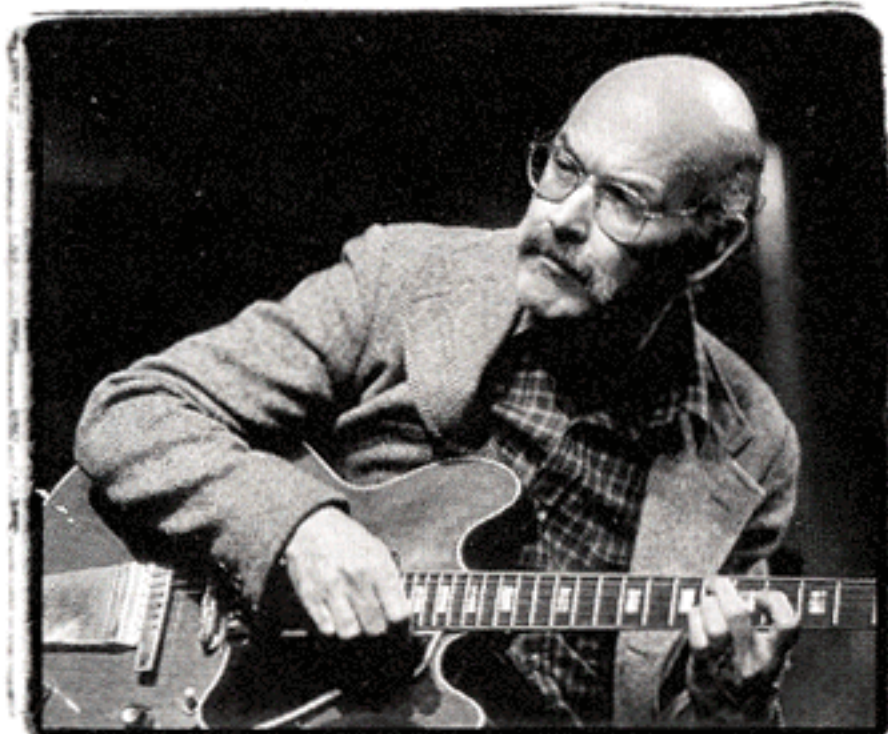


Jim Hall On Jazz Guitar And Legato Phrasing



IN A MAY '83 COVER STORY BY JIM Ferguson and Arnie Berle, the great Jim Hall spoke eloquently about his life and the art of jazz guitar. Here are selected highlights from this rare interview. —AE

Soloing. To keep a solo sounding like it was just invented, I try to make myself ignorant and go only by sound and feeling. When things are going right, it feels like the music is happening because you finally got out of the way.

Collective improvisation. I like to think of improvisation as instant composition—a way of reflecting a tune's melody and sharing it with some-

one else. Ideally a group should be in an evolving state like a mobile, with each player acting and reacting as the music takes shape.

Influences. Jazz horn and piano players have had a big effect on me. Bill Evans, Art Farmer, and Sonny Rollins were very influential. Lester Young's playing sounds better to me now than when I first heard it. He played with so much grace and delicacy, but he had a stomping quality too. I don't find guitar players as interesting.

Sound. My legato phrasing is a result of [horn player] Jimmy Giuffre wanting me to get a slurring sound so I wouldn't interrupt the flow of the lines he'd write. For example, here's how I might play a phrase in *B \flat* . It uses the notes from *F* to *B \flat* and is played all on the *D* string.

T
A 3 5 7 8 7 5 3
B

Practicing. Players should force themselves to hear something and then play it, rather than just do whatever comes under the fingers. I try to make my playing as fresh as possible by not relying on set patterns. When I practice, I tie off some of the strings with rubber bands to force myself to look at the fingerboard differently. For instance, I might play on the *G* and *D* strings only, or even just the *G* and *A* strings.

Skills. Being able to take music off a piece of paper is important because that's how musical information is communicated; however, it isn't everything. In the long run, I think it's more important to look at paintings than to listen to the way somebody plays bebop lines.

Mastering the guitar. The instrument keeps me humble. Sometimes when I pick it up it seems to say, "No, you can't play today." I keep at it anyway. I don't really play fast—speed has never come easily for me. Little by little I pared down my playing to suit my personality. ■