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Contents

NOVEMBER 2014 | VOLUME 48, NUMBER 11

GP COMMUNITY

- 16 Want a sense of community? Share your photos, gear and CD/DVD reviews, likes/dislikes, favorite amps and guitars, tone and technique tips, gig stories, and more with the *Guitar Player* reader community. Come on... join in!

OPENING SHOTS

- 18 We get up close and personal with the gigs, the gear, the guts, and the glory that make playing guitar the coolest thing in the world.

RIFFS

- 20 Dick Wagner remembered, Tristan Avakian on how to sound like Brian May, the *GP* Hall of Fame, and more!

NOW HEAR THIS

- 28 Fred Boekhorst

COVER STORY

- 56 **Brian Setzer**
The riotous rockabilly rebel keeps it loud, fast, and furious as he discusses his rockin' new album. Bonus! Setzer's tech talks about what goes into maintaining his gear.

FEATURES

- 32 Kenny Wayne Shepherd
38 Night Ranger's Brad Gillis and Joel Hoekstra
44 James Rotondi
50 Ace Frehley

CLASSIC COLUMN

- 162 **Jeff Baxter's Eclectic Electric**
(from the October 1976 issue of *GP*)

Brian Setzer

On the cover: Brian Setzer, photographed by Russ Harrington

LESSONS

- 90 **Under Investigation**
A thorough examination of a particular style or player. This month: The amazing new book *Joni Mitchell Complete So Far...*
- 100 **Rhythm Workshop**
Rhythmic Motif Redux Pt. 1
- 102 **Fretboard Recipes**
Modes Pt. 6: More Modal Magic

GET SMART

- 130 Carl Verheyen on Performing
132 Scott Mathews on Producing
134 Gary Brawer on Maintenance
136 Craig Anderton on Technology

NEW ACOUSTIC SECTION FRETS IS REBORN!

- 78 Bob Taylor
84 Buyer's Guide to Capos
86 **Bonus Acoustic Lesson!**
Tommy Emmanuel
88 **Vintage Frets Excerpt**
Sam Bush on Sessions (from the March 1985 issue of *Frets*)
89 Matt Turk

GEAR

- 30 New Gear
104 **Roundup!** Boutique Gear Bonanza
114 **Stompbox Fever** Pedals from Ogre, Zaim, MC Systems, and VauxFlores
126 **Fable Fighters** What's the Big Deal About Pure Nickel Strings?

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Lessons

Under Investigation

Joni Mitchell Complete So Far...

BY JESSE GRESS

PREAMBLE: MOST GUITARISTS ATTEND WINTER NAMM TO CHECK OUT THE LATEST GEAR, BUT FOR ME THE BEST-IN-show product that induced the greatest “Hallelujah!” factor was... a book? Let me elaborate.

From the opening cut on her first album (*Song to a Seagull*) to her most recent release (*Shine*), there’s always been something mystical and transcendental about the way Joni Mitchell pulls sounds from a guitar. Unfettered by rules, she seemingly broke them all, devising her own tuning systems and unique chord voicings to accommodate the many-faceted compositions in her vast repertoire. Very inspirational stuff, but unfortunately, anyone attempting to correctly play or transcribe her songs over the past 40-plus years faced a daunting task, since Mitchell’s tunings and voicings have, for the most part, remained shrouded in mystery.

Until now.

Meticulously researched, well-organized, and beautifully packaged, *Joni Mitchell Complete So Far...* [Alfred Music] is so much more than a songbook. It’s a gateway to a new universe—an important historical document that will be forever referenced by future generations. Granted, several Mitchell folios have appeared over the years—some correct, and some not so—but never has a work of this magnitude been made available to the masses. Transcribers Joel Bernstein, Daniel Libertino, and Andrew DuBrock did a remarkable job notating the songs. In fact, Bernstein’s longtime gig was tuning Mitchell’s



guitars, which required learning to play at least the first eight bars of every one of her songs and preserving every tuning. Mitchell herself admits that without Bernstein’s documentation, many of her tunings might have been lost to the ages. This much scordatura, or altered tuning, used to require traveling with a fleet of acoustic guitars, but in 1995, Mitchell began gigging exclusively with a Roland VG-8 programmed with her virtual tunings.

The real beauty of Mitchell’s methodology was summarized in a comment by Joni to Alfred’s Aaron Stang during production when she mentioned that if any of her guitar parts are hard to



Lessons

JONI MITCHELL

play, you're playing it wrong. It's true. The book's accuracy is astounding and you'll be thrilled and delighted as you marvel at how Mitchell's complex chord structures result from relatively simple fingerings. It's been a long time coming, so dig out those albums—*Court and Spark* and *Hejira* will do for now—and I'll meet you between the covers.

THE BOOK

What you *don't* get in this book is full-song transcriptions of every note Mitchell played. This really doesn't matter, because what you *do* get provides the key to unlocking her guitar parts via detailed song and tuning indices, four- to eight-bars of note-for-note standard notation and tablature for the intro to each song, and most importantly, dead-on accurate chord grids featuring the correct chord voicings. The transcribed intros typically establish Mitchell's strumming or fingerpicking pattern (a subject in itself), which can then be applied for the duration of the song at hand. This approach allows each song to be reduced to two to four pages and facilitates the inclusion of 167 titles. You also get an enlightening and detail-oriented 1986 interview and a fantastic photo section. Well done!

THE TUNING INDEX

The comprehensive eight-page Tuning Index, which contains a whopping 42 entries, lists the correct tunings for every guitar-based song included (the dulcimer- and piano-based tunes have been arranged for guitar in standard tuning). This is an absolute marvel, and perhaps the most important part of the book. The introductory text explains how the tunings "are grouped into families based upon either similarity to standard tuning, or quality (major/minor) of the open chord implied by the component notes." Each "block" in the chart is headed with a banner identifying the tuning type and its intervallic structure, and entries are organized from left to right by song title, the album it appears on, Joni's unique tuning notation (by fret), tuning of the actual pitches from low to high, capo position (if any), and the name of the open chord produced (disregarding the capo). There's also an explanation of how Mitchell documents

her tunings: "Joni has devised a system of tuning notation using the letter name of the note found on the sixth string followed by five numbers representing the fret to which the next string will be tuned. For instance, standard tuning would be notated E-5-5-5-4-5. The open sixth string is tuned to an E note. The open fifth string is tuned to the note at the 5th fret of the sixth string. The open fourth string is tuned to the note at the 5th fret of the fifth string, and so on."

Fig. 1 reprints the Tuning Index entry for the Major (add 9, 11) tuning used on six different songs, two of which we'll excerpt shortly. To follow Joni's system (C-7-7-3-7-4), tune the open sixth string to low C, the open fifth string to the 7th fret of the sixth string, the open fourth string to the 7th fret of the fifth string, the open third string to the 3rd fret of the fourth string, the open second string to the 7th fret of the third string, and the open first string to the 4th fret of the second string. But don't go there just yet. We'll be investigating three different tunings over the course of four song excerpts reprinted exactly as they appear in the book, and this isn't the first one.

When playing the following excerpts, keep in mind that Mitchell's melodies and lyrics are equally as important as the guitar parts, but unless you or someone else sings the melody, you'll have to appreciate these

songs on the merit of their harmonic structures alone. (And you can always play along with the record.) Joni, take us away!

"FREE MAN IN PARIS"

Double dropped-D tuning (D-7-5-5-4-3) facilitates the one-finger root-position C, D, and F major triad punctuations that alternate with open G chords (muted on beat two) during the first two bars of "Free Man in Paris" (from 1973's *Court and Spark*), as shown in **Ex. 1**. Lay heavy accents on the C, D, and first F hit in bar 1, as well as the first open G chord (on the *and* of beat three) in bar 2. Shifting to a bar of 3/4, Mitchell changes string groups and forms the C and G voicings notated in bar 3, plus the A(9) in bar 4 by moving the same shape to three different positions. (Tip: These shapes recur in many of Mitchell's songs and in several tunings.) Accent beat one and the *and* of beat two between the open-string passing chords in bar 3. Returning to 4/4, bar 4 returns resolves to the tonic A(9) and features a rhythmic motif used on the repeat to establish Mitchell's strumming pattern during the verse and chorus rhythm figures. The verse continues the same pattern with two bars each of A(9), D/A, and C/G (note the hammered notes in the last two), and an open D5 all-purpose-passing-chord appears on beat four

Fig. 1

SONG TITLE/TUNING TYPE	ALBUM	TUNING (Frets)	TUNING (Pitches)	CAPO	OPEN CHORD (Disregarding Capo)
MAJOR (ADD 9, 11) CHORD: ROOT-5TH-9TH-11TH-R-3RD					
Coyote	Hejira	C-7-7-3-7-4	CGDFCE		C(9,11)
Don Juan's Reckless Daughter	Don Juan's Reckless Daughter	C-7-7-3-7-4	CGDFCE		C(9,11)
Just Like This Train	Court and Spark	C-7-7-3-7-4	CGDFCE		C(9,11)
Ladies of the Canyon	Ladies of the Canyon	C-7-7-3-7-4	CGDFCE	2	C(9,11)
Sisotowbell Lane	Song to a Seagull	C-7-7-3-7-4	CGDFCE	2	C(9,11)
Woman of Heart and Mind	For the Roses	C-7-7-3-7-4	CGDFCE		C(9,11)

Ex.1

Guitar in Double Drop D tuning:

D-7-5-5-4-3

⑥ = D ③ = G

⑤ = A ② = B

④ = D ① = D

Moderately fast ♩ = 164

§ Intro:

2.4.6.

To Coda ⑥

5

A(9)
6fr.

1. "The way_ I
2. See additional lyrics

TAB

Verse:

A(9)

9 *Cont. rhy. simile*

see it," he said, "you just can't win it. Ev - 'ry - bod - y's

in it for their own gain; you can't please them all. There's al-ways some-bod - y call-ing you down.

Ex. 2

F/C $\overset{H}{\curvearrowright}$ 10fr. $\overset{H}{\curvearrowright}$ 5fr. $\overset{H}{\curvearrowright}$ 7fr. $\overset{A(9)}{\curvearrowright}$ 6fr.

Lessons

JONI MITCHELL

Guitar tuning:

C-7-7-3-7-4

⑥ = C ③ = F

⑤ = G ② = C

④ = D ① = E

Ex. 3

Moderately ♩ = 102

Intro:

Chord diagrams for Intro: C, Gm9, Gm7, Am9/G, Am7/G, Gmaj7(#11)/G(9), C.

Tablature for Intro:

```

T 2 2 2 4 5 5 6 7 8 9 10
A 2 2 2 4 5 5 5 7 7 9 9
B 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
  
```

Verse:

Chord diagrams for Verse: Gm9, Gm7, Am9/G, Am7/G, C, G13, Am7/G, G13, C/G.

Lyrics: 1. I'm al - ways run - ning be - hind the time, 2.3. See additional lyrics

Cont. rhy. simile

Tablature for Verse:

```

T 5 6 7 8 0
A 5 5 7 7 0
B 5 5 7 7 0
  
```

Chord diagrams for Verse: Gmaj13, G7sus, G13sus, Fmaj9, Fmaj7/A, C/G, G7, G, Am7/G, G, G7.

Lyrics: just like this train, shak - ing in - to town, with the brakes com - plain - ing.

Tablature for Verse:

```

T 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20
A 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20
B 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20
  
```

of the last three measures, preceding the G and F(9) voicings.

To complete the verse, repeat bars 9 - 16 and add four bars of A(9). You can play the chorus using the chords diagrammed in Ex. 2—just play each one for two bars, again observing the hammer-ons in the first three shapes.

"JUST LIKE THIS TRAIN"

Employing the Major (9,11) tuning illustrated in Fig. 1, Ex. 3 maps out the first thirteen bars of "Just Like This Train," a magical track from *Court and Spark* that brims with lush chordal harmonies. The four-bar intro begins with an open C pedal and three ascending parallel minor third

Ex. 4 Fast ♩ = 162

Intro:

Guitar tuning:

C-7-7-3-7-4

⑥ = C ③ = F

⑤ = G ② = C

④ = D ① = E

Ex. 5

intervals (fingered as if they were fourths in standard tuning) to create a smoky C7 vibe. (TYPO ALERT #1 [Hey, these things happen]: The C chords in bars 1 and 3 should be fretted as shown in the TAB, not the grids.) Mitchell contrasts this with the response in bar 2, where she rhythmically and harmonically displaces three parallel, easy-to-play minor-9-to-minor-7 shapes over a low C pedal. (Followers of Rhythm Workshop will recognize this as a partial, three-against-four hemiola.)

As the verse begins, refer to the vocal part of the score for rhythmic placement of the gorgeous G13, Am7/G, C/G, Gmaj13, G7sus, G13sus, Fmaj9, and Fmaj7 voicings in bars 5 through 11. (TYPO ALERT #2: The fret marker on Am7/G in bar 5 should read “7th,” not “9th” fret.) Following the

brief, two-bar instrumental passage in bars 12 and 13, you can continue the verse by repeating bars 7 and 8, and then inserting bars 5 and 6 before jumping back to bars 9, 10, and two repeats of bar 11.

“COYOTE”

Jumping ahead a few years to 1976’s *Hejira*, which prominently features bassist Jaco Pastorius’ beautifully simpatico bass playing, we find that the opening cut resembles our last example in more ways than one. Both “Coyote” and “Just Like This Train” share the same tuning (C-7-7-3-7-4) and utilize similar rhythmic motifs, albeit at drastically different tempos. The core of the energetic “Coyote” rhythm figure, which features Mitchell’s then-new and now signature

chorused electric sound, can be found in the eight-bar intro documented in **Ex. 4**. Dig how this tuning transforms a simple open-A chord (note Joni’s fingering) into a gorgeous Aadd9 voicing that alternates with the open Csus(9) in the even-numbered bars.

Continue the same rhythm pattern and use the eight chord grids in **Ex. 5** to construct the 34-bar verse progression as follows: Play Ebsus2 for two bars; play G13sus for two bars; play C(9) to Csus(9) as in bars 1 and 2 of the intro; play Gsus(9) to G and Fsus(9) to F for one bar each (with hammer-ons); repeat the last two bars; play C(9) to Csus(9) for two bars, as before. Repeat all 14 measures, and then add two bars of Ebsus2 and four bars of G13sus before returning to the eight-bar intro.

Lessons

JONI MITCHELL

Ex. 6

Moderately ♩ = 115

Intro:

Guitar in Open C tuning:

C-7-5-4-3-5

⑥ = C ③ = E

⑤ = G ② = G

④ = C ① = C

mp *hold throughout*

TAB: 1 0 3 0 | 5 5 5 5 | 5 5 5 5 | 5 5 5 0

4 *Dm* *Em* *F* *B♭/F*

1. I was

TAB: 1 3 3 0 | 5 5 5 5 | 5 5 5 5 | 5 7 7 5

Verse: *Cont. fingerpicking simile*

7 *G* *C/G* *G* *B♭* *E♭/B♭*

driv - ing a - cross the burn - ing des - ert when I spot - ted six jet planes

2-7. See additional lyrics

TAB: 1 3 3 0 | 5 5 5 5 | 5 5 5 5 | 5 7 7 5

10 *B♭* *C5* *Am7* *C* *Bm(b9)* *C* *G* *C/G*

leav - ing six white va - por trails a - cross the bleak ter - rain.

TAB: 1 3 3 0 | 5 5 5 5 | 5 5 5 5 | 5 7 7 5

Lessons

JONI MITCHELL

Ex. 6 *continued*

14 C 8fr. Em(#6) 2341 Bm(b9, b6) 2341 10fr.

It was the hex - a - gram of the heav - ens; it was the strings of my gui -

18 Am7 8fr. G 7fr. F 5fr. Bb/F 5fr. 131211

tar. A - me - lia, it was just a false a - larm.

22 F 5fr. Dm 2341 Em 2341

TAB

5 5 5 6 5 5 5 5 5 5 0 1 0 3 0

5 5 7 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 0 2 4 4 0

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"AMELIA"

Maintaining the same pitches on the bottom two strings and tuning the top four down in various increments yields the open C tuning (C-7-5-4-3-5, which is identical to open E tuned two whole-steps lower) for the dreamy and haunting "Amelia," also from *Hejira*. **Ex. 6** commences with a six-bar intro, which along with the rest of the song emphasizes Mitchell's delicate and intricate fingerpicking style. Bar 1 is in 3/4 as the tuning simplifies the fingerings for the complex Dm(4) and Em(#5) voicings within (Recognize those shapes?), and illustrates how Mitchell often frets full chord shapes without playing every

note. Bars 2 and 3 utilize a 5th-fret barre and re-contextualized Keef-style B \flat /F-to-F-chord pull offs. Accent beats one and four, plus the *and* of beat two in bar 2 as well as the downbeat of bar 3, and then repeat the three-bar figure with the variations notated in bars 4 through 6. As the verse begins, apply a similar picking pattern to navigate the G-C/G-G, B \flat -E \flat /B \flat -B \flat , Am7-Bm(b9, b6), Em(#5), and F/B \flat /F changes in bars 7 to 13. (A real "moment" occurs in bar 18 when Mitchell gently reverse rakes the lush Am7 voicing just after singing "It was the strings of my guitar.") In this tuning, the all-purpose open-string passing chord is C or C5, depending on how many

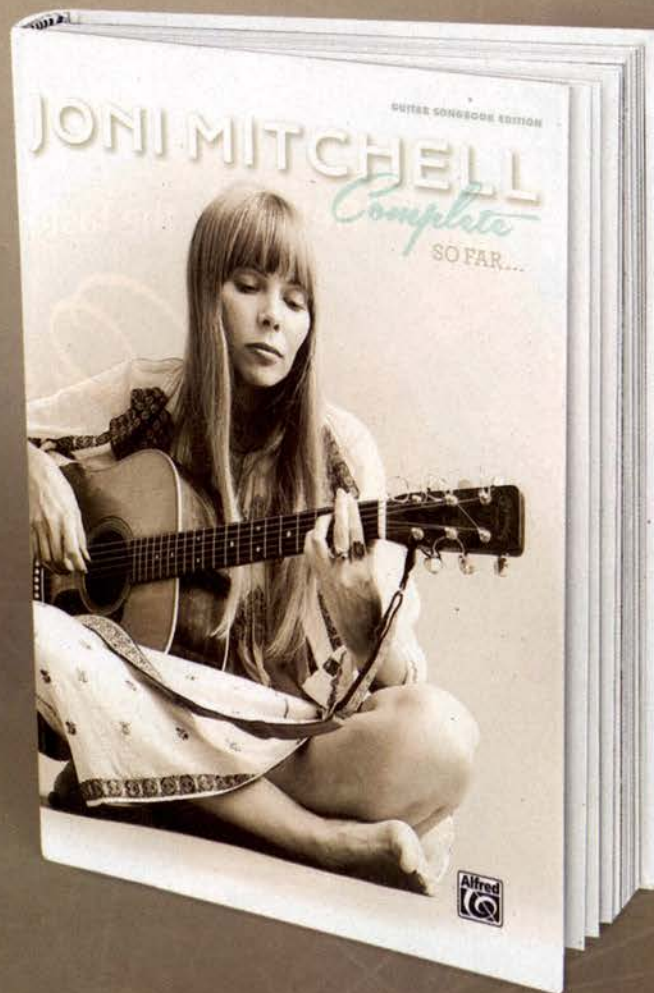
strings are played (see bars 10 through 14). Segue back to bar 2 of the intro via bars 22 through 24 and you've pretty much got all seven verses (!) of the 17-bar progression covered. Like many of Mitchell's compositions, it's a profoundly moving piece of music that stands on its own even without its beautiful melody and exquisite lyrics.

This is merely the tip of the iceberg. There are 163 more songs within the pages of *Joni Mitchell Complete So Far...* awaiting your exploration. Don't let this one get away, folks—you'll cherish it for years to come.

(Special thanks to Aaron Stang and Jack Allen at Alfred Music.) ■

JONI MITCHELL

Complete
SO FAR...



THIS COLLECTIBLE, HARDCOVER SONGBOOK INCLUDES:

- Over 500 pages with 167 songs from 18 landmark albums
- Accurate transcriptions
- Guitar tunings and chord fingerings approved by Joni
- An easy-to-use, cross-referenced tuning index
- Full-color historic photos of Joni and friends throughout her career



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SAMPLE SONG!

