

Django Reinhardt's Guitar Wizardry

In a world where many great guitar players leave a significant body of music, styles and techniques at our disposal, Gypsy guitarist Django Reinhardt has an unparalleled position. Blazing technique, strong phrasing, beautiful tone and impeccable taste cohabitated in equal proportions in the recordings left behind by the nomadic genius.

The backbone of Gypsy jazz is the rhythm. The whole subject of Gypsy comping is enough to fill out an entire book; Example 1 shows a few basic styles that may be played over a minor blues. They are all interchangeable; pick one and play it throughout the course of one solo, then experiment with the others. Since the rhythm guitarist functions as a drummer in this style, be sure to develop a strong steady beat before working on the variations. Notice the voicings that include only three notes played on the four lowest strings for a more percussive effect.



Patrick Berrogain

Like all jazz improvisers, Reinhardt had his bag of tricks. He used distinctive Gypsy colors, such as the major 6th over minor chords, as well as the major 7th and the 9th. Example 2 shows the use of those colors. The first four notes are played with a pull-off from B₁ to A, then a slide from A to G₂ and back to A with the first finger. Notice the resolution on the major 6th over the Dm.

Example 3 shows the use of open strings to play a straight minor 6th arpeggio over a minor triad. Open strings have a distinctive timbre and are used as often as possible in Gypsy music. This originated from Reinhardt's infirmity, but became inherently part of the style.

Example 4 shows the use of the Major 7th and the 6th over a major chord. Notice the F triad over the E7, a fairly advanced concept and a testimony to Reinhardt's sophisticated ears.

Diminished arpeggios were also Reinhardt trademarks; he often treated dominant chords as a 7_b9—F, A_b (G_b), B and D diminished arpeggios over an E7. Example 5 shows a straight G_b diminished arpeggio used over the E7 and the major 6th resolution over the minor triad.

Although all these concepts may be used as improvisational tools by all instrumentalists, guitar players may want to experiment with fingerings. Many of Reinhardt's licks are easier to play using two fingers across the fingerboard rather than in positions. The tablatures indicate a way you can play those examples with two fingers. Down strokes and sweeps across adjacent strings (when possible) are favored. **DB**

Patrick Berrogain is a San Diego-based guitarist, composer, arranger and teacher. He provides open counseling in the Gypsy jazz style of guitar playing at the Musicians Institute in Los Angeles and is the lead guitarist in The Hot Club of San Diego. For more information, visit www.hotclubsandiego.com.

Ex.1

Style 1: G-6 D7 G-/Bb D7 G-6 D7 G-/Bb B°

Style 2: C-6 G7 C-/Eb G7 G-6 D7 G-/Bb D7

Style 3: Eb7 D7 G-6 D7 Eb7 D7

Style 4: G-6 D7 G-/Bb D7 G-6 D7 G-/Bb B°

Style 5: G-6 D7 G-/Bb D7 G-6 D7 G-/Bb B°

Ex.2 A_m D_m

Ex.3 D_m G_m

Ex.4 F₆ E₇ F₆

Ex.5 F₆ E₇ F₆