

How to Play Jazz Guitar in the Style of



Wes Montgomery

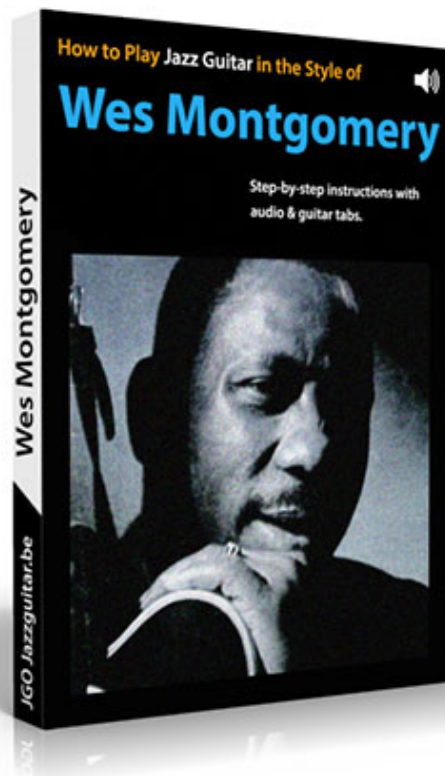
Step-by-step instructions with
audio & guitar tabs.



Sample Pages

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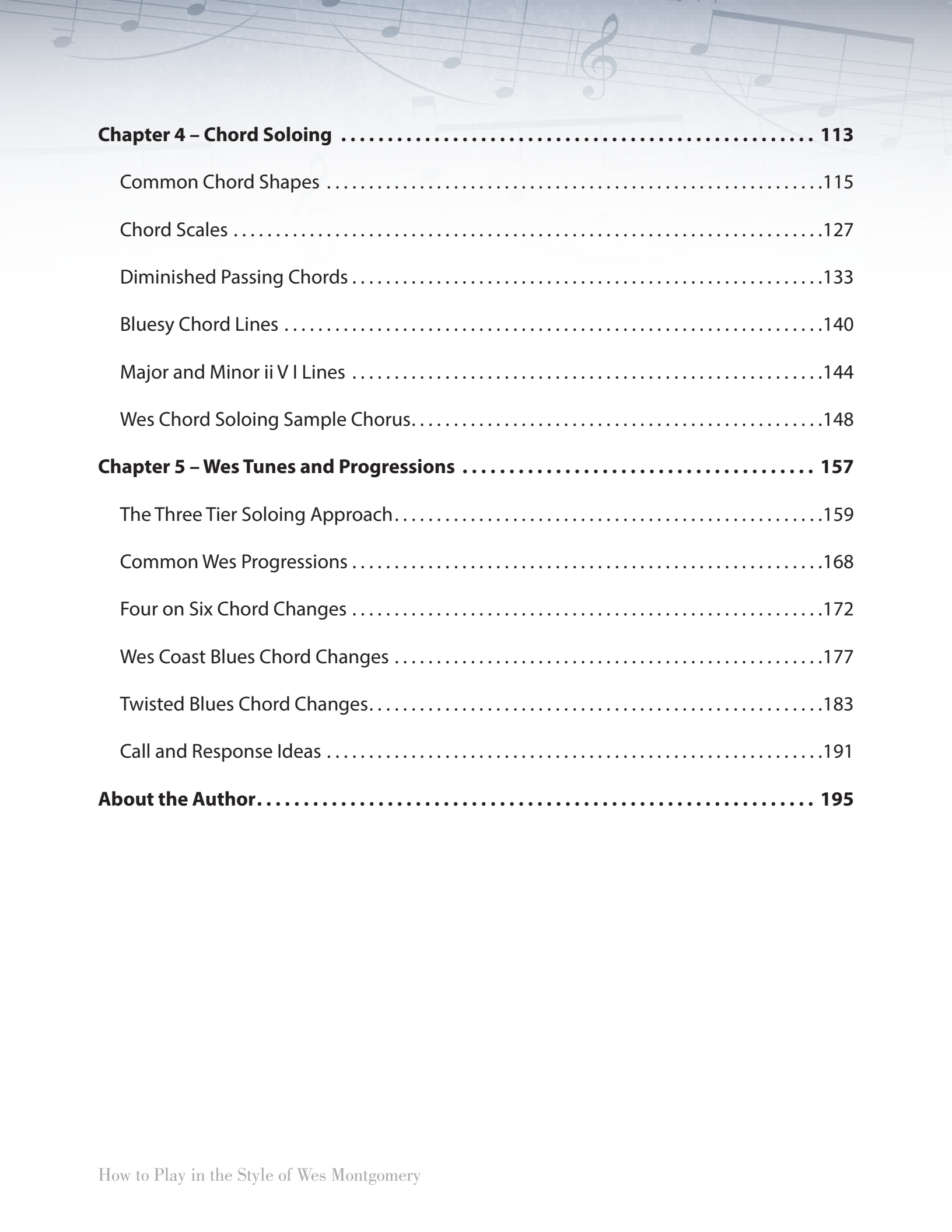
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Wes Montgomery's Guitars and Amps

In comparison to many other guitarists, Wes was **not interested at all in guitar equipment**, he saw his guitar as a tool to do the job, and man, was he good at doing his job! Keep in mind that Wes Montgomery played with his thumb rather than with a guitar pick, which is a major characteristic of his sound.

"I got a standard box. I don't never want nothing special. Then if I drop my box, I can borrow somebody else's." - Wes Montgomery

Guitars

Gibson L-5 CES

From 1963 onward, Wes Montgomery played almost exclusively on a Gibson L-5 CES (cutaway electric Spanish). Gibson produced this guitar since 1922 and is still in production today. It was the favorite rhythm guitar in big bands. The L5 was the first Gibson guitar with f-holes.

Gibson made 3 custom guitars for Wes Montgomery, but they only had 2 differences compared to standard L-5's: 1 pickup instead of 2, which was placed upside down.

Other Guitars

- Wes Montgomery played a **Gibson L-7** on the recordings of The Wes Montgomery Trio (1959). The L-7 was loaned to him by Kenny Burrell, together with a Fender Deluxe amp.



- **Gibson L-4** with a Charlie Christian bar pickup.
- **Gibson ES-175**: pictured on the cover of The Incredible Jazz Guitar of Wes Montgomery (1960).
- **Gibson ES-125D**

Strings

Wes Montgomery used heavy gauge flat wound guitar strings to get that fat, characteristic tone that he was known for the world over. Wes preferred to use **Gibson HiFi Flatwound** strings on his guitars going from .058 to .014.

Amps

Wes Montgomery **never really found the amp that sounded the way he wanted it to**, though he did spend his career trying many different models in search for the perfect tone and performance, including the ones listed below:

Fender Super Reverb

Wes Montgomery used a Fender Super Reverb in his early years. This tube amp has 4 x 10-inch speakers.



1965 Standel Super Custom XV

In his later years Wes Montgomery played this Standel amp.

The Super Custom XV has 2 channels, a normal one and a reverb/vibrato one. The amplifier has 70 watts RMS and a JBL speaker.



Fender Twin Reverb

Wes Montgomery switched between the Standel and a Fender Twin Reverb in his later years.



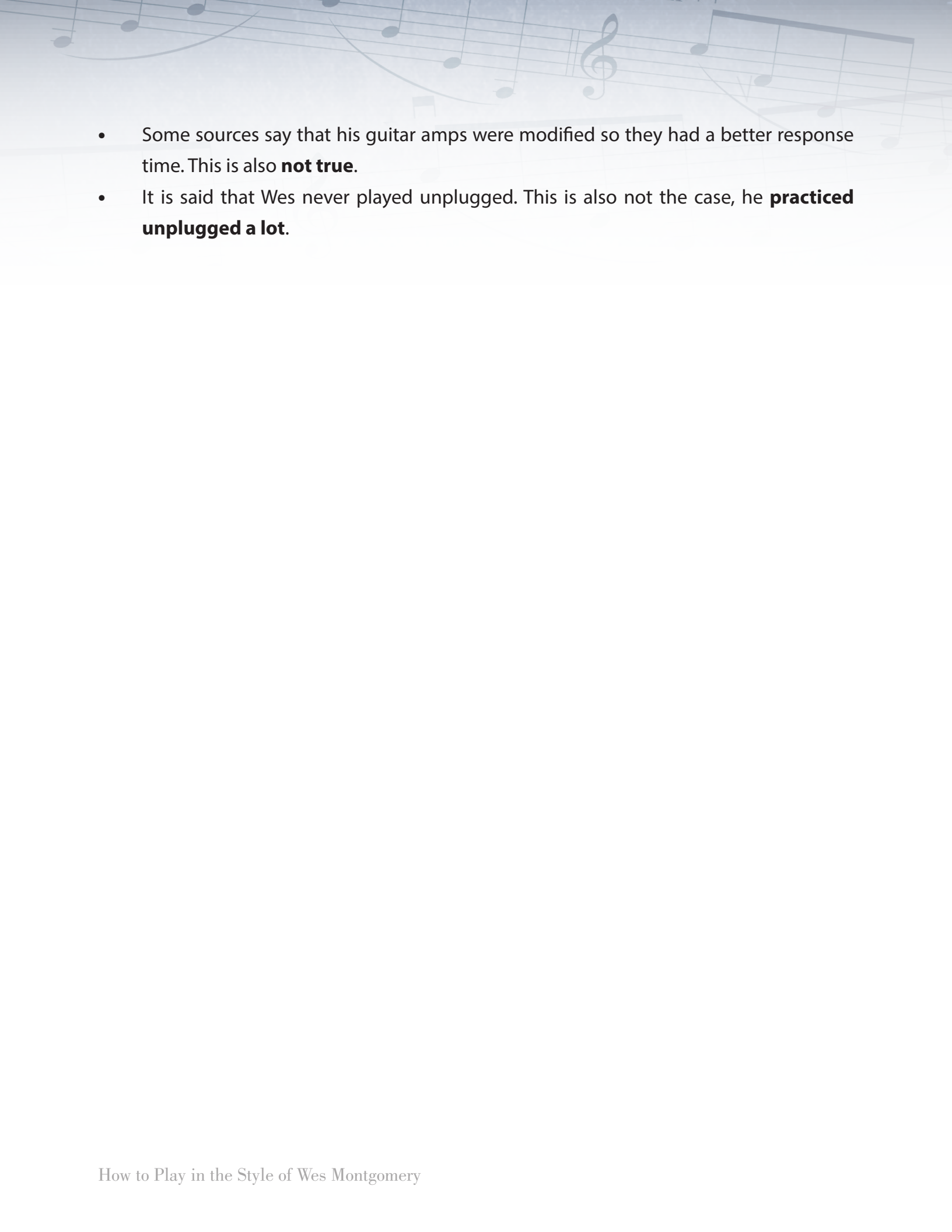
Other Amps

- **Fender Deluxe Amp:** Wes' Verve recordings were done in the studio of Rudy Van Gelder, where a Fender Deluxe Amp was available.
- **Gibson L-4** with a Charlie Christian bar pickup.

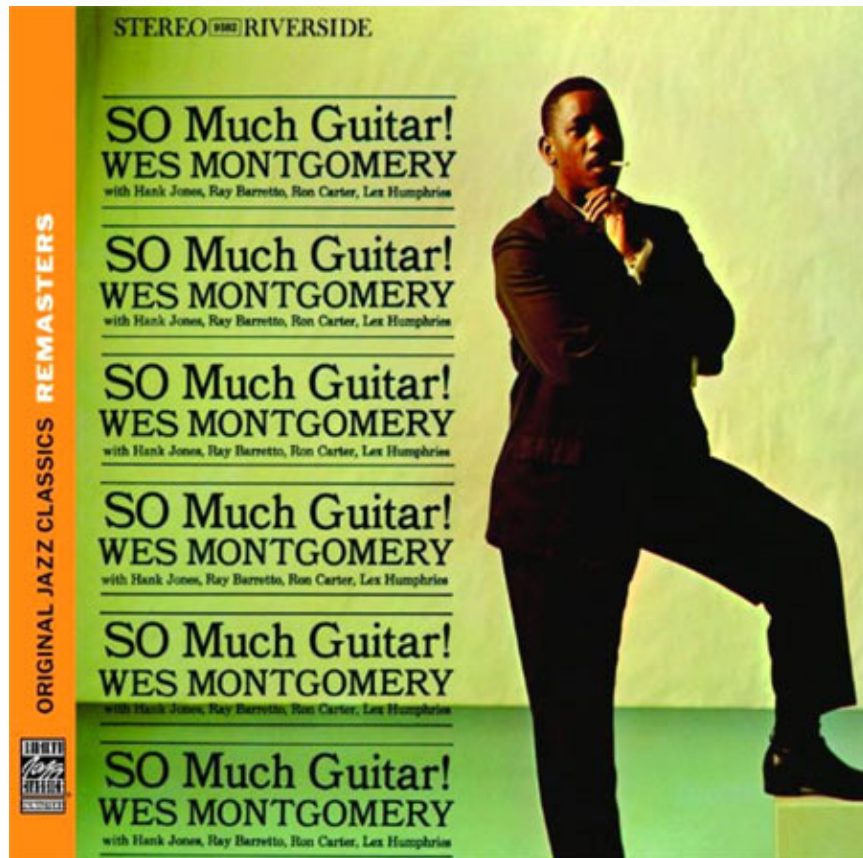
Technical Misconceptions

There are some misconceptions about Wes Montgomery's playing and gear:

- It is commonly thought that Wes played with his tone knob rolled off. This is not true, he was always trying to get **more treble** from his pick-up to compensate for the mellowness of using his thumb.

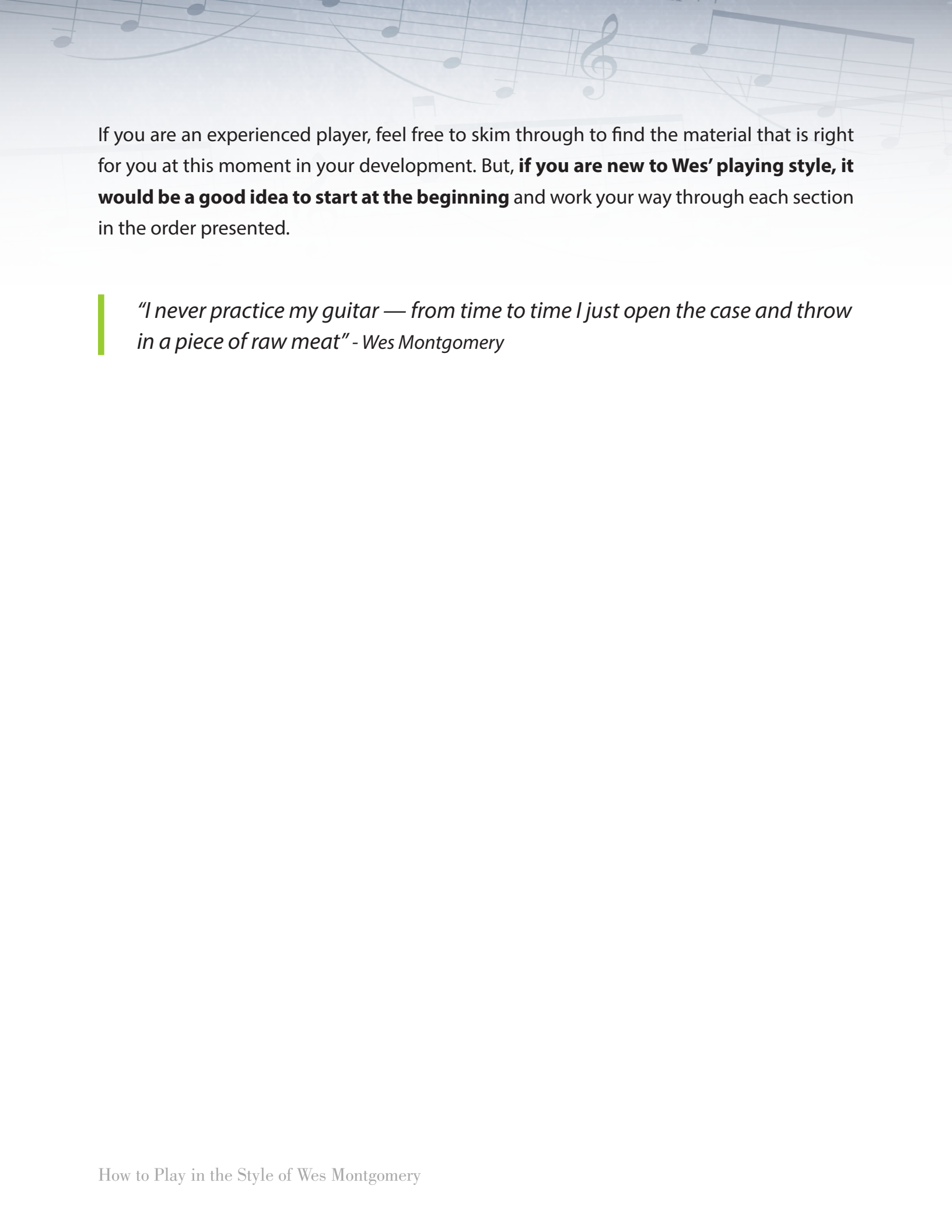
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- Some sources say that his guitar amps were modified so they had a better response time. This is also **not true**.
 - It is said that Wes never played unplugged. This is also not the case, he **practiced unplugged a lot**.

Chapter 2 – Single Note Soloing



Wes was a master of many aspects of the guitar, including playing bluesy and blistering single-note solos, which stand out as some of the best in recorded jazz history. In this chapter, you will explore various aspects of Wes' **single-line playing** in order to understand the theory behind these melodic concepts, as well as run through exercises and sample licks in order to take these ideas from the page and onto the fretboard.

The material in this chapter is presented in a way that places **the easiest to get down ideas first**, and then progresses to the harder material as you move through subsequent sections of the chapter.



If you are an experienced player, feel free to skim through to find the material that is right for you at this moment in your development. But, **if you are new to Wes' playing style, it would be a good idea to start at the beginning** and work your way through each section in the order presented.

"I never practice my guitar — from time to time I just open the case and throw in a piece of raw meat" - Wes Montgomery

Major Blues Scale Review

The other blues scale that Wes and many other jazz guitarists use in their playing is the major blues scale. This scale is built with the following **interval pattern**:

A Major Blues Scale	A	B	C	C#	E	F#
	1	2	b3	3	5	6

Since this scale contains a **major third** interval, it is mostly used to outline:

- Maj7 chords
- Dominant 7th chords

This means that if you want to apply a major blues scale to an **F blues progression**, you need to play:

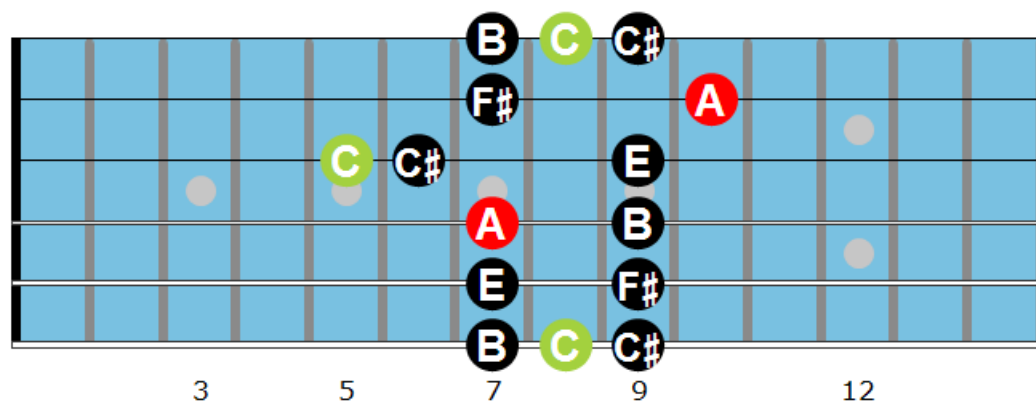
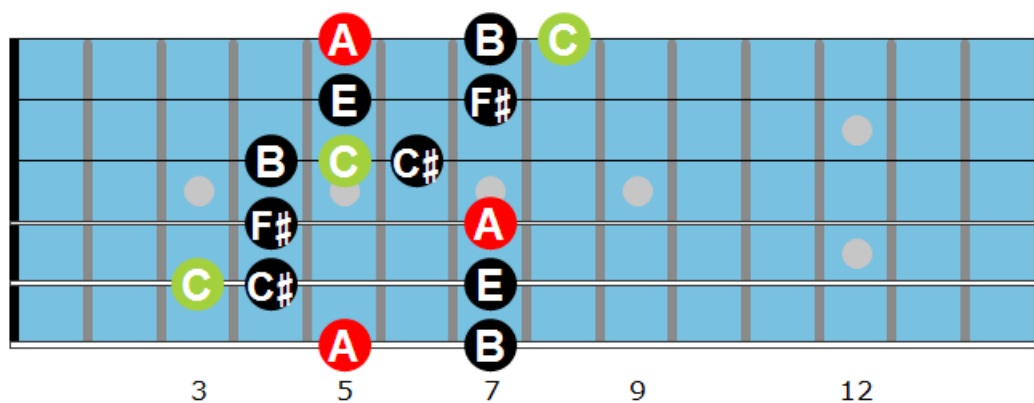
- F major blues scale over F7
- Bb major blues scale over Bb7
- C major blues scale over C7

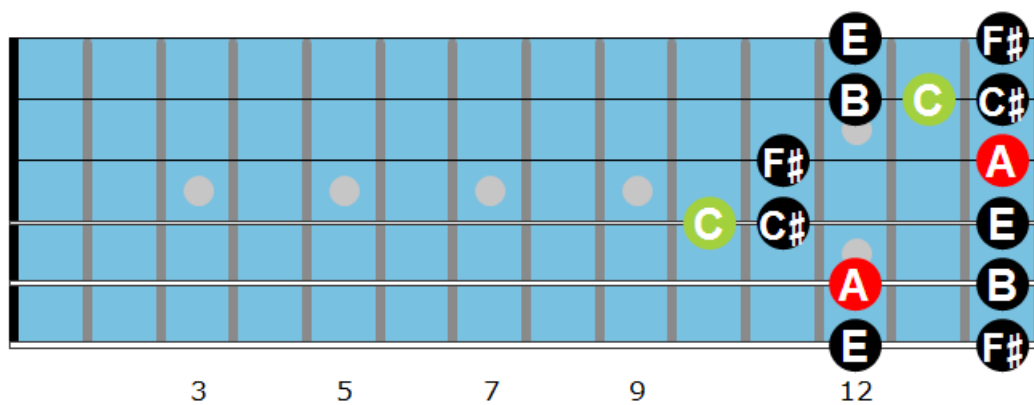
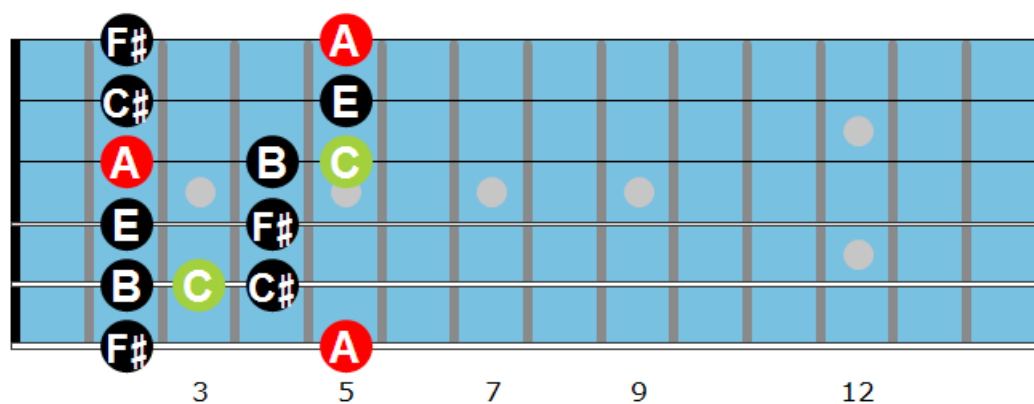
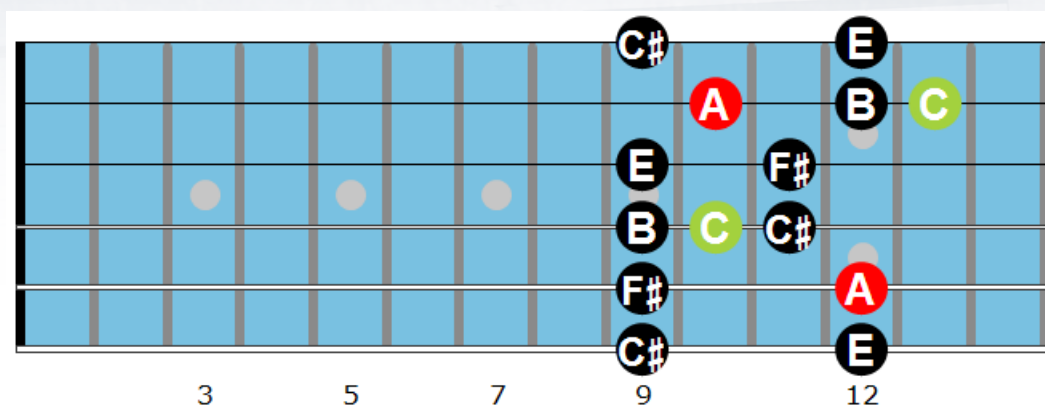
Each new chord gets a new blues scale to match up with that chord. For this reason, the major blues scale is a bit tougher to bring into your playing, as you have to switch keys with each chord as compared to the minor blues scale, which can be used over all chords of a blues progression.

Here are 5 fingerings for the **A major blues scale**:

AUDIO EXAMPLE 5

[Click here to play audio example 5](#)







Did you notice that these **major blues scale shapes resemble the shapes of the minor blues scale?**

shapes of A major blues scale = shapes of F# minor blues scale

Since both the minor and the major blues scale have their own unique sound and fingerings on the guitar, put on an A7 backing track and **try to switch between the A minor and A major blues scale** in order to hear how each scale sounds over the same chord. This will allow you to move between each scale in your solos with confidence moving forward.

Major Blues Scale Lines

We'll now take a look at **three licks** in the style of Wes' single-note playing, only here you'll be using the major blues scale to construct each of these phrases.

The first lick uses an **A major blues scale** to solo over the middle four bars of an A blues progression. This is one of the rare cases where a tonic major blues scale will work over more than one non-diatonic chord, as D7 and A7 have different key signatures. The only reason this works is that Wes avoids the C# from the scale over the D7, which would have caused a clash against the C in that chord.

As well, notice how both phrases, over each chord, are very similar and there are only two notes different between them. This use of **motivic development**, playing one idea over two chords with a slight alteration to fit each chord is a great way to stretch out your lines, as well as keep the audience along for the ride at the same time.

AUDIO EXAMPLE 6

[Click here to play audio example 6](#)

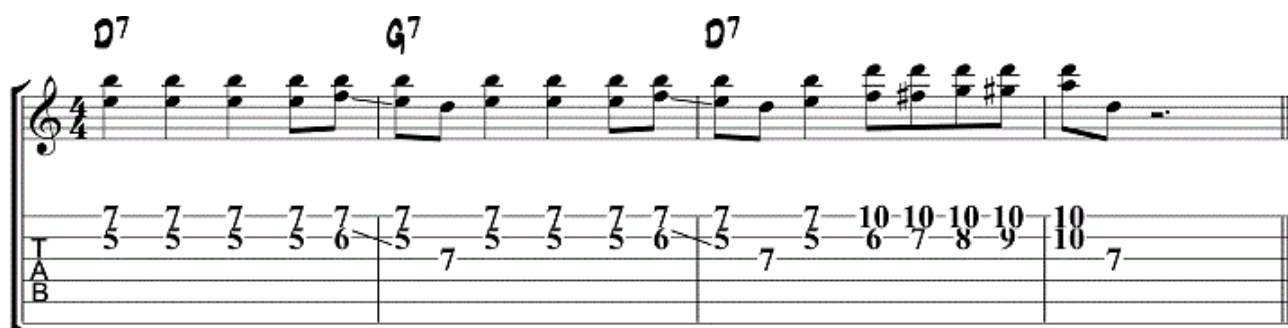


As well as using single notes with his blues scale ideas, Wes also liked to thicken things up by throwing in double-stops (playing 2 notes at once) from time to time in his improvisations. Here is an example of such a line, where the D and G major blues scales are used to create a line over bars 1-4 of a D blues, with the tonic note on top of the whole phrase to give it a cool-sounding organ vibe throughout.

Keeping the tonic on top of your lines, with a moving single-note phrase underneath, is a great way to thicken your lines and bring a secondary texture to your improvised in a Wes style at the same time.

AUDIO EXAMPLE 7

[Click here to play audio example 7](#)



The final lick in this section is based over a **V-IV-I turnaround over the last four bars of a D blues** progression. Again, you can see Wes playing a similar phrase over each chord, slightly altering it to develop the idea throughout the line as a whole, as well as using mixed rhythms to create interest in the phrase.

There are also a number of **leaps** within the phrases, which we saw earlier as being characteristic of Wes' single-note style:

- A-D-F# in bar 2
- A-D-F in bar 3
- D-A-B in bar 3

AUDIO EXAMPLE 8

[Click here to play audio example 8](#)

The image displays a musical score for a 4-bar blues lick in 4/4 time. The top staff is in treble clef, and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The chords are A7, G7, and D7. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes, with triplets indicated by a '3' over the notes. The bass line consists of single notes, with some triplets indicated by a '3' under the notes. The notation is as follows:

Bar	Chord	Melody (Treble)	Bass (Bass)
1	A7	Rest, quarter rest, eighth note F#, quarter note A	7
2	A7	quarter note A, eighth note B, eighth note C# (triplet), quarter note D	7-4, 7-5, 4-6
3	G7	quarter note B, eighth note A, eighth note G# (triplet), quarter note F#	7-4, 7-5, 3-7, 7-4, 7
4	D7	quarter note A, eighth note B, eighth note C# (triplet), quarter note D	7

When you can play these three major blues licks from memory, and are comfortable applying them to your jazz guitar soloing ideas, try writing out or **creating three blues licks of your own** in a similar Wes vibe. This will allow you to get used to creating phrases such as these on the spot, which you can then apply in the moment when jamming or gigging in a jazz situation.

Bebop scales

One of the other scale concepts that can be found in Wes' single-note playing are bebop scales. These **8-note scales** are often used over three different types of chords, 7th, m7 and maj7 shapes. While all three are possible, Wes tended to focus more attention on the first two, dominant bebop scale and minor bebop scales, and so these are the two that we'll explore in this Chapter.

What Is The Dominant Bebop Scale

To begin, let's take a look at what exactly the **dominant bebop scale** is and where you can use it in your jazz guitar solos. Taking a mixolydian scale, and adding in the major 7th interval to its construction, will form an 8-note scale called the dominant bebop scale.

Note that a bebop scale is usually **played descending**.

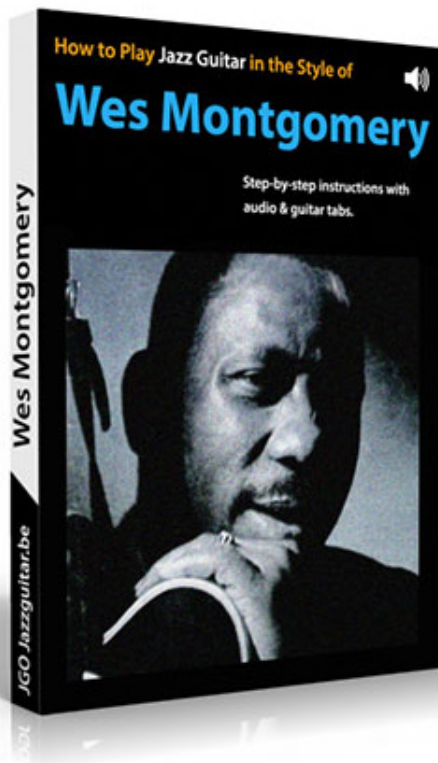
Dominant bebop scale = Mixolydian scale + 7

Here is the interval structure:

G dominant bebop scale	G	Gb	F	E	D	C	B	A
	1	7	b7	6	5	4	3	2

Since this scale comes from the mixolydian sound, it is used to solo over dominant 7th chords, such as playing G dominant bebop over G7 in the example below. Bar 1 is the mixolydian scale, bar 2 the dominant bebop scale.

How To Play Like Wes Montgomery



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