University of Adelaide

Elder Conservatorium of Music

Emily Remler - Product or Prodigy?

Submitted by

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Introduction

Over the years since Jazz education was formalised in the late 1960s it has often been criticised (particularly at the tertiary level and including the Berklee School of Music in Boston) for delivering programs that are simply producing musician clones. Hal Garper, a highly respected jazz musician and educator himself, is one critic who writes:

> *"By embracing neo-European classical methodology, the development of a true, historically valid "Jazz methodology" based upon African oral teaching concepts has never developed…The institutionalisation of teaching Jazz in the university has been most destructive."*[1]

Ronan Guilfoyle, a well-regarded Jazz bassist from Ireland, who has incidentally performed with Emily Remler, also raises this issue in an on-line discussion.

> "*I think it's fair to say that in the jazz media, jazz education (or at least formalised jazz education in institutions) gets a bad press…I once had the good fortune to spend some time with the great American classical composer John Adams... His son is a jazz bassist and Adams told me about watching him playing in an ensemble in his school, playing Wayne Shorter tunes. Adams expressed amazement at the harmonic sophistication of those young musicians and their ability to undertake something as challenging as that. Yet playing through the repertoire of Wayne Shorter's music is precisely the kind of activity that draws the ire of jazz education's critics - 'everyone learns the same stuff' is the mantra… used to reinforce the argument that jazz education has a negative impact on jazz and its practitioners."* [2]

The general criticism of institutionalised Jazz education claims that students in these programs are being taught the same material from the same sources by the same lecturers in the same classes and as a result are graduating like a flock of mass produced musicians with little or no intuitive or artistically creative ability of their own.

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[1] Garper,H., *Jazz in Academia*. Available from http://www.halgarper.com/articles/jazz-in-academia [11/3/2014]

[2] Guilfoyle, R., 2009, *In defence of Jazz Education*, 5/6/2009. Ronan Guilfoyle: Blog. Available from http://ronanguil.blogspot.com.au/2009/07/in-defence-of-jazz-education.html [11/3/2014]

It is not the intention of this study to prove or disprove this theory, rather, the purpose of this study is to examine the music of a single Berklee Graduate, Emily Remler, in an attempt to discover whether her music is simply another uninspired derivative of the past masters' works or whether it is, in fact, largely creatively original. The subject of Emily Remler has been chosen as she herself has been criticised as being a clone of her greatest influence, Wes Montgomery. Leonard Feather, although careful not to personally accuse her himself, highlights this point.

> "*Remler is often told that her style represents Montgomery's*"[3].

Remler herself was evidently not only aware of the issue but also clearly concerned by it.

> *"As early as five or six years ago I thought I sounded so much like I'm copying Wes Montgomery… that why would anybody want to listen."*[4]

Using an analytical approach to examine her improvised solos and comparing them to solos of the guitarists that she openly admits are her main influences, namely Wes Montgomery and Pat Martino this paper will attempt to identify musical phrases and devices "stolen" from Montgomery or Martino and used in her improvised sections. The second part of the project is a brief study of her original compositions in the search for signs of regurgitation, or alternatively, obvious originality.

The decision to use Montgomery and Martino as likely sources of Jazz plagiarism on Remler's part was inspired by her own confession;

> *"Wes Montgomery, Joe Pass and Pat Martino, these are the people that influenced me"*[5]

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[3] Feather, L 1982. "Sophisticated's Lady Guitarist", *Los Angeles Times* 7 Feb 1982, p. 68.
[4] Remembering Emily. 2007. *Emily Remler – Interviewed in 1986* [Online]. [Accessed 29 April 2014] Available from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iy_NE7iRMpg#t=112>

The influence of Joe Pass extends more to her solo arrangements, of which there are precious few on her studio recordings. More exist on bootleg live recordings of her concerts, but the clarity of the recordings is not sufficient to make the kind of truly accurate musical analysis necessary for a study of this nature.

In conclusion, the study intends to consider to what extent Emily Remler's improvised lines are inspired by the past masters, how much is influenced by her education and how much she displays a level of original creativity. Maybe this will add weight to one side or other of the argument regarding formalised Jazz education and its methodologies, and shed some light on the benefits of total originality as distinct from historical repetition.

[5] *Bebop and Swing Guitar* 1986, (video recording), New York, Hot Licks Productions.

Chapter 1

Emily Remler Biography

In the interest of context it is important to understand Remler's roots and how she became a Jazz guitarist. She was born in 1957 and grew up in Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey. Her early musical influences were typical for teenagers of that era and locale and included the Beatles, Eric Clapton, Jimi Hendrix and Johnny Winter. She taught herself how to play B.B. King's and Eric Clapton's solos and in so doing developed an unorthodox technique. After graduating from high school (without the ability to read music) she needed to decide whether to attend art school or to study music. Before making the decision, however, in July 1974, Remler attended a summer school where she was exposed to Indian music, and it was here that she discovered a significant talent.

> *"The thing I noticed about myself was that I could sing all the parts on the record and I got into Indian music, Ravi Shankar, I could sing the whole raga, I could sing all the improvisation so there was something up there, there was something about my memory. I found that I had a good memory for music which all good ear really is in my opinion is memory. So it was pretty abnormal or super-normal, whatever you want to call it. So that was the direction I had to go because I just had to do something with that."*[6]

At Berklee Remler experienced her first taste of Jazz. Initially she was unimpressed by the likes of tenor saxophonist John Coltrane but through the lyricism of altoist Paul Desmond and guitarist Charlie Christian she soon began to appreciate the artform. It was the starting point of a life-long love affair with the genre. She worked hard to learn the music and was soon transcribing Wes Montgomery solos during every spare minute she had.

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[6] *Guitar Corner* 1983 CJSB Ottowa 1983 Available < http://www.allthingsemily.com/quotables/> [Accessed 29 April 2014]

She graduated from Berklee School of Music in 1976 at the age of 18 and shortly thereafter moved to New Orleans beginning her career as a professional musician. Remler herself gives a clue to the value of institutionalised Jazz education in comparison to the old school oral tradition and underlines its impact on her personal development.

> *"I came out not playing that great but with a lot of knowledge of chords and theory. I would say that Berklee was good for me in theory and harmony and ear training"*[7]
>
> *"I'd say I learned everything I've learnt on the job when I moved down to New Orleans"* [8]

While in New Orleans she met Jazz guitarist Herb Ellis who recognised her talent and introduced her to Carl Jefferson, the President of Concord Records. Another major influence on her eventual style came while spending two years working with Brazilian singer Astrud Gilberto. Remler's passion for Brazilian music is highly evident in her recordings, particularly in her later years and her own compositions. She went on to work with many of the most respected jazz musicians around the world and released 7 albums under her own name.

It is a true tragedy and great loss to the entire Jazz world that Remler succumbed to her heroin addiction at the age of 32 while on tour in Australia in May 1990. The official cause of death is recorded as "heart attack".[9] Her last body of recordings, released posthumously as the album "*This is Me*", shows an emerging new voice in Remler's music and we can only speculate as to where she was headed and where she might have taken Jazz guitar as a genre.

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[7] Lees, G. 2000, *Waiting for Dizzy*, Cooper Square Publishing, London.
[8] Sidran, B. *Talking Jazz,* 2006 (audio recording), Brooklyn, Unlimited Media Ltd.
[9] Unknown Author. 1990**, '**Emily Remler Dies On Australia Tour; Guitarist Was 32', *New York Times* 8th May 1990, available <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/05/08/obituaries/emily-remler-dies-on-australia-tour-guitarist-was-32.html?module=Search&mabReward=relbias%3Aw> (Accessed 8/6/14)

Chapter 2

Overview of Remler's Playing Style

"No one ever told me that girls shouldn't play guitar like that."[10]

Emily Remler was never keen on being labelled as a great female jazz guitarist, she wanted to be known simply as a great jazz guitarist. Her view on the gender issue was that the whole topic was ridiculous. On the bandstand she never thought about the fact that she was a female any more than her male counterparts thought about the fact that they were not. In her early years she strived to emulate the sounds she loved to hear on the records that influenced her. This led her to becoming a phenomenal Bebop guitarist but as her career progressed and encompassed wider-reaching influences, her Latin flavour began to dominate, but she never lost touch with her earliest influences.

It is of interest to note that for her recording dates Remler tended to choose tunes that were slightly less known than the most popular of the standard Jazz repertoire, perhaps in a deliberate attempt to create her own individual voice. However her influence has now brought these particular tunes into the spotlight and as a result is they are now performed more regularly.

Remler's choice of equipment was somewhat dictated by her feminine physique. She loved the sound of Fender Twin reverb amplifiers and these were her first choice in the studio, but as she couldn't physically lift one she used a Polytone Minibrute while on tour. Her main

[10] Unknown Author. 1982. Lookout - A guide to the up and coming. *People magazine* (**April 1982**), available <http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20082010,00.html> (accessed 8/6/14)

guitar was her brother's 1960 slimline Gibson 330. Wes Montgomery almost always played a Gibson L5 and in his early days Pat Martino also used similar large, traditional arch-top guitars. Remler loved the sound of these big arch-top guitars and she experimented with a few. However she found that the large guitars cut off the circulation in her right arm and she reverted to her trusted Gibson 330. In 1985 she had a Borys BG100 custom made for her, and she regularly interchanged between this and her Gisbon for the rest of her career. During the stint with Larry Coryell she was also known to use an Ovation Adamas which created a radical departure from the tone of her forebears and on her last album she experimented with signal processors and even a guitar synthesiser neither of which Montgomery ever used and Martino only sparingly. We can deduce that by the end of the 1980s she was not only ready, but actively trying to separate herself from the sound of the past masters and forge for herself a new and individual tonal palette. Pete Callard sums up Remler's style while also alluding to her developing individuality

> "*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 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 more complex harmonic ideas, chromaticism and substitutions*" [11]

Although in this instance Wolf Marshall is describing just one of Remler's solos ("*How Insensitive*"), he sums up her overall improvisational style in one concise sentence;

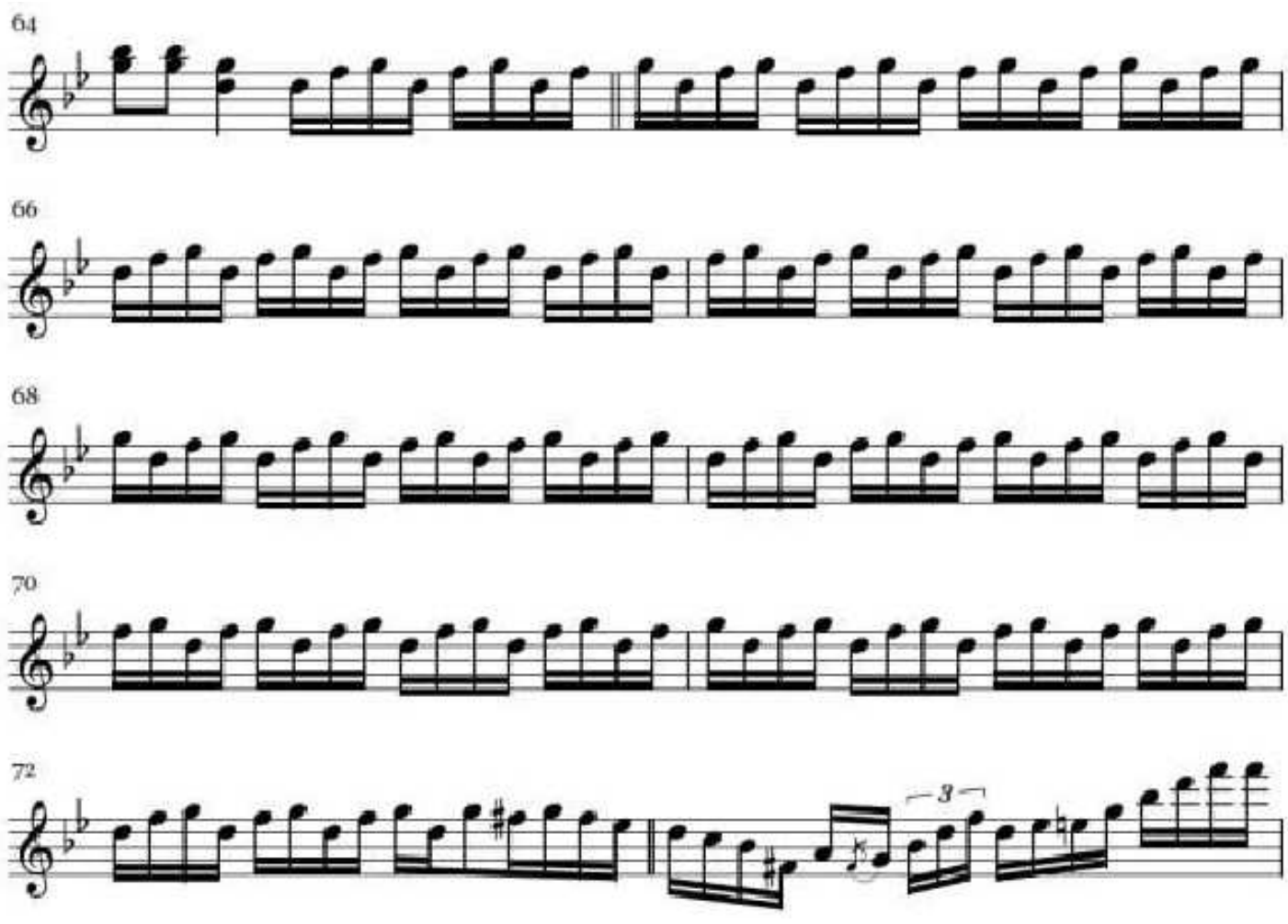
> *"Remler speaks the bebop language fluently and includes numerous references to her influences, particularly Wes Montgomery and Pat Martino."*[12]

[11] Callard, P, 2012, 'Emily Remler', *Guitar Technique Magazine,* Nov 2012 p82
[12] Marshall, W 2000, *Best of Jazz Guitar*, Hal Leonard, Milwaukee, p151

Polyrhythms

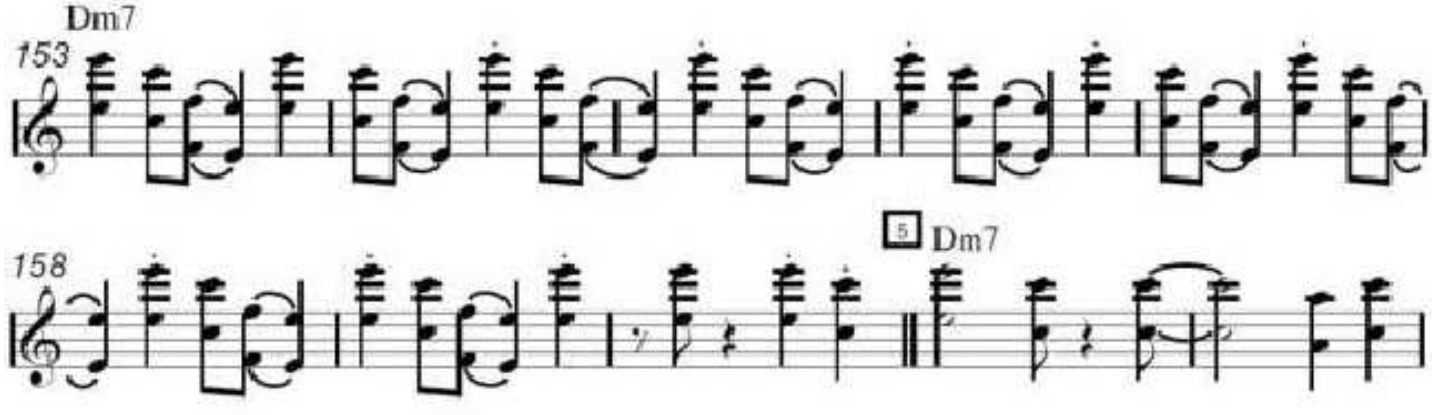
Creating a rhythmic push-pull effect by the use of odd number length patterns is not new to jazz or unique to the guitarists being discussed here. However, a very common feature of Remler's improvised solos is the use of repeating musical patterns, often in three or five note lengths. This is not uncommon in either Montgomery's or Martino's performances, but Remler tends to use this particular musical device much more frequently than either of them. She has also developed her own ideas within the framework of this device including some particular complexities that are not seen in either Montgomery's or Martino's playing. The following example is from Pat Martino's improvisation on Wes Montgomery's composition "*Road Song*". During bars 64 all the way through to bar 72 Martino plays the same 3 note repeating pattern for the entire section.

Example 1 - Martino, *Road Song*, bb.64 – 73 (2:07-2:26)



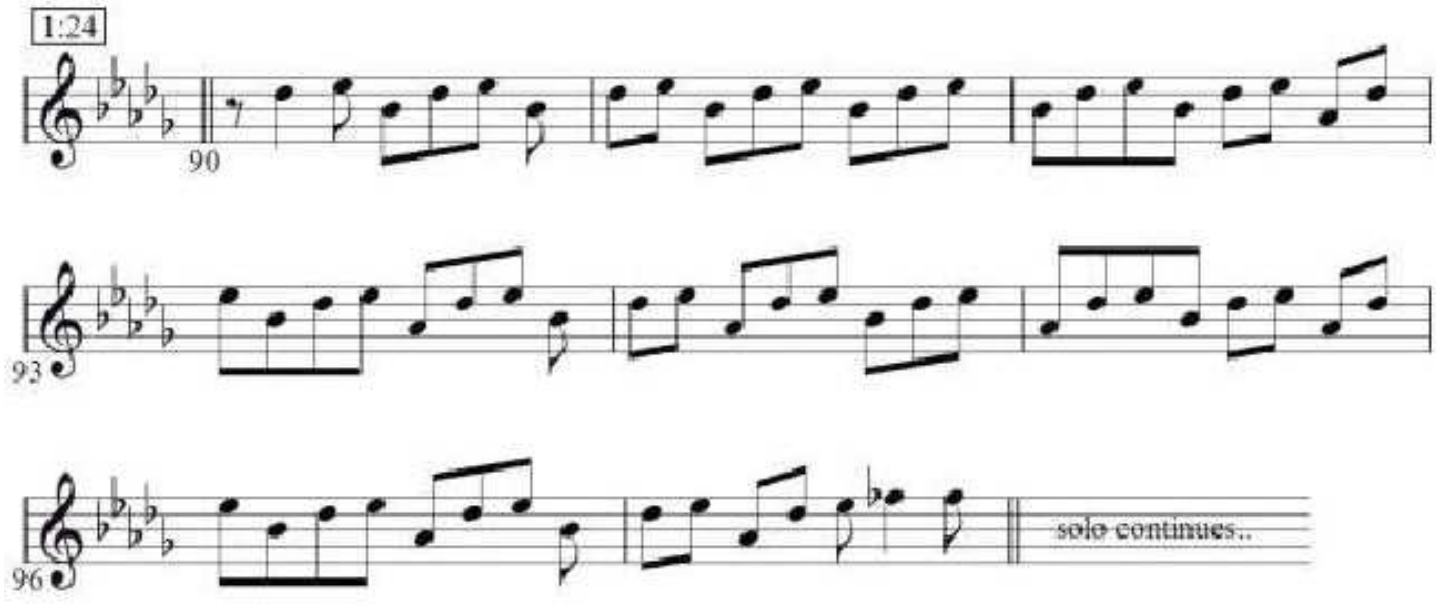
Wes Montgomery can also be found playing repeating polyrhythms all throughout his improvised solos. Example 2 uses a pattern of 4 notes across 3 beats in his solo on "*Impressions*" creating a rhythmic displacement effect, this time using his signature octaves.

Example 2 - Montgomery, *Impressions*, bb.153 – 162 (2:00)



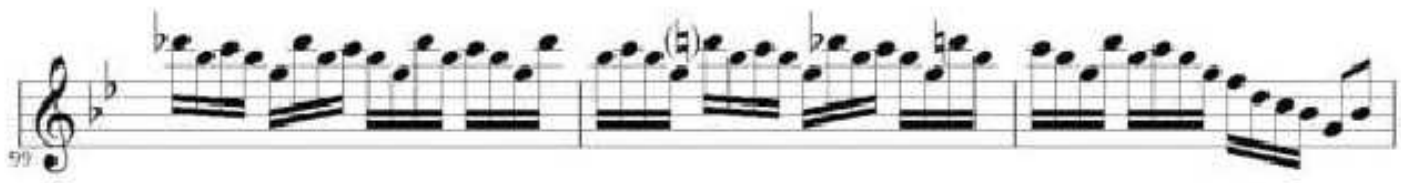
Remler has developed this polyrhythm idea further and made it one of her own signatures, with a number of progressive iterations of the concept. For example in bar 90 of her own tune "*Firefly*" (Example 3), Remler introduces a three note pattern. By bar 92 she has introduced an alternate bottom note and thus creates a six note pattern which she continues all the way into bar 97.

Example 3 - Remler, *Firefly*, bb.90 – 97 (1:24 – 1:32)



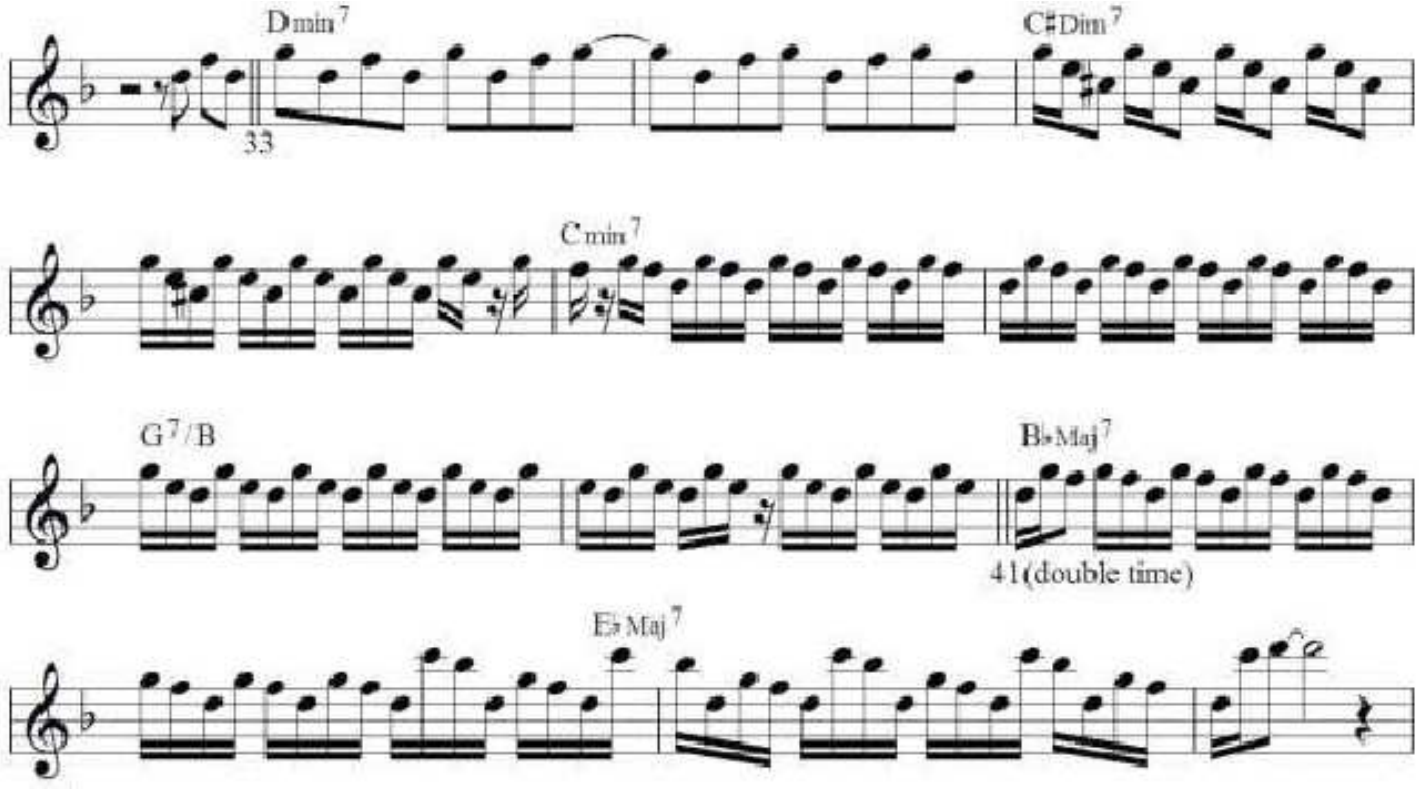
Taking this idea further, during her one of her compositions dedicated to Montgomery "*East to Wes*", the title track of her fifth album, Remler creates a 5 note long repeating pattern during bar 98, she continues the pattern into bar 99 but raises the top note a semitone thus making a ten note long pattern.

Example 4 – Remler, *East to Wes*, bb.98 – 100 (2:52 – 2:59)



For eleven bars of her solo on Jobim's "*How Insensitive*" she utilises this polyrhythm device blatantly with subtle expansions of the idea including altering the pattern slightly to fit the underlying harmonic structure as it moves beneath her. After introducing the three note polyrhythm in bars 33 and 34 she then begins to accelerate and by bar 36 is using sixteenths. A couple of times during the phrase she skips a quarter of a beat adding another aspect of rhythmic displacement. To finish off in bar 42 she introduces new top notes to create a six note long pattern. The strength of this polyrhythmic device inspires her accompanist (Larry Coryell) to alter his feel and launch into a double time samba as a result of the intensity Remler builds by using this pattern.

Example 5 - Remler, *How Insensitive*, bb.33 – 44 (5:06 – 5:26)



These sort of iterations of this classic Jazz musicians' polyrhythmic device can be found in both Montgomery's and Martino's improvised solos but not nearly to the extent that Remler utilises them. She has made this feature a significant part of her personal style.

Remler's Technique

Wes Montgomery is famous for utilising a particular technique whereby he sets the strings of the guitar in motion using the thumb of his right hand rather than by the traditional plastic or tortoise shell plectrum typically used by other jazz guitarists. He developed this technique early on in an attempt to appease his maiden aunt while he practised in the next room. The adoption of this unique (at the time) technique gave Montgomery an instantly

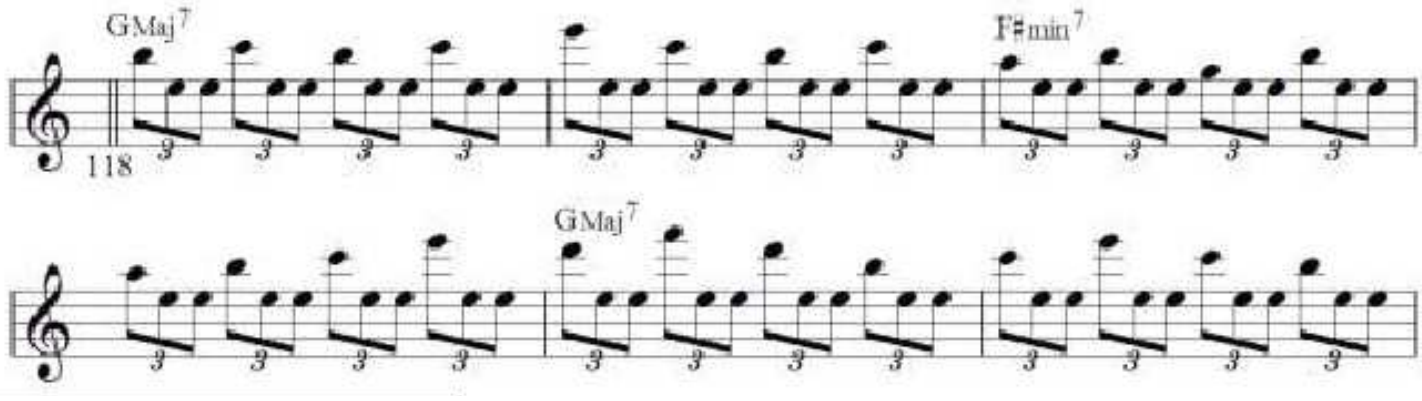
unmistakable voice. Although he may have adopted this technique out of necessity, Emily Remler, and countless other Jazz guitarists, have adopted it simply to emulate his sound.

> *"I may look like a nice jewish girl from New Jersey, but on the inside I'm a 50-year-old, heavyset black man with a big thumb"*[13]

Remler's "Modes".

It is possible to roughly dissect Emily Remler's improvised solos into three stylistic sections. The most obvious sections are where she is clearly emulating Wes Montgomery, not only by using the octave device but also his patternistic approach to phrase development. Then there are sections where she is in Martino mode, most notably playing long scalar 16th note runs. Thirdly there are sections that are "Remlerisms", phrases of her own invention including patterns of chromatic development and in particular the use of open string pedals underneath a moving top note. This idea is generally not to be found in either Montgomery's or Martino's solos. An example of her using this particular device is in her solo on her composition "*Transitions*"

Example 6 – Remler, *Transitions*, bb.118 – 123 (4:39 – 4:49)



This particular device may have come from her rock or blues background as it is not unique to her and it can be frequently found in those genres.

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[13] Unknown Author. 1982. Lookout - A guide to the up and coming. *People magazine* (**April 1982**), available <http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20082010,00.html> (accessed 8/6/14)

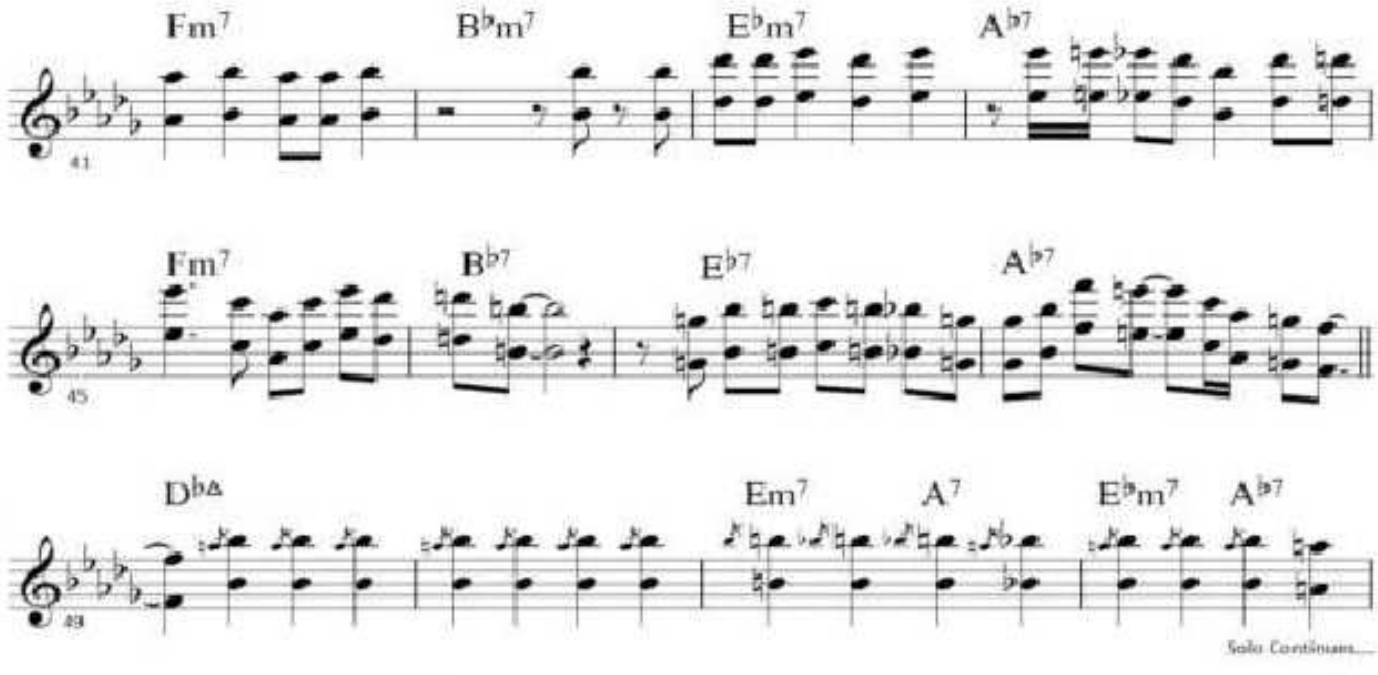
Chapter 3

Wes Montgomery

> *"I was so obsessed with Wes Montgomery that I had a picture of him on my wall and for two years I learned a new Wes song every day, and couldn't wait to be alone to practice this. And so Wes Montgomery was my idol."* [14]

Without doubt the single most significant influence of Wes Montgomery's on the whole of the jazz guitar world that followed him was the use of playing melodic lines in octaves. This is well documented in a plethora of publications and need not be explored to any extent here for the purposes of this study. Remler's use of Montgomery's signature device is evident at least somewhere in nearly every tune she ever played. Remler was infatuated with Montgomery's sound and worked hard at trying to replicate it in her own playing. In fact we need look no further than the opening track on her debut album for an example of Remler using his signature device, as the last 24 bars of her improvised solo over Horace Silver's tune "*Strollin*" is executed entirely in octaves.

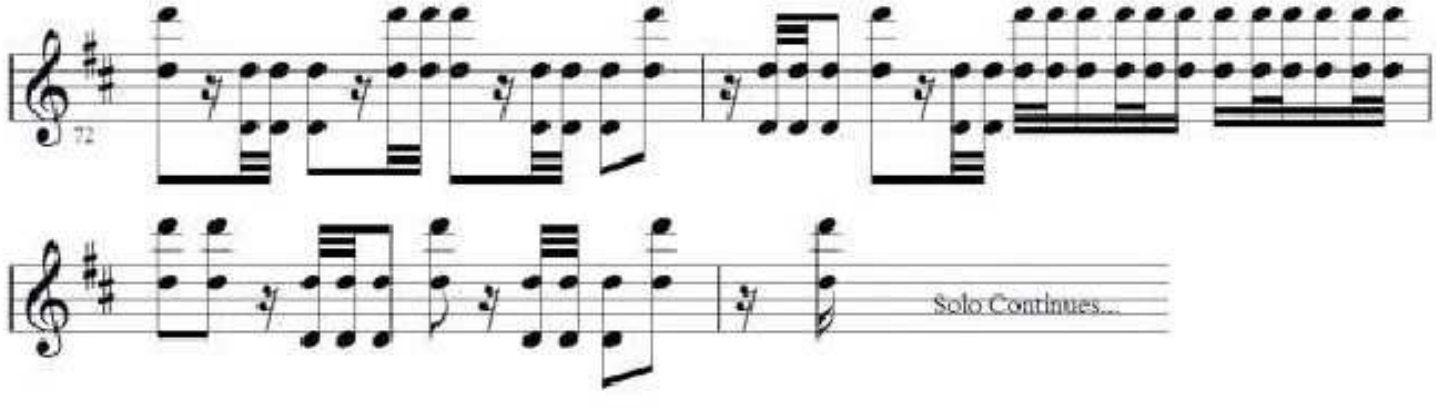
Example 7 - Remler, *Strollin*, bb41 – 52 (2:26 – 2:46)



[14] Remembering Emily. 2007. *Emily Remler – Interviewed in 1986* [Online]. [Accessed 29 April 2014] Available from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iy_NE7iRMpg#t=112>

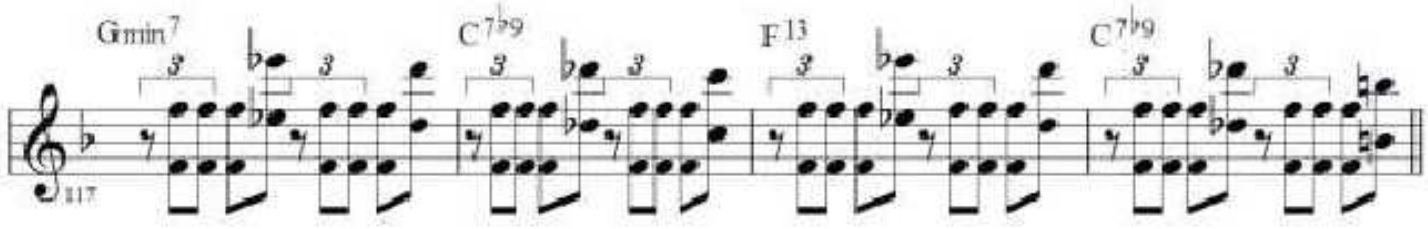
Another musical device that Montgomery often combined with his use of octaves was the quick repetition of a note followed by an intervallic leap to a higher pedal tone. Here is an example of this in his solo on his tune "*D Natural Blues*". In this case the intervallic leap is itself also an octave.

Example 8 – Montgomery, *D Natural Blues*, bb.72 – 74 (3:52 – 4:00)



This is a favoured Montgomery quote of Remler's, and Example 9 shows her using the same device in "*Blues for Herb*". This time, however, the top note is descending chromatically.

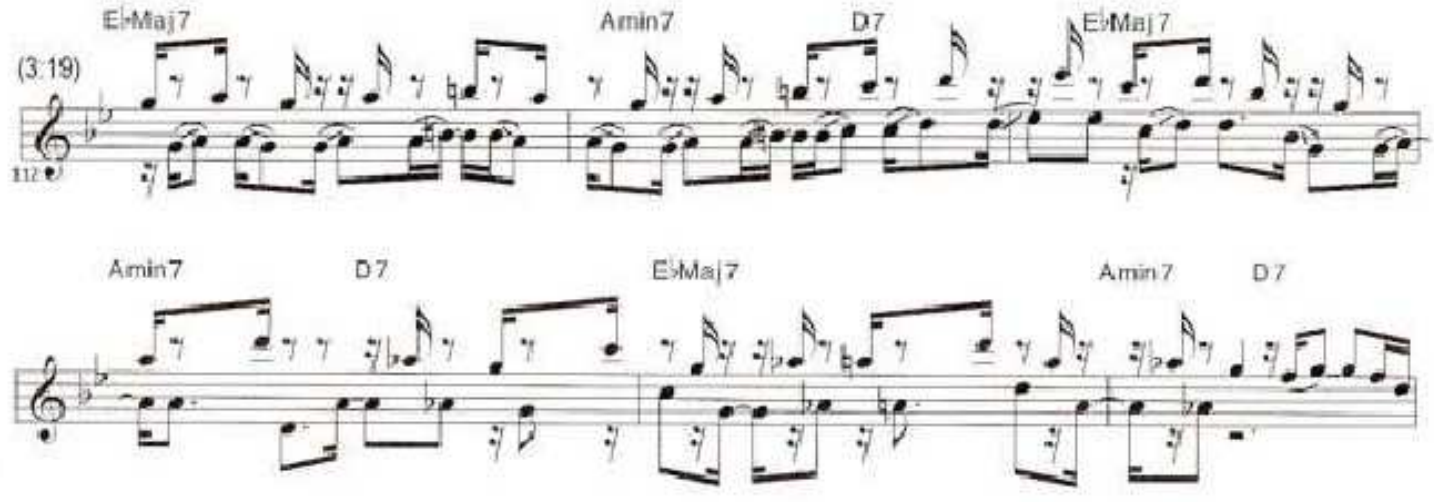
Example 9 - Remler, *Blues for Herb*, bb.117 – 120 (2:15 – 2:19)



One idea that Remler uses on a number of occasions, which is not found in Montgomery's use of octaves, is to split the octaves playing the bottom note a sixteenth either before or after the top note. Example 10, from the improvisation in her dedication to Montgomery,

"*East to Wes*", clearly demonstrates Remler's use of this idea, her own development of a device she adopted from Montgomery.[15]

Example 10 – Remler, *East to Wes* bb.112 – 117 (3:18 – 3:28)



While advising her students how to use transcriptions of other guitarist's solos, Emily explains that she never intends to perform note for note transcriptions of Montgomery's solos, but having learnt a few of his musical devices she has practised them in to her subconscious so that they come out naturally when she is improvising.

> *"They've compared me to Wes Montgomery because I have transcribed a few Wes Montgomery melodies, not five choruses, maybe 4 or 5 licks. You can either wait for them to come out in a moment of ecstasy or you can concentrate on it now, get it down and develop it as part of your own vocabulary"*[16]

Also, in an interview for Downbeat magazine she expands on how she develops ideas she has taken from other musicians, in this particular case Montgomery, and develops her own variation.

> *"I have a method of learning that works for me which is some transcription, very little. A few bars, things like that. And transcribing melodies that Wes would play that were the essence of what he was doing, a few of his melodies that he would repeat that would sound like him, plus his octaves of course which I worked very hard on… I'd learn it on the guitar and it would*

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[15] Bowden, D 1996, *Emily Remler Retrospective Compositions* , Mel Bay, Missouri. p90
[16] *Bebop and Swing Guitar* 1986, (video recording), New York, Hot Licks Productions.

> *become a part of my vocabulary and because I have somewhat of an imagination I would vary it"* [17]

Her overall approach to developing a solo is something Remler has in common with Montgomery. She would typically begin a solo section with short and simple single note phrases, develop the intensity using a range of musical devices including longer, faster runs or polyrhythms, then at some point switch to using octaves and finish the solo in that style or even develop to full chords. A large proportion of her solos use this particular approach. Remler's solo on Ray Brown's composition "*Mistreated but Undefeated Blues*" (see appendix 1) is a simple but clear example of this. The solo starts with short blues phrases interspersed with chord stabs, in the third chorus she predominantly uses triplet structures and double stops in a high register, and then plays the entire final chorus using octaves. In comparison, Wes Montgomery's solo over his own composition "*D Natural Blues"* (see appendix 2) also begins with short phrases, develops by the third chorus into triplets and longer 16th note phrases and the entire fourth and fifth choruses utilise his famous octaves.

Another musical device common to Wes Montgomery's solos and Remler's improvisations is the use of a repeating a pattern with descending chromatic motion.

Example 11 shows a sample of Wes using this device during the improvisation on his own composition "*West Coast Blues*".

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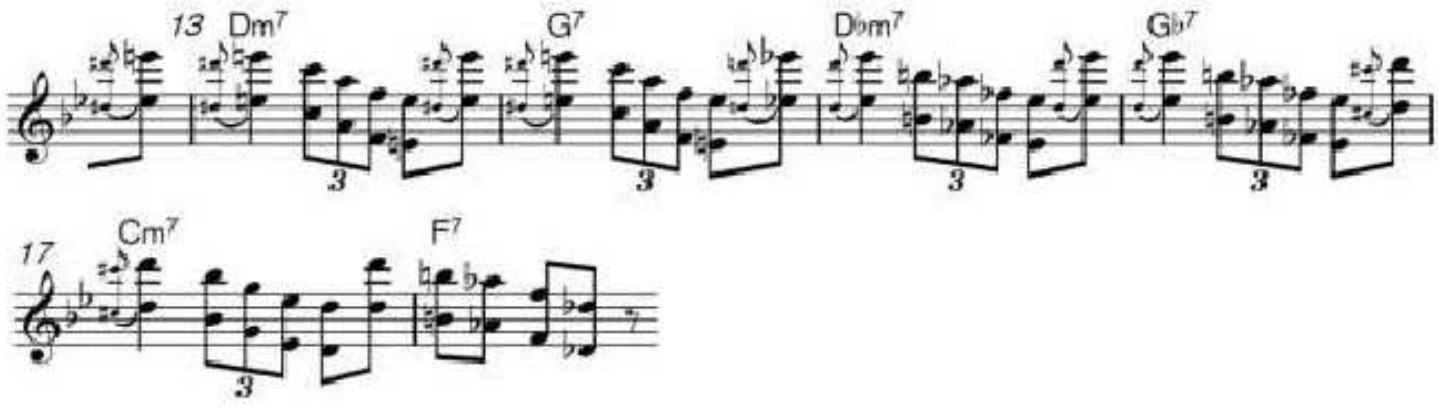
[17] Coryell, J 1985, 'Emily Remler: Life After Wes', *Downbeat,* May 1985, p23

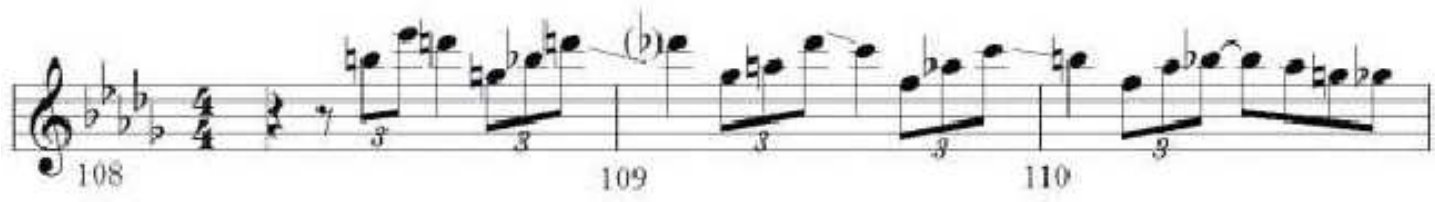
Example 11 – Montgomery, *West Coast Blues*, bb.13 – 18 (1:40 – 1:46)



The motif is repeated once before being moved chromatically down, repeated again then shifted chromatically down again, forming a sequence.

Here is an example of Emily Remler using chromatic displacement during the solo section on her composition "*The Firefly*". Although shorter the similarities also include the use of triplet arpeggios.

Example 12 – Remler, *The Firefly*, bb.108 – 110 (1:42 – 1:44)



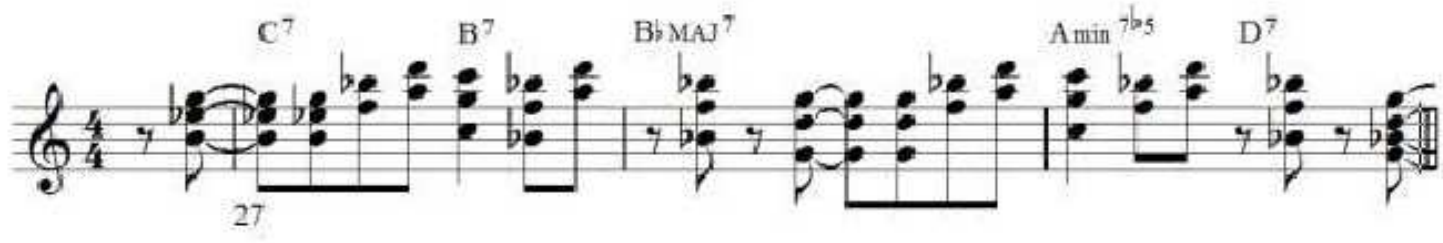
In her own words she describes her approach to taking an idea from another musician and adding it to her own vocabulary as a pool of musical ideas from which to draw when improvising.

> "You can't take a whole Wes Montgomery or Pat Martino Solo and apply it to you own vocabulary, take the essence, take the one lick that you really like…we always play something that we've heard before, nothing is ever new… No-one improvises a hundred percent of the time. Basically what I've got down is maybe twenty five or thirty licks... to

have a lot of things to fall back on when you're not spilling out your guts with improvisation."[18]

Example 13 shows how Remler has taken Montgomery's octave device and developed it into part of her own personal vocabulary by adding an inner voice.

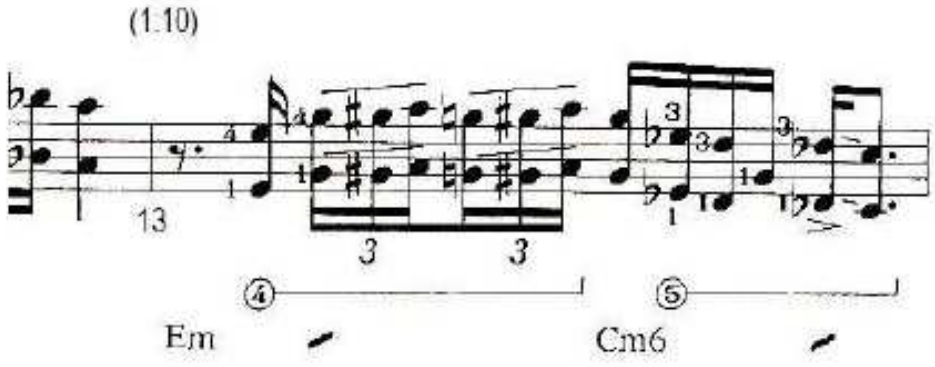
Example 13 – Remler, *East to Wes*, bb.27 – 29 (0:49 – 0:53)



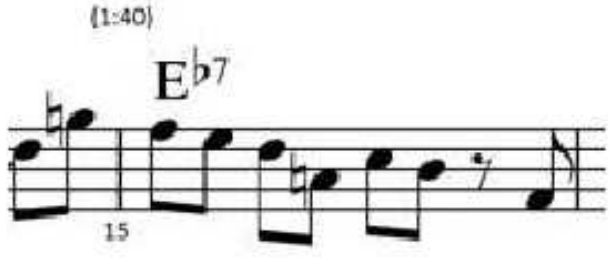
It could be said that the final example in this chapter represents the true essence of Remler's imitation of Montgomery. In comparing the two phrases from Montgomery's "*Polkadots and Moonbeams"* and Remler's rendition of "*Strollin"* we see very little similarity on the surface. The two phrases are in different keys, they are at different tempos, Montgomery plays his version of the phrase in semiquavers and in octaves while Remler performs hers with single notes and with heavily swung quavers. On paper, note for note these two phrases are quite different. However, it is with the feel, the way she plays the phrase, the little subtle nuances that we cannot represent on paper, in other words the soul with which she plays this phrase, that we can hear that she is truly copying Wes Montgomery. Not in a note for note way, but in what lies beneath the notes.

[18] ***Bebop and Swing Guitar*** **1986, (video recording), New York, Hot Licks Productions.**

Example 14 – Montgomery, *Polkadots and Moonbeams*, b.13 (1:10 – 1:11)[19]



Example 15 – Remler, *Strollin*, b.15 (1:40)[20]



[19] Mairants, I 1994, *The Great Jazz Guitarists*, Sanctuary Publishing, London, p117
[20] Keskitapio, T. 2003, *Emily Remler's Guitar Solo on Strollin*. Available from , <http://www.allthingsemily.com/pdfimages/Strollin.pdf> [25 March 2014].

Chapter 4

Pat Martino

> *"I learned a lot from those guys* (Pat Martino and Pat Metheny) *just by playing with them, hanging out with them and talking with them."*[21]

One particular phrase which features perhaps more than any other in Remler's solos is the following, found in bar 36 of her composition "*Perks Blues*" from her debut album.

Example 16 - Remler, *Perks Blues*, bb.35 – 36 (0:43 0:44)

Remler performs this phrase (or variations of it) no less than a dozen times during the improvised solos on her debut album "*Firefly*". In its simplest form the five-note long phrase consists of a chromatic run from the third of the chord up to the fifth followed by a leap down to the root. Sometimes she will extend the run by commencing on the flattened third or occasionally the second of the chord. This particular sequence is actually standard Jazz vocabulary and it would be difficult to lay any claim as to its exact origins. It was certainly not Pat Martino who invented the phrase, but it is arguable that Remler adopted it from him as it is so prolific in his music. It can be found repeatedly on Pat Martino's album "*El Hombre*" which we can safely assume Remler was familiar with as she performed one of the

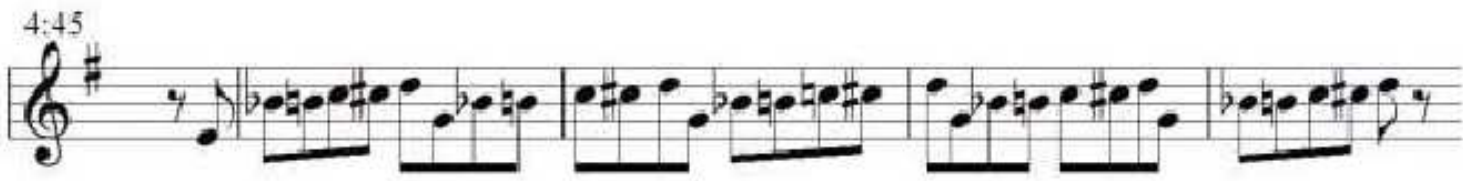
[21] Berle, A 1981, 'EMILY REMLER A Jazz Guitarist's Promising Debut', *Guitar player magazine*, September 1981 p102.

tunes "*Gerri's Blues*" (a.k.a. "*Cisco*") on her own duo album with Larry Coryell. Martino executes this riff during his solo over "*Just Friends*" from the album "*El Hombre*".

Example 17 - Martino, *Just Friends*, bb.53 – 54 (1:02)

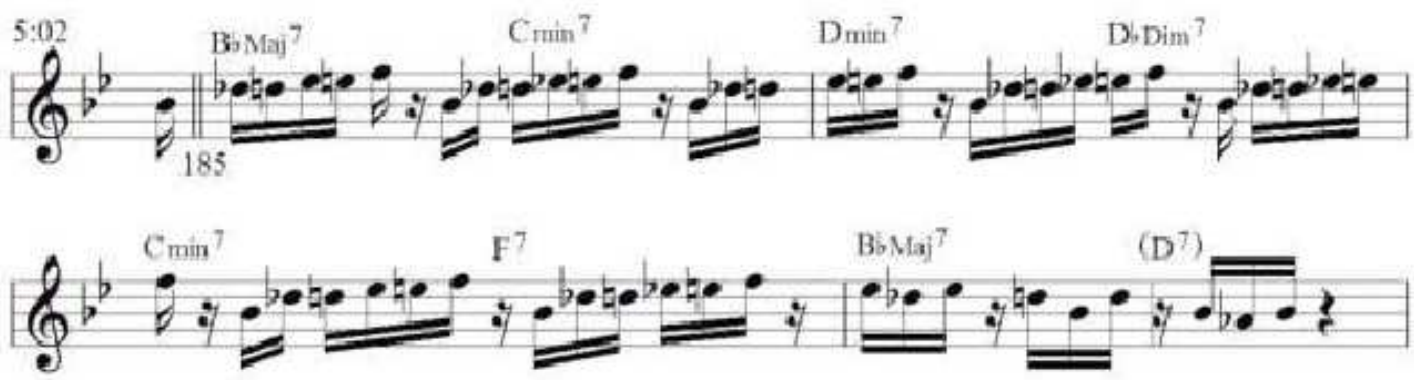
Remler often adopts a variation of this phrase by repeating a 3 beat long version of it over bars of 4/4 time creating a poly-rhythm, with the accents of the phrase falling on different beats on each repeat. Inspiration for this can be found, interestingly, during Trudy Pitt's Hammond organ solo on "*Blues for Mickey-O*", also from Martino's album "*El Hombre*";

Example 18 – Trudy Pitt, *Blues for Mickey-O*, bb.146 – 148 (4:45 – 4:49)



Just one of the many examples of Remler playing this variation is to found on her solo on the Jazz standard "*My Romance*" from David Benoit's album "*Waiting for Spring*" on which Remler appears as an associate artist.

Example 19 - Remler, *My Romance*, bb.185 – 188 (5:02 – 5:08)



In this example she repeats the phrase over a three-beat pattern forming a polyrhythm that we have seen many times before in her soloing, she then resolves the phrase with a descending minor pentatonic scale run to the tonic.

Another Martino inspired riff is shown in the following example from his solo on his composition "*One for Rose*". It is also found on the 1967 album "*El Hombre*", with which we have established Remler was familiar, so she might have first been exposed to it from this source. The riff comprises a descending major 7 arpeggio played as sixteenths, with a chromatic approach note on the first of each group of four.

Example 20 – Martino, *One for Rose*, bb.186 – 188 (2:50 – 2:55)

Martino also uses the same phrase in his solo on Jobim's composition "*Once I Loved*" from the same album. Here we see Remler using the same device over an F major triad during her solo in Julian Adderley's composition "*Cannonball*", the opening track on her second Concord album "*Take Two*".

Example 21 – Remler, *Cannonball*, bb.109 – 110 (1:37 – 1:40)

Differences worthy of note here are that Martino slurs the first two notes in each group of four while Remler articulates each note clearly. Also, Remler arpeggiates the triad rather than the major 7 chord. She does, however, spell the complete major 7 in the subsequent scale that completes the phrase.

Another example of Martino's influence on Remler's improvised lines is the frequency with which she begins a descending scale by repeating the first note. We can see Martino doing this, commencing on beat two of the eightieth bar of his solo on Montgomery's composition "*Road Song*".

Example 22 - Martino, *Road Song*, b.80 (2:40)

Remler plays a similar line in the second half of bar 79 in her improvisation on Jobim's beautiful composition, "*How Insensitive"*.

Example 23 - Remler, *How Insensitive*, b.79 (6:23 – 6:24)

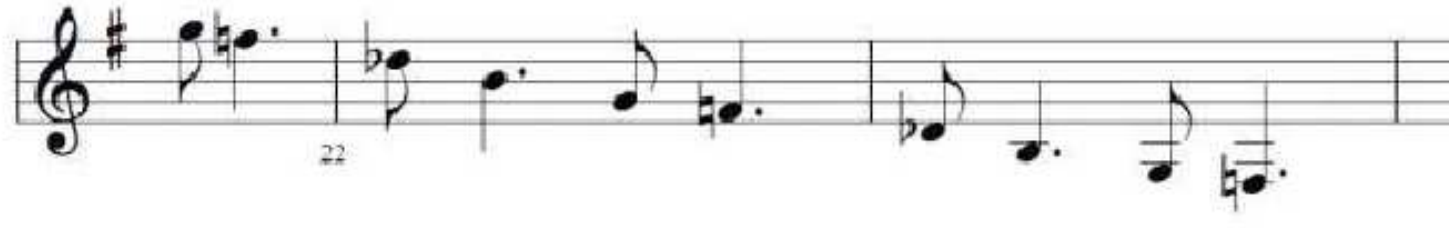
Cisco (aka Gerri's Blues)

A close examination of Remler's and Martino's improvisations on their own versions of the same composition reveals some interesting similarities and differences. The Tune "*Cisco*", composed by Martino, appeared on the duo album Remler made in 1985 with Larry Coryell,

however here it is alternately titled "*Gerri's Blues*". There are quite a number of phrases in Remler's improvised section that are worthy of closer examination when compared to Martino's original 1967 version.

In the 21st bar of Remler's solo she begins pairing quavers and dotted crotchets descending from G to F then D flat to B (see Example 24). During his own solo Martino executes a similar descending line of quavers followed by dotted crotchets, however his notes are simply descending the minor pentatonic scale.

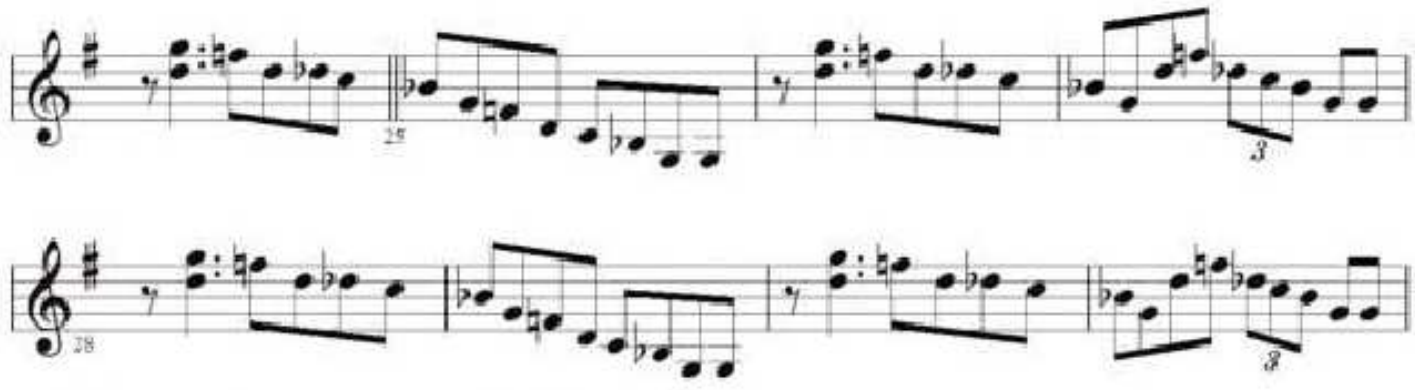
Example 24 – Remler, *Gerri's Blues*, bb.21 – 23 (2:57 – 3:00)



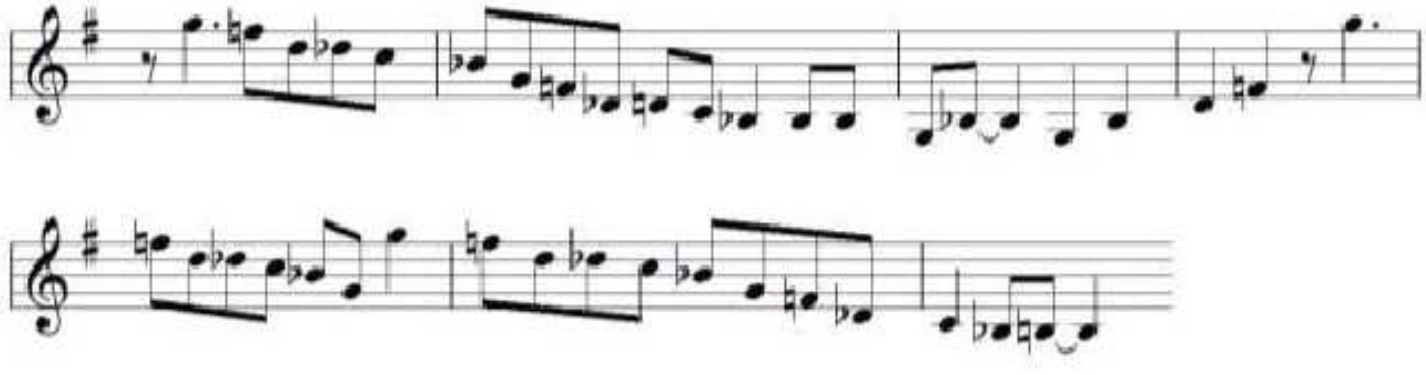
Example 25 – Martino, *Cisco*, bb.92 – 94 (1:40 – 1:43)

The very next phrase in Remler's solo, (example 26) a descending scale pattern she developed into a blues lick and then repeated, uses similar phraseology to that executed by Martino in his solo (example 27)

Example 26 – Remler, *Gerri's Blues*, bb.24 – 31 (3:00 – 3:09)

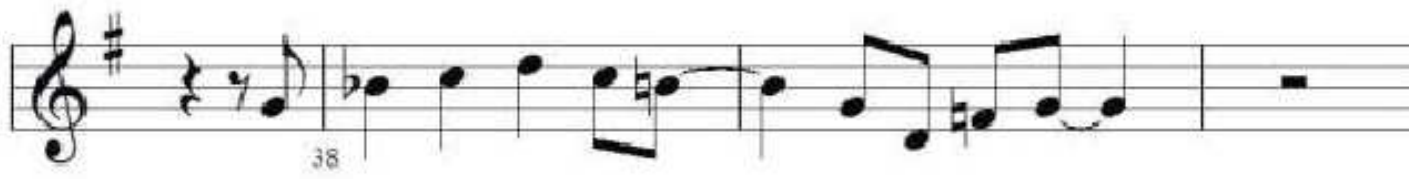


Example 27 – Martino, *Cisco*, bb.167 – 173 (3:01 – 3:09)

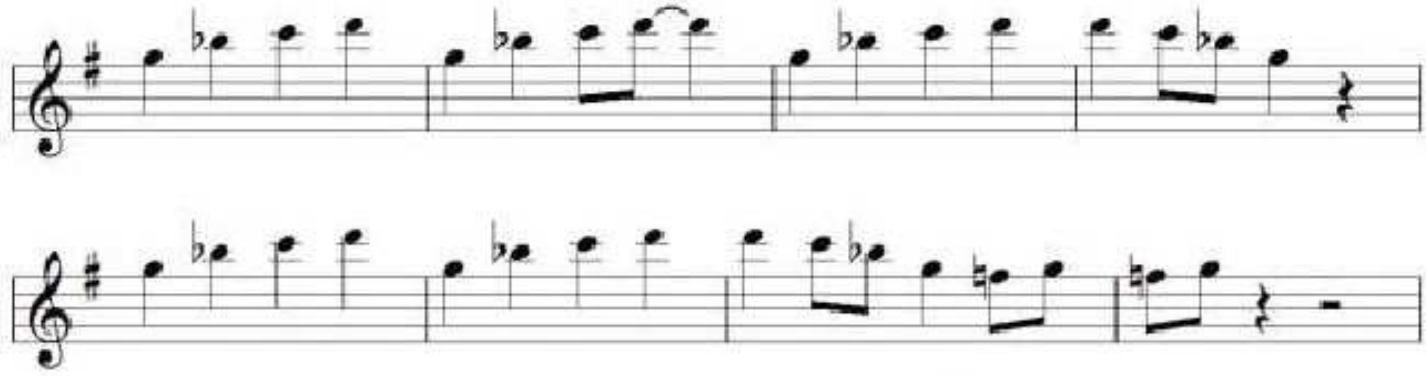


Six bars later, after mostly pedalling an upper tonic, Remler then inserts another Martino inspired phrase (see Examples 28 and 29). Martino plays this particular phrase, or variations of it, three times throughout his own solo.

Example 28 – Remler, *Gerri's Blues*, bb38 – 39 (3:15 – 3:17)



Example 29 – Martino, *Cisco*, bb.121 – 124 (2:35 – 2:44)



In all of these examples we see that Remler has clearly garnered ideas from Martino's original version of the tune but rather than copy them verbatim she has modified them to make them her own. The fact that all three Martinoisms follow one after the other hints at Remler either being in Martino-mode or maybe she is deliberately acknowledging Martino during her rendition of his composition. We can only speculate on the extent to which Remler is consciously undertaking this process of imitating Martino or whether it is happening entirely by second nature.

Stylistic – It is of interest to note that when Remler uses long 16th note lines in her improvised solos, her tone becomes brighter, with more attack on each note, and her feel is much straighter. These elements accentuate her reflection of Pat Martino's stylistic characteristics while she switches to "Martino-mode", whether consciously or subconsciously, for sections of her solos. During one of her instructional videos, "*Bebop and Swing Guitar*", Remler demonstrates and explains how she copied Pat Martino's way of playing over an A Minor scale yet develops her own take on the phrase.

"But I've done it so much now I'll start out like Pat did but I'll end it some other way"[22]

[22] *Bebop and Swing Guitar* 1986, (video recording), New York, Hot Licks Productions.

Chapter 5

Compositions

> *"Actually I think of myself more as a composer than as a guitarist, I want to be a composer more than anything else."*[23]

It would not be fair to assess Emily Remler's talent as a Jazz guitarist without also analysing her compositions. This, however, would be a large enterprise and well beyond the scope of this study. Here we will be undertaking merely a brief overview of her compositions.

Emily Remler's recording career spanned less than a decade yet within that period we see an obvious growth and development within her compositional style. The compositions on her first two albums include *"the Firefly", "Perk's Blues", "Pocket Wes" and "Waltz for my Grandfather"*. The first three of these are all essentially Bebop/Blues flavoured and they are all in the key of Bb (either major or minor). They are traditionally constructed, designed to be purely hard swinging mainstream Jazz tunes and they certainly bolstered her reputation as a convincing Bebop guitarist who played with authority and conviction. "*Waltz for my Grandfather*" however is a little different. It is in the Key of D major and as the name implies it is in triple time. The tune revolves mainly around II V I progressions but is littered with extensions and alterations to give lots of colour. Rhythmically the melody is extremely simple allowing the colour of the harmonic structure to give the tune its flavour. This tune is perhaps influenced more by Remler's favourite piano players (eg McCoy Tyner and Hank Jones) and hints at the compositional style she takes on in later years. To this point there is

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[23] Remler, E cited in Bowden, D 1996, *Emily Remler Retrospective Compositions* , Mel Bay, Missouri. P3

nothing in her compositions that is not to be expected from someone who has studied Jazz at any mainstream tertiary institution.

Her third album, appropriately entitled "*Transitions*" allows us to witness the completely new direction that her composing embarked upon, a view confirmed by Leonard Feather in his liner notes for the album.

> *"I suspect that Transitions will be long remembered as one of the giant steps in the evolution of Emily Remler"*[24]

This album and the next "*Catwalk*" feature many more contemporary and Latin inspired compositions. It is interesting to note that the two year period prior to the recording of the album "*Transitions*" approximately relates to the period when she toured with Astrud Gilberto, from this we can assume that the greatest influence on these compositions was her experience on the road and her deep involvement with Latin music rather than what she was taught at Berklee a decade earlier. Describing "*Nunca Mais*", the opening track to her third album she alludes to the influence Brazilian music had on her as a composer, confirming the previous assumption.

> *"this is my tribute to all the authentic Brazilian music I've learned about from the musicians in Astrud Gilberto's band"* [25]

A further clue to her compositional development is found in the fact that in 1988 she studied composition with Jazz legend Bob Brookmeyer and Turkish Jazz pianist and fellow Berklee graduate Ayden Esen, both well known for compositional invention.

It is beyond the scope of this study, and should perhaps be the topic of a much larger dissertation, to fully analyse Remler's compositions in the interest of establishing influential

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[24] Feather, L 1984, *Transitions* (Liner notes), Concord Jazz, Concord
[25] Feather, L 1984, *Transitions* (Liner notes), Concord Jazz, Concord

foundations from Berklee and other sources. Other Jazz guitar composers who have also come from Berklee include John Scofield, Pat Metheny, John Abercrombie, Al DiMeola, Bill Frisell and Mike Stern, so further comparison might reveal some very interesting trends in Jazz guitar composition from Berklee alumni.

Scofield's early albums reveal a different trend in that nearly all the tracks are his own compositions while more than half of the tracks on Remler's albums are Jazz standards. The first track of his first album introduces us to Scofield's favoured compositional tool – the vamp. The second track "*Amy, (who Else?)*" is superficially similar to Remler's "*Waltz for my Grandfather*" in that it stands out from the rest of the album by being a slow harmonically colourful solo guitar arrangement.

Metheny's compositions are somewhat eclectic, quite numerous, and always exploring the boundaries of Jazz. Abercrombie has focused on Post-bop, with a bent towards fusion. From this particular group it is DiMeola's compositions that are perhaps the most similar to Remler's, particularly her later works, as he has a very strong Latin flavour and inclines towards technical proficiency. Frisell's very flavoursome and somewhat more progressive approach also has similarities to the direction in which Remler was heading in her last days. Mike Stern has primarily focussed on blues fusion.

This brief analysis hardly shows any trends of commonality between the compositional styles of these Berklee alumni guitarists contemporary with Remler other than that they are all individually characteristic and adventurous. Perhaps that in itself is the Berklee moniker, the legacy Berklee alumni take with them when they graduate.

Conclusion

"I want a totally unique voice…..but I'm derivative. Of course, I have to be. To have my own voice means going through a personal maturity"[26]

It is a necessary part of jazz education that learning the basic jazz language comes from listening to, and attempting to imitate, the jazz vocabulary of the past masters. Just as an infant learns to talk by listening to its parents and copying the sounds they hear, budding Jazz students listen to the music and musicians they wish to emulate, and do whatever they can to achieve those sounds. It is a natural and necessary part of the journey. As Isaac Newton famously said:

"If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants."[27]

All jazz musicians must first learn the language (stand on the shoulders of Jazz giants) before they can develop their own technique and voice. This is clearly what Emily Remler chose to do by studying in fine detail the works of jazz giants Wes Montgomery and Pat Martino. Chuck Israels seems to sum up what Remler has put herself through in his commentary on Jazz education.

> *"In general jazz educators tend to underestimate the length of time that needs to be spent in imitation in order for a student to assimilate traditional techniques. It is an intuitive process of incorporation; literally "putting it into the body". This requires admitting music through intense listening and a long process of practice and comparison until what comes out of the student begins to resemble what has gone in….interestingly, personal expression will emerge*

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[26] Coryell, J 1985, 'Emily Remler: Life After Wes', *Downbeat,* May 1985, p23
[27] Newton, I 1675, *Letter to Robert Hooke*, Available <www.scienceandyou.org/articles/ess_14.shtml>. [29 April 2014]

unbidden and of its own volition in all but the most exceptional cases of great talent for mimicry."[28]

Remler certainly paid her dues by spending many hours in imitation during her phase of learning in order to "assimilate traditional techniques". However her personal expression almost certainly emerged unbidden and revealed itself on all of her recorded and live outings. Although she clearly possessed a great talent for mimicry, Remler certainly chose to develop her own voice.

Due to its design and nature there are many ways the same note, or perhaps more importantly each combination of notes, can be played on the guitar. Mick Goodrick, having done the maths, explains it this way;

"When you calculate all the numbers, it comes out this way: the average note on the guitar has 2.8 locations and 9.2 fingerings!"

As a result of this complexity the guitar is such a characteristically personal instrument that each player has his or her own, clearly distinguishable voice. Consequently each player develops their own unique style that is shaped by each and every note, scale, chord, phrase, melody etc they have learned along the way. One guitar player will play the exact same phrase as another in a different position or with different fingering patterns according to what feels natural which depends upon what they have learned in the past, and since no two guitar players have shared the same journey, each one has his or her own idea of what feels 'natural'. Remler has clearly adopted ideas and musical devices from her forebears but rarely plays them note for note as she has discovered her own "shapes" and patterns across the fretboard and kinetically interprets each phrase in her own way.

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[28] Israels, C 2014, An unpopular perspective on Jazz education13/1/2014 Chuck Israels: Blog. Available from, <http://chuckisraelsjazz.com/index.php/blog/item/72-an-unpopular-perspective-on-jazz-education> [13 March 2014]

Without Wes Montgomery and Pat Martino (Remler's giants) having built the platform from which Emily Remler launched her personal development she would have had no starting point, so it goes without saying that she was influenced by her predecessors. So as we near conclusion it is perhaps fitting to consider her own insightful statement.

> *"I had really just screwed around at Berklee, I didn't concentrate that hard, I was a child, a total beginner. I came out not playing that great but with a lot of knowledge of chords and theory. I would say that Berklee was good for me in theory and harmony and ear training, but when I got to New Orleans, I was forced to get better and better. I played all these show gigs and jazz gigs, and I had 25 students. I was forced to come up to a certain level of playing. It was great. There was a modern jazz thing happening down in there. It was much hipper than New York because the people want to be a part of it. In New York, it was very serious, in New Orleans, everybody jumps up and down, there's an R&B kind of feeling. I sort of stole that rich culture and applied it to my own music. If I had stayed in Boston, I'd be playing Giant Steps like a madman-like everybody else."*[29]

Was Emily Remler simply another product of the jazz education system or a talented prodigy? It is safe to say that she was, in fact, both. She clearly possessed a strong creative spirit but used the foundation of a formalised education and idioms of her forebears from which to develop her personal voice on route to becoming one of the greats of jazz guitar.

[29] Lees, G. 2000, *Waiting for Dizzy*, Cooper Square Publishing, London.

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