

Contrapuntal Improvisation

Volume 1

By
Serge Pierro



Introduction

I have long been fascinated by the concept of playing multiple lines at once on the guitar. However, there has always been a dearth of material on the subject, and those that did touch upon it lacked a clear presentation of the concepts in a progressive manner, where each step along the way built upon the previous ones. Jimmy Wyble's excellent tome, "The Art of Two Line Improvisation", is an inspired book, however, it is based on an altered scale, and contains only etudes, thus making it less "useful" for the player looking to play in a more traditional harmonic setting. George Van Eps' classic series of books, "Harmonic Mechanisms For Guitar", touched upon the subject over the course of the three volumes, however, the student had to find the pages of merit and try and organize them in a suitable manner. And as amazing as those books are (and they both are highly recommended!), there has never been a book or series of books devoted to the contrapuntal approach of playing the guitar. Until now.

This series of books will present the essential elements necessary for you to be able to improvise/compose multiple lines on the guitar. In this, the first volume, I will show you how to start learning the layout of the fingerboard by dividing it into three main areas, Root in the bass, Third in the bass and Fifth in the bass and all of the main diatonic arpeggios for each area. We will start with whole note bass notes and progress to using half notes, quarter note and eighth note rhythms. We will increase the stretching capabilities of your left hand, as well as developing finger independence. Once you have grown accustomed to the fingerings and understand their layout on the fingerboard, we will then start to work on some scale fragments and essential rhythms to further "separate" the lines from each other. At the end of this volume you will have a solid foundation on which to build your pursuit of more advanced concepts, either on your own, or continuing with the next volume.

Having taught privately for 35+ years, I've developed "systems" that allow students to progress at an accelerated pace, due to distilling the essential elements of the subject matter and being able to convey it in a clear manner. Many of my former students have gone onto having careers in the music industry, appearing on MTV, winning awards for movie soundtracks, having their material appear on TV shows, as well as becoming full time teachers themselves. Although I no longer practice 12-16 hours a day, I still manage to practice 4-6 hours a day and still enjoy the challenges of the instrument. If you are willing to devote the time practicing the material presented in this book, you will have the essential mechanisms for your personal pursuit of mastering Contrapuntal Improvisation.

Let's get started!

Diatonic Arpeggios

1

Root in the Bass (Ascending/Descending)

We begin by learning the diatonic seventh arpeggios in each of three different positions: Root in the bass, Third in the bass and Fifth in the bass. This chapter focuses on Root in the bass. It gets its name from the fact that the bass note of each arpeggio is also the root of the associated chord. Example: The Amaj7 arpeggio has “A” as its bass note. We will be using these bass note designation as a road map for the layout of the fingerboard, as all chords, arpeggios, scales, etc. can use these positions as landmarks in a logical manner.

The bass note is a whole note and your attention should be focused on holding it for its full value, especially since there may be a tendency for it to move due to the movement of the other fingers. Likewise, each note of the arpeggio should be clear and held for their full value and not released early in order to get to the next note/fingering.

Be sure to relax, and apply only the minimum amount of pressure necessary to hold down the bass note, as well as the individual notes of the arpeggio. It is a common mistake to apply too much pressure, which only leads to straining the muscles and ligaments in your forearm, wrist and elbow. This is very important!

Once you start to become familiar with the fingerings of each of the arpeggios in the “Diatonic Arpeggios” section, you will move onto the sections featuring each of the arpeggios isolated. Here you will play each arpeggio over a series of diatonic bass notes. These can also be thought of as slash chord arpeggios. For instance, the Amaj7 arpeggio with the “B” in the bass can be thought of as an “Amaj9” arpeggio with the “9th” in the bass.

Although the examples are written in the key of “A”, they should also be practiced in other keys. It is more important to understand what their function is, rather than the actual key. For instance, “Amaj7” should be thought of as a fingering for a “Imaj7” chord, so that it can be easily transposed to other keys.

Note the two fingerings for the G#m7b5 arpeggio. This introduces you to the concept of using different arpeggio fingerings, due to the position of the bass notes.

Also note the use of the fourth finger in the bass on the “B” and “E” notes on the isolated Amaj7 arpeggio (measures 5 and 8). Although it might prove to be a bit awkward at first, this is a fingering that will allow for many interesting ideas while improvising. Many players try to avoid the use of the fourth finger in the bass, but it is quite useful for the playing “below” the bass note. An improviser should have a full array of fingerings at their disposal, since you don’t know where your ideas are going to take you!

Chapter 1 Root in the Bass

Diatonic Arpeggios

First system (measures 1-4):
Measure 1: Treble clef, D4 quarter, E4 quarter, F#4 quarter, G4 quarter. Bass line: 5, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.
Measure 2: Treble clef, A4 quarter, B4 quarter, C5 quarter, D5 quarter. Bass line: 7, 7, 5, 7, 5, 7, 7.
Measure 3: Treble clef, E5 quarter, F#5 quarter, G5 quarter, A5 quarter. Bass line: 4, 6, 5, 4, 5, 6, 4.
Measure 4: Treble clef, B5 quarter, C6 quarter, D6 quarter, E6 quarter. Bass line: 6, 7, 7, 5, 7, 7, 6.

Second system (measures 5-8):
Measure 5: Treble clef, F#5 quarter, G5 quarter, A5 quarter, B5 quarter. Bass line: 7, 5, 4, 7, 4, 5, 7.
Measure 6: Treble clef, G5 quarter, A5 quarter, B5 quarter, C6 quarter. Bass line: 4, 6, 5, 7, 5, 7, 6.
Measure 7: Treble clef, A5 quarter, B5 quarter, C6 quarter, D6 quarter. Bass line: 6, 3, 7, 4, 7, 4, 7, 3.
Measure 8: Treble clef, B5 quarter, C6 quarter, D6 quarter, E6 quarter. Bass line: 7, 6, 5, 4, 5.

Amaj7

First system (measures 1-4):
Measure 1: Treble clef, D4 quarter, E4 quarter, F#4 quarter, G4 quarter. Bass line: 5, 6, 5, 4, 5, 4, 5, 6.
Measure 2: Treble clef, A4 quarter, B4 quarter, C5 quarter, D5 quarter. Bass line: 6, 5, 4, 5, 4, 5, 6.
Measure 3: Treble clef, E5 quarter, F#5 quarter, G5 quarter, A5 quarter. Bass line: 6, 5, 4, 5, 4, 5, 6.
Measure 4: Treble clef, B5 quarter, C6 quarter, D6 quarter, E6 quarter. Bass line: 6, 5, 4, 5, 4, 5, 6.

Second system (measures 5-8):
Measure 5: Treble clef, F#5 quarter, G5 quarter, A5 quarter, B5 quarter. Bass line: 6, 5, 4, 5, 4, 5, 6.
Measure 6: Treble clef, G5 quarter, A5 quarter, B5 quarter, C6 quarter. Bass line: 4, 6, 5, 4, 5, 4, 5, 6.
Measure 7: Treble clef, A5 quarter, B5 quarter, C6 quarter, D6 quarter. Bass line: 6, 6, 5, 4, 5, 4, 5, 6.
Measure 8: Treble clef, B5 quarter, C6 quarter, D6 quarter, E6 quarter. Bass line: 7, 6, 5, 4, 5, 4, 5, 6.

Chapter 7 Inversions

C#m7

First system (measures 1-4):
Measure 1: Treble clef, D4 quarter, E4 quarter, F#4 quarter, G4 quarter. Bass line: 4, 6, 5, 4, 5, 6, 4.
Measure 2: Treble clef, A4 quarter, B4 quarter, C5 quarter, D5 quarter. Bass line: 9, 9, 7, 9, 7, 9, 9.
Measure 3: Treble clef, E5 quarter, F#5 quarter, G5 quarter, A5 quarter. Bass line: 13, 12, 14, 12, 14, 12, 13.
Measure 4: Treble clef, B5 quarter, C6 quarter, D6 quarter, E6 quarter. Bass line: 9, 9, 7, 9, 7, 9, 9.

Second system (measures 5-8):
Measure 5: Treble clef, F#5 quarter, G5 quarter, A5 quarter, B5 quarter. Bass line: 4, 5, 6, 4, 6, 5, 4.
Measure 6: Treble clef, G5 quarter, A5 quarter, B5 quarter, C6 quarter. Bass line: 9, 7, 7, 7, 7, 9.
Measure 7: Treble clef, A5 quarter, B5 quarter, C6 quarter, D6 quarter. Bass line: 12, 14, 12, 13, 12, 14, 12.
Measure 8: Treble clef, B5 quarter, C6 quarter, D6 quarter, E6 quarter. Bass line: 9, 7, 7, 7, 7, 9.

Chapter 8 Arpeggio Pairs

I ii

First system:
Treble clef, key signature of one sharp (F#), 4/4 time signature.
Melody: Quarter rest, eighth notes (F#, A, C, E), quarter notes (G, F#, E, D), quarter notes (C, B, A, G), quarter notes (F#, E, D, C).
TAB: 4 3 2 3 2 3 4 | 5 5 3 5 3 5 5 | 7 7 8 7 8 7 7

Second system:
Treble clef, key signature of one sharp (F#), 4/4 time signature.
Melody: Quarter notes (B, A, G, F#), quarter notes (E, D, C, B), quarter notes (A, G, F#, E), quarter notes (D, C, B, A).
TAB: 5 5 8 5 8 5 5 | 11 12 12 10 12 12 11 | 12 10 13 12 13 10 12

Chapter 10 Scale Fragments

Ex. 1a

First system:
Treble clef, key signature of two sharps (F#, C#), 4/4 time signature.
Melody: Eighth notes with triplets (F#, A, C, E, G, F#, E, D), eighth notes with triplets (C, B, A, G, F#, E, D, C), eighth notes with triplets (B, A, G, F#, E, D, C, B), eighth notes with triplets (A, G, F#, E, D, C, B, A).
TAB: 2 4 6 4 6 7 6 7 9 4 6 7 | 2 6 4 4 7 6 6 9 7 4 7 6 | 4 2 6 6 4 7 7 6 9 6 4 7

Second system:
Treble clef, key signature of two sharps (F#, C#), 4/4 time signature.
Melody: Eighth notes with triplets (G, F#, E, D, C, B, A, G), eighth notes with triplets (F#, E, D, C, B, A, G, F#), eighth notes with triplets (E, D, C, B, A, G, F#, E), eighth notes with triplets (D, C, B, A, G, F#, E, D).
TAB: 4 6 2 6 7 4 7 9 6 6 7 4 | 6 2 4 7 4 6 9 6 7 7 4 6 | 6 4 2 7 6 4 9 7 6 7 6 4

Chapter 11 Scale Fragments

Position 1 (3rd String)

First system:
Treble clef, key signature of two sharps (F#, C#), 4/4 time signature.
Melody: Eighth notes with triplets (F#, A, C, E, G, F#, E, D), eighth notes with triplets (C, B, A, G, F#, E, D, C), eighth notes with triplets (B, A, G, F#, E, D, C, B), eighth notes with triplets (A, G, F#, E, D, C, B, A).
TAB: 6 7 9 6 7 9 6 7 9 6 7 9 | 6 7 9 6 7 9 6 7 9 6 7 9 | 6 7 9 6 7 9 6 7 9 6

Second system:
Treble clef, key signature of two sharps (F#, C#), 4/4 time signature.
Melody: Eighth notes with triplets (G, F#, E, D, C, B, A, G), eighth notes with triplets (F#, E, D, C, B, A, G, F#), eighth notes with triplets (E, D, C, B, A, G, F#, E), eighth notes with triplets (D, C, B, A, G, F#, E, D).
TAB: 5 7 9 5 7 9 5 7 9 5 7 9 | 7 9 7 5 7 9 7 5 7 9 7 5 | 9 7 5 5 7 9 7 5 7 9 7 5

Chapter 12 Modal Fingerings

Ionian

Chapter 15 Basic Rhythms (Moving Upper Line)

The musical score consists of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It contains four measures of music, each separated by a double bar line. The notes are: Measure 1: quarter note D4 (finger 4), quarter note E4 (finger 2); Measure 2: quarter note F#4 (finger 4), quarter note G4 (finger 2); Measure 3: quarter note A4 (finger 4), quarter note B4 (finger 2); Measure 4: quarter note C5 (finger 4), quarter note D5 (finger 2). The bottom staff is labeled 'TAB' and shows fret numbers for the same sequence: Measure 1: 7 5; Measure 2: 7 5; Measure 3: 7 5; Measure 4: 7 5.

[illegible]

Contrapuntal Improvisation

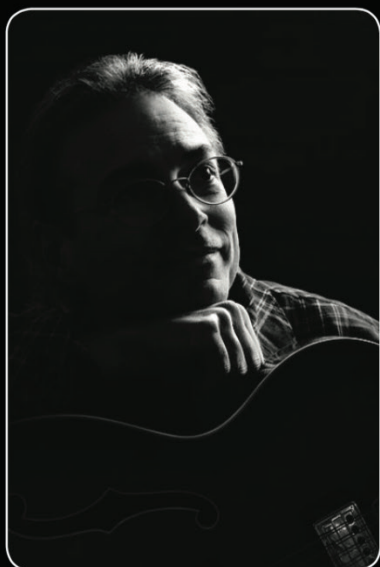
“For years, guitarists have longed for a comprehensive book on learning the art of contrapuntal improvisation. The wait is now over! “Contrapuntal Improvisation” provides the essential information necessary for learning how to improvise two lines at the same time.”



- You will learn to play diatonic 7th arpeggios over bass notes, in multiple positions along the fingerboard.
- You will further develop your technique, by working through a comprehensive study of scale fragments over bass notes, as well as developing finger independence and stretching.
- You will learn to play various rhythms, in both the upper and lower voices.



Future volumes will include topics such as: advanced arpeggios, juxtaposed arpeggios, complex rhythms, harmony, chord progressions, advanced scale fragments and much more!



About the Author:

Serge Pierro has been teaching guitar professionally for 35+ years. He has performed onstage, as well as in recording studios. His former students include touring and recording artists, award winning film composers, record producers, and teachers. Known for his prodigious practice regimen, he has spent countless hours studying the guitar. Inspired by his teacher, Howard Morgen, he is now writing books to share his insights with others. He currently lives on Shelter Island, NY

www.sergepierro.com

\$30.00

