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CD

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Hank Jones
Gary Burton
Pat Metheny
Jimmy Bruno
Robert Conti, John Stein
Dave Glasser, Peter Leitch
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Pat
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Henry Johnson

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& Analysis:**
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Vol. 4, Number 4
Summer 2004
USA \$12.95,
Magazine & CD
Canada \$17.95

Publisher: Eric Nemeyer
Editor: John Barrett, Jr.
Advertising Sales: Jamie Cos
Marketing: Lisa Powers
Circulation: Richard Kahn
Proof Reading: Bill Donaldson, Ellen Kahn
Imaging, Technical: Joe Patitucci

Columnists: Dr. Mike Bogle; Todd Coolman; Greg Fishman; Don Glasgo, Rick Helzer, Mel Martin, Marco Pignataro, Paul Combs, Richie Zelon, Marc Stefani.

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Jazz Improv® (ISSN 1080-3572) Magazine is published quarterly by E.S. Proteus, Inc., 491 Old York Road, Jenkintown, PA 19046 USA. Telephone: 215-887-8808; Fax: 215-887-8803; E-mail: jazz@jazzimprov.com Website: www.jazzimprov.com

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Please allow up to eight weeks for processing subscriptions and changes of address notifications. Postmaster: send address changes to *Jazz Improv*, P.O. Box 26770, Elkins Park, PA 19027 USA.

Jazz Improv® Volume 4, Number 4

ISSN: 1080-3572

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**Companion CD**

12 What's On The CD?

Cover—Interviews & Profiles

- 38 **Feature: In Depth Exploration—An Interview With Pat Metheny** by Eric Nemeyer
- 65 **Pat Metheny Albums & Recorded Appearances, Researched & Compiled** by John Barrett, Jr.
- 68 **Feature: Searching for Charlie Christian** by Dr. Wayne Goins

Interviews—Guitarists

- 147 Roni Ben-Hur
149 Jimmy Bruno
152 Robert Conti
155 Chris Cortez
159 Carl Filippiak
161 Bruce Foreman
162 Grant Green, Jr.
163 Tom Guarna
164 Ken Hatfield
166 Henry Johnson
169 Peter Leitch
171 Chuck Loeb
173 Doug Munro
178 Gil Parris
180 John Stein
182 Dave Stryker

Interviews—Vocalists

- 78 Nneena Freelon
82 Carmen Lundy
89 Jackie Ryan
96 Jackie Allen
98 Karrin Allyson
99 Jane Blackstone

*(Continued on page 8)***REGISTERED TRADEMARK**

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Jazz Improv's goal is to provide music, ideas and motivation, to help jazz enthusiasts, students and musicians develop their skills, understanding, ability to communicate and make music, and to encourage musical participation, interest in, and support of jazz. Toward that goal, *Jazz Improv* publishes songs to play and note-for-note transcriptions of improvised solos as recorded by master practitioners of the

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Carl Filipiak

Interview with Carl Filipiak

March 2004

Taken by: Jazz Improv

JJ: Discuss your association with Bob Berg who played on your recent CD. How specifically did his style and music complement yours?

CF: I was introduced to Bob Berg in '91 by Dennis Chambers. He invited me to New York for the weekend to hang out and hear him record his first solo album, *Getting Even*, and Bob was playing on it. I really wanted to have Bob play sax on my next record so on a break I asked him if he would be available in January. He asked me what week I had in mind, and I said "the week that you're open," so I arranged the recording around his schedule. It was as easy as asking, and I'm very aware of how fortunate I am to have had him play on several of my CDs. Having Bob play on *Right on Time*, raised the bar line for my playing and helped my music reach another level. Bob played great and it was a pleasure to watch him work. In the studio, he immediately focused on getting a good sound and knew just what he wanted. When it came time to play, he was all business and I learned many things by being an observer. Stylistically he came from a place that resonated well with my music; I loved jazz and bop and he was the real thing. The tunes he played on gave him plenty of space to play and it was in a context that he was certainly familiar with. I also dug his chromatic ideas. But, the thing that I remember most is that he brought his son with him and I always thought that was beautiful —just like his playing.

JJ: How specifically did drummer Dennis Chambers inspire and complement your own playing on your latest album?

CF: *Looking Forward Looking Back* was a departure from my previous CDs. Dennis came in and played the perfect part. Even though he's noted for his groove and chops, it was great to hear him play brushes on "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat". I thought that was awesome and it really opened up the tune. There is also a certain conviction in his playing that comes through and is always inspiring

to hear. It's been an honor to work with someone who has literally played with some of the best guitarists on the planet. He's also one of the most imaginative players out there. On top of it all, Dennis is probably one of the most giving persons that you'll ever meet. He's got a big heart, and that's probably where all his playing is coming from.

JJ: Who or what inspired you to play guitar and pursue a career in music?



Photo courtesy of Carl Filipiak

CF: The sound of the guitar always fascinated me. I thought it was the coolest thing I ever heard and it took years for me to save up enough money from my paper route to buy my first electric guitar (which I still own!). By then I was 13 years old (1963) and I heard the Beatles for the first time and it was magical. That was it for me... and within a year or two I heard George Benson, Pat Martino and Wes Montgomery, and I was determined to figure out what they were doing. Well it's been about 40 years and I'm still trying!

The 60's were a great time to get started on guitar and a lot of that music is still mean-

ingful to me. I've been blessed with great teachers, and my wife and family have been very supportive. My career in music was a very natural transition for me and arose from my passion and perseverance for playing what I loved.

JJ: What is the Baltimore/Washington music scene like, and how does it work for you?

CF: Baltimore and Washington, while only 50 miles apart, are two totally different scenes. While I only perform a few times a year in DC at Blues Alley and The Smithsonian's Jazz Café, I feel their jazz scene is definitely more thriving. Baltimore has a ton of great players, but limited venues to perform in. I am fortunate to have cultivated an audience that supports my music. I couldn't have a better or more diverse band and I definitely couldn't do it without them. My wife and I promote our gigs by e-mail, web site, mailing lists, ads, telephone calls, and any radio support we can get to increase our chances of success - if you don't make it happen, "it ain't happenin'!" Also, I'm not bound to playing traditional jazz. My interests include rock as well, and I'm totally into Hendrix. While that may close some doors to be sure, I feel that many more open and it definitely contributes to being able to support yourself in music. In addition to performing, I teach about 20 students a week, run a small record label, do some clinics for Fender Guitars, and write books on guitar; my latest one for Mel Bay Publications. While it seems like diversity is an answer to making it happen here, I honestly feel that it's all music, and playing standards in a jazz trio is just as cool as playing a night of Hendrix. So far, it's working.

JJ: Discuss a couple of the artists who have had the most impact on your life and playing. Specifically define how or what it was that was so moving.

CF: Pat Metheny, Jeff Beck, Wes Montgomery, Jimi Hendrix, Miles Davis and John Scofield are just a few artists that have influenced my playing and attitude toward music. While they each have done it in different ways, they all have one thing in common be-

(Continued on page 160)

(Carl Filipiak, continued from page 159)

sides their ability to change music and challenge our ears and minds. They are uncompromising in all aspects of their playing. From Pat changing the sound of jazz guitar, Beck saying more with one note than most of us with a hundred, Wes using his thumb, Hendrix playing sounds, Miles changing music many times, and Scofield taking jazz guitar to new places, how can you *not* be inspired! Somehow, that uncompromising attitude comes across as that indefinable thing that I experience when I hear any great musician play. To be able to move people like I have been moved would definitely be one of three wishes. The other two would be...better not, this is a jazz magazine.

JJ: What approach do you take to teaching music in general and improvisation in particular?

CF: My approach deals with each student individually. I have quite a diverse group of students with interests ranging from jazz to rock. A few questions prior to the first lesson can reveal quite a bit of information about their interests and what level the student is on. It's important to know what someone loves, because that's going to keep them motivated. Teaching improvisation can be very challenging and I try to balance the amount of information needed so as not to overload the student. For example, I'll reduce most modes and scales to four parent scales. While I also stress the importance of learning the vocabulary, an equal amount of time is devoted to playing. You're not only hearing what you are playing, but you're internalizing a tune as well. And that is something I can't stress enough – the importance of form. The ultimate goal is to take all this information and make music out of it.

It's awesome to see students develop into great players. It's also cool to see rock players take an interest in jazz, and some of my die-hard jazz players appreciate the Beatles or Hendrix ...and turning students on to new things is what it's all about.

JJ: How was your teaching endeavor influenced by your artistry?

CF: I have learned how to articulate some musical concepts in a fairly efficient and direct way. I usually give an explanation of why something works and at the same time describe how it can be used. Some things are conveyed quite well with an analogy, but most of the time hearing it played says it all. I'll use whatever approach is necessary to get some-

one to play. I would like to think that the same kind of focus and clarity helps to shape my own music.

JJ: Discuss the temptation to focus on technique over music. How have you worked to balance the two?

CF: While one needs a certain amount of technique to convey ideas, the idea is to convey music, not technique. I have been known to be guilty on this one – but I honestly believe my last two CD's have been more musical than my others. One thing I'll do is listen to the track I'm to play on and let the rhythm section influence my solo, as opposed to trying to play "guitar" over it. I'll also try to remember that some of my favorite musicians

weren't exactly noted for being "the fastest", but, the music they made was timeless. Jim Hall, George Harrison and Miles Davis are just a few greats that come to mind.

JJ: Players are seeking their own sound.

How do they develop that – isn't it much more than the notes and the music?

CF: I'll try to answer this even though I'm still in search of my own sound. While it is more than the notes, note choice is a big part of our musical identification. Some players are easily identified by their unique rhythmic and/or harmonic sense. I think the key word is "unique" and it seems that some of the most easily identifiable players have taken their individual "quirks" and even their shortcomings and made it a part of how they sound. But I think the most important thing to remember is that whether you are listened to or not, is dependant upon your tone. Welcome to the guitarist's eternal quest for the perfect sound...

JJ: What significant accomplishments, additions or changes would you like your life and music to include in five years?

CF: This is easy...I'm fairly content in my life. It would be nice to have an opportunity to be a better writer and do another book with Mel Bay. I'd also like to see my music get a little wider recognition and do a tour with Dennis Chambers.

JJ: How do you want your music to influence people – what do you want it to say or do?

CF: want it to say that I'm playing every note on here because I love the music and I'm detached from the outcome.

JJ: Could you discuss what ideas or activities outside of your music you engage in and how they provide fulfillment for you?

CF: My wife and I love having our family over for dinner during the holidays and we have an annual Christmas party for our friends and musicians. My marriage, family and friends are what it's all about. Any excuse to have pasta is fine with me and by now you've probably figured out I'm Italian.

JJ: What ideas or words of wisdom have significantly impacted your awareness and sensitivity, and provide principles by which you live.

CF: Do what you love. Don't define yourself by the gig. Sometimes not getting what you want is a stroke of luck. Think about what it is you want. Do something about. Let it go. Nothing is real. Nothing to get hung about. I never want to hear smooth jazz again!

Visit me on the web at:
www.carlfilipliak.com

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(Henry Johnson, continued from page 168)

JJ: What are your general thoughts regarding the excessive value placed on scales, modes, and arpeggios for improvising?

HJ: These are tools to learn how to get around on your instrument, these tools in themselves will not teach you how to play music. Modes? When you look at the white keys on a piano, there's all your modes. And logic tells you that all the modes are based off a "C" major scale with different starting notes. Why not put more time into learning a song than learning to play the different degrees of a major scale? On a gig you'll be asked to play "Cottontail", not a Phrygian love song.

JJ: You have a real passion for seeing jazz as a unique art form preserved and exposed to younger musicians, because things were considerably different when you were growing up and learning to play. Any advice to educators and aspiring players?

HJ: Keep studying the recordings of those before you. When you study John Coltrane, start at his first recording and work your way through his history. You can't start studying him at the "Impressions" period and understand how he got to that point. Go out and see players perform live because one can give you a description, but one cannot give you an experience.

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Rock/Fusion Improvising Taught by Carl Filipiak

ISBN: 0-7866-7142-4. Paperback. Retail List: \$17.95. 40 pages.

Published 2004 by Mel Bay Publications, Inc. #4 Industrial Drive, Pacific, MO 63039.

Website: www.melbay.com

Review by Winthrop Bedford

What makes *Rock Fusion Improvising* a practical and valuable resource is that Filipiak is an active artist, practitioner, and teacher, and the contents of this book are a function his years of experience. Filipiak grew up listening to and being inspired by fusion music in the late 1960s and early 1970s—when the genre was prolifically emerging. Fusion, as the word suggests, draws from a variety of styles of music rock, R&B, funk, Latin, jazz and so on. The leading contributors to this music at its inception included Miles Davis, Mahavishnu Orchestra (led by guitarist John McLaughlin), Chick Corea's Return To Forever, Weather Report (led by keyboardist Joe Zawinul, and saxophonist Wayne Shorter), Pat Metheny and others.

Filipek astutely points out that by learning the music, the ideas, the tunes in this book, the results will, in general, spill over into the user's overall musical understanding and ability. The assimilation of the ideas herein are applicable to learning and performing the expansive repertoire of jazz and fusion tunes.

In *Rock/Fusion Improvising* Filipiak addresses some of the questions which he is most frequently asked by his students. The book is packaged with a CD, and the tracks correspond to the exercise and music throughout the book. The book is accessible for all levels. There are both chord symbols (with notation on what frets to use) TAB notation, and music (treble staff) throughout the book.

The first chapters focus on harmony and Intervallic Harmony. He uses the Dorian scale to demonstrate voicings using fourths, and the employment of intervals (seconds, sevenths, thirds, fourths) to create these chords. All of the examples may be heard on the companion CD. In the chapter on Melody, Filipiak employs fourths and pentatonics, with the Dorian scale as the foundation. He demonstrates several patterns and ways of expressing fourth intervals here.

Most of the ideas are presented by employing eighth note, eighth note triplet and quarter note triplet notation in the chapters dealing with triad, sequences and intervals. Filipiak presents the modal triad and modal seventh chords (scale tone triads and scale tone seventh chords) in relation to C (or D Dorian). This provides useful perspective for users who are getting acquainted with how a given chord relates harmonically, and the most basic tonality or place from which it originates. He also presents essential scales and simple application for the diminished scale, half step-whole step diminished scale, melodic minor scale, and how and why they work.

In the chapter "Imaginary Chords and Some Other Cool Stuff" you'll find odd note groupings (rhythmically groups of five and seven and so on), triad pairs (the use of neighboring triads), and an exercise on the changes to John Coltrane's "Giant Steps." Filipiak briefly addresses slash chords (triads over bass tones), Odd Time Signatures and assorted grooves and basic jazz song forms. There is also a brief and useful summary "Looking Back" at the end of each chapter.

Carl Filipiak has earned his success by being both a highly skilled and accomplished artist, composer and importantly in the music industry, an astute business person. He has released five albums on his own label, Geometric Records. Those albums have featured some of the leading contributors to this music including Bob Berg and Gary Thomas on tenor sax, Dennis Chambers on drums, Will Calhoun on bass.

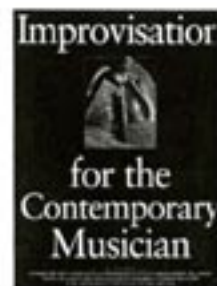
Rock/Fusion Improvising is one of twelve books in the Series entitled "Mel Bay's Private Lessons." Others in the series include Jimmy Bruno: The Art of Picking; Mimi Fox: Guitar Arpeggio Studies on Jazz Standards; Vic Juris: Modern Chords Advanced Harmony For Guitar. Filipiak's *Rock Fusion Improvising* is a handy way to get a quick overview and get started with the rhythmic, melodic and harmonic vocabulary that compose this music.

Improvisation for the Contemporary Musician

By Arnie Berle. 72 pages. Published by Amsco Publications, A Division of Music Sales Corporation, New York, NY. ISBN: 0-8256-1642-5. Retail List: \$17.95.

REVIEWED BY
MICHELLE LABIENEC-DESPARD

Those of you learning or teaching the art of improvisation, know how difficult each task is. Finding a method to address this is very easy because there are so many out there. However, finding the right one is a constant challenge for the musician and the teacher. Musician, teacher, and author Arnie Berle has written a method for this endeavor called *Improvisation for the Contemporary Musician* published by Amsco Publi-



cations, part of Music Sales Corporation. This book is very good, though I personally haven't taught from it. In this step by step approach, Berle achieves the tasks that he set forth to accomplish. In the Preface, Berle addresses the group to whom this method is for and explains the goals of this book. It is for those who want to learn how to improvise, not for those who already know how. He wrote this book for all the people who know their scales, arpeggios, chords, and who also know their licks and patterns but still can't improvise. This method applies those skills to actual songs in a systematic fashion thus weaning one from being glued to the notes on the page.

He has three steps for improvisation. Step one is to simply alter the melody by changing the rhythm. Step two is adding notes to the original melody - or embellishing a melody. Step three is learning how to use chord tones in order to move further away from the melody. With all that said - here is how he applies these steps. He takes the first eight measures of a standard tune and applies each step to those eight bars. Berle begins with one general example which is *Little Brown Jug* then moves into the five standards of *Everything Happens to Me*, *Poika Dots and Moonbeams*, *Imagination*, *Aren't You Glad You're You?*, and *It's the Talk of the Town*. Each improvisational step is demonstrated in the eight bar example followed by an analysis that explains the author's alterations. For example, in *Everything Happens to Me*, the first eight bars of the original melody are stated. In Variation No. 1 the notes are the same but the rhythm is now different. This is followed by the analysis which explains and compares how it changed from the original melody. Mr. Berle then shows three more variations. This format continues for each standard piece thus completing the step one portion.

Step two of this method which is adding notes to the melody, is applied in the same exact way. In the beginning of this section, Berle shows the approach tones above and below each scale degree of the C major scale. This is where things become a little more detailed. Berle includes a "Points to Remember" section where there is a five note melody with some variations. These variations are examples of how to use the approach tones. After this, Berle goes on with the same exact format used for step one. He takes *Little Brown Jug* again and now has embellished the melody. This step by step format is