

I. Intro

This is not really a “method” book, per se.

I just happened to like the title.

What it is, is a series of exercises and tips, and a particular manner of introducing conceptual material that I have been using, over many years, with my students at Mohawk College and with my private students at my home. I have found that these particular exercises, and this manner of presentation, work quite well. I still use many of the exercises myself when working on new material. I will be using these concepts for as long as I continue to play the guitar. Many of my students seem to have found this approach useful too. I figure that, at the very least, if I write this book out now, then I can spare my students the agony of trying to decipher my illegible hand scrawled notes, and that I can also spare myself the agony of having to write out the same stuff over and over again.

This book can not teach you how to improvise jazz on the guitar. Only you can do that. The book is merely aimed at helping your brain, your ears, and your hands learn to hear/play some useful musical sounds, so that you can learn to play what you hear, in real time, on the guitar, while you’re hearing it. My intent is to help you learn to hear things that you can not hear now, and to help enable you to play them on the guitar once you can hear them.

Disclaimer

I am by no means an authority on the guitar, on jazz, on music education, on music theory, etc, etc. (And I’m definitely no master of English grammar! - Pun intended.) I have no degree from any institution. I did study for three and a half years at Berklee College Of Music in the early 1970’s, and I have taken some studies since then. But that is all. I am simply a pretty good player, with years of experience on the bandstand, in the studio, and in the classroom. Take everything I say with a grain of salt, and if something I say does not jibe with something else you run across, then do some research on your own to find out your own truth.

Although I do start at square one, this book really assumes that you can already play, at least a little.

I assume that you have already developed the ability (and the strength necessary) in your fretting hand, to play basic open-position chord-forms and “barre chords”.

It is beyond the scope of this book to deal with the basics of musical literacy. I will not be covering the topics of elementary music reading; such as simple rhythms, pitch recognition on the staff, the conventions of musical form, etc., in any depth. Nor will I be covering things like key signatures, time signatures, etc.

There are several very good books on the market already that can do a much better job of dealing with these subjects than I can. I recommend:

Rudiments of Music, by Robert W. Ottman, Frank D. Mainous (Contributor), Published by Prentice Hall.

or

Fundamentals of Music, by Earl Henry, also Published by Prentice Hall.

I assume that you already know how to read music, at least a little bit. You don’t have to be a good sight-reader yet, but you should be capable of figuring out how to play the examples that are written out on the treble clef staff without too much difficulty. You should know the names of the lines and spaces on both the treble clef and bass clef staves and how to read and execute most simple rhythms. I will not be using tablature.

If you do not yet have these skills, I suggest that you spend some time with a good teacher for beginners. I learned quite a lot about the guitar from William Leavitt’s wonderful series of books called “A Modern Method For Guitar”, Volumes 1, 2, and 3 (Berklee College of Music Press) (aka “The Berklee Books”), when I was a student at Berklee. Try to find a teacher who uses these books to get you started. They are available nowadays through Hal Leonard Publishing.

William Leavitt also wrote a couple of books designed to help with Position-Style sight-reading. “Reading Studies For Guitar”, and “Advanced Reading Studies For Guitar”.

I also highly recommend the following two books for developing skill in reading, and for learning how to accurately feel and execute the types of syncopated rhythms found in jazz and popular music:

Modern Reading Text In 4/4, by Louis Bellson, Published by Bellwin Mills.

and

Melodic Rhythms For Guitar, also by William G. Leavitt.

Therefore, you should consider basic musical literacy (i.e. pitch recognition on the staff, being able to read simple rhythms, understanding everyday time signatures, understanding key signatures, understanding formal devices such as repeat signs, codas and the like, etc., etc.) to be a pre-requisite for using this book.

My book is not a harmony book. This subject is well beyond the scope of my book. If you have never formally studied jazz harmony, or classical harmony, you may get rather confused, rather quickly, with this book of mine. My book is more about applying the things you have already learned about harmony and composition to the guitar, than it is about learning them in the first place.

Here are some other book suggestions on the topics of harmony, jazz improvisation, and composition:

The Jazz Language by Dan Haerle, Jamey Aebersold Press.

Modern Harmonic Progression by Allen Michalek - Humber College Press (Toronto).

[Al Michalek was a student, and then later a teacher, at Berklee. He moved to Toronto in the early 1970's to head up the new jazz department at Humber College. Al's book is the hardcopy version of Berklee's jazz-harmony course. I learned all this stuff in lectures at Berklee. I'm glad Al wrote it all down, because I lost all my notes! This book is rather hard to find though. As far as I know it is only available from the Humber College Book Store (416-675-6622, Ex. 3236). You might also try Dave Snider Music (416) 483-5825.]

The Jazz Theory Book, by Mark Levine, Hal Leonard Publishing.

The Jazz Piano Book, by Mark Levine, Hal Leonard Publishing

The Chord-Scale Theory And Jazz Harmony, by Nettles and Graf, Advance Music.

Modern Harmonic Technique, by Gordon Delamont, Kendor Publishing.

[A great text/workbook of Romantic Era harmony. Written with jazz and popular musicians in mind.]

Modern Arranging Technique, by Gordon Delamont, Kendor Publishing. [All of GD's books are great.]

The Craft Of Musical Composition, by Paul Hindemith. Schott Publishing.

Fundamentals Of Musical Composition, by Arnold Schoenberg, Faber and Faber.

I assume that you enjoy jazz, are listening intently to several jazz artists, and are presently attempting to imitate some of the sounds you are listening to. If you don't actually listen to any jazz, then none of this will make any sense at all. We will be studying the things that jazz musicians deal with on a technical level, but if you've never heard any jazz, you won't have a clue as to what these techniques are really used for. The techniques used in this book can be applied to many types of music that involve improvisation, including popular music and rock, but if you don't spend the requisite amount of time studying these ideas within a traditional jazz setting, you will most likely be missing the point(s).

Like I said earlier, I DO start at square one with most topics, but it's more in the sense of re-learning some of the basic stuff that most novice guitar players always learn, with an eye towards developing an advanced improviser's technique. The book is not really intended for absolute novices. If you are an extremely tenacious, strong willed beginner (or just a glutton for punishment), you may have some luck just diving right in. But don't say I didn't warn you. Remember... This book was intended for people who are studying one-on-one with me directly.

There is at least a lifetime's worth of work suggested within these pages. Don't be real hard on yourself if you don't "master" some of the concepts, or the exercises, within a week or two. This is a very gradual process and you are just starting out. Progress does take time. Once they are understood, these ideas will begin

to gradually work their way into your playing, and they will stay with you for as long as you continue to play music on the guitar. It is more important to understand the concept behind a particular set of exercises than it is to be able to flawlessly execute the material at the speed of light, although virtuosity is nice too!

Feel free to jump ahead to any chapter, or sub-chapter, in this book that interests you. As a matter of fact you will HAVE TO do just that if you want to use this book successfully. I have intentionally over compartmentalized these subjects in an effort to achieve a type of continuity in the subject matter. In reality, music making is a “holistic” process drawing on many disparate disciplines at once.

For example, my chapter, Chords: Construction / Execution / Basic Harmony begins simply enough, with the construction of the basic triads and some movable chord-forms for them on the guitar. But it might not be necessary for you, at this point in time, to get into all of the triad inversions that I present next. Once you know the basic triadic chord-forms it will probably be better for you to move on to the 7th-chords. My intent was to explore triads, but it’s probably better to get a handle on 7th chords so that you can jam with people, on real jazz tunes, as soon as possible. You can always come back to triad inversions at a later time.

So....

- As soon as you know how to play some chord-forms, you should try to learn the chords to some standard tunes. Then check out the next topic in the book about chords.
- As soon as you know how to arpeggiate a triad, you should try to improvise a chord-tone melody over a standard tune’s progression, then jump ahead to the 7th-chord arpeggios section, etc.
- As soon as you know how to play a few melodies by ear, you should try to learn some tunes out of a fake book also. Then try to improvise by ear. Etc.

Etc.

You will have to use the Table Of Contents as you would use an index. For example, if you’re working on a tune, and you get an idea that pentatonic scales might useful, then have a look in the TOC and you will probably find a sub-heading about pentatonics in there somewhere. Etc.

If your goal is to become a better *jazz musician*, then, at ALL times, you should be working on *repertoire*.

If you don’t know any tunes, then you really don’t know how to play anything, do you?

When you learn about chords, try to learn about the chords *of a tune*. When you learn about scales, try to learn about the scales involved *in a tune*. When you work on technique, work on the technique needed to *play a tune*. Etc.

There are several good “fake” books on the market. You will need at least one of them while working through my book. A fake book is a collection of “lead sheets”. A lead sheet is a simple sketch of the most important aspects of a tune, allowing a musician (or group of musicians) to make-up an arrangement, on the spot, from the information provided. The term “lead-sheet” comes from the practice within jazz big bands of referring to the highest note in the trumpet, trombone, or saxophone sections as the “lead”. The lead part is usually the melody. Everyone else in the section follows the lead player for phrasing and dynamics, etc. A lead-sheet consists of the melody (usually written in the treble clef in concert pitch), and a set of chord-symbols (which is a shorthand notation that describes a basic harmonization for the tune).

In my experience, the two fake books that are the most popular among music students everywhere are: The Real Book (an obvious play on words) - originally written by anonymous music students in Boston, circa 1974. Now published by Hal Leonard.

and

The New Real Book (Vols. 1-3) - published by The Sher Music Co.

The Real Book was first put together in the mid 1970’s at Berklee College of Music by some students there. It caught on everywhere because of its great selection of tunes. The sellers of the RB did not pay any royalties to the owners of the compositions, so, technically, it was illegal. The RB had some other problems too though. There were *many* mistakes; wrong chords, wrong melody notes, wrong keys, wrong forms, etc.

The makers of the New Real Book attempted to address the problems of the original. They pay royalties to the composers. The tunes are very well researched and transcribed correctly. However, the selection of tunes is not as representative of the most important jazz compositions as the original Real Book’s selection was. If you buy all three of the NRB’s volumes you will have a nice selection of tunes though.

But Hal Leonard publishing has recently released the original RB themselves, and they’ve corrected most of the problems listed above. If you’re on a tight budget, my 1st choice would be the Hal Leonard Real Book (“6th Edition”). As a matter of fact, many of the exercises in my book refer directly to lead sheets from the Real Book. In many ways then, you should consider the Real Book to be a supplementary text to my book.

What type of guitar player needs the stuff in this book?

Not every jazz guitar player needs to know anything about a lot of the stuff I present in this book. There have been many great, and just plain real good, guitarists who know next to nothing of a lot of this stuff. There are many great guitar players who do know a lot of this stuff too. As far as I am concerned, if you can play what you hear and you hear some interesting things, then I would probably enjoy your playing. How a musician gets himself to that point is different for everyone. The exercises and the concepts presented here are intended to be more-or-less universal. But let's face it, this is my own approach. This is how *I* learned how to play the things that *I* know how to play, and this is how *I* think about music on the guitar. You might have a totally different way of conceptualizing music in your own mind. Lots of great players do.

For example: Wes Montgomery supposedly could not read music. When I asked Ed Bickert and Lenny Breau what methods they used to harmonize melodies, they both replied; "I just play what I hear." It is unlikely that Jimmy Hendrix or Stevie Ray Vaughan spent a lot of time playing chord-tone melodies on *All The Things You Are*. Pat Metheny holds his pick completely differently from the method I espouse. Howard Roberts held his pick another way. Scott Henderson is probably not too concerned with Freddie Green style comping. Etc. Etc. Etc.

But what every one of these gentlemen has had to come to grips with is:

- how to hear a melody in their head.
- how to hear the chords of the tunes they perform.
- how to map out several places where the notes they are hearing can be found on the guitar, with several ways of executing those notes.
- how to develop some way to communicate their ideas to the other musicians they have to play with.

The last of these needs is met quite nicely by learning to read and write standard musical notation. But there are other ways that musicians can communicate with each other, once they have their ears together. This book attempts to address the other needs, but in a very round about way. Much of the material in this book is preparatory. It is not until the end of this book that I have a chapter called "Playing What You Hear". I suggest you have a look at this chapter *first*, and if it presents no real challenges to you, then I would say that you may have no real need for this book. Perhaps you should be writing your own!

Quite frankly, I don't know exactly how Wes and Lenny and Ed and Jimmy and Stevie, etc. all learned how to hear, and to play, the great stuff that they did. Most jazz and pop musicians spend a long time imitating their idols. That's a BIG part of it. But, every musician has to figure out how to extract the concepts behind the music they've stolen from others, in order to create their own music. On a certain level, this book is my own distillation of the concepts and principles that I think I have gleaned from the musicians that are my own influences.

Why do you need to know a zillion different ways to play the same chord?

You don't. You can get by quite nicely with one or two. But if you want to have some choice, and you have a desire to go beyond the ordinary run-of-the-mill stuff you hear everybody else doing, you should attempt to do some exploring of your own. Exploring harmony will also help you to hear more things earlier on in your development. You are, after all, playing, and listening to, more than one note at a time when you play a chord. Saves time!

Why do you need to know a zillion different ways to play the same scale or arpeggio?

You don't. You can get by with 3 or 4 fingerings. But if you are more adventurous than the average guitarist, you will want to explore more of the possibilities. The more fingerings you investigate, the more likely it is that you will be able to find the best fingering for whatever it is that you are trying to play. You might even learn to hear some new things in the process.

Why do you need to know about all of the modes of all of these scales? Eg. Why do you need to learn 7 modes when you could just learn 1 major, or minor, scale?

You don't. Modal thinking is just another way of exploring things.

Etc.

You don't have to do any of the things suggested in this book to be a great guitar player. But if you do want to be a great player, *I* think it's worth exploring as many avenues as you can.

I hope you find the material in this book, and the way it is presented, of some help to you in achieving your own musical goals.

Good luck!