



## 7-String Fingerstyle Jazz

By Steve Herberman

Pioneering 7-string guitar legend George Van Eps used to say that guitarists play too many notes in their chords. Taking the maestro's cue I'll address three approaches to chordal playing which are a nice alternative to the standard block chord approach. You'll find that a few block chords mixed in as a varied approach are always refreshing.

For me, the most useful concept for improvising solo fingerstyle guitar consists of 2-line counterpoint with an occasional 3rd note to help complete the harmonic picture. Try this on your own by playing your favorite swing or bebop lines with the addition of a half note bass line below it.

Secondly I've included two examples of 3, 4 and 5-note chords. Still, the texture is light and open. Generally you'll see a bass note with an important chord tone or tones above it, all beneath an eighth-note based melodic line.

Lastly I've included two examples of inner-line motion, which I've covered in the previous month's columns. When I improvise solo guitar, these are the three basic concepts I rely on most often. I combine them frequently, sometimes in the same phrase.

I've chosen a very popular chord progression to illustrate these concepts; I-IV-III-VI-II-V-I. This chord pattern and its many variations can be seen in hundreds of standard tunes and is a logical extension of the common III-VI-II-V-I progression. Take note of any chromatic activity (half step motion) that occurs. Chromaticism was a big favorite of George Van Eps and for good reason; it's as natural as a flowing stream.

Play the examples with a relaxed swing feeling. Hold notes for their full duration as legato phrasing adds to the effortless quality we are all looking for in our music. If an awkward fingering is suggested, it's always in the interest of getting a fuller chord. I highly recommend the Harmonic Mechanism books by George Van Eps, published by Mel Bay Publications. Van Eps' exercises will run your hands through just about every conceivable fingering situation. I adapted many of the exercises in those books to the 7-string guitar, which really helped me learn how to approach the instrument.

I hope that these exercises will inspire and help you improve your improv of solo fingerstyle guitar.

Happy practicing and playing!  
Steve Herberman

1. These first two examples illustrate an 8th note melody line above a half note bass. Often times I try to flesh out the chord wherever possible such as in the last two bars of example #1. Many times I strive to get the lowest bass note possible which sometimes determines my note choice on the dominant 7th chord. For instance using an A7b9 instead of the tritone substitute Eb7 so I can sound the lowest note "A" on the seventh string. Using an open bass note can also give you a chance to rest the left hand for a second.

Guitar

C F Emi7 A7b9

let ring-----

Gtr.

Dmi7 Ab7 G13 Bb B7b9 C

let ring-----

2. The first two measures feature arpeggios above half note root motion. Note that the arpeggios used on the C7 and Bb9 contain extensions such as 13, #11, and 9. Try to let notes ring out as long as possible to achieve a legato sound. For the final G 6/9 chord notice that the lowest note is a 5th sounded a half a beat before the rest of the chord (G 6/9 with a low D below it.) This gives the chord some added depth yet still keeps its G major flavor.

The image displays two systems of guitar tablature. The first system covers four measures with the following chord changes: Gma7, C7, Bmi7, and Bb9. The second system covers four measures with the following chord changes: Ami7, D7b9, G, D7, G, and G6/9. Each measure includes a treble clef staff with a melodic line and a bass clef staff with a bass line. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4 on the strings. Arpeggios are shown with slanted lines and a '3' indicating a triplet. 'let ring' markings with dashed lines are placed below the notes in the first two measures of each system. The G6/9 chord in the final measure has a circled '5' on the bass line, indicating a low D note.

3. The concept for the following two examples is playing a melody above half note chords or intervals which create a steady pulse. Since example #3 is in 3/4 time the pulse is created by using dotted half notes. Dotted quarter notes or quarter notes could have also been used but are generally more difficult to play beneath an active melody. Nice melodies can be created by arpeggiating certain chord voicings as shown here in the first two bars. In bars 5 and 6 (Emi9 to A13) a nice melody is achieved by adding a note a 1/2 step below a chord tone. In bar 5 this note is the C# and in bar 6 the note Bb. In measure 3 on the last two notes roll the 4th finger of the left hand to get the C# and F# notes.

Gtr.

**Dma<sup>7</sup>**      **G7#11**      **F#mi<sup>7</sup>**      **B+7b9** <sup>4</sup>

let ring-----| let ring-----|

TAB

Gtr.

**Emi<sup>9</sup>**      **A<sup>13</sup>**      **Dma<sup>9</sup>**

TAB

4 Notice the descending chromatic line in the middle voice beginning on the C note in bar 1. On the Eb+7 the 1st finger needs to form a barre in order to play the last 8th note (Db) in the measure. It's a good idea to practice playing chords like beat 1 of bar 3, using the 7th string within the first few frets to build up left hand strength. It also gives the chords a huge sound using bass notes in that register. The final Abma13#11 builds gradually into a 6 note chord.

Gtr.

A<sup>b</sup>      D<sup>b</sup>7      Cmi<sup>7</sup>      F<sup>7</sup>

T  
A  
B

Gtr.

B<sup>b</sup>mi<sup>7</sup>      E<sup>b</sup>+7      A<sup>b</sup>ma<sup>13</sup>#11

let ring-----|      let ring-----|

T  
A  
B

5. These last two examples are a continuation of the inner line approach detailed in the May through July issues of Guitar Sessions only this time for 7 string guitar. The following example contains many slurs which help give the guitar a horn-like sound. Notice again how the low Bb on the 7th string 1st fret is used instead of the Bb on the 6th string. This keeps the sound full and rich.

Gtr.

**E<sup>b</sup>ma<sup>7</sup>**      **A<sup>b</sup>ma<sup>7</sup>**      **Gmi<sup>7</sup>**      **C<sup>7</sup>b<sup>9</sup>**

T  
A  
B

Gtr.

**Fmi<sup>7</sup>**      **B<sup>b</sup>7<sup>#9</sup>**      **E<sup>b</sup>ma<sup>13</sup>**

T  
A  
B

6. This example has a definite blues feel to it and gives another chance to practice slurs and also slides. In bar 1 on beats 1 and 3 slide into the note G from 1/2 step below. In bar 2 on the first beat triplet make sure you hammer-on and then slide using the 4th finger. Beat 3 of measure 2 employs the same technique only with the 3rd finger. In the last measure on the first beat slide into both the Bb and D notes from 1/2 step below.

Gtr.

The image shows two systems of guitar sheet music. The first system consists of four measures with the following chords:  $B^{\flat}6$ ,  $E^{\flat}7$ ,  $Dmi^7$ ,  $G7^{\flat}9$ , and  $D^{\flat}9$ . The second system consists of four measures with the following chords:  $Cmi^9$ ,  $F^7$ ,  $B^{\flat}$ ,  $B^9$ , and  $B^{\flat}9$ . The music is written for guitar (Gtr.) and includes triplets, slurs, and slides in both the treble and bass staves. The bass staff includes fret numbers and some specific techniques like hammer-ons and slides.