



Cool Jazz Guitar Solos



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Introduction

This package was originally conceived as a follow up to the [Jazz Guitar Improvisation Workout](#), which contains exercises with audio tracks and extensive notation, backing tracks, introduction videos and fret board videos, starting at a very basic exercise level, and going up to advanced solos. The Cool Jazz Guitar Solos¹ use the the same format, but contain complete tunes, with **solos and backing tracks at intermediate and advanced levels**, definitely *no beginner level*, in a mainstream jazz style. The tunes are not actual standards, but use chord progressions typically found in many standards, and therefore have a definite “standards feel” to them. Working on these tunes will definitely prepare you for improvising on actual standards. The rhythms are varied, from latin, to swing and waltz. The tempo varies from medium to fast. The level goes from intermediate to advanced.

This collection, is not set up as a step-by-step tutorial, but should be seen as a source of advanced soloing examples, and practice material, with guidance. The explanations given here often refer also to soloing principles, explanations and exercises that can be found in the *Jazz Guitar Improvisation Workout* which is much more a *tutorial* and *exercise* package. Also, music theory is not explicitly treated here; if you need general information on scales and chords, there are endless resources, books, internet sources etc., and on the Podia platform there is the [Jazz Guitar - The Basics Course](#) which covers all you need to acquire the basic knowledge and skill. Now, having said that, this solos collection is a great resource for learning and understanding **real mature soloing**, phrasing, use of scales etc., by listening, playing, watching the introductions and reading the solo analyses.

Another collection in this format is the [Smooth Jazz Guitar Solos collection](#).

¹ There is another collection available, the ‘Smooth Jazz Gitar Solos’



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How to use this collection

How should you use these materials? Depending on your goal, and the time you want to put into it, and your skill level, you can do different things:

- **always watch the introductory videos to understand the song structure, scales and chords.**
- listen to- and analyze complete solos and eventually play them; you will surely learn a lot, but it also takes time and patience. The section 'General advice' points out what the important aspects are that you should pay attention to, while studying the solos. Solo analyses are also provided for each tune, which point out and explain some particular features, so that you can listen with a critical and educated ear to the rest of the solo(s),

OR

- listen to the solos played, pick out the ideas that appeal to you or catch your attention, and find out exactly how they are played, so that you can incorporate them in your own playing. Remember, however, a good solo is not just a collection of cool licks, it has a structure, and the simple phrases are important as well!
- use the backing tracks to practice and play!

Although the example solos vary quite a bit in difficulty, they are all played 'for real' and in a very natural way. That is, they are not played as preconceived exercises with a specific and limited educational purpose in mind; they are played as real improvised solos, the only limitation was to play as cleanly as possible, so that all notes are clear and articulated. This means first of all that the solos are not simple, but, if you want to learn *on an advanced level*, this is the only way to learn how *all* aspects of soloing (scales/modes, dynamics, phrasing, timing, tone, form etc) fit together to create something appealing. If you focus only on a certain aspect, say, what scales to use, and take a phrase out of its context, you will miss a lot of other aspects, like: how does it fit between other phrases, how is it timed, why is it played in a certain register, where does it lead etc. Of course you have to focus on certain aspects first, but in the end you want to try and see the whole picture. Moreover, there are already so many books and other resources about theory, scales, modes, chords etc, and you can learn a lot from those, but only 'real' solos contain *all* aspects of soloing. **After all, a good solo should be more than the sum of its parts, and though you have to learn the parts at some point, only the final combination makes a great solo.** It is very hard to put all of that into words, to some extent you just have to hear and play it to really 'get it'. That is why practicing actual solos



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helps to learn to see the whole picture, and to understand how it all comes together.

Here's an analogy: think of a comedian: if the right lines are spoken with the wrong tone of voice, or a bad timing, the comic effect is usually lost completely. Try putting that into words! You just have to hear it, or see it, to get it. In the same way, if the right notes are played with the wrong feel and timing, they don't work as they should. You have to hear and feel it!

Some remarks about the notation: the fret board videos show the real timing as played in reality. Most of the time, all the subtleties in timing, phrasing and dynamics cannot be faithfully reproduced in notation, and certainly not without becoming unreadable. For instance, the 'lateness' of playing a fraction after the beat, which occurs a lot, is impossible to notate. In jazz swing tunes, the swing feel is something in between a triplet feel and a straight eights feel, and cannot be written down exactly, you have to hear and feel it.

Those subtle aspects, which can make the difference between a good and natural sounding solo, and a dull or stiff sounding one, cannot really be properly written down; it becomes either inaccurate or unreadable. So, to keep it readable, notation is always slightly simplified. Therefore it is not advisable to focus too much on the notation in terms of timing, because you will miss some essentials; in fact, if you were to play them exactly as written, they would sound rigid, so *listening is the most important thing*, and you should *listen first* and then use the notation (or fret board visual) to see the note details of what is played. A good practice is the read along with the notation while you listen.

Whether you study the solos extensively in detail, play along, or just pick up one idea per day that appeals to you, and learn to play it, you will definitely get something and probably a lot of understanding out of it!

The tunes: all five tunes are original tunes, but written in a mainstream jazz style, using chord progressions that you would find in very many jazz standards. So, in that regard, they sound and play just like standards, and may even remind you of some. That also means that what you learn here is directly applicable to 99% of jazz standards, or in fact 100% if you think about it. Because, what you learn, is how real solos are constructed, using the appropriate scales and modes, but also what the logic is in terms of melody, phrasing and form. That, of course, applies to all jazz standards, even the ones with more complicated chord progressions.



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General advice

Here are some general tips for listening to- and analyzing the solos, and your own improvisation:

- ✓ pay attention to how often small and large intervals are used: it is so easy to just play scales with consecutive notes, but that will soon start to sound boring. Vary the intervals you play, i.e., use some larger intervals as well as one- or two semitone intervals. By the way, if you are not confident enough yet to make interval jumps in your solo lines, start with occasional octave jumps: they can't be wrong!
- ✓ pay attention to timing: notice how notes tend to trail after the beat, giving it a laid back feeling; the notation does not capture this important aspect, because it is too subtle, so listen well to the solos as played.
- ✓ pay attention to phrasing, i.e. notice how long and short phrases are mixed and how they start and end on different beats. Notice the lengths of pauses. Notice how phrases often cross over song sections and key changes. Playing exactly within the key changes is predictable and rather dull; anticipate them or lag behind now and then. All of this helps to get a natural feeling and avoid the impression of notes being 'forced' into a strict harmonic structure. **The chord changes should be your guide, not a straight jacket.** Another way to get a feeling of not being glued to the chord changes is to use counter motion: when the bass line or chords go down, let your solo melody go up, choosing the right notes of course, and vice versa. Don't do that all the time, because then it becomes contrived again. The solos in this package are fairly 'neat', meaning they follow the chord changes pretty well, but the above principles are definitely applicable. Other jazz styles that are much more 'free' obviously will take much more freedom in choosing notes, and often play 'outside' (outside the key). This is an other topic, and is not covered here. Anyway, going 'outside' only works if you're coming from 'inside'.
- ✓ pay attention to passing notes and chromatic scale sections, filling in the notes in between the scale notes is a very common way of increasing the number of melodic possibilities, and creating a 'looser' feeling, in the sense that the tonality of largely chromatic melodies is less strictly defined. A diatonic scale is a scale, but a pure chromatic note sequence has no explicit tonality, and its perceived tonality depends on various things, like what notes are emphasized, or what chords are played behind it. Chromatics is used very little in pop and rock, in jazz it is used extensively.
- ✓ pay attention how things are spiced up using many subtle slides, hammer-ons and light vibrato, but not too much! Some spice makes a bland dish tasty, but too much spice makes it inedible. The trick is to use the right amount, and you have



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to develop a feeling for it, according to your own taste, of course. But be careful: using too many of those added effects, will soon sound contrived and unnatural.

- ✓ pay attention to ‘thematic’ playing, it is the glue that holds the solos together. It means that a short melodic fragment is re-used by 1) repeating it, 2) modifying the rhythm 3) transposing it 4) modifying one or two notes, or any method of re-using the melodic or rhythmic idea with some kind of modification. You will hear this a lot in these solos, when you pay attention to it. Often it is just a few notes, like 3 or 4, that are repeated or recycled in some way. Thematic playing gives a high sense of “logic” and coherence to a solo (more explanation in the *Jazz Guitar Improvisation Workout*). For you as the player, ‘recycling’ melodic ideas, once you get the hang of it, also provides more time to think, before coming up with the next totally fresh and new phrase.
- ✓ don’t forget space; leave some space between phrases. Think of a singer or a horn player, they need some breathing space. Apart from the fact that it is musically pleasant to listen to, space also helps you to take your time, relax, and play with more confidence.
- ✓ pay attention to how solos are played over the complete range of the guitar, and all positions on the fret board. Playing in the middle of the neck is a good base position, because you can easily go up or down in position from there. Listen also to where your guitar sounds best and try to make use of that when you solo. You have to know your scales all over the fret board, in order to move around freely. This package is not set up to teach you that specifically, and there are plenty of other resources to learn scales all across the fret board, but you will be able to use and practice it with these solos!
- ✓ pay attention to form: how is the solo structured, e.g. fast and slow parts, low and high register parts, relaxed and tense parts. Mostly you will find that there is a sort of ‘wave’, i.e. pitch going slowly up and down, several times in a long solo. So, in fact, you should sometimes ‘zoom in’, to understand the note choices, but also sometimes ‘zoom out’, to pick up the aspects of phrasing and form. Most phrases have some relation to the previous one, and the next one. Musical ideas develop over several phrases, and sometimes several choruses.



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All of the above are aspects of a varied and appealing solo, even if only a few basic scales are at the core. Obviously, when you listen to the examples, you cannot pay close attention to all aspects at once, but try to pay special attention to one of the above points whenever you're listening to a particular solo. The next time you listen to the same solo, focus on another aspect. In the solo comments in the following chapters, some of those aspects above will be selected to explain, taking parts of a solo as a examples.

Using all those aspects to effect in your solo takes a lot of practice and listening, but **you have to be aware of them first**, to able to learn and incorporate them into your playing. Quite often, in jazz courses much attention is paid to scales/modes and theory in general, and too little to timing, phrasing, dynamics, and form, in fact all the aspects mentioned above; then again, many self-taught players may be very aware of dynamics and form, but don't have sufficient knowledge of scales and chords. In the end you need all of it.

The feeling of naturalness is one of the most difficult things to achieve, and by definition, naturalness cannot be forced; nevertheless, if you are aware of all the above aspects, you have the tools to learn to sound 'natural'. Better yet, with practice, these things will actually become natural, like second nature.

Philosophy

On a slightly philosophical note: in this age of automation, no one has yet come up with a computer program that will create great musical natural sounding solos (other than piecing together already existing phrases, which is rather limited and uncreative). This means that no one knows the rules for creating a great solo or melody, in fact there probably are no rules. It is a feeling that you have to develop by listening and playing a lot. And it helps to develop this feeling if you have some good and understandable examples to learn from, which is what this set of soloing examples is all about. Learning by example is probably the most natural way for people to learn. Little children don't learn to speak by reading grammar books, but just by listening, copying, and let the understanding grow naturally as more and more things fall into place, like the pieces of a puzzle. And even though it starts with copying, everyone will in the end create his own blend of language. Music, and especially improvisation, works the same way. By learning from many examples, understanding gradually grows, and things will start to fall into place. While your intuitive understanding grows, you will find your own way of doing things. But, you have to keep playing and listening(!) for this process to take place. Theory also helps a lot to understand why some notes sound better than others in a given context, it can help you to find more possibilities, and find them more quickly, and can certainly accelerate your understanding, but there is no theory that defines or prescribes how to play a great solo, because that is still something subjective and human, and a matter of experience and feeling. Listening and playing will always remain the most important aspects of learning to play music.