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THE PUBLICATION FOR THE JAZZ GUITAR ENTHUSIAST

No. 59 MAY 2009

John Stowell



MUSIC

I Fall In Love To Easily
You Do Something To Me
Caravan
A Fine Romance
What Could Have Been
Switch-er-oonie
Blues Tripper

INTERVIEWS

John Stowell Larry Lucie
Luthiers Ralph Novak and
Mark Piper
The Jazz Guitar of Alex Skolnick
Gianfranco Continenza
Wilbert Longmire
...
How To Seriously Improve Your
Guitar Playing
Jimmy Wyble Tribute
Plus 10 lessons

Jazz Guitar/Classical Guitar:
Symbiotic Relationship Part 2

Guitar Reviews

Erich Solomon's Phidelity
and
D'Aquisto Jazz Line

LISTENING  TEST
with Gene Bertoncini

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Jimmy Wyble



Gianfranco Continenza

by Ed Benson

Gianfranco Continenza, guitarist and composer, was born in Turin, Italy, on February 1, 1968. He started to play guitar when he was 12 years old, thanks to his father Nino Continenza, a jazz guitar player.

He studied classical music for 5 years, then progressed to the study of the modern guitar (jazz, fusion, blues, rock...) and played with local bands. Gianfranco graduated from G.I.T. (Guitar Institute of Technology) in Hollywood, California, in 1992 specializing in many music styles (jazz, fusion, blues, R&B, Latin, funky, rock...) studying with Joe Diorio, Don Mock, Scott Henderson, Ron Esch te, Howard Roberts, Peter Sprague, Gary Willis, Jennifer Batten, Steve Trovato, Jeff Berlin, Jamie Findlay, Jeff Richman, Tommy Tedesco and Mike Miller.

In 1994 he founded the P.M.I. (Professional Musicians Institute), and in 1998 the C.M.A. (Contemporary Music Academy) in Pescara, Italy, with students coming from all parts of Italy where he teaches jazz guitar.

He has performed with many world-famous artists like Bill Evans, Joe Diorio, Mark Egan, Don Mock, Jeff Richman, Scott Kinsey, Jamie Findlay, Barrett Tagliarino, Richard Smith and John Stowell.

EB: Please discuss your early years studying the guitar, such as your practice schedule and what books you used.

GC: I started playing guitar when I was 12 years old, thanks to my father Nino (jazz guitar player); I took my first lessons from him. I remember that he had a great ear, and I was impressed that he could figure out any kind of chord progression just by listening to it one time. Later on I was practicing scales, arpeggios and chords and starting to work on improvisation and a little bit on reading, studying from 9 to 11 hours per day. The main books I used during my first ten years in studying the guitar were: Joe Diorio: *Intervallic Designs For Jazz Guitar & Fusion Guitar*, Don Mock: *Artful Arpeggios*, Ted Greene: *Chord Chemistry*, Mick Goodrick: *The Advancing Guitarist*; Nicolas Slominsky: *The Thesaurus of Scales and Melodic Patterns*.

EB: Who were your early influences?

GC: I was influenced by George Benson, Tal Farlow, Wes Montgomery and Jim Hall, but the one who really made an impact on me was Joe Pass. I used to listen to lots of his records.

EB: What were the differences in your teachers?

GC: The differences were many. When I started studying with jazz luminaries like Joe Diorio, Don Mock, Howard Roberts, etc., I discovered another way to approach music, how to live the music, the right way to improvise. Joe especially helped me a lot to reach my own personality in music and to develop creativity.

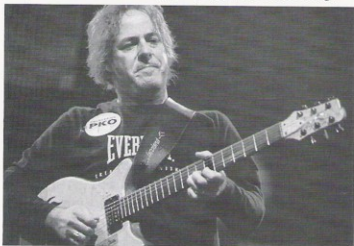


Gianfranco and Joe Diorio

EB: Were you always interested in jazz?

GC: Not really, even when I heard jazz as a child, I started playing rock, funk and blues. I had different bands where I was playing covers of Jimi Hendrix, Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple, Van Halen, Steve Ray Vaughan,

etc., I think this made my playing more interesting.



EB: Tell me about your move from Italy to attend the Musicians Institute in L.A.

GC: After ten years of playing guitar I felt like something was missing in my playing. I needed to learn more, and in 1991 I attended the Musicians Institute. It was a great experience that helped me very much to improve my musicianship and my playing, especially being in touch daily with such a great musicians and teachers like Joe Diorio, Howard Roberts, Don Mock, Ron Escheté, Scott Henderson and Tommy Tedesco. After I graduated in 1992 it took me some years to put all the learned information to use.

EB: Did you play other instruments?

GC: Yes, I play electric bass.

EB: How have other non-guitarists influenced you?

GC: I didn't focus just on guitar players but I tried to emulate pianists and horn players-especially sax players. They influenced me on the way they use the intervals in phrasing, the rhythm feel, chord voicings that a pianist uses. I used to transcribe John Coltrane, Charley Parker, Oscar Peterson, Michael Brecker, Wayne Shorter, Chick Corea and Herbie Hancock.

EB: Do you teach privately?

GC: No, it's about 15 years since I founded the "Contemporary Music Academy" in Pescara, Italy, where I teach jazz guitar.

EB: Tell me about your Contemporary Music Academy.

GC: It's a modern jazz school where we teach all the main instruments. There are classes in harmony, theory, fingerboard harmony, chord-melody, improvisation, gar training, composing, arranging, reading and a live

playing workshop. There are also clinics with international musicians. I tried to reproduce here the same situation I used to have at Musicians Institute.

EB: What method or system do you use?

GC: Basically I use what I learned from G.I.T. (Guitar Institute of Technology – the guitar department of the M.I.) with some additions from my 22 years' experience teaching. This method works fine; many of my students are working as jazz musicians.

EB: How do you approach teaching jazz?

GC: I start teaching scales, modes, arpeggios, intervals, chords and rhythm patterns. After that, I let them connect two chord changes. The student must be able to connect to the nearest note of the next scale, first playing eighth-notes and then sixteenth-notes. After that, they have to connect four chord changes, then eight, etc. They have to recognize every interval of each note they are playing. When they have a good knowledge of that, we start studying standards. I give a lot of importance to harmony. I also teach them how to play in different comping styles, walking bass, etc. I try to let them be creative and work to find their own personality as a musician.

EB: What is the state of jazz guitar in Europe?

GC: I think it's doing pretty well. Europe is crowded with jazz guitar players, and many are good. There are lots of jazz guitar festivals and jazz clubs and many opportunities to play jazz here. I had a great experience playing at the "Bratislava Jazz Days 2008" (International Jazz Festival) in Slovakia, sharing the stage with Stanley Clarke, Marcus Miller, Victor Wooten and Al Jarreau.

EB: Tell me about your last CD, "The Past Inside the Present" that featured sidemen saxophonist Bill Evans and keyboardist Scott Kinsey (Tribal Tech).

GC: It was a great experience to have Bill and Scott playing and recording my compositions. They really enjoyed playing them. I'm very happy the way that the CD came out. I decided to make my solo record only after 25 years that I was playing guitar 'cause I just felt that I had something to say through my playing and through my compositions. I didn't want to make just a record of standards played straight-ahead. I always worked on compositions and improvisation, developing creativity (that's the main thing I try to teach to my students at C.M.A.).

EB: How were you able to get a contract with ESC Records, one of the label leaders in Jazz/Fusion?

GC: When I finished the recording of "The Past Inside the Present," and after I received positive quotes from all those great musicians, I was looking for a good label, so I first tried the German ESC Records. I remember when I sent the e-mail to Ulrich Vormehr (ESC director) he did answer me very quickly and said that he was very interested, and he invited me to send him a copy of my CD. He really liked it and said he found my music fresh and innovative, and I got the contract. Actually I'm the first Italian musician produced by ESC.

EB: The CD contains 10 of your compositions. Tell us your approach to the compositions.

GC: Well, I practiced many years on compositions. I think it's like playing an instrument; you need to work at it. I'm using lots of harmonies: parallel harmony, quartal harmony, trying to use unusual chord connections. For the melody there are different combinations of intervals and lots of octave dispersion. I use interesting combinations of rhythm patterns with different odd time signatures, but all have to be musical.

EB: Your CD doesn't concentrate just on guitar, but it gives space to the others instruments. Why this choice?

GC: Right, I wanted to make a "Musicians CD" instead of just a "Guitar CD." It sounds more interesting and complete.

EB: Which guitar, strings and amp are you using now?

GC: I have my guitar model: the Jacoland Heaven Jazz "Gianfranco Continenza Signature," which is a hand-crafted guitar built by a great Italian luthier named Fausto Fiorini for the "Jacoland" company. We worked hard to make this guitar happen and it sounds great. I use D'Addario strings, the 0.11 gauge for the electric guitar and 0.13 gauge for the acoustic and archtop guitar. I have two old Roland Jazz Chorus JC-77 amps that I'm using in stereo.

EB: Which guitars have you owned over the years?

GC: Lots of them: Gibson ES 175, Gibson ES 347, Gibson Les Paul Anniversary 25/50, Fender Stratocaster, Fender Telecaster and many others.

EB: How are your reading skills?

GC: I'm not a great reader; I'm just OK.

EB: Do you think it is important to be able to read?

GC: I don't think reading is most important for a guitar player. Of course, it could help in some situations. I think it's important to know how to spell every rhythm combination and be able to write it down, as well.

EB: What's your feeling about the use of tab in guitar notation?

GC: Absolutely positive. I think it is very helpful in some cases; makes it easier to find the right positions on the fingerboard.

EB: How has your playing changed over the years?

GC: I guess my playing has become more like sax and piano phrasing year by year, with a better sense of rhythm and harmony; a more unforeseeable playing.

EB: Are your students interested in learning to play rhythm well or are they just interested in playing licks at blazing speed?

GC: Some of them. Firstly, most students are attracted by speed licks and try to play as fast as they can, but when I explain the importance of rhythm, they are very interested in it and work hard to get it.

EB: If you were on a desert island which 5 jazz guitar records would you want?

- GC:** 1) Joe Pass – Virtuoso
2) Joe Diorio – We Will Meet Again
3) Pat Martino – Consciousness
4) Jim Hall/Bill Evans – Intermodulation
5) Wes Montgomery – Full house

EB: What guitarist would you have liked to play with that you didn't?

GC: Joe Pass. I grow up with his music.

EB: What was your first paying job as a musician?

GC: It was for a Silvester Night's gig, back in 1983.

EB: Any disastrous or memorable gigs or studio dates?

GC: Some disastrous ones at the very beginning. The memorable gig was here in Italy with Joe Diorio back in 1997, and playing with my band at the "Bratislava Jazz Days 2008" International Jazz Festival (You can see it on YouTube), a memorable studio date was the recording of my CD with Bill Evans, and besides that,

the recent recording I made with the bassist Mark Egan.

EB: Still practicing? If so what?

GC: Yes, I'm still practicing every day. It's important to know that you never finish learning; I think it is the key to improving yourself. I'm practicing on new phrasing lines, on improvisation, on new chord voicings and also on technique. I'm still transcribing from horns and piano players. I always remember what the guitarist John Stowell told me: he still feels like a student.

EB: Any advice for young guitarists?

GC: I can tell them to listen to a lot of jazz music from classics to modern (jazz) and to give a lot of importance to the harmony and the rhythm, to be open to other kinds of music and to practice slowly, using the metronome. Don't just be a clone of someone else, but develop their own personality in music, working on creativity.

EB: What is your approach to learning the fingerboard?

GC: I divide the fingerboard into different positions. On each one, students have to learn notes, scales, intervals, arpeggios and chords, so at first they approach it in a vertical way. After a good knowledge of the fingerboard I let them visualize it in a horizontal way; for example, I let them play a scale on one single string so that they would have a complete vision of the whole fingerboard. Another idea that helps I learned from Scott Henderson, which is to randomly open a page of the Realbook and play the scale on one string, following the chord changes (connecting to the nearest note of the next scale) of the standard chosen.

EB: Any new recordings or books in the works?

GC: I recorded a track for the double CD "Mahavishnu RE-Defined" tribute to Mahavishnu Orchestra (ESC Records), that was released last September; it's my arrangement of the famous John McLaughlin song "One Word." On that track there is Mark Egan on bass, Alessandro Centofanti on keyboards and Walter Martino (the son of Bruno Martino, composer of the standard, "Estate") on drums. On that CD there are many great musicians: Dennis Chambers, Jim Beard, Jon Herington, Mitch Forman, Billy Cobham, Gary Husband, Vinnie Colaiuta, John Stowell, John Patitucci, Steve Hunt, Matt Garrison, Richard Smith.

and many others.

I've already composed ten tunes for my next solo album (also for ESC Records), "Face The Truth." I'm recording it. This CD will feature many great international musicians: Mark Egan, Don Mock, John Beasley, Michael Manning, Tetsuo Sakurai (Casiopea), David Liebman, and many others.

There is also a project of a CD and a tour with the fine jazz guitarist John Stowell. I start working on a book about quartal harmony for the guitar soon.

EB: Tell us about the musical examples you selected.

GC: I would like to use "One Note Waltz," which is my composition in 3/4 from my last record, "The Past Inside the Present." Let's take a look at the theme section (A). If you start to analyze it from bar 15, going ahead you can see 4 chromatic root movements. Then it moves up to the b5th (or down, 'cause the b5th is equal on both directions) ex. D6-Db7-C6/9-B7(#5). Then it moves up (or down) a b5th and goes for another 4 chromatic root movements so on F6/9-E7(#9)-EbMa9-D7(#9), then up (or down) a b5th again with another 4 chromatic root movements starting on AbMa7(#11) etc. It's all like that and it forms a cycle. Another symmetry of this tune is that it's alternating a major chord with a dominant one. I composed this tune in 5 minutes; it just came out like that.

Here are two short examples of an intro and an ending that I would use. I'm using mostly parallel harmony. In that case, on the ending progression I'm leading the top notes with the whole-tone scale for the first two bars.

EB: What's your opinion of jazz critics?

GC: I think there are some good jazz critics—very professional—but there are many who pretend to be a jazz critics without having the competence, so they are writing what they want without making sense.

EB: If you had one thing you would like to get across to a young student, what would that be?

GC: I would like to hear his first step towards finding a personality on his playing.

EB: How has your being an educator challenged or affected your work as a performer?

GC: I think being an educator made me a better performer. I don't think that it challenged my playing, but for sure, it made it stronger. Sometimes when I teach I myself learn something.

EB: It seems that many young players focus on technique rather than the music. How do you balance that?








GC: That's right. When I went to some music expo to demonstrate my guitar signature, I saw all those young players that play all the same way-fast-without musicality and personality. I guess it depends on the fact that now it's so easy to learn, they have so many opportunities. Today we have lots of guitar methods, DVDs, easy-to-find material on the internet and so much info, it makes the young players drunk in a musical way. We


should return to the way the great players of the past learned: from the recordings of others.

EB: What wisdom have you received from a mentor that you abide by?









GC: I always remember what Joe Diorio told me during my GIT time: "The more you know the harmony, the better improviser you will be."


Gianfranco's Intro




Gm11  10
 F#m7(b13)  9
 Fm13  8
 Em7(b13)  7
 Dbm7(b13)  4
 Bbm7(b13) 
 FMaj7(#5) 




Gianfranco's Ending

Em11  5
 Eb7(#5#9)  5
 Dm11  3
 Db7(#5#9)  3
 G7(#5#9)  7
 A7(#5#9)  9
 B7(#5#9)  11
 C#7(#5#9)  13



GMaj7(#9#11)  9
 EMaj7(#9#11)  6
 DBMaj7(#9#11)  3



1ST MELODY FRETLESS BASS

2ND SOPRANO SAX

3RD GUITAR

4TH SOP SAX

♩ = 200

ONE NOTE WALTZ

GIANFRANCO CONTINENZA (2005)

INTRO

x4

BASS ARMONICS

CMA9 D7(9#11) Dm11 D7(9#11)

A

5

C9 B7(#9) F9 E7(#9) EbMA9 D7(#9) AbMA7(#11) G13(b9)

13

GbMA9 F7(#9) BMA13 Bb7(#9) AMA9 Ab7(#9) D6 Db7

SPECIAL

x3

21

CMA7 Db7 D6 Db7

RALL. (SOLO AL FINE)

FINE

25

CMA7 BMA7