LESSON: JAZZ

Emily Remler

Join Pete Callard as he uncovers some of the greatest licks from the giants of the genre. This month, the first lady of jazz guitar: Emily Remler.

Emily Remler: here pictured with a cherry Gibson ES-335

studying at Berklee in the mid ’70s that she discovered jazz. Practising ferociously, she graduated Berklee at the age of 18 and relocated to New Orleans to begin forging a career as a professional musician. Remler was championed by Herb Ellis, who declared her “the new superstar of guitar”. She went on to work with singers Astrud Gilberto and Rosemary Clooney, and in 1985 was named Guitarist Of The Year by Downbeat magazine. She released two instructional videos for Hotlicks - Bebop & Swing Guitar and Advanced Latin & Jazz Improvisation, but it was her series of releases on the Concord label which best showcased her growing maturity both as soloist and composer. In all Remler released seven albums beginning with Firefly in 1981 and culminating with 1990’s This Is Me. A heroin addict, Emily Remler tragically died of heart failure at the age of 32 while on tour in Australia in 1990.

Remler’s playing is an interesting mix of the old and the new. The influence of players like Wes Montgomery, Herb Ellis and Pat Martino are certainly in evidence; but she also developed a strong individual voice as her career progressed, alongside a real affinity for Latin music. Favouring a classic jazz guitar sound, Emily Remler’s playing takes in Wes style octaves and simple, swinging phrases but also speedy, more complex harmonic ideas, chromaticism and substitutions, and all of these are featured in this month’s examples.

This blend of old and new is highlighted in the first two examples. Example 1 features a classic bop style short III-VI-II-V-I line in F, followed by some lovely substitutions over a II-V-I in Example 2 (admittedly it resolves to Ebmaj7 but that’s basically a substitution for the I chord Gm7). Example 3 is the first of our examples to highlight Remler’s love - and command - of the blues as over a Bb II-V-I she showcases simple bluesy phrases and great feel and phrasing. Example 4 features the first half of a Bb blues, mixing bluesy phrases, hip substitutions and different rhythmic groupings to great effect, while Examples 5 and 6 are both speedy 16th-note lines dancing around the changes with great chromatic movement and substitutions. Example 7 features a Bb short I-VI-II-V-I idea followed by a great Bb7 phrase featuring a series of substitutions, then we’re back to the blues for Example 8 with a full chorus in Bb beginning with strong rhythmic motifs before moving into a more complex series of ideas. Examples 9 and 10 feature aspects of Remler’s use of octaves - Example 9 is a Bb II-V-I-Wes type line, followed by a split octaves idea (Example 10), and the final two examples are speedy, complex, weaving 16th-note minor and major II-V-I lines (Examples 11 and 12).

"I may look like a nice Jewish girl from New Jersey, but inside I’m a 50-year-old, heavyset black man with a big thumb."

Emily Remler

GET THE TONE

Emily Remler primarily played a Gibson ES330, an ES335 and a Beryllium Hollowbody, strung with 0.11 gauge half-round strings. For a good classic jazz sound use the guitar’s neck pickup with the tone control rolled off to around 3 or 4 (or take the treble down on the amp), and set up a warm clean tone on your amp. Thick strings work better, as does a hollowbody guitar, but neither is essential.
EXAMPLE 1 SHORT III-VI-II-V-I IN F

Here's a Charlie Parker-esque short III-VI-II-V-I in G, based around Am7, D7b9, Gm7 and C7b9 arpeggios and ending on a chromatic idea over Fmaj7.

EXAMPLE 2 SLOW SHORT MINOR II-V-I IDEA

This Latin feel minor II-V-I has an Ebmaj7 acting as a substitute for the Gm7 "I" chord. Remler plays around Ebmaj7 in the first bar, then outlines a G major arpeggio over Am7 and an Am arpeggio over the D7, closing on a Gm7 arpeggio over the final Ebmaj7.

EXAMPLE 3 BLUESY II-V-I IDEA IN Bb

This very cool lick is the first of our examples to highlight Remler's love and command of the blues. Over a Bb II-V-I she showcases simple bluesy phrases and great feel and phrasing, playing around Bb Dorian/blues scale and ending on the 3rd (D) and root of the Bb7.

EXAMPLE 4 MINOR II-V-I IDEA IN A MINOR

Remler mixes blues phrases, hip substitutions and rhythmic groupings to great effect. She starts around Bb and Eb Mixolydian with chromatic passing notes, moving to a triplet idea at the end of bar 3 that outlines Bbm7; then Bm7 in the second half of bar 4 before resolving to Bbm7 and Eb7, closing on the 3rd of Bb (D).
EXAMPLE 5 16TH NOTE II-V IDEA

This is a speedy 16th-note line starting around Dm7 then moving to a Bm7, Eb7, II-V and finishing on Fmaj7. Remler plays around D melodic minor over the Dm7, initially suggesting Dbmaj7 over Bbm7 before moving straight down 8b Dorian (with a chromatic passing note) and ending on A, the 3rd of the final Fmaj7.

EXAMPLE 6 II-V-I IN GB

This example features another 16th-note line, this time over a GB II-V-I. Remler outlines Abm7, Db and Ab Dorian over the Abm7 in the first bar, then suggests Db half-whole diminished scale over the Db7 and descends chromatically to end on the 5th (Db) of the Gbmaj7 I chord.

EXAMPLE 7 SHORT I-VI-II-V-I IN Bb

Here Remler begins with a Bb short I-VI-II-V, over which she plays a standard bebop phrase following the chords, then over the Bb7 suggests Abmaj7, Bb9, Eb and Bbm, finishing on a bluesy Bb idea. Notice how Remler mixes blues and jazz ideas in one flowing phrase, to superb effect.

EXAMPLE 8 BLUES CHORUS IN Bb

Remler begins with a strong rhythmic motif, moving into Bb altered resolving to the Eb7 then suggesting Eb Mixolydian and Lydian b7 with lots of chromaticism resolving back to Bb7. Over the Cm7 she recalls her mentor Herb Ellis, outlining Ebmaj7 (or Cm9), then F altered over the F7 and resolving to a blues phrase on Bb7.
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EXAMPLE 9 II-V-I OCTAVES LINE IN Bb
CD TRACK 80
Emily Remler was heavily influenced by Wes Montgomery, as shown in this octaves idea over a II-V-I in Bb. Use the fleshy part of the side of your picking hand thumb and employ only downstrokes for this line, all the while being careful to mute the surrounding strings with your fretting fingers.

EXAMPLE 10 SPLIT OCTAVES IDEA
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Here's another octave idea that Remler used frequently, this time splitting the two notes to give a great rhythmically displaced line. Use the pick (or thumb) for the bass notes and the first or second finger for the higher octave - always paying close attention to the rhythms.

EXAMPLE 11 G MINOR II-V-I LINE
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Over the Am7b5 here Remler starts around Gm with a b5 thrown in (Db), then on beat 3 anticipates the coming chord, outlining D7 and D altered. She continues with D altered over the D7b9 then suggests a series of V-I resolutions, ultimately resolving to the root and 5th of Gm7 in the final bar.

EXAMPLE 12 F MAJOR VI-II-V-I LINE
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Remler starts with G altered (G Ab Bb Bb Eb F) over the G7, resolving to Ebmaj7 over the Cm7 (similarly to Ex 8) then plays around C minor with an added b5. Over the F7 she returns to F altered and anticipates the Ebmaj7 with a Dm7 arpeggio (beat 4) followed by a Bbmaj7 arpeggio over the Bbmaj7 and throws in a favourite idea taking a small motif down chromatically, finishing back on Bbmaj7. I hope these licks give you a great insight into this much missed jazz guitar great.