Swing dreams are made of these: A lesson in Gypsy jazz

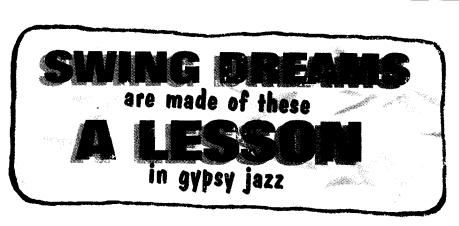
Mackenzie, Andy; Jorgenson, John *Guitar Player;* Dec 1996; 30, 12; Research Library

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jango Reinhardt's playing, and Gypsy guitar in general, is a mother lode of inspiration for pickers of all persuasions. When I'm stuck in a solo, I think, "What would Django do here?" Inevitably, I find something to help me along, no matter what music I'm playing.

Two years ago, while at the Django Reinhardt Memorial Festival in Samois-sur-Seine, France, I met Andy MacKenzie, a great jazz guitarist from Manchester, England. He too is an aficionado of Gypsy guitar. We've written this lesson to introduce



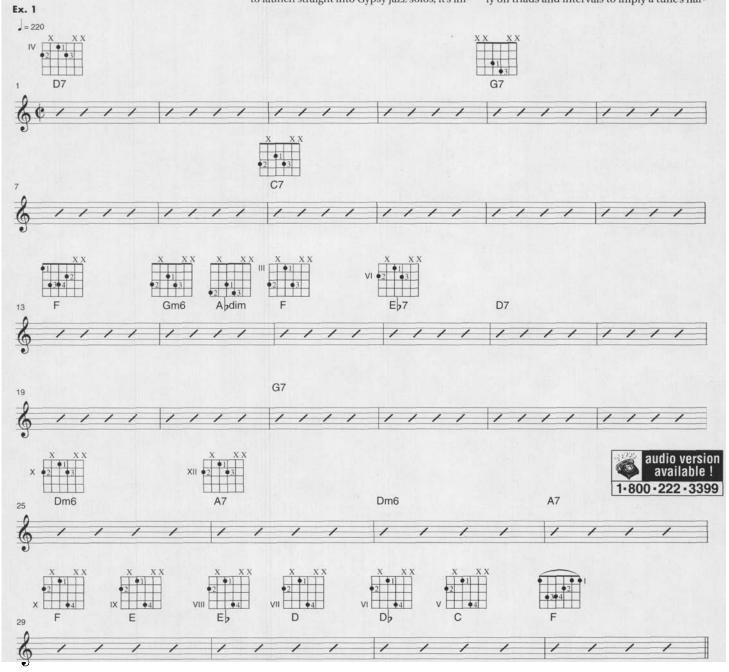
you to Django's rich style, which, thanks to many modern players, is alive and evolving.

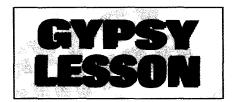
—JOHN JORGENSON

The rhythm method. Though it's tempting to launch straight into Gypsy jazz solos, it's im-

portant to get a foundation in the unique harmony and driving four-to-the bar rhythm that's at this music's core.

Because of his hand injury, Django could not play full six-string chords. Instead, he relied mainly on triads and intervals to imply a tune's har-





mony. Ex. 1 features some of these chord shapes and Django's favorite substitutions in a rhythm part that fits "Sweet Georgia Brown." Usually played in Ab or G, here it's written in F to keep the shapes within the first 12 frets.

The first voicing is a chameleon that lets you

The chord can also function as a minor 6 (root, 6, 5) or a diminished 7 (each note can be the root). When a song calls for straight minor chords, try substituting the minor 6—instant Django!

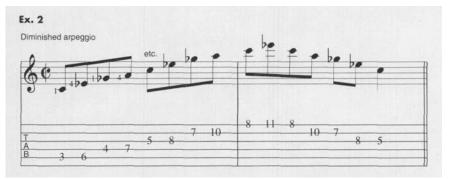
Scales and arpeggios. Though Django used scale tones in his solos, he relied heavily on em-

bellished arpeggios. To get a grip on the Gypsy jazz sound, you need to thoroughly explore major, minor, dominant 7th and diminished 7th arpeggios. For instance, play Ex. 2's arpeggio over *Cdim7* or, when you want an altered bebop sound, against *C7*. For a Gypsy-flavored run, play this diminished arpeggio over *Cm6*.

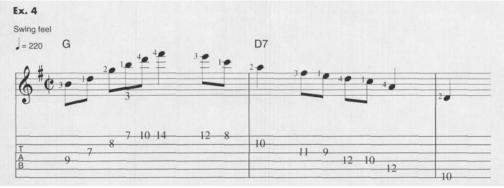
In addition to major, minor (both harmonic and melodic) and pentatonic scales, Django laced his solos with more exotic chromatic and whole-tone scales. The three-octave chromatic run in Ex. 3 puts your chops to the test. When you can flawlessly execute it at a fast swing tempo, you're on your way. Pick each note on the high-*E* string as you slide your finger along the fretboard.

Building a solo. To analyze Django's soloing techniques, let's explore the second improvised chorus from "Dinah," one of the tunes from the Hot Club Quintet's first recording session. In a mere 32 bars, Django lays out the techniques he and other players would develop for years to come.

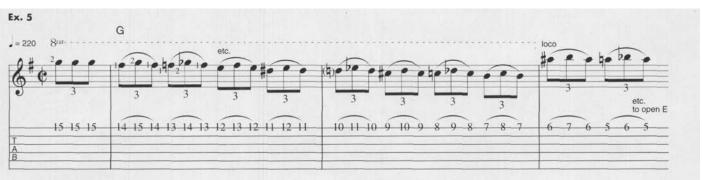
We start at bar 4 of the second chorus. Django outlines the harmony with a *Gmaj7* arpeggio followed by a *D9* arpeggio (Ex. 4). Ex. 5 then descends chromatically from high



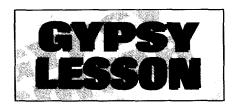








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Gusing hammers and pulls. Recorded in 1934, this lick has been used by many guitarists, in-

cluding Jeff Beck.

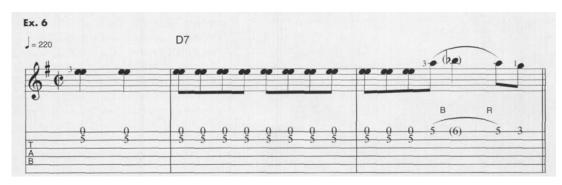
Ex. 6 picks up the chorus at bar 12. Here against D7, Django punches out the 9 with a unison E played on the second and first strings. He releases this tension in the next bar.

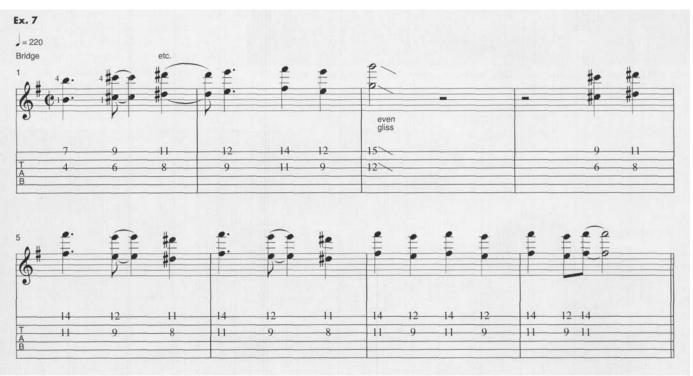
Next is the solo's bridge played in octaves (Ex. 7). This predates Wes Montgomery's lush sound by some 30 years. How Django fingered this with his deformed hand is a mystery. Note the descending glissando in bar 3—another

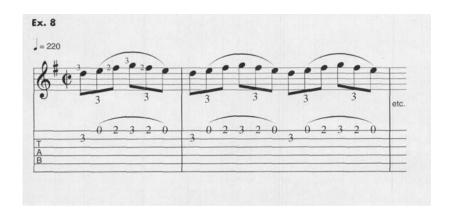
Django trademark.

Ex. 8 heralds the solo's final eight bars. Here Django repeats a flashy triplet lick using hammers, pulls and open strings. How many times have you heard this?

To dig deeper into Django's style, study his influences—including Louis Armstrong—and those who carry the flame today: Stochelo Rosenberg, Romane, Jimmy Rosenberg, Bireli Lagrene, Rafaël Faÿs and other Gypsy jazz masters.









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