

GUEST GURU

Frank Gambale's Dangerous Riffs

Reunited they stand—Gambale and legendary keyboardist/composer Chick Corea, trading licks before a recent concert at the Hollywood Bowl.

BY JUDE GOLD



IT SURE IS DIFFICULT to hold a conversation with Frank Gambale.

No, it's not because the powerhouse fusion hero has any problem conveying his ideas—quite the contrary. (Gambale is, after all, the very articulate head of the guitar department at the Los Angeles Music Academy.) The problem is that when Gambale is holding a guitar, it's darn near impossible to focus on what he's saying because he keeps distracting you with his superhuman noodling—jaw-dropping licks that are faster than a speeding bullet and more angular than a mountain of kryptonite.

Luckily, if you're the sort of person who likes to decode such monster maneuvers, there may be a rewind button in your future. "I've always loved concert films," says Gambale. "But the more I watched them, the more it began to occur to me that it would be great if after the performance, the artist would

go back and explain exactly what he or she played."

Such is the inspiration behind *Frank Gambale: Concert With Class* [Warner Bros.], a new video in which the lethal guitarist performs an inspired set with his trio and then sits down with the camera for a 60-minute, one-on-one lesson with the viewer. And, luckily, the compositions are fully notated in the accompanying booklet, and feature plenty of intros, themes, and progressions that are approachable by players of most skill levels.

"This phrase is actually very easy to play," notes Gambale of **Ex. 1**, the intro to "Yang," one of the songs he performs on the video. "It's got a lot of one-fret, four-note chords that are just one-finger barres—how difficult can that be? Lately, I've made this progression even easier by leaving out the lowest note of each chord. It makes sense because the bass plays those notes already."

However, as its name implies,



the adventurous composition entitled "Dangerous Curves" contains some deadly licks and features several chops-testing melodic twists and turns. Its first eight measures, however, are hypnotic, jangly and not very hard to play. "The song's intro came about when I told

[bassist] Stu Hamm to play me some weird bass notes one after the other," reveals Gambale. "He went from *D* to *F#* to *Bb*, which I thought sounded really cool, so I began arpeggiating *D7*, *F#maj7* and *Bb9* clusters over the top, letting the notes ring [plays **Ex. 2**]. In

Ex. 1

"Yang" F/G Db/Eb Bb/C Am7#5 Db/Eb Bb/C Ebm
 Eb/F C/D Fm/Bb Eb/F B/C# Ab/Bb

T	•	10	8	6	5	3	1	1	8	6	4	3	1
A	•	10	8	6	5	3	3	0	8	6	4	3	3
B	•	10	8	6	5	3	3	3	8	6	4	3	1
		10	8	6	5	3	1	5					6

the upper voice of this progression, there's a haunting, chromatic melody; I find it fascinating against what's happening below."

It's with the sixteenth-note pick-up to bar 11 that the melodic curves get truly dangerous. Naturally—as anyone at all familiar with Gambale's legendary fretboard speed would expect—there are some sweeps of the pick involved.

"I'll often use some pretty odd fingerings, because in the early stages of developing my sweep approach, the game was to put notes in places that enabled the sweeping. Nowadays, I can sweep with any shape or any position, but I still put notes in awkward places simply because I like the way they sound on one string as opposed to another. This particular lick is hard to play be-

cause the intervals are really spread out—especially the last three notes.

"Harmonically, however, this section is pretty simple—it just goes *D7* to *A♭7*, and when I'm improvising over these changes, I usually just go back and forth between *D* and *A♭* Mixolydian. The interesting harmonic angle to this progression is that in *D7*, the *♭7* is *C* and the 3 is *F♯*, while in *A♭7*,

those same notes are present, but their roles are reversed. That is, the *C* is the 3 and *F♯*—which you can respell as *G♭*—is the *♭7*. Either way, it's a tritone in both chords. I play games with it in my solos—it's kind of a melodic brain teaser."

Catch up with Gambale on the World Wide Web by clicking to frankgambale.com.

Ex. 2

"Dangerous Curves"

1. *D7* *F♯maj7* *B♭9* *D2* *A♯sus* *A♭maj7*

5. *D7* *C♯6* *A♭maj7/B♭* *B♭7* *D7* *F♯maj7* *E7♯5*

9. *D7* *F♯maj7* *E7♯5* *D7*

13. *A♭7*