with us for those to come!