

Here is a compilation of my popular Solo Jazz Guitar Tips of The Day. (C) 2014 Tim Lerch Music

Tip #1

Learn the melody to the song you are trying to play. Learn it well and be able to play it beautifully, unaccompanied. Play it horizontally along the top three strings (if possible). Play it in time and let the notes ring for their full value. All the hip chords in the world won't help a poorly played melody. [#solojazzguitartipoftheday](#)

Solo Jazz Guitar Tip Of The Day #2:

After you learn to play the melody to a song (see tip #1), learn the basic changes. Listen to more than a few recordings of the tune and get a consensus about the changes rather than just looking at a fake book. Spend some time playing the basic changes with a nice feel while humming or whistling the melody before you try to make a solo arrangement. [#solojazzguitartipoftheday](#)

Solo Jazz Guitar Tip of the Day #3

After you have learned the melody and the basic changes(tip 1 and 2), play the melody with just the root of the basic chords as small duet. After you can play comfortably with the low root and the melody try alternating the root with the fifth to create a nice two beat feel. Notice that however you decide to place the bass note and the melody the rest of any chord voices will fit in between the bass and treble, just one of the ergonomic truths of the instrument. Check out the video I posted yesterday for a demonstration of this concept. [#solojazzguitartipoftheday](#)

Solo Jazz Guitar Tip Of the Day #4

Learn the Numbers. There are two very important sets of numbers to learn if you want to be able to play a tune in any key and really understand its construction. First is what I call the Horizontal set. This is the roots of the chord progression in relationship to the key. These numbers are often written in Roman numerals like this ii V I or iii vi ii V etc. The reason I call this the Horizontal set is that the numbers travel from left to right in written music.

The other set, equally important, is the Vertical set. This set is the notes of a melody or chord in relation to the root of the chord of the moment. At any point along the way of the Horizontal set there are Vertical events. For instance on the ii chord the melody note might be b3. And the chord might be spelled 15b7b3 (low to high). As you learn a tune, learn both sets of numbers. Personally I don't worry too much about note names but I really pay attention to the numbers. [#solojazzguitartipoftheday](#)

Solo Jazz Guitar Tip Of The Day #5

Learn and practice major and minor Harmonized Scales in a variety of voicings. I like to do this with triads and four part chords. This way you have an entire set of chords that are in the same "voicing group" (have the same density) here are some common voicing

groups.

Play the tonic chord with these spellings and then continue up the key maintaining the same organization.

1357

1573

1735

1537

The above spellings are arranged by density from close to more spread out.

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Solo Jazz Guitar Tip of the Day #6

Playing solo guitar is physically demanding in many ways. We spend hours practicing and hours on the gig. Make sure you are using a posture that is healthy and incorporate simple gentle stretching into your practice and performance routine. Here is one of my most helpful stretches for arms and shoulders : Put your hands palms together (like praying) raise your elbows and then very gently point your fingers toward you solar plexus feeling a gentle stretch in your shoulders and forearms, then point your fingertips in the opposite direction. Remember don't be aggressive with this stretch it should be very gentle. I try to do this every 15 minutes or so while practicing and between every tune on a gig. It only takes a few seconds to do it but it will help a lot to keep things from tightening up and hurting. Feel free to post your tips on this very important subject.

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Solo Jazz Guitar Tip of the Day #7

The importance of the picking hand cannot be understated. How we bring sounds into existence is a crucial component of the overall performance. The internal dynamic of any vertical event is something we need to consider and control. Here is a challenging exercise that will bring greater awareness to the role of the right hand. Play a harmonized Bb major scale on the middle set of strings voiced 1573. Then play it so that the top note, the third of each chord, is louder than the other three. This will require that your picking hands third finger acts somewhat independently from the rest. Now play it again this time making the root of each chord louder than the rest. Now play it again making the seventh of each chord the loudest, now play it again making the fifth of each chord the loudest. This is very difficult to achieve but I believe just working on it and trying will make a positive difference in your picking hand awareness and your appreciation for the inner dynamics of vertical events.

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Solo Jazz Guitar Tip of the Day #8

Transpose! In an earlier tip I suggested to learn the horizontal numbers, meaning, the root motion of a song. Ted Greene called this the road map. One way to test if you really know the numbers is to transpose a song to an unfamiliar key and give it a try.

Transposing to different keys can lead to some very interesting discoveries. I often play

with a certain singer who likes things in unusual keys. Add to that, I tune my guitar down a whole step when I play with him. That leads to some gnarly transposing but just when I am dreading playing in Gb or some other "inconvenient key" i discover something that works really well that I might not have seen in a more "convenient" key. It is also a nice musical device to modulate to one or two different keys when playing solo. Future tips will give some cool modulation ideas.

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Solo Jazz Guitar Tip of the Day #9

Listen carefully, listen widely and listen deeply.

Music requires listening, you might say it's the most important aspect of what we do. Without listening its like the proverbial monkey at the typewriter. Try listening to a recording of a piano trio for instance. The first time listen just like you always do, let your mind be pulled here and there by various interesting events in the music, then listen again and listen just to the drums, only the drums ignore everything else, then listen again and listen only to the bass, really concentrate on every note the bass player plays, then listen again to just the left hand of the piano, just the harmony, then listen again only concentrating on the right hand of the piano. Then listen again and just let the music pour over you taking it all in. Does it sound different the last time than the first. Is it possible to learn to listen more deeply to even our favorite recordings? How about when playing with others? Can we learn to listen more deeply even while we are playing? The deeper the listening, the deeper the music.

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Solo Jazz Guitar Tip of the Day#10

Pay attention to the stuff in the middle.

Can you hear the inner movement of the voices that live between the bass and the melody? For me this is where the most exciting sounds can occur in a solo piece. To develop a better appreciation for the "stuff in the middle" try this. Play a common ii V7 I that you already know. Pluck all the notes of each chord simultaneously, try to sing the line that lives on the string just below the highest note in each chord. Then try to sing the line that lives on the string just above the bass note of each chord. No cheating! Just pluck all the notes together and try to pick out those middle notes. Can you hear it? If so great! If not learn to listen for the stuff in the middle and you will become very happy. By hearing and attending to the middle voices we can elevate the quality of our solo guitar playing.

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Solo Jazz Guitar Tip of the Day #11

Pay attention to the condition of your right hand fingers (plucking hand) if you use nails, are the surfaces if your nails really smooth and nicely polished? if you play with the flesh are you fingertips nice and smooth without torn skin or snags? I use a 4 way buffer to keep my thumbnail and fingertips smooth and polished and it really makes a difference in the sound of the notes. I have also noticed that if you keep the nails really well polished

they don't wear as much or as unevenly if you are playing on steel strings. So go and grab a pile of em and make sure you always have one with you for general maintenance and in case of an emergency.

Anyone else have handy proven nail/fingertip care secrets? [#solojazzguitartipoftheday](#)

Solo Jazz Guitar Tip of the Day #12

Use your imagination.

When you have learned the melody and basic changes and are about to begin making an arrangement of a tune, put your guitar down, clear your mind and imagine how you want the new piece to sound. Play it in your mind, don't worry about the technical stuff yet just hear it as you want to hear it. Sometimes we are too quick to grab the guitar and just use all of our old muscle habits. If you can imagine the music in your mind first, you might have to work hard to actually realize it on the guitar but chances are you will discover something new and beautiful.

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Solo Jazz Guitar Tip of the Day #13

Make sure you have a good feeling quarter note pulse. Jazz guitar players often put a lot of time and energy into playing 8th notes and triplets etc. that's all good but I would suggest that if you don't have a good quarter note pulse that really feels good, your higher divisions will never feel very good. A good, fat, steady pulse is especially important for solo guitar and accompanying singers etc.

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Solo Jazz Guitar Tip of the Day #14

Inversions!

One very efficient and clear way to get your inversions together are Systematic Inversions. I learned this method from Ted Greene. Here's the drill, start with a chord you know already that has the root in the bass, for now stick with a four note chord with no doubled tones. Let's say C7 at the 3rd fret spelled 15b73(root position). Now, on the same string set move each chord tone up on the same string to the next higher chord tone and you will have 3b715 (first inversion) do this procedure again and you will get 513b7(second inversion) then again and you will get b7351(third inversion) all on the middle set of four strings. Once you get the fingerings figured out, write them down so you can keep them straight then try playing them very slowly with a nice quarter note pulse. First four beats each then two beats each then one beat each, take your time don't try to do too much too soon, maybe just go back and forth between root position and first inversion till you get it down, then add one more etc. after you get smooth at playing them one beat each, try creating an 8th note melody by alternating the top voice with the next lower voice (second from the top). Suddenly there is the effect of a simple walking bass line with an 8th note melody. Apply this procedure to all of your common root position chords, remember doubled notes can create some difficult fingerings so it's best to start with four note seventh chords. Later after you get familiar with the procedure you

can use any chord you like and find all of the related inversions.

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Solo Jazz Guitar Tip of the Day #15

Go out and take a nice long walk.

We spend lots of time practicing and listening, teaching and playing. Sometimes the very best thing you can do for your creativity, flow and mental awareness is to get outside and "get the stink blown off a ya" so enjoy your walk and the benefits it will have on your playing and well being.

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Solo Jazz Guitar Tip of the Day #16

Learn how to play diatonic thirds and sixths in double stops.

Thirds and sixths are great melodic devices and can be a great way to change up the density of your arrangements and improvisations. Another cool trick is to play a third double stop then lower the lower note a diatonic step and raise the upper note two steps. Then you have a diatonic sixth and instant contrary motion.

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Solo Jazz Guitar Tip of the Day #18

Today's tip is for developing rhythmic independence between the thumb and the fingers of your picking hand.

Finger two notes one on the 5th string and one on the 2nd string, for instance play a major 10th with D and F#.

Then, play quarter notes on the bass note with your thumb. Then add quarter notes on the high note alternating index and middle. Then switch to middle and ring, and finally ring and pinky. Take it slow and keep it steady. Then change to 8th notes in the treble against quarters in the bass. Go thru the finger combinations again. Then try 8th note triplets in the treble with all the two finger combinations then try three finger combinations. If you really want to push the envelope try quarter note triplets in the trebles against quarters in the bass and then try quarter note triplets in the bass with quarters in the treble. I'm sure you'll find more combinations to try, the possibilities are nearly endless. The trick is to make an exercise that shows you your weak areas and then work on those areas until you have clarified a deficiency.

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Solo Jazz Guitar Tip of the Day #19

Triads are the keys to the kingdom! An in depth study of triads is essential for learning how the guitar fingerboard is organized. Not to mention that triads just sound good to us. If you learn harmonized triad scales in Major, Melodic minor and Harmonic minor. In root position and 1st and 2nd inversions you will be very happy. If you write them out yourself rather than looking for a book or internet page, you will be even happier.

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Solo Jazz Guitar Tip of the Day #20

Explore cycles.

In Yesterday's tip I encouraged you to learn triad scales. If you get tired of hearing the scales just going up and down by step, try this.

In the key of C major play any inversion of a C major triad, then locate the 5th of the chord. Raise the 5th up a diatonic step to the 6th. Bingo you are now playing an A minor triad. Find the 5th of A minor and raise it a diatonic step and bingo you are playing an F major triad. Keep this up and you will cycle thru the key in 6ths. If you start near the nut you can go thru the key three times before running out of neck. This particular cycle is fun cause it sounds great and you'll play all the inversions of each triad as you climb the neck. Just remember raise the 5th degree of each chord to the 6th and then re name that note the root of the next chord.

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Solo Jazz Guitar Tip of the Day #21

Dynamics Dynamic Dynamics!

The guitar is capable of a pretty broad range of volume from whisper quiet to nice and loud, very often we don't explore much of that range. Experiment with playing very quietly and then the opposite, where do you usually reside? Perhaps it is possible to widen your comfort zone. Experiment with starting a passage softly and increasing the volume and the passage unfolds. Or try it the other way around. Consider the inner dynamic of a single note melody, do you accent certain notes? Are you in control of the accents? Dynamics are an important component to any performance and will add drama, emotion, suspense and excitement to your playing.

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Solo Jazz Guitar Tip of the Day #22

Today's tip came up in a recent conversation I had with brilliant guitarist [Sylvain Courtney](#).

What would it be like to be able to play any chromatic note as the top note of any chord type? Of course not all chromatic notes work or sound nice with all chords but it's fun to explore and you might be surprised at how much can be learned. Try this:

Start with any chord, say Cmaj7 and have the tonic C as the highest note. Then play C# as the highest note. Not a very pleasing sound with maj7 but it works nicely with C7 then play D on top, works great, then Eb probably better to go back to C7 for this one, continue up one half step at a time and see, not only how you need to finger the supporting chord to get the high note but also make a judgement about whether you like the sound or think it might be useful. Obviously some notes will clash with chord tones then you have to make a choice, drop a chord tone to eliminate a clash, or perhaps change a chord tone to adjust the quality of the chord, it's a nice experiment and puts you in the lab to discover things that might not be conventional but that you may just like. Once you do this with Maj7, Dom7, Min7, Min7b5. If you are still loving the game try it with

inversions of all of the above chord types. Have fun exploring.

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Solo Jazz Guitar Tip of the Day #23

Here is a fun way stretch your conventional chord vocabulary. Play a ii V7 I VI7 in any key, Start low on the fingerboard and play the ii with the b7 as the top voice, then have the next chromatic note higher be the top note of the V7 and then keep it going up by half steps as you go thru the progression a few times, it's ok to move a whole step from time to time if you really need to. Try again starting on a different chord tone. Eventually starting an ascending chromatic line from every chord tone and extension of the ii. Then try it all again but this time start high and descend chromatically with the top voice. This game isn't limited to the top voice but it's a good place to start.

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Solo Jazz Guitar Tip of the Day #24

The next few tips will be on the subject of harmonic enrichment and re harmonization. I'm not trying to cover the entire subject in this or any single tip but hopefully over the course of the next few weeks you'll get some good ideas.

Ok here's today's tip

In major key harmony there are three basic tonalities. Tonic sounds (I iii and vi), Sub Dominant sounds (IV and ii) and Dominant sounds (V and vii). The scale degrees grouped together in () are generally interchangeable, I think of them as Diatonic substitutions. Experiment with a simple I IV V type song like Amazing Grace and see if you can generate some interesting sounds by using some of these diatonic substitutions to get some fresh sounds. Remember you don't always have to replace the original chord but rather use the diatonic sub to enhance and create root movement.

There will be many more principles coming so try to resist the temptation to list all of your favorites in the comments for now.

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Solo Jazz Guitar Tip of the Day #25

You can approach any chord by its own V7. You can also bounce back from any chord to its own V7 then back again. This is very handy to create a bit more movement in situations where the harmony doesn't have very much movement. Try adding V7 approach and jump back V7 to your Amazing Grace from yesterday.

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Solo Jazz Guitar Tip Of the Day #26

Expanding on yesterdays tip of approaching any chord with its own V7, try playing "streams" of I V7 I etc. using inversions. Use systematic inversions (see the tip from a week or so ago) to generate inversions of a maj 7 chord on the middle set of strings and then approach each inversion with an inversion of the V7. You should be able to find a nice V7 right near each inversion of I. Play them all in a row and you'll have a very nice

"stream" of I sounds. Work this out on the top set and the bottoms set and any other voicings that you use regularly. Now try this with the ii chord and it's V7 etc.

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Solo Jazz Guitar Tip of the Day #27

Any Dominant 7 chord can be coupled with a minor 7th chord built on its 5th. For example, if you have an A7 for four beats you can play Em7 A7 two beats each. This gives not only bass movement but a subtle inner voice movement to an otherwise static bar of A7. Ted Greene called this principal Companion Minor or Co minor. So now if you use the previous tip about approaching chords with their own V7, now you can add the Companion Minor to your approaches. This chord enhancement is often simply called a "two five", sometimes this is true but often it's not. Some common co minor - Dom7 couplings are ii V7, iii VI7, iv bVII7, v I7, vi II7, bii bV7,

[#iv VII7, biii bVI7.](#)

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Solo Jazz Guitar Tip of the Day #28

Strengthen your "mind guitar".

I popped a tendon in my wrist yesterday (away from the guitar) so I'm taking a few days off from my usual hours and hours a day of playing. But that doesn't mean i cant practice. I am currently working on a new arrangement so I'll have to practice with my mind only. I'll play it end to end perfectly with a beautiful tone and great time feel. The guitar in your mind has the perfect sound, perfect action, perfect intonation, spend sometime with it and you'll find out if you really know the sound and layout of your instrument. Mental practice of all kinds is an important component to our growth as musicians.

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Solo Jazz Guitar Tip of the Day #29

More reharmonization ideas,

Using Flat Five substitution with Companion Minor.

In tip 26 and 27 I talked about approaching any chord with its own V7 and then also adding a companion minor to that V7. Today's tip is to make a substitution on that substitution. Once you have determined a chords V7, you can play a flat five substitution of that chord and add the new chords companion minor. For example Dmin7 G7 Cmaj7 can become Abmin7 Db7 Cmaj7. Of course the melody must be given a priority so the new chords may have to be modified to accommodate the melody, (rather than the other way around).

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Solo Jazz Guitar Tip of the Day #30

In much the same way as using a chords V7 to approach or bounce back, you can use diminished 7.

There are many uses of diminished 7 chords and it is not a subject that can be covered

comprehensively here but one way is to approach a chord with a diminished 7 from a half step below the root. Of course voice leading makes a big difference in the success of this approach so make sure to pay attention to how the voices move. Once you try it with root position chords try using diminished 7 to approach all of the inversions as well. For instance here are some nice ways to approach Cmaj7.

Bdim7 Cmaj7, Ddim7 Cmaj7/E, Fdim7 Cmaj7/E, Abdim7 Cmaj7/G Bdim7 Cmaj7/B.

Remember all of these diminished chords are most properly called Bdim7 the vii dim7 for the key. Try this for all chord types.

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Solo Jazz Guitar Tip of the Day #31

If you know how to use Melodic Minor in your single lines, try harmonizing melodic minor into thirds, sixths, triads and 7th chords and use the resultant double stops and chords in the same types of situations. For instance, for a G7 altered, you might play Ab Melodic Minor, if you harmonize Ab Melodic Minor into 7th chords you can use any of the resultant chords as a sub for G7 alt. If you use chords built on any two adjacent scale degrees, say, Abmin/maj7 and Bbmin7, you'll get all of the altered tones along with the 3 b7.

Don't forget to try this idea for Tonic minor, min7b5 and 7#11 and any other situation that you might like melodic minor derived sounds.

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Solo Jazz Guitar Tip of the Day #32

Since today is Independence Day in the US today's tip is about independence of the Left Hand (fretting hand). A very important and often overlooked quality for playing solo guitar is to allow some notes to ring while others are moving. This requires a level of independence in the fretting hand that is difficult to develop but ever so satisfying when it works. Here is a fun exercise that is challenging and also sounds interesting. Start with a major7 chord on the top four strings spelled 1357. Hold down all of the notes then switch the string location of the 1st and 4th finger (1st moves to D string and 4th moves to E string) without moving the 2nd and 3rd fingers. Play the original chord again then switch the 1st and 4th and see if the middle two notes keep ringing. Next move back to the original chord and switch the 2nd and 3rd while letting the outside two notes ring. Fun right? Now switch 1st and 2nd, now try 3rd and 4th. For a variation, flip the whole chord so now it's a Dom13#9 and repeat the finger switches. It's also a good brain stretcher to name the resultant chords after each switch.

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Solo Jazz Guitar Tip of the Day #33

Today's tip is regarding improvising as a solo guitarist. Here the scenario: you're on the gig and play the arrangement that you worked on all week and it goes nicely until you are about 90 seconds into the tune, the arranged portion is over and then you try to do a few improvised choruses. This is when things can often go a bit south. The groove starts to

get a little less than solid, it's hard to keep track of the chords and the melody is a bit disjointed, beats get dropped, suddenly the arrangement and the improvised portion sound like two different players. We've all been there! There is no one absolute solution, the truth is it takes as much or more work to improvise well as it does to learn and remember nice arrangements. A few reminders can help. First make sure that if you are going to try to improvise that your arranged portions aren't way more intricate than your ability to improvise, be realistic about tempo and overall difficulty.

If you are going to improvise, you don't necessarily have to suddenly become Mr. Bebop and blow your fastest lines all over the chords. One thing that can work well is to stick with the fingerings that you use for the main melody but change it up and play a simple variation that still has a nice groove and feel. Sometimes a modulation can create possibilities for variations. Another strategy that I use often is to make sure you can at least play two chords per measure using inversions, subs, passing chord etc. creating a nice "Two feel" in the bass then add a simple melodic movement to each voicing. If you keep the pulse feeling good even a simple improvised melody can sound great. Another strategy is to concentrate on the strength and rhythmic integrity of your improvised melody and just punctuate with small chords in the way you might play in a trio or duo, if your pulse is good and you make the changes with your lines this is a satisfying approach. Overall, I'd recommend keeping it simple and grooving as a first priority. if you get people tapping their foot and leave them hanging that's not so good and you can't really keep people interested if you play rubato all night so use the song as a model and create tuneful melodic variations with a good feel, you might not win any bebop shred awards but your audience will have a good listening experience and the guitar players in the crowd will have plenty to enjoy as well. Future tips will get into more specifics about this very important aspect of being a solo guitarist.

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Solo Jazz Guitar Tip of the Day # 34

A very basic Latin feel with a bass line primarily made up of roots and fifths (think the famous bass line from Song For My Father) is a great starting place to develop independence between what your right (picking) hand thumb is doing and what your fingers will do. Start easy by playing an Amin7 at the fifth fret, play the bass line dum ta ta (root fifth fifth) until it feels good and natural then try to play simple melodies above the bass line right there at the fifth fret area. If you need to simplify the bass line at first to just root and fifth on beats one and three do that then try to add the syncopation later. When the bass line and a simple melody come together and really lock up its a very wonderful feeling, it might take a lot of practice and be a bit humbling but certainly worth the work.

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Solo Jazz Guitar Tip of the Day #35

I enjoy playing challenging tunes with multiple parts and trying to make all the parts feel good and be fully realized but I also really enjoy playing a simple tune and just relaxing

and letting it feel good. Make sure when you are putting a set together to put in tunes that allow you to relax and enjoy yourself. Let your fingers and brain have a rest as well as letting your audience just pat their foot and get a good feeling. A solo guitar performance doesn't all have to be heavy lifting! If you haven't already, think of some simple fun tunes to add to your set, you might be surprised how well they are received.

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Solo Jazz Guitar Tip of the Day #36

Modulation is a very useful device for the solo guitarist. Rather than playing the tune and then improvising over the changes like we might do in a group, it can be very effective to play the tune and then modulate and play it again perhaps even modulating a third time to finish up. One of my favorite modulation devices is to use the iv as a pivot chord. It might go something like this. You are in the last two bars of the tune, and playing a iii VI ii V7 to take it home, instead play iii VI ii V iii Vi iv bVII at this point the iv bVII becomes ii V of a key a minor third higher. Do it again and you'll be another minor third higher then do it again and you'll be right back where you started from. If nothing else it's a great way to practice playing a tune you know in various keys. Have fun

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Solo Jazz Guitar Tip of the Day # 37

Learn your inversions! No, really I'm serious, learn your inversions. They are very important. You'll enjoy your life much more if you do. You won't be so worried about how to harmonize a melody, you'll have the beginnings of intelligent bass motion, your playing and arrangements will flow more effortlessly because you will have worked out systems for expressing the harmony that set you up for being able to improvise melodically while outlining the changes. Ok have I convinced you? Learn your inversions!!!

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