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Using Octaves, Chords To Build Your Guitar Solo

When we play a solo, we try to tell a story. It's good to have a beginning, middle and end, and it can be effective to gradually build the excitement in your story (or solo). As guitarists (or any instrumentalists, for that matter), we can look to Wes Montgomery (1923-'68), one of the greatest storytellers in the history of jazz, and learn from how he built his solos. He often would begin his solos with single-note lines, followed by octaves in the middle, and finish with chords or chords-and-octave combinations. His improvisations often sounded like a big band building up to a final shout chorus.

When playing octaves on the guitar, Montgomery, George Benson and others often use fingers 1 and 3 on octaves built above the notes on the low E and A strings, and fingers 1 and 4 on the octaves built above the notes on the D and G strings. The string between the octave is muted. I use fingers 1 and 4 for all octaves, as I like how it lays on the guitar, and I find it works better for me. Try experimenting and use what works best for you. A lot of Montgomery's sound comes from his plucking the strings with his right thumb, and playing octaves with your thumb gives a very rich tone.

The following song, my "Blues For Wes

#2," is an example of an idea you might try incorporating into your own playing for the last chorus of a blues, where you are doing a call-and-response between a simple octave phrase, followed by a chordal stab, similar to the above-mentioned shout chorus.

Try playing the octave starting in 8th position with the low F on the A string and the F an octave above on the G string. Then go to 6th position and play the A \flat on the D and B strings. Go back up to 8th position for the next note, B \flat (again on the D and B strings). Then the B \flat 13 chord stab is played in 6th position on the "and" of 2 on the top four strings. Next, play the same three-note phrase, only move over a string set, starting the B \flat octave on the D and B strings on the "and" of 3 in the first measure. Continue this motif leading into each chord until you get to measure 9, where you play an E \flat major arpeggio phrase over the Cm-F7+ progression in measures 9 and 10, followed by the descending dominant turnaround starting on D \flat 13 on beat 3 of measure 11.

You also can try adding your own improvisation while keeping the chord stabs consistent. This is a nice call-and-response way to build your solo and finish with an exclamation mark!

Of course, this one idea barely scratches the surface of Montgomery's artistry. Try using this idea inspired by Montgomery to build your solo, and perhaps it will help to inspire you to tell your own story. **DB**

Dave Stryker recently launched his online Jazz Guitar School at artistworks.com/jazz-guitar-lessons-dave-stryker. As a leader, Stryker has released 28 CDs to date. He was voted as one of the top jazz guitarists in the 2017 DownBeat Critics and Readers Polls. Stryker's most recent CD, *Strykin' Ahead* (with Steve Nelson, Jared Gold and McClenty Hunter), was named one of the top CDs of 2017 by DownBeat. He has performed with Jack McDuff, Stanley Turrentine, Freddie Hubbard, James Moody, Dizzy Gillespie, Jimmy Smith, Dr. Lonnie Smith, Steve Slagle, Kevin Mahogany, Javon Jackson, Eliane Elias and numerous others. He is an adjunct professor of jazz guitar at Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University and at the John J. Cali School of Music at Montclair State University. Stryker teaches at the Jamey Aebersold Summer Jazz Workshop and the Litchfield Jazz Camp. His book, *Dave Stryker's Jazz Guitar Improvisation Method* (Mel Bay Publishing), is available at davestryker.com.

MEDIUM SWING

1. For octaves use fingers 1 and 4 on alternate strings (unless fingers 1 and 5 are more comfortable on octaves with the low note on the low E and A strings).

2. This is a good approach for comping while soloing.

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