

Introduction to The Guitar Styles of Merle Travis and Chet Atkins

Overview

Students will learn to identify, isolate and, ultimately, bring together the physical techniques required to play in the style of Merle Travis and Chet Atkins (Thumbstyle / Fingerstyle). Although the primary focus will be on developing the righthand skill required to play Bass, Percussion, Harmony, and Melody simultaneously on the guitar, students will also be given the tools to refine their approach to mastering lefthand chord fingering.

All material is presented and discussed in the context of repertoire associated with Merle Travis and Chet Atkins. When appropriate, actual transcribed examples from their recordings will be referenced.

At the the end of this course students' will have a thorough understanding of the physical skills required to play in the style of Merle Travis and Chet Atkins, and will have a clear and detailed view of how to develop and master these skills.

Prerequisites

Basic lefthand ability to play some common open position chord shapes. No previous righthand ability is required. No Theory or Sightreading is required.

Materials

Any guitar - acoustic, electric, steel string, or nylon string. A Tuner. A Capo. A Metronome. A Thumbpick. *(Some students may ultimately decide to not use a thumbpick however, it is important to both hear the difference in sound as well as feel the difference in technique between using or not using one.)*

Additional Information

10 weeks, 1 hour per week. Maximum 10 students.

Outline

- Overview of the Elements of Thumbstyle / Fingerstyle Guitar

An overview of all the elements that come together to create a Thumbstyle / Fingerstyle guitar arrangement are demonstrated and explained.

- Lefthand Facility Assessment and The Lefthand Fingering Principles For Chords

Although the primary focus of this course is to develop the Righthand skill required to execute Thumbstyle / Fingerstyle Guitar, there are several Lefthand inefficiencies that can hinder this development. Through a discussion of the Lefthand Fingering Principles For Chords, students are given the learning tools needed to refine, master, and automate their Lefthand movement. This will allow students to completely focus their attention on Righthand skills development.

- Chord Voicings and Progressions Associated With The Travis / Atkins Guitar Style

Through the introduction of a Selected List Of Merle Travis' and Chet Atkins' Repertoire, students will be introduced to Chord Voicings and Progressions used by these players. More specifically, the Lefthand fingerings used by each of these players is explored and related to their arranging styles. Some students may find some of the fingerings quite foreign to their experience and, therefore, quite challenging. Students do not need to be able to play the more challenging chords in order to thoroughly grasp all the righthand techniques to be discussed.

- All Thumb Versus Thumb & Finger Accompaniment Techniques

This is really the foundation of the style. Students learn to separate the the notes of a chord to create the effect of playing Bass, Percussion and Accompaniment simultaneously. In addition to applying this to previously introduced chords, students will also understand how to apply this knowledge to chords they already know or will know.

- Righthand Pattern Playing and Righthand Patterns Associated With Travis / Atkins

A wide range of righthand accompaniment patterns as well as patterns often used by Merle Travis and Chet Atkins are presented, analyzed, and applied.

- How To Effectively Use a Capo and a Metronome to Develop Physical Skill

A capo is usually thought of as a tool to facilitate a key change and a metronome as a tool for staying "in time". The real power of these two devices is that they can be used to expose students' progress even when they can't see it, as well as help students' master the patience that will allow them to progress at all.

- Applying Simple Melodies to Accompaniment Patterns

This is one effective approach to arranging for Thumbstyle / Fingerstyle Guitar which doesn't require a deep knowledge of theoretical concepts. Students will be guided in applying simple and familiar melodies to their favourite Chords and Accompaniment Patterns discussed thus far.

- Analyzing, Simplifying, and Learning From Detailed Transcriptions

As with any popular guitarist, there are professionally transcribed and published transcriptions of both Merle Travis' and Chet Atkins' recordings. These can be both a blessing and a curse to students. The blessing is that students can learn to play exactly what is on the record and develop both their Ear and their ability to authentically emulate their favourite players. The curse is that, since it is unlikely that all parts of the piece of music will pedagogically fit into the student's current level of development, it promotes all sorts of nasty habits - I.e. uneven rhythm and timing, fumbling for notes, etc. Throughout this course students will be shown techniques and "tricks" for simplifying and solving issues related to learning from transcriptions.

Note

Each class will begin with a review of previous material presented. Due the inherent accumulative and evolutionary nature of learning music, the amount of time spent on this review during each class will be driven by both students' questions and the instructor's assessment of how well previous material has been understood. As classes progress, a larger portion on time is generally required.