

## *The Magic Beyond The Mystique* | His left hand was severely mutilated by fire. He

refused to carry his own guitar, and he preferred flashy clothes. Virtually illiterate, he could barely write his own name. He told time by the sun and loved fishing, billiards, and gambling, all of which caused him to miss musical engagements with regularity. 🎸 Endless mystique surrounds the amazing Gypsy guitarist Django Reinhardt, whose recording career spanned from the late '20s to just prior to his death in 1953. But his remarkable music alone is enough to qualify him as one of the most memorable players of all time. While America gave birth to jazz guitar and clearly remains its home, the European-born Reinhardt is probably the genre's best-known figure. 🎸 During the '30s | while American jazz guitarists were still determining whether the guitar was a rhythm or solo instrument, Django's single-note choruses exhibited a level of technical perfection and fire that has never been equaled. Untold numbers of stylistically diverse players have fallen under his spell, including Chet Atkins, Julian Bream, Carlos Santana, Wes Montgomery, B.B. King, John McLaughlin, Joe Pass, Jerry Garcia, and Larry Coryell.

# DJANGO REINHARDT

And while many have tried to imitate him, none have fully achieved his ability to play single-note lines so cleanly, quickly, and effortlessly. 🎸 Jean Baptiste Reinhardt was born to a Gypsy family in Belgium on January 23, 1910, and shortly thereafter was dubbed "Django." His mother was a dancer and actress and his father was a musician. The family eventually settled into an area outside of Paris. Surrounded by music, Django quickly became proficient on guitar and violin. On a fateful November night in 1928, Django's caravan accidentally caught fire and he was horribly burned, leaving his left hand permanently scarred and limiting the use of his 3rd and 4th fingers. It took him over two years to regain his ability to play; in the

process, he laid the foundation for one of the most exceptional guitar techniques and styles ever. 🎸 Exposed to jazz in the early '30s | Reinhardt teamed with violinist Stephane Grappelli and, inspired by the American duo Eddie Lang and Joe Venuti, the pair made their first recording together in 1934. Later that same year they began working with bassist Louis Vola and rhythm guitarists Roger Chaput and Joseph Reinhardt, Django's brother, as the Quintet Of The Hot Club Of France. Their sets included jazz tunes such as "Dinah," "Lady Be Good," "The Sheik Of Araby," and "St. Louis Blues," as well as originals such as "Minor Swing," "Djangology," and "Bricktop." His playing with the Quintet-primarily done on his

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ILLUSTRATION BY ISABELLE SAMARAS

trademark Selmer *modèle* Jazz acoustic—was ornate, swinging, and often eccentric, with a decidedly Gypsy flavor.

In the years before World War II, Django's reputation spread throughout the world. Visiting *jazzmen* sought him out, and he recorded and performed with luminaries such as Coleman Hawkins, Benny Carter, Eddie South, and Rex Stewart. As he absorbed more jazz, his music became increasingly aligned with American-style swing. In the '40s Django started to use amplification and continued to update his music. The original Quintet broke

up when Grappelli fled to England during World War II, while Django remained in France for the most part, fronting a variety of groups and recording numbers such as "Douce Ambiance," "Cavalerie," and "Nuages," his most popular composition. After the war Reinhardt worked on and off with Grappelli, fronted a revamped Quintet, and toured the U.S. with Duke Ellington. Always sensitive to advances in jazz, he began exploring the avenue opened by bebop. Clef's *Great Artistry* of Django **Reinhardt**, from his second-to-last recording session on March 10, 1953, is decid-

edly bop-flavored and indicates the direction he was headed. On May 16, 1953, after fishing in the Seine, Reinhardt died of a stroke.

Throughout his career, Django proved himself to be an inquisitive, evolving musician. Regardless of his stylistic inclinations, his playing's most memorable quality is its sense of wild abandon and freedom, suggesting that he possessed the rare ability to call upon the improvisational muse at will. His achievements are all the more remarkable considering that he was forced to work around the limitations of his fire-damaged hand. Although Django's left-hand technique has been the subject of much speculation, in a 1954 issue of *Melody Maker*, Stephane Grappelli said, "He acquired amazing dexterity with those first two fingers, but that didn't mean he never employed the others. He learned to grip the guitar with his little finger on the *E* string and the next finger on the *B*." That accounts for some of those chord progressions which Django was probably the first to perform on the guitar. . . at least in the jazz idiom."

Amazingly, Django's single-note work was done exclusively with his 1st and 2nd fingers, although photographs and critical listening reveal that he could form certain chords that required his 3rd finger on the third string. For the most part, his left-hand limitations arose from being unable to extend his 3rd and 4th fingers in the normal manner.

Reinhardt's right hand, although more orthodox in behavior than his left, was equally amazing. With a pick, he was capable of an extremely even tremolo—a skill central to executing fast runs—that was probably acquired through his Gypsy background. He could also crosspick quickly and accurately. Not as recognized is his considerable fingerstyle technique, which he used less frequently.

But Django was much more than an exceptional technician; he was a great jazz musician who could provide hot solos, intricate ensemble work, and propulsive comping as needed. Our accompanying pickstyle examples highlight common aspects of his technique and vocabulary. (For a better understanding of Reinhardt's monumental achievement in overcoming his injury, try playing the single-note passages with only your first two fingers.)

A 12-bar blues chorus, Ex. 1 demonstrates several characteristics of Django's playing, including his arpeggio-based vocabulary. He frequently incorporated open strings, a practice probably derived from years of playing Gypsy music (see bars 1 through 3). In measures 1, 3, 5, 7, and 8, notice the arpeggios that outline 6th chords (root, 3, 5, 6), an element that Charlie Christian also employed to good effect

a few years later. (Django often bent notes, but never more than a half-step; see bar 2.)

Reinhardt embellished chord tones in many ways; measure 5 features a half-step slide up to the root (C) and then a grace down to the 5th (G) from a whole-step above. In bar 6, the E $\flat$  note suggests Cm, a common swing-era link between the C and G chords, while measure 9 implies D9. The figure in bars 12 through 13 features a main note (E), a step-wise upper neighbor (F#) and a chromatic lower neighbor (D#). As Django's work became more bebop-like, it increasingly relied on the blues scale, extended arpeggios, and more complex rhythmic figures.

# Ex. 1

$\text{♩} = 80$

**G6** **c7** **G7**

1

R P P S

5 **c7** **G7**

S P S H P

9 **D7** **G6** **D7** **G6**

H P P S

Exl 2 and Exl 3 show two more ways Django embellished arpeggios. In Exl 2, a Cmajor triad (G| E| G-see bar 1) is stated, followed by embellished Cmajor and Dmajor arpeggios (bars 2 and 3, respectively), where each chordal tone is slurred into from a half-step below. Exl 3 features a sequence in which each note of the B $\flat$  major triad is approached by playing its step-wise upper neighbor, its chromatic lower neighbor, and then the chordal tone. Today this is a favorite sequence of Joe Pass and many others. Apply it to straight eighths, triplets, and other rhythmic groupings.

# Ex. 2

$\text{♩} = 100$

**C6** **D7** **G7**

H H H H H H H H

B1/4

# DJANGO REINHARDT

Rx. 3

♩ = 100

Wes Montgomery is most closely associated with octaves, but Reinhardt paved the way, often using them to bring a solo to a dramatic conclusion, as in Exl 4. Django also soloed with block chords, another element Wes took to great heights decades later.

Exl 4

Reinhardt employed harmonics in introductions, for parts of accompaniments, and in his solos. Exl 5 illustrates the last method and utilizes 4th-fret double-octave natural harmonics before changing to fretted pitches in bar 2. Again, notice the preponderance of chordal tones.

5

Exl 6 is devoted to Django-style accompaniment, an oft-neglected area. With as many as three guitars simultaneously playing chords, the Quintet Of The Hot Club Of France has been criticized for having a ponderous rhythmic feel. "I've had enough of two guitars-sounds too much like a train," declared Django when faced with changing his bands instrumentation due to Grappelli's absence during the war years. But while the Hot Club's rhythm may seem locomotive-like at times, it swings in its own way as a result of Django's active, rolling, part-shuffle, part-swing approach to rhythm.

In Exl 6, mute the unused strings and slightly release your left-hand fingers, cutting short the "and" of beats two and four. Accent the last chord in measures 10 and 12, which kicks things into the following measure. Bars 15 and 16 feature a thirty-second-note tremolo. Also try tremoloing from measure 9, an approach Reinhardt frequently utilized behind a soloist. (To improvise to this progression, he would primarily use the A harmonic minor scale—A $\flat$  B $\flat$  C $\flat$  D $\flat$  E $\flat$  F G $\sharp$ —which encompasses the Am, Dm, and E7 arpeggios.)

# DJANGO REINHARDT

♩ = 100      Am6      Dm6      E9

1

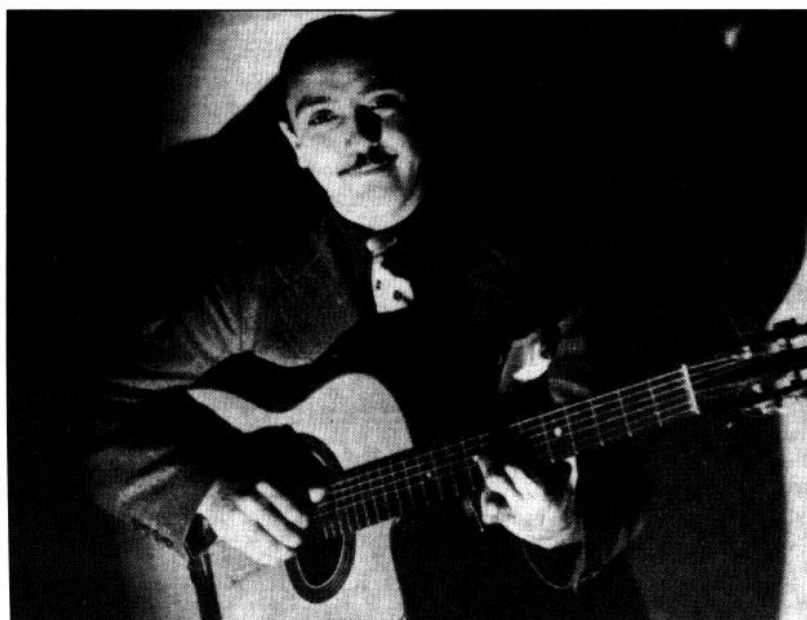
7

Am6      Dm6      Am6

12

E      Eb      E      Am6

trem.



Django recorded hundreds of sides and is probably the most reissued jazz guitarist of all time. Several single- and multiple-CD anthologies have recently appeared, with many more undoubtedly on the way. I highly recommend Swing's seven-CD set *Djangologie* and Decca's Django Reinhardt 1952-53. Excellent LPs include RCA's *Djangology*, *Angel's Quintet*, *Of The Hot Club Of France*, and any disc in the GNP/Crescendo series.

Fortunately, Reinhardt's extensive discography offers vast possibilities for analyzing and appreciating his priceless playing. Even when some of his material begins to sound dated-especially compared to that of the great swing and bebop players who followed him-his unmatched technique never ceases to fascinate and amaze.

The Gypsy great with a **Selmer Maccaferri**