

Guitarist

A Publication of the Minnesota Guitar Society • P.O. Box 14986 • Minneapolis, MN 55414

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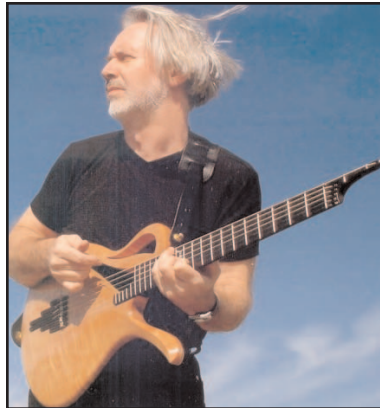
VOL. 21 NO. 6

Sundin Hall Concerts

International Fingerstyle Guitar Night

with

Aquiles Báez, Claus Boesser-Ferrari, and Sándor Szabó
Friday, November 4, 8 pm



Jazz Guitarathon
Tribute to . . .



Mike Elliott

Saturday,
December 10, 8 pm

Also In This Issue

Mike Elliott: A Life of Music, Chris Olson on More Basslines for Guitar, and Local News

Society News & Notes

Thank You

First, we offer a belated thanks to Al Norton, who arranged for permission to reprint the interview with Muriel Anderson that ran in our September/October issue. Al also provided expert editing-for-length and got us the accompanying picture. Second, our sincere thanks to Francena Elliott, Mike Elliott's widow, and Patrick Courtemanche, friend of the Elliott family, for providing the picture of and information about Mike Elliott that appear in this issue. We are grateful to them for helping us share this with you.

Contributions Welcome

Regular readers may notice new features in the newsletter. First, we'd be happy to receive your news—upcoming gigs, concerts, CDs, books, teaching positions—for inclusion in our "Society and Local News" pages. Second, we hope area teachers interested in writing articles with an educational flavor will consider contributing to the "Masterclass" pages. Finally, we plan to launch a "Briefly Considered" feature in future issues that will include one-paragraph reviews of CDs, books, and performances of interest—primarily classical guitar, lute, fingerstyle acoustic guitar, and jazz guitar. We want and need your ideas and submissions. Please contact the editor for more information.

MSG Online

Just a reminder that up-to-the-minute information about area concerts, gigs, and other guitar-related events can be found at the Minnesota Guitar Society website calendar. Included is a complete list of the Sundin Hall concerts and our Local Artists series of events. The web address is <www.mnguitar.org>. From the homepage, just click on "Calendar" and you'll see a listing of events for the next 90 days. While it covers our Society concerts, it also includes other events featuring our members and other guitarists of note. We'd like to see this calendar become the source to check for guitar events in the metro area. Be sure to get your events listed, and let us know if we've missed other important events by emailing Al Norton at <apnorton@msn.com>.

Distributors Needed

We'd like to get copies of the newsletter to more guitar students. If you teach, through a home studio, store, private music school, or music department at an area college, please contact us to receive a bundle of newsletters. We'd also be glad to have one or two more distributors willing to drop off bundles, especially in the northern, far eastern, and southwestern parts of the metro area. Time commitment is 1 to 2 hours, every other month.

Inquiries, Comments, Commendations, and Complaints

To reach us, please contact the editor, Paul Hintz, by email at <phintz@divcs.org> or by phone at 651-699-6827.

*As a member of the Minnesota Guitar Society, you receive ticket discounts on all MGS-sponsored events, a year's subscription to the Guitarist and the opportunity to place free classifieds in each issue. To join the Minnesota Guitar Society, please fill out the information on this coupon and mail it to:
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MINNESOTA GUITAR SOCIETY MISSION STATEMENT

To promote the guitar, in all its stylistic and cultural diversity, through our newsletter and through our sponsorship of public forums, concerts, and workshops.

To commission new music and to aid in its promotion, publication, and recording.

To serve as an educational and social link between amateur and professional guitarists and the community.

To promote and help create opportunities for Minnesota guitarists and players of related instruments.

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Directions to Sundin Hall on the Hamline University campus

From I-94, head north on Snelling Avenue in St. Paul, past University Avenue to Hewitt Avenue. Turn right, the Hall is on your left a half-block east of Snelling. Free parking is available one block past the hall, in lots off Hewitt (on your right) or off Pascal (1 block north).

Concert Spotlight

International Fingerstyle Guitar Night

On Friday, November 4th, at 8 pm, fans of virtuoso fingerstyle guitar have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to hear three of the style's foremost practitioners, all on stage at the acoustically superb Sundin Hall, when the Minnesota Guitar Society hosts Claus Boesser-Ferrari from Germany, Aquiles Báez from Venezuela (now based in New York City), and Sándor Szabó from Hungary, for the International Fingerstyle Guitar Night.

Claus Boesser-Ferrari

Claus Boesser-Ferrari was born in 1952 in Germany, and first began playing the electric guitar at age 14. Two years later he switched to acoustic guitar after hearing American folksinger/songwriter Tom Paxton on TV. In 1967 he started his first rock band; from 1973 to 1975 he studied classical guitar. From 1977 to 1980 he worked with a folk-rock ensemble that signed a major deal with Polydor Records and toured with American folksinger Joan Baez among others. Boesser-Ferrari's first solo recording was released in 1984, and concerts throughout Europe and Brazil followed. In 1993, he released the first of several CDs on the Acoustic Music label. He has toured worldwide, including the U.S., since 1998. He has composed music for various ensembles and theatre productions, worked with a variety of internationally known guitarists, and appeared at the annual All-Star Guitar Night founded and hosted by Muriel Anderson. Upcoming projects include a performance next year at the Global Festival of Strings in Mannheim with guitarists Marc Ribot and Fred Frith.

Aquiles Báez

Aquiles Báez, a native of Venezuela, is a versatile musician (guitar as well as Latin American stringed instruments), arranger, and composer. He has an innovative style that combines Latin American rhythms with sophisticated harmonies to create a unique sound.

Báez has recorded five CDs of his original compositions. In addition, he has collaborated with artists such as Paquito de Rivera, Fareed Haque, John Patitucci, Ilan Chester, Mike Marshall, and Giora Feidman. He has appeared in concert with the Ensemble Gurrufio and Worlds of Guitars, as well as the Boston Symphony, Simon Bolivar, and Bach Academy orchestras. Other projects include *Calle 54*, a documentary film by Fernando Trueba, and two Grammy-nominated records by pianist Danilo Perez (*Motherland* and *Central Avenue*).

Báez's awards include the Premio Nacional del Artista Best Arranger of the Year award in Venezuela, the William Leavitt Award at Berklee College of Music, and other awards for his excellence in theatre, film, and dance

scoring. Báez has toured extensively in Latin America, Europe, Japan, and the U.S.

He served as faculty member at Berklee College of Music and has conducted workshops and residencies at many other colleges and universities in the U.S. and Europe. Báez now resides in New York City. From there, he continues his international career.

Sándor Szabó

Born in 1956 in Törökszentmiklós, Hungary, Sándor Szabó started his studies with a private teacher of classical guitar. After trying different styles, he focused on jazz and improvisation. In the early 1980s, he studied with the Jazz Faculty of Béla Bartók Music Conservatory in Budapest. At that time he already felt that he should approach improvisation not by one certain style, but rather by synthesizing all his musical influences. Immersing himself in Far Eastern music was an ideal way to achieve this.

He was the first to play solo acoustic guitar music in Hungary. His records have been released in England, the U.S., and Germany. His playing can also be heard on the three SzaMaBa trio albums released in Hungary.

In 1980 drummer/percussionist Balázs Major joined Sándor in the Sándor Szabó / Balázs Major duo. Within a few years they had performed throughout Hungary. In 1988, Leo Records in England released their first album. In the 1980s, Szabó often invited musicians from other countries to play together, such as Belgian guitarist Gilbert Isbin, Greek guitarist Andreas Georgiou, and Massimo De Mattia, the Italian flutist.

The most significant period of his career was with the SzaMaBa trio, which performed for 10 years and consisted of Szabó, guitarist/group leader László Bagi, and percussionist Balázs Major. Simultaneously with the SzaMaBa trio, Szabó established a guitar trio called Great-Plain Workshop with László Bagi and András Bakondi. One year later the two groups, playing different styles, unified. The playing of Great-Plain Workshop can be heard on the albums *Sanctified Land* and *Anima*. After two years András Bakondi left the group, which then remained named SzaMaBa. By 1993, they were one of the most successful groups in Hungary. They, with guest musicians, made three albums released by Tandem Records. There is a live recording released by Pannon Jazz in 2005. Due to the economical situation in Hungary, the trio disbanded in 1996. Since then Szabó has pursued his solo career. His music has become freer and more experimental but also more composed and structured. He uses the full potential of solo guitar playing. This can be heard on his three latest albums released on Acoustic Music Records. Since 1998, he has played on many tours and

Fingerstyle, *continued on p. 5*

Concert Spotlight

Jazz Guitarithon Tribute to Mike Elliott

For the past four years, the Jazz Guitarithon has been a mid-season part of the Minnesota Guitar Society's Sundin Hall concert series. We've had an opportunity to present many of our region's fine jazz guitarists in unique solo and duo settings. This year, we thought it would be appropriate to dedicate the concert to the memory of Mike Elliott, an important and influential guitarist and teacher who made the Twin Cities his home from the 1966 through 1981, and again for the past 7 years. Elliott passed away in September, just as planning for this concert was being done. We are fortunate that several fine musicians with ties to Elliott were available and willing to appear. In addition, several participants plan to base their performances on the arrangements in Elliott's two famous books of chord-melody solos. It will be a great night of jazz guitar. Please join us on Saturday, December 10 at 8 pm in Sundin Hall. Here's the line-up.

Kevin Carlson

Kevin Carlson graduated summa cum laude from the University of Minnesota with degrees in Classical Guitar and Theory/Composition (1987) and with honors from Musicians Institute (GIT) in Los Angeles (1988). He has broad performance experience with ensembles and artists ranging from symphony orchestras to Marvin Hamlisch, Rita Moreno, Thad Jones, and others. He appears on recordings with Jan Michael Joncas for GIA Publications in Chicago and Minneapolis and with Christina Seaborn in St. Cloud. He's played back-up guitar for major stars; and worked in pit orchestras and big bands for shows in the Twin Cities and St. Cloud. Kevin has worked as a professional liturgical musician for 15 years and is currently Director of Music at the St. Cloud State University Newman Center. He has worked at Music Tech in Minneapolis and as an adjunct faculty member at St. Cloud State University. He is the founder of Professional Music Instruction (PMI), where he teaches private lessons as well as the nationally acclaimed ChildBloom Guitar program to kids. He is a member of the Minnesota Guitar Society, Chet Atkins Appreciation Society, and the MN Music Teachers Association (MMTA), and serves as MMTA Guitar Program Chair. His solo guitar repertoire ranges from classical to pop/jazz to the work of Chet Atkins, Jerry Reed, and Scott Joplin. He also composes original music and plays a variety of historic guitars in his programs.

Ross Clark

Des Moines, Iowa, native Ross Clark began playing jazz guitar on his local scene at the age of 17. Two years later he moved to the Twin Cities to attend McNally-Smith College of Music. While here, he has been lucky enough to have played and studied with Chris Olson,

Clay Moore, Cliff Wittstruck, Pete Whitman, Terry Burns, Michael Philhofer, Billy Holloman, Jay Young, and others. He had the honor of studying with Mike Elliott during his first and second semesters. They spent the lesson time discussing different jazz musicians and their music. In Ross's words, "Mike influenced me every time I came in contact with him. He was truly an inspiration."

Bob Ekstrand

Bobby E. Ekstrand has been performing in the Twin Cities area for more than 30 years. His newest CD, *The Guitar*, features music from three continents spanning 8 decades. His eclectic tastes take him from jazz to Brazilian, folk, and rock. His current groups include Jumbo Ya Ya (Cajun) and a trio with John Hartley (bass) and Aisha Baker (vocals). Bob also maintains a full schedule of guitar students. He teaches at Matt's Pro Guitar in St. Paul.

Billy Graczyk

Billy Graczyk is a guitarist, composer, and teacher. He started his professional career at age 19, playing guitar for the Minneapolis rock trio Autonomy. He enrolled at McNally-Smith College in St. Paul in 2002, and studied under the late Mike Elliott. He is currently working toward a BA in Guitar Performance. Billy works as a full-time guitar teacher at Eclipse Music in West St. Paul while promoting Autonomy's debut album. His literate approach to guitar, passionate playing style, and hunger for continued learning have earned him respect from local musicians and fans across the Midwest.

John Hartley

Bassist and producer John (J.R.) Hartley was born in Eveleth, MN, in 1964. J.R. has been gigging in the Twin Cities region, and producing music at Home-BASS Studio, in since 1985. As a young teenager, he was introduced to the vibrant Minneapolis jazz scene by Mike Elliott, along with his mother Janny, a Twin Cities Jazz Society member. In J.R.'s own words, "Mike was my main musical mentor, as well as a father-figure and a big brother to me. I got to know almost all of his incredibly talented friends, and saw first-hand how he wrote, developed, performed, and recorded his music. He was, and will always be the foundation of my musical life, and I am honored to take part in this celebration of his life and his music."

Paul Hintz

Milwaukee native Paul Hintz is honored to be part of this tribute to Mike Elliott and his lasting contributions to jazz guitar. Paul was originally inspired to take up the

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Fingerstyle, *continued from p. 3*

festivals in Japan, Korea, the U.S., and throughout Europe. Apart from his solo concerts he often plays in duos with Balázs Major and with Bulgarian pianist Nikolay Ivanov.

In his music he blends classical forms with the meditative mood of Eastern music, Hungarian folk musical elements, and improvisation inherited from jazz. The atmosphere of his concerts is intimate and personal. He approaches each concert with a sense of mission.

The works and spiritual heritage of Hungarian writer Béla Hamvas have greatly influenced him. For Szabó, improvisation is a way to the hidden depth of the world. His music is an acoustic project of this invisible but perceptible world in which ancient and modern appear as one. He looks for the eternal passages between different cultures and ways of thinking here at the end of a declining materialistic culture and the beginning of a new spiritual culture.

In his search for new ways to build the 'perfect' guitar, Szabó discovered innovator Michael Kasha. American guitar builder Steve Klein planned a 16-string acoustic guitar that Hungarian luthier Tihamer Romanek built for Szabó. Romanek has built many guitars for Szabó using the Kasha system.

Szabó uses many acoustic guitars in his concerts. Besides differently tuned and strung 16-string guitars, he uses an 8 string fretless guitar with a sound somewhere between the Indian sarod and Arabic 'ud. Six- and 8-string classical guitars are also used in concerts and recordings. Recently, he started playing 6-string baritone guitar.

Szabó also composes and plays contemporary experimental music, introducing a new sound called AmbiMorph. He has conducted far-reaching experiments with electric guitar and created a concept called Multishift for developing new, interesting sounds based on psychokinetic hearing. To achieve this he uses special algorithms with the latest generation of digital effects.

Since 2002 he has been a member of the Georgian Contemporary Unit in the U.S., an ensemble of experimental improvising musicians. (Read more at <www.solponticello.com>). Szabó is an organizer of the International Acoustic Guitar Festival, an annual tour of 10-12 concerts in various cities in Hungary.

***For concert and ticket
information, call
612-677-1151.***

Tribute, *continued from p. 4*

guitar by the music of Simon and Garfunkel, not realizing that they were in fact two separate people supported by a horde of studio musicians. After a spectacularly unsuccessful career as a singer-songwriter, he turned to jazz, thinking it would be easier (at least he wouldn't have to sing). He studied with nationally known guitarist Jack Grassel, among others, while enrolled full-time at the Wisconsin Conservatory of Music. For the last 15 years, he has supported his caffeine dependency with regular performances at coffeehouses throughout the region and occasional appearances at other public venues and private events. Since 1998, he has specialized in the 7-string guitar (he thought it would be easier than 6). He teaches the normal 6-string version in private lessons through various Community Education programs. A former Managing Director of the Guitar Society, Paul is happy to have a second opportunity to work as the Society's newsletter editor.

Jim McGuire

Jim McGuire's interest in jazz guitar began in the late 1950s. He was inspired by the recordings of Barney Kessel, Johnny Smith, Jim Hall, and Wes Montgomery. He was able to develop a repertoire of standards by playing with dance bands on weekends and, later, club dates with his own trio. In the early 1960s, when Bossa Nova music became popular, he took up the classical guitar, and eventually studied with Jeffrey Van to earn a Master of Music Degree in classical guitar. Since 1974, he has been teaching classical guitar (and some jazz) at several Minnesota colleges and universities. He performs regularly in southern Minnesota with his own jazz trio and various other jazz groups. Over the years, he has performed with many fine jazz musicians including Charlie Byrd, Clark Terry, and Dominick Spera.

Chris Olson

Chris Olson teaches guitar, jazz, and music theory at McNally-Smith College and at MacPhail Center for Music. During the summer Chris is an instructor at the Shell Lake Arts Center in Shell Lake, Wisconsin, where a Guitar Camp is planned for 2006. He earned a master's degree in jazz studies/performance from the University of North Texas in 1995. He holds bachelor's degrees from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point in jazz studies and music education/choral emphasis. A former guitar instructor at UW-Stevens Point and the Wausau Conservatory of Music, Chris taught guitar, jazz history, and improvisation, and directed jazz ensembles at UW-Marathon County and Inver Hills Community College. He performs on both 6- and 7-string guitar throughout the Midwest as a soloist and with groups of all sizes. More information about him, including available recordings and books by him, can be found at his website <www.knowtheneck.com>.

Mike Elliott: A Life of Music

Mike Elliott passed away at his home in St. Paul on September 14, 2005 at the age of 65. He had been seriously ill since suffering a heart attack in January. He is survived by his wife Francena Elliott, who was by his side at the time of his passing, and stepchildren Stephanie Noel and Natalie Page of Dallas, Texas.

Elliott was born in Chicago in 1940. His father was a studio musician and his mother a blues singer. He began his professional career at the age of 16 as a guitarist in Colorado Springs, and studied under the legendary Johnny Smith. Throughout his life, critics (including the world-famous Leonard Feather), fellow musicians, and music business professionals praised Elliott for his versatility and talent, describing him as one of the world's best guitarists. Typical was the comment of Johnny Smith himself, who said Elliott had "the best technique of any jazz guitarist I am aware of."

In 1960 Elliott became a partner in Johnny Smith's music store and began teaching guitar lessons. Elliott formed his own jazz group and went out on the road in 1964.

In 1966, Elliott relocated to Minneapolis, which served as home until 1981. There, he formed the band "Natural Life," which recorded six albums and hundreds of radio and TV commercials. They shared the stage with Charles Mingus, McCoy Tyner, Larry Carlton, and other jazz greats. Elliott performed with many notable musicians, including The Minnesota Orchestra, and was a featured soloist with the Toronto Symphony. He also taught private lessons and held masterclasses at several universities. During this period (in 1974), he was the subject of an article in *Guitar Player* magazine

From 1978 to 1981 Elliott worked as a clinician for the Gibson Guitar Company, often with close friend and jazz great Howard Roberts. He traveled the world, on a schedule that included 150 clinics per year at various events.

In 1982, Elliott moved to Nashville to become manager of Gibson Professional Musical Services Division. He conducted clinics with artists like Les Paul, Howard Roberts, and Elliot Easton, and authored training, technical, and owner manuals for Gibson. He also authored two successful method books for Hal Leonard, *Expanding Jazz Harmonies* and *Contemporary Chord Solos*. Now published by Hal Leonard as *Contemporary Chord Solos Books One and Two*, these books have stayed in print for over 20 years (a phenomenal achievement in itself), and have sold over 100,000 copies.

During that time, Elliott participated in a series of "Great Guitars" shows with B.B. King, Larry Carlton,

Howard Roberts, Pat Martino, Les Paul, Chet Atkins, Earl Klugh, Steve Morse, and others, and appeared on a CBS network special with Chet Atkins and Earl Klugh.

In 1986 Elliott founded Magic Tracks recording studio, which later became The Recording Club. He was president of Celebration Records and music director for the legendary Nashville producer Jack Clement. Clients included many of country music's biggest stars and most established record labels.

During this time Elliott was also a full-time teacher, session player, recording engineer, producer, arranger, and songwriter. He recorded with many notable artists. His 1996 recording of "Train's a'Comin'" by Steve Earle received a Grammy nomination and the prestigious NAIRD award. A song he wrote appeared on *Seminole Wind*, the triple-platinum John Anderson album. His students included famous banjoist Bella Fleck

In 1998 Elliott returned to the Twin Cities as an educator, live performer, and recording engineer. In January 1998, he joined the faculty of McNally-Smith College of Music (then MusicTech). He loved teaching, but he had a particular love for playing at the Artists' Quarter with Adi Yeshaya on piano, Gordie Johnson on bass, and Gordie Knudtson on drums. He also played with other local jazz musicians such as Joanie Knudtson, Cookie Coleman, and the Petersons—Ricky, Billy, and Bobby.

The list of all the people who influenced his life through the years is very long, but he had a special place in his heart for his mentor Johnny Smith, his contemporary Pat Martino, whom he loved and respected immensely, and his lifelong friend Joe Allen, songwriter and producer. His complete list of credits includes performances with a who's-who list of famous country, jazz, and popular music artists.

Elliott was a member of MENSA as well as the "cubase.net" forum. He loved boats and had several fancy cars. He was an avid golfer and a six-time "Hole in One"er. He was inducted into the "Hole-In-One Hall of Fame" on June 6, 1973!

Although Elliott had some health insurance, he had spent most of 2005 in the hospital and his family is left with staggering medical bills and other expenses. Donations to help cover expenses can be sent to: The Elliott Family, P.O. Box 211256, Eagan, MN 55121-9998. A benefit and celebration of Mike Elliott's life was held on Sunday, October 16 at the Artists' Quarter in downtown St. Paul. The Minnesota Guitar Society's annual Jazz Guitarathon, on December 4 at Sundin Hall, will be a Tribute to Mike Elliott. See the article on page 4 of this issue for more information.

Society & Local News

Minnesota Guitar Wizards

Minnesota has great guitarists in all styles. In particular, as musicians, guitar aficionados, and critics know, the state is home to a concentration of nationally and internationally acclaimed acoustic guitarists. Five of them have recently joined together in a new concertizing (and possible recording) partnership called the Minnesota Guitar Wizards.

The Minnesota Guitar Wizards is a collaboration that celebrates and showcases an amazing pool of talent. Its purpose is to present to audiences the marvelous diversity of style and repertoire found in the music of acoustic masters Peter Lang, Dakota Dave Hull, Tim Sparks, Phil Heywood, and Dean Magraw.

A typical concert will feature three or four of these artists. Presenting solo performances and group pieces, each show highlights the unique artistry of the individual players as well as the stunning creative synergy of the ensemble. With a dizzying array of musical genres at their disposal, including blues, ragtime, jazz, folk, gospel, spiritual, Latin, western Classical, and Hindustani and Carnatic Indian music, the Minnesota Guitar Wizards tap American and world musical roots in their virtuoso performances of original compositions and covers of timeless pieces.

Recent performances include an October appearance at Cedar Cultural Center in Minneapolis and concert venues throughout the Midwest. Look for more on the Minnesota Guitar Wizards in a future issue of the newsletter.

OpenStage in November

OpenStage is a monthly event sponsored by the Minnesota Guitar Society. It gives players of all styles and abilities (and instruments) a chance to perform for others in a friendly atmosphere. OpenStage welcomes all MGS members, their family members, and friends. There is no charge to attend. Our November gathering will be at Betsy's Back Porch Coffee. Betsy's is located on the southeast corner of Diamond Lake Road and Nicollet Avenue in Richfield. It's been a favorite location for several years now. The date is Friday, November 18th, at 7 pm. The December gathering will be at the University of St. Thomas Brady Education Center on Saturday, December 17th at 3 pm. The Brady Center is on the UST St. Paul campus, west of Cretin Ave. and north of Goodrich Ave. For more information about OpenStage, visit the Society website at <www.mnguitar.org>

Local Artists Series

In addition to our main Sundin Hall concert series, the Minnesota Guitar Society sponsors an annual series



Minnesota Guitar Wizards (clockwise from top): Dakota Dave Hull, Peter Lang, Tim Sparks, Phil Heywood

of concerts presented at locations throughout the area that feature great locally based classical, fingerstyle, and jazz guitarists. Next in this series is fingerstyle guitarist Jerry Kosak, who will perform on Sunday, December 18th, at 2 pm, at the Central Park Amphitheater, 8598 Central Park Drive in Woodbury. These concerts are always free and open to the public.

Guitar in Cambridge, MN

A "Coffee House Series" will be held in the Richard G. Hardy Performing Arts Center at Cambridge-Isanti High School during winter-spring 2006. The first concert of the series features fingerstyle guitar legend Peter Lang on January 14 at 7:30 pm. Tickets are \$10, or \$33 for a season ticket to all four scheduled concerts. For more information, call Cambridge-Isanti Community Education at 763-689-6189.

Other Notable News

Members and friends! See your name in print! Attract vast multitudes to your next event! Sell copies of your new CD! Attract students to your new teaching job! Send information to the editor at <phintz@divcs.org>.

Information must be received by the 1st of any even-numbered month for inclusion in the next issue (e.g., January and February information needs to reach us by December 1st).

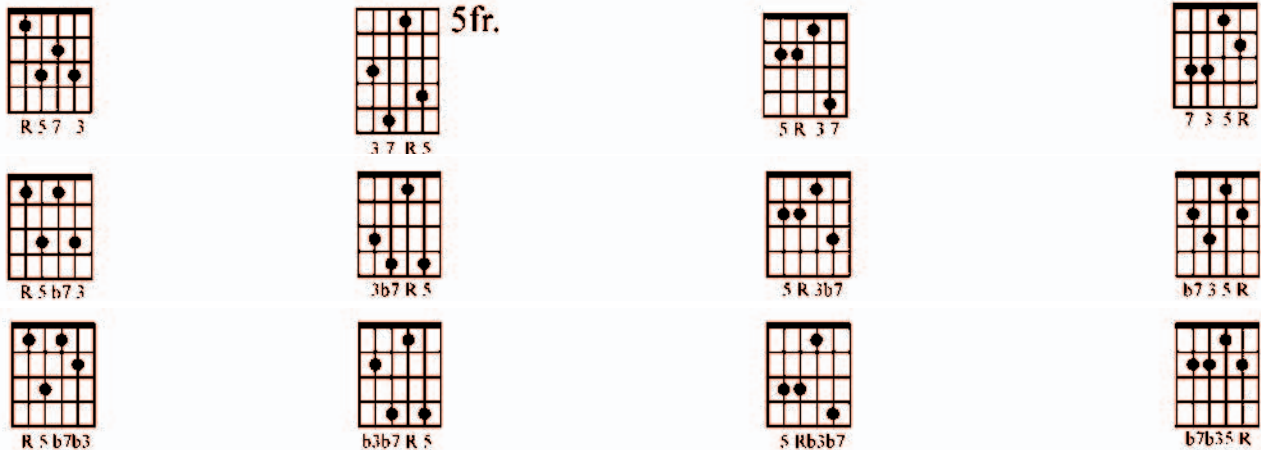
Visit the MGS website:
<<http://www.mnguitar.org>>

Masterclass: More Bass Lines For Guitarists

by Chris Olson

In a previous article we discussed ways to create a bass line for chord progressions that change chords every two beats. When the chord occurs for longer periods, more voicings must be mastered in order to keep the accompaniment interesting, while providing both bass line and chord. To reach this next level, chord inversions must be learned.

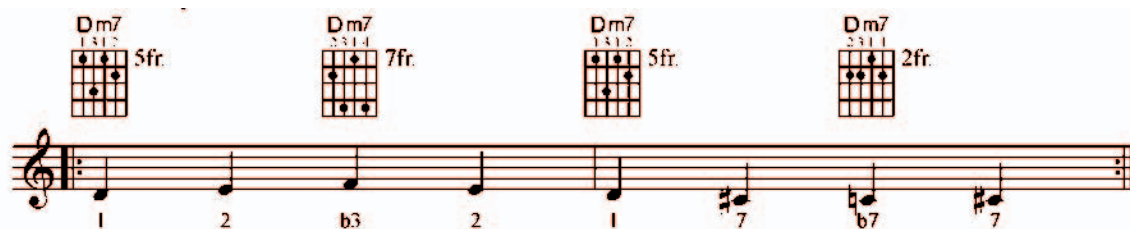
Below are four inversions for Major 7, Dominant 7, and minor 7 chords on strings 5,4,3,2. The root (R), 3rd, 5th, and 7th of the chord are indicated:



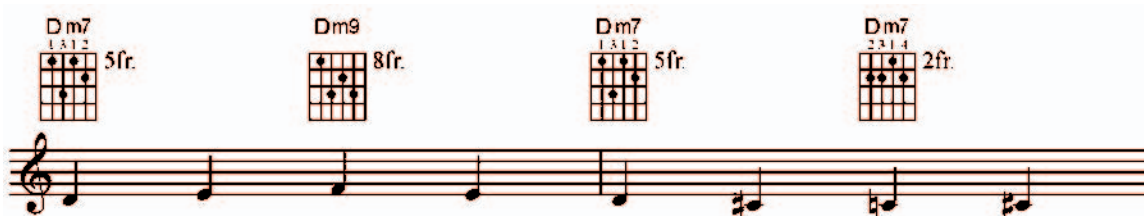
Of course, inversions for half-diminished (minor7b5) and diminished chords should also be learned. As should all inversions on string set 6,4,3,2. You can cover a lot of ground with these two string sets, but inversions on strings 5,3,2,1 and 6,5,4,3 can add even more possibilities. Inversions on strings 4,3,2,1 are useful for other purposes but bass lines sound best when the 5th or 6th string is on the bottom.

A note on practicing these voicings: You want to be able to find each inversion with equal ease, not just root position. First, find the inversion that occurs on the lowest fret first and work your way up. Then, with the next chord, find the nearest inversion and work your way down. For instance, go up with B7, B7/D# (1st inversion with D# in the bass), B7/F#, B7/A, then come down with E7/G# (the voicing of E7 on the closest fret to the last chord), E7, E7/D, E7/B, then find the nearest A7, which is A7/C# and continue up. Follow the circle of 5ths (B E A D G C F Bb Eb Ab Db Gb) until all 12 roots have been covered. Then move on to the next string set or chord quality.

With the minor 7 inversions above, a simple “vamp” can be created, using a repetitive bass line with a chord tone occurring on beats one and three of each measure. The function of each bass note is indicated. Remember, from our previous article, chords can be placed on, after, or before the beat. Mix it up and have fun.



While inversions should be learned as simple 7th chords initially, eventually chords can be enhanced by adding 9ths, 11ths, and 13ths. Sometimes this actually makes a passage easier to play, as shown below.



Notice how the 2nd chord in the last sequence is easier to grab. You may also notice that it looks like an F Major7 chord. Adding a 9 to any chord makes it resemble a different 7th chord. The difference is in how it functions. Other inversions might look familiar as well. For instance, in the next example, the first inversion of Am7 looks just like a C6 chord in root position. These “dualities” can seem confusing at first, but it should be helpful because it means your fingers don’t have to learn a different shape for every chord.

Here, now, is the same minor vamp using inversions on strings 6,4,3,2 for an A minor chord:

A nice exercise to practice dominant chord inversions with bass line is the bridge to the "rhythm changes" progression explored in the previous article. Just play the 4 inversions of D7 off the 5th string ascending; then descend with G7 off the 6th string. Continue with the identical pattern for C7 and F7. Start with the root position chord each direction and add a major 7 as a passing note between the root and flat 7 when descending. This amounts to what is often called a “bebop” scale, and it’s used here to allow a chord tone to consistently land on beats one and three.

While the last example is a fine exercise, it is not the most practical way to negotiate those chord changes. The following 8 bars follow the same progression, but combine string sets and add 9ths when helpful. A suggested “comping” rhythm is provided, but feel free to experiment.

Next time we’ll apply a bass line to Bossa Nova chord progressions.

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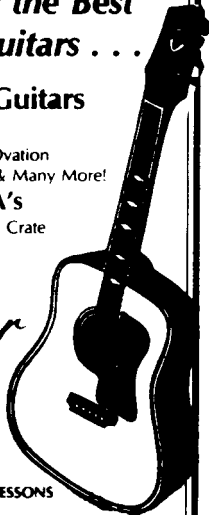
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