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# Mundell Lowe's Accompaniment Style on the Electric Guitar

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**Abstract:** This paper brings information and data about the work of jazz guitarist Mundell Lowe, who has influenced many musicians for over fifty years and is widely recognized for his imaginative and “orchestral-like” method of accompaniment. Mundell Lowe was born on a farm in Laurel, Mississippi, United States, on April 21, 1922, and died on December 2, 2017, he has often been described as a “guitarists' guitarist”. This study provides transcriptions and analysis of his accompaniment (comping) approach on all ten pieces from *After Hours*, the highly regarded 1961 album by the vocalist Sarah Vaughan. The data analysed in this paper is based on the biographical material and interviews of the guitarist plus transcriptions of the album mentioned - both transcriptions and interviews were done and conducted by the author as part of a doctored research. Lowe's complete accompaniment work is examined in detail and, for on this paper, few samples of his playing on the album were selected and presented for better explanation - the samples are written on traditional music notation. The findings disclose his techniques and tendencies pertaining to chord voicings, harmonic choices, treatment of intros and endings, double-stops, rhythmic devices, reharmonization, as well as several other techniques that embody his stylistic approach. Much of his style can be traced, and so related, to his musical background, his experience as a performer and arranger, and his interest in music styles beyond jazz.

**Keywords:** Jazz Guitar, Accompaniment, Mundell Lowe, Transcripts

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## 1. Introduction

Although the major media (mainstream radio and recording labels) have overlooked Lowe to a large extent, his contribution to the area of jazz guitar is substantial and warrants attention. There is a lack of information related to his accompaniment skills and “orchestral like” approach to the instrument, which can be heard on many sessions for a variety of artists and music for TV/movie scores. There is a consensus among jazz guitarists that Lowe's musical and guitar skills rate him as a “guitarist's guitarist”, and the lack of scholarly inquiry should be addressed. Thomas Owens remembers Lowe's name together with other notable guitarists that are important to 1950s bebop jazz: “the guitar's place in bebop was not fully defined until that time [1950s], when many fine guitarists joined their predecessors. Among the best were Ed Bickert, Kenny Burrell, Herb Ellis, Grant Green, Jim Hall and Mundell Lowe” [21].

Swing and sophistication are considered hallmarks of

Mundell Lowe's diversified guitar style. Also included are the concepts of deep blues feel, groove and sensitivity. Based on many reviews (newspapers, magazines and websites) and interviews, he is considered one of the most soulful and “bold” guitar players of the 1950s [24] (Scott Yanow 2013). It is possible to find Lowe's name being mentioned by many writers in various books relating to jazz and jazz guitar history, usually related to the jazz recordings during the late 1950s and early 1960s [20, 21]. Internationally recognized guitar greats? Such as Johnny Smith and Billy Bauer, for instance, would often cite Lowe's name when they were interviewed and were asked about influences, or speak about great performances/moments for the jazz guitar [5]. Furthermore, Lowe has appeared on covers of such publications as *Guitar Player Magazine* (1972) and *Just Jazz Guitar* (2005), *Jazz Times* (2008) and *Jazz Podium* (2012).

With that been said, this paper aims to presente the guitarist to the academic community, but specially, his playing as an accompaniment musician while providing

analysed musical examples of his style. The material shown in here is derived from my doctorate dissertation in music performance on electric guitar at Five Towns College in New York, USA. Mundell Lowe was interviewed first by email, by phone and finally face to face by the author. The reader will find in here a discussion about comping on jazz and on guitar. Moreover a guitar player could find interesting lines for practice.

## 2. Biographical Information About the Guitarist

Mundell Lowe was born on a farm in Laurel, Mississippi, on April 21, 1922. He left his parents' home when he was just fourteen and soon after that, he switched from banjo to guitar, realizing the guitar fit the changes happening in the jazz scene and the big band world. During his youth, he had the opportunity to listen to great music, as he mentioned in an interview to Ed Benson (2005):

"I had a wonderful grandfather who played country fiddle. When I came along, all of his sons had grown up and moved out. My older sister had a tenor guitar and she taught me some chords. Granddad taught me all old country tunes so we could play together. After a few years, I graduated to a six string guitar. [...] My dad was a minister in the church, and also directed the choir, so from him I learned how to read and write music. I never studied the guitar. In those days, living where I lived, you were lucky to find someone who knew as much as you did about guitar. We were mostly self-taught. You watched, listened and learned" [1] (BENSON, 2005, p. 45).

Lowe began playing in a variety of groups in Nashville, in the style of country, blues and small ensembles of jazz (combos and the Original Dixieland style) featuring vocals or horns. By his twenties, Lowe found his way to New Orleans, where he started his career as a jazz guitarist playing in the clubs on Bourbon Street. At that time, he did not appear on any released recordings, but he played with jazz greats Lester Young and Billie Holiday.

During World War II, Lowe was sent to Guadalcanal after basic training. While in service, although playing guitar in a dance band and cymbals in a marching band, his main duties were helping the Medical Corps and then serving with the 398<sup>th</sup> Combat Engineers. Even though he was not assigned as a full time armed forces musician, these years were important as he met John Hammond (record producer), who introduced him to Ray McKinley (drummer), which later led Lowe to many New York's performances.

In the 1950s, Lowe was a very busy guitarist. His evening performances at jazz clubs, including Village Vanguard, Birdland, Café Society and The Embers, to name a few, were balanced with early morning television performances at NBC (National Broadcasting Company), including the "*A Date In Manhattan*" show - with Cy Coleman, and later the "*The Kate Smith Hour*". While living in New York, Lowe formally studied harmony, counterpoint, and orchestration by taking

lessons with Hall Overton, Charles La Gorce and Walter Piston.

From that time to the early 1960s, Lowe often played with George Duvivier (bassist), whom he met when they played together in the "*Today Show*" studio band (hosted by Dave Garroway). He also played and conducted the CBS (Columbia Broadcasting System) orchestra until he was transferred to work in the News and Special Events Department of the broadcasting company as a composer and arranger. In 1965, after moving to Los Angeles, California, he began composing, arranging, conducting and performing music for some of the biggest television and film companies. Although he made special appearances with Peggy Lee, toured Japan with Benny Carter (more than once), recorded with Herbie Mann, and was a regular performer at the Monterey Jazz Festival, Lowe found he was spending more time writing than playing, which, according to his official website<sup>1</sup>, he found frustrating.

Looking for a change during the 1970s and 1980s, he stepped out of the studio world of film and television and returned to performing as a leader. He also performed in duos, trios and big bands with such notable players as: Sal Salvador, André Previn, Johnny Smith, Charlie Byrd, Herb Ellis and Lloyd Wells. For the two decades Lowe also put some time into teaching and festivals. He taught at the Grove School of Music in Studio City and the Guitar Institute of Technology in Los Angeles and from 1981 to 1986 he became the musical director of the Monterey Jazz Festival.

In addition to recording as a sideman for prominent names and directing/conducting a jazz orchestra, Lowe also recorded original material. For instance, Riverside Records re-leased his first solo album, *Guitar Moods*, in 1950. Since that time, he has recorded eighteen albums as a leader with a repertoire of original compositions and specially chosen jazz standards. Some albums from that list are: *California Guitar* (1974); *Second Time Around* (with Sal Salvador, 1998); *This One's for Charlie* (with Lloyd Wells, 2000). A selection of books published with Lowe's materials and contributions are: *Guitar Impressions* (1956), in which Lowe transcribed his own solos from his recordings with the Benny Goodman Sextet; and *World's Greatest Jazz Solos: Guitar* (1978), which is a book that presents his transcriptions of solos recorded by Charlie Christian, Miles Davis and Sonny Rollins among others, edited for guitarists. In 1982, the *Mundell Lowe: Fake Book* was published by Dick Grove Publications (1982). It includes some of Lowe's original jazz themes and movie/television songs in lead sheet form.

In 1999, Lowe was a recipient of an Honorary Degree (Doctor of Arts) from Millsaps College (Jackson, Mississippi), and in 2000, he was inducted into the Mississippi Music Hall of Fame. In 2009, Mayor Malvin Mack of Laurel Mississippi honoured hometown native Lowe with the "Keys to the City" and proclaimed July 18<sup>th</sup>,

<sup>1</sup> "Mundell Lowe," found on Mundell Lowe website - bio, PDF format. [www.mundelllowe.com/bio.htm](http://www.mundelllowe.com/bio.htm), accessed November 27, 2014.

2009 as “Mundell Lowe Day”. At the time this research started Lowe was living in San Diego with his wife Betty Bennett and occasionally performing and giving guitar clinics, workshops and master classes due to health issues. In February of 2017 StarPoint Records released an album entitled “Essentials”, which included tracks from various past albums recorded by Lowe. Between 2014 and 2018 Lowe completed three phone interviews and an in-person interview with this re- searcher at his home in California. These interviews are fully transcribed in the appendix of this work.

On December 2<sup>nd</sup> of 2017 Mundell Lowe passed at 95 years old, leaving a family of one son, three daughters and two stepdaughters plus an enormous music legacy for guitarists (more than fifty recordings were cataloged and present in tables on my complete DMA dissertation), educators and jazz lovers.

### 3. The Importance of Examining Comping Style

According to Walter Piston (1955), the performance and placement of the accompaniment to a melodic material is more a matter of composition than of applying orchestration procedures or rules. Moreover, Piston states:

“The rhythmic style and the texture of a background is just as much a part of the composer’s thought as a melody itself. Harmonically, the accompaniment supplies tonal orientation for the melody, harmonic color through the choice of chord structures, and the motion of harmonic rhythm through the pattern of root changes. It also supplies rhythmic designs and pulsation that establish the underlying rate of motion of the music, a function that can affect vitally the musical meaning of the melody itself. The background is important in setting an overall mood or atmosphere” [22] (PISTON, 1955, p. 431).

The word “comping” is an abbreviation of “accompanying” and, in the jazz world, it is often described as the art of improvising a chordal accompaniment for a soloist or vocalist. Much like accompaniment lines in a big band or orchestra, the function of comping supports a musical statement, while at the same time offering a response when the melody or improvisation is at rest. Galbraith (2010) [7] states that it is a concept most often related to guitarists and pianists when backing up vocalists and other melodic instruments (e.g. sax, trumpet, and flute). By focusing their skills on providing a rhythmic feel, harmonic movement and embellishing lines supporting the main melody of a song, guitarists and pianists must artistically choose between various rhythmic styles and figures (straight, swing, Latin, Bossa, funk, etc.), a palette of chord voicings, chord extensions, and the use of counter melodies.

For authors/jazz educators J. Richard Dunscomb and Dr. Willie L. Hill, Jr., “comping is the guitar’s primary function in jazz” [12]. The use of an accompaniment instrument such as the electric guitar can help the featured soloist by providing and establishing the style, keeping the tempo, and enriching the overall musical texture of a composition.

Possessing high- level comping skills is also a valuable tool for solo guitarists when playing in a “chord- melody” (explain this term at the bottom of the page) style.

The jazz guitar and its players usually favor styles such as bebop, latin, swing, ballad and, because of this, regardless of the guitarist’s preferred style, learning how to accompany has become an important topic for guitarists of all experience levels or styles. Comping is a “must have” skill for students playing at their local school or college bands and professional musicians playing at jazz clubs, Broadway and recording sessions. Guitarists need to become familiar with the many elements of this technique, and with it, the many concepts of various distinguished players and different styles of music (and jazz itself: swing, ballad, waltz, be- bop) to improve their skills. With this in mind, there is a need for world-class examples for students of jazz guitar to emulate and study. For instance, it is worth remembering that many students have become familiar with the style of Freddie Green<sup>2</sup> (specifically voiced chords, technique and rhythmic style). In the future, this particular research – based on the transcription and analyses of Lowe’s style – can be used by college and university programs.

While studying the concept of comping, an accompanist explores various methods to establish a personalized style. One of the most effective ways to learn this skill is to observe and study what others are playing. Jim McNeely, the author of *The Art of Comping* (1993), emphasizes the importance of listening to recordings as an indispensable source to learn this concept. Developing listening skills is imperative in observing the balance and interplay in the ensemble with depth. In accordance with McNeely’s philosophy: learning comping through great models and observance is a crucial component for the eventual performance.

### 4. The Transcribed and Analyzed Album: After Hours

The study explored the characteristic musical devices of the guitarist presented on the recording *After Hours* by Sarah Vaughan. The album, recorded during a fruitful year by Lowe as a sideman, has been selected to be transcribed and analyzed. Vaughan’s album is selected due the fact that so few albums consisted of this instrumentation and that the guitar in this instance takes the role of a piano (which would be far more typical in a Jazz trio).

The album was Vaughan’s 22<sup>nd</sup> studio recording release. After her contract with the Mercury label expired in the fall of 1959, she obtained a new recording contract with Roulette Records and began recording on the label in April of 1960 with the attention and production of Teddy Reig, whom she had met in the 1940s. Jazz writer and Sarah Vaughan biographer Leslie Gourse (1993) [8] states from a musical standpoint, that Vaughan’s recordings for Roulette rank

<sup>2</sup> Jazz guitarist famous for his contribution on comping behind the Count Basie orchestra.

among her finest.

Although the date for the recording can be easily found as it is presented on the album cover as “recorded in New York City on July 18, 1961, Lowe, in his 2012 radio interview, said that the album was recorded in the late 1950s. The album was released in the early months of 1962 and then reissued in 1997 “along with one previously unreleased selection [the song “Through the Years”, which according to Lowe, was recorded by Johnny Smith and not himself] from a slightly earlier exploratory session with the same players. This is a 34 minute album consisting of ballads, blues and jazz standards. The “band” consisted of only two musicians (something new for vocalists recording at the time).

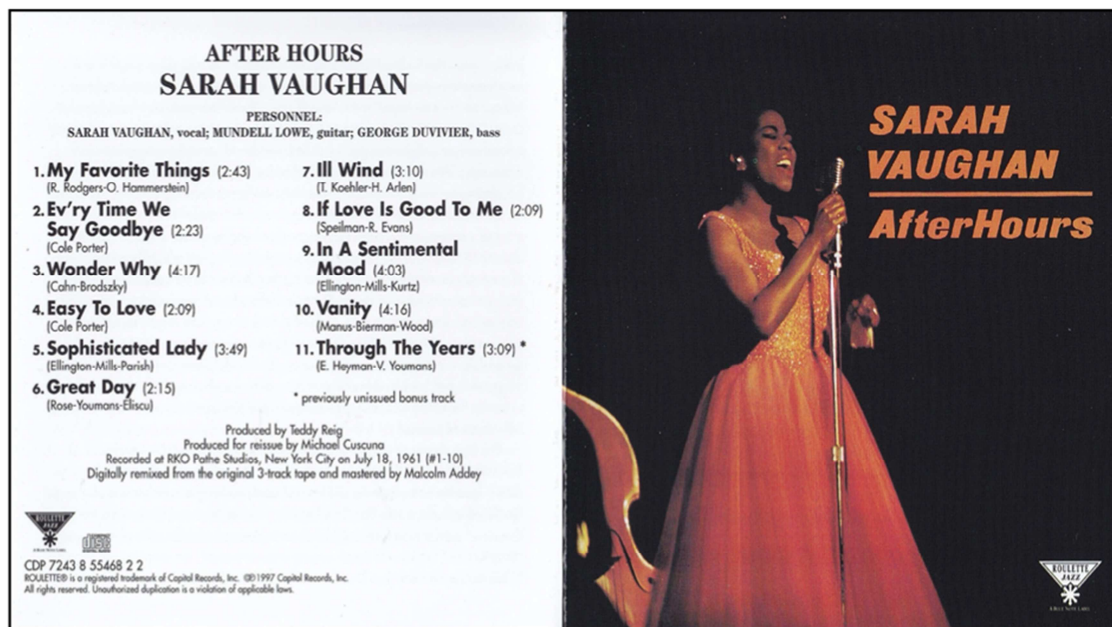
In July 1961, she [Vaughan] recorded *After Hours*, an intimate relaxed album done with guitarist Mundell Lowe and bassist George Duvivier, both subtle, versatile musicians’ musicians. [...] Teddy Reig brought tables, food, and drinks to the studio on West 106<sup>th</sup> Street in Manhattan. Every song was recorded in one or two takes. Sassy’s work was devoid of vocal tricks. She sang with exquisite control, stressing her jazz songs as the uptempo “Great Day; there was none of the flamboyant vocalizing that characterized much of her other work” [8].

Is this album a studio recording? Although “Recorded at RKO Pathe Studios” appears on the cover, according to research it was not recorded in a typical studio environment, as the RKO (Radio-Keith-Orpheum) company was not a recording studio for *After Hours*, but did work on the

business and production (mastering) of the tracks. The studio was located in Hollywood during the late 1950s and early 1960s and, at the time, it had almost closed due to financial problems. According to Lowe, when asked about this specific gig with Vaughan and Duvivier, he said that he was invited to play at a party in New York by Count Basie’s and Vaughan’s manager Teddy Reig. That “informal little party” ended-up being the impetus for the album. In Lowe’s words:

“So, we got there, and we got ourselves together [on the party there was a small stage all set for recording], and when it came 8 o’clock, we looked at each other and we said “so, what are we gonna do”? Then he [Count Basie Band’s manager] came to Sarah and asked “how do you wanna start this?” and she said “I think that would be [the song] these are a few of ‘My Favorite Things’.” And I said to her, “how do you wanna do it?” and she said: “I don’t know! You are playing the guitar...” so I said “ok, so I will start playing over a little vamp and we just see how it goes from there...” [9] (GARCIA, 2014).

At this session Lowe was on the electric guitar and George Duvivier on the upright bass. Duvivier was born in 1921 and “his first professional engagement was with Coleman Hawkins orchestra in 1939”. The bassist was a composer and arranger, but his talent and accomplishments overshadowed these facets of his career as an instrumentalist, playing for many big bands, orchestras and artists. He died on July 11, 1985 at age 64, and examples of his original compositions and arrangements are virtually non-existent after 1948.



**Figure 1.** "CD book as released in 1997. Note the bonus track “Through The Years” (11<sup>th</sup> track) with an observation/star (\*), as added on the reissue [for educational use only].

The album has become a milestone for electric jazz guitar playing. On the recording, there are few guitar solos. However, the solo passages for introductions, the comping and harmonization techniques applied by the guitar are substantive, and worthy of examination. Also, due to the

album being recorded during a live, unrehearsed session, it could be hypothesized that Duvivier and Vaughan were improvising their lines at the same time that Lowe was improvising his guitar parts and *vice-versa*. That real-time interactive music making produced some unexpected results,

even to the musicians involved.

When referring to Lowe's work supporting Sarah Vaughan, Edward Berger, from the Institute of Jazz Studies and author of several Jazz publications (including a biography about bassist George Duvivier), writes that Lowe and Duvivier were "the two best accompanists, both had had extensive experience backing vocalists" [2]. Also, Berger mentions that the vocal-ist and producer Teddy Reig had carefully chosen those two instruments and players among many others available. In the box set collection titled "*First Ladies of Song*," Berger chose to include recordings by such greats as Billie Holliday, Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughan, and the set consists of tracks from the *After Hours* album.

On the *After Hours* album, Lowe's artistic choices on the guitar are highly influenced by his study of orchestration with Walter Piston. Skillfully managed, a guitarist's comping might be quite elaborate similar to *tutti* played by full orchestra however, the accompanist needs to allow a melody to be clearly heard.

As previously stated, the significance of this particular album is the unique instrumentation and the guitarist's performance. Up to the point when the album was recorded (1960), very few recordings in jazz history consisted of the instrumentation of guitar, bass and voice. By using this album, university and college professors around the globe are teaching various approaches available for jazz guitar comping to their students. Lowe has mentioned, at various moments on interviews, that some vocal instructors have used the album's concepts to help their vocal students as well.

## 5. Lowe's Accompaniment Style

This part will discuss and analyze Lowe's guitar accompaniment work found on Vaughan's album *After Hours*. The comping concepts to be addressed are: (1) Treatment of introductions, endings and turnarounds; (2) Voicing tendencies; (3) Connecting material; (4) Use of double-stops; (5) Single-line comping (use of scale, arpeggios and motives); (6) Rhythmic devices (space/filling); (7) Unique-elements (timbre/texture, techniques). By exploring these characteristic musical concepts, one will be able to identify his unique stylistic approach with respect to the accompaniment of Jazz vocalists.

In order to avoid the paper to become too extensive, no more than three examples of each of the seven accompaniment concepts will be presented on the next pages. Masur's numbers used are related to the song as a whole and the full transcripts of it. The song's titles are described under each figure. Bass lines are presented (the F clef) here when they occur in conjunction with the guitar. The material present here the analyses follow the rules of functional theory and jazz theory in agreement with author Mark Levine (1995). There could be a section to explain the methodological processes applied on this work in a more detailed manner.

### 5.1. Treatment of Introductions, Endings and Turnarounds

Any musical idea used in the measures before the beginning of a song form is referred to as an introduction<sup>3</sup> or if it appears at the Coda of the song form it is referred to as an ending<sup>4</sup>. It includes the possibility of any number of chord choices, a selection of invented melodic phrases that may reference the melody of the song played in a particular rhythm that supports or reinforces one or more of the following: the song's structure, key, style and/ or tempo. Turnarounds refer specifically to the chord progression used in the first ending of a repeated passage or to connect the end of the song form to the beginning of the song form. Levine states that a turnaround is "a chord progression occurring (1) at the end of a repeated section of a tune, leading back to the repeat; (2) at the end of the tune, leading back to the top" [13]. These turnaround chord progressions are constructed to insure the inevitable targeting of the "goal" chord utilizing harmonic concepts that create forward motion and simultaneously capture the idiomatic sound of modern jazz.

In the song "My Favorite Things" Lowe utilized the repetition of a single "vamp" chord for the intro (Figure 2), the same chord is also used for the turnaround section between the A sections (Figure 3) as well as when creating the ending (measures 73 through 77). This uniquely voiced chord has a common fingering, but it can be named in many ways, such as Esus2/B or Bsus. At the ending the same voicing could be named as Esus, however as the bass plays a G, it has been named G6/9 in the transcription. For all of these passages, Lowe uses a sweep-picking technique at this passage, striking the strings with an upward pick motion which elicits a "harp like" sound out of the guitar.



Figure 2. "My Favorite Things," intro. Measures 1 through 4.

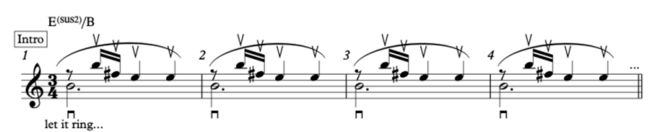


Figure 3. "My Favorite Things," outro. Measures 73 through 77. Figure displaced.

The examples that follows (Figure 4) illustrate the turnaround and outro as performed in "Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye". When playing the C section of the song Lowe uses variations of the turnaround in order to connect the first and second choruses, and later utilizes similar material in the

<sup>3</sup> Often called just INTRO for short. Thus INTRO is a common jazz term that means introduction of a piece.

<sup>4</sup> Often called just OUTRO. Thus OUTRO is a common jazz term that means the ending of a piece.

ending. Figure 4.2d shows the turnaround between the choruses. Notice the use of an extended cycle of dominant chords, where G7(b9) is the V of C7(b13), which is the V of F7, which resolves to tonic Bbmaj7 of the next A section. Lowe has a tendency to voice lead his chords using the B string as the highest string for these voicings, which, due to the natural sustain and richness of that string. Lowe is able to produce a consistently warm sound out of his instrument. According to master luthier Leroy Aiello, who has worked on and restored dozens of John D'Angelico's handmade guitars, the B string on original D'Angelico archtop guitars is known for its rich clarity and sustain. Lowe verified that the top of the Gibson guitar that he played on this session was replaced with a John D'Angelico carved top which explains the exceptional clarity and sustain of his instrument.



**Figure 4.** "Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye," turnaround between chorus. Measures 31 and 32. Displaced.

Figure 5 e illustrates the final tag<sup>5</sup> of the last C section, where Lowe starts to vamp<sup>6</sup> indicating that the performance is coming to a close. Every two measures the same chord progression is repeated with slight voicing variations, which is also the same material for the outro<sup>7</sup> with additional variations of voicings with chords containing the tonic as a dominant 7(#11). Again, Lowe demonstrates his full awareness of his instrument, the ability to instantly draw upon various arranging techniques and artistically discern the exact needs of this particular performance.



**Figure 5.** "Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye," tag before Outro. Measures 61 through 70. Displaced.

## 5.2. Voicing Tendencies

This concept is related to the unique chord voicings and also the most frequently- played chord voicings that Lowe used when performing on the album *After Hours*. This includes the physical way in which he constructed such chords as: minor seventh, major sixth, dominant ninth and others. Lowe has also used very specific and unique voicings due to both his knowledge of the instrument and orchestration, and these will be brought to light. With this

examination one will be able to better understand his style of harmonic and melodic invention. Furthermore, voicing tendencies will be demonstrated with fingering, positioning and choice of strings used.

The voicing found in figure 6 highlights Lowe's fingering and voicing tendencies of major seven chord (Maj7) on the recording which is due to the drop-D tuning. He frequently uses the left-hand fourth finger to play the root of the chord on the lowest string (sixth string). Lowe's drop-D major seven voicing and fingering found extensively throughout many songs on *After Hours*.



**Figure 6.** "My Favorite Things," major 7 chord voicing/fingering tendencies. Measures 17 and 18 plus Maj7 fingering.

The use of chords with extensions on the guitar was not something new at the time of this recording (1961). Notable Jazz guitarists such as Wes Montgomery, Barney Kessel, Tal Farlow, and Johnny Smith were adding such colors to their chords also. However, the drop-D tuning for jazz guitarists was something uncommon, used only at that time by jazz Smith had recorded eleven albums as a leader, and had been using the drop D tuning exclusively in his playing since 1949. As Mundell and Smith traveled in similar musical circles in NYC and were friends, it can be well assumed that Mundell Lowe, along with every other professional guitarist of that time era, was well aware of Smith's tuning and style. New York- area professors Peter Rogine and Joe Carbone both recall the influence of and respect everyone had for Johnny Smith. However, the drop D tuning was often used by Classical guitarists and Lowe did study Classical guitar privately and had a lifelong interest in and passion for the Classical guitar. When asked about why he would switch standard to drop-D he answered:

[...] I cannot think of his name right now... But anyway, to keep going with that history, he had written a series called "The Drop-D" or with the Drop-D he called it. [...] And I started playing that, and I studied classical guitar a little bit in New York. And I started messing around with that and I discovered that when you are accompanying a singer he Drop-D is absolutely wonderful. It is much better than the way the guitar is tuning with the low E string. You go out to D, and a lot of interesting things happen to you. [...] Segovia is the man's name (Garcia 2015).

The drop-D helps Lowe obtain lush voicings of five and six note chords that are only available with this tuning. These chords present notes in close position at the upper structure and a perfect fifth (like a drop 3 chord) on the lower register. The chords that appear on the third beat of measure 64 through the third beat of measure 65 of "Easy To Love" (Figure 7). After positioning his fingers on the fingerboard he moves them in a descending parallel motion in the direction of the headstock, one fret at a time. The "BVIII, BVII, BVI and BV" related to the fret position of his first finger as it is placed as a full bar, pressing all the six strings. Although

<sup>5</sup> TAG is an approach used to conclude the tune. It consists of repeating few times the last phrase of a tune while re-harmonizing the chord changes to create movement and expectation to its conclusion.

<sup>6</sup> VAMP is a musical term than means repeat (loop) a section until singed.



Lowe does not pick all the strings every time, he holds the same chord shape during this passage. This voicing are found in different songs thru the album.



Figure 7. "Easy To Love," five and six note chords. Measure 64 and 65.

Another voicing tendency of Lowe's comping vocabulary becomes clear when analysing the use of diminished seven chords on the performance of "Wonder Why." In order to add the b9 tension to the dominant seventh chords Lowe would often choose a diminished shape starting on the 7<sup>th</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> degree of the dominant in question. For instance, over F7(b9) he plays Ebo7 (Figure 8) and over Eb7(b9) he plays Go7 (earlier on the same song, measure 8) in drop-2. It is also worth mentioning the major 7<sup>th</sup> in the voicing on the fourth beat of measure 4, a diminished seventh drop-2 voicing that has been modified: the alto voice is moved up a whole step to accommodate the 13<sup>th</sup>.

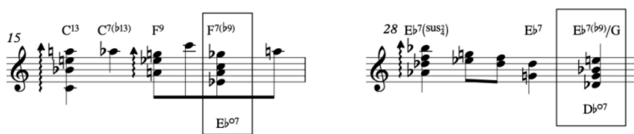


Figure 8. "Wonder Why." Diminished chords as embellishments for dominant chords. Measure 15 and 28.

### 5.3. Connecting Material

In this research the concept of connecting material is defined as any harmonic or melodic phrase played by Lowe when a song modulates or changes its musical character, an element specially found between sections of songs. On songs ending with a "tag" or a "vamp" this concept will be found as Lowe intertwines chords and lines with one another by adding harmonic elements to a basic structure for harmonic continuity. This concept, combined with the voicing tendencies discussed previously, will give a more thorough understanding of Lowe's voice leading.

After Vaughan begins the track "Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye", taking the first four measures on the A section by herself, Lowe and Duvivier had to play ideas that subtly connect the instruments to what Vaughan had just sung while also adding effective elements such as tempo and mood to the piece. Thus, when answering Vaughan's phrase and in order to conclude the eight measures of the A section, the guitarist and bassist played ideas from the melody while establishing the tempo and feel. Those ideas also established the key by quoting the melody and before Vaughan started to sing again, thus being supportive and helping the singer. The figure figure 9 illustrates how the bass and guitar played together in octaves, complementing each other. Note how the F7b9 on the fourth beat of measure eight adds the b9 color

tension to the V7 chord before the B section of the song.



Figure 9. "Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye," connecting AA sections. Measure 5 through 8.

A connective comping technique known as back-cycling is often applied by Lowe in order to create a clear and strong transition between sections. Backcycling, is the use of combinations of II-7 V7 cadences (and their possible substitution chords) building harmonic momentum until the target chord is reached. An example of this technique is found in measures 42 and 44 of "Sophisticated Lady" (Figure 10). The technique is also known as extended dominant cadences but Boling [3] terms it "Cycle of II-Vs" and he states that this is a great way to add some harmonic forward motion to comping.



Figure 10. "Sophisticated Lady." II-Vs back-cycle. Measure 42.

There is an instance in the piece "Wonder Why" in which Lowe's experiences as a conductor appears to be a factor. His experience helps to signalize clearly to the musicians to modulation to come a half-step higher (from the key of Ab to A) into the final C section and conclusion of the song. When asked about "Wonder Why" and how the modulation happened live for the recording, Lowe said:

On "I Wonder Why"? We do a lot of it by "sight", do you know? I would be playing along and a look at George and I would... [pointing with up with his finger and moving his head up], by that I mean "go up a step" and we would play the whole tune that way. And, of course Sarah was watching us, so she knew when to go "up" also. [...] A lot of this has to do with your experience, how many years you have been playing and knowing the material, knowing the songs. Do you know? That is the only way I can explain it to you. Once you get the repertoire and you understand how to play in many keys (Garcia 2017).

Figure 11 shows what Lowe plays at that moment to connect the section B of the second chorus to the C section of "Wonder Why", where it modulates. The parallel movement applied by Lowe is shown in the three boxes below, creating interest to the transition, the parallel motion shown in the three boxes below create a moving line to the transition while the bass is at rest. Needed to point out, it is made easieras Duvivier was not playing at the moment (bass comes back only for the C section, in the new key on measure 47).

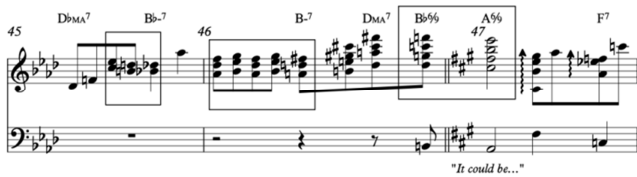


Figure 11. "Wonder Why." Measure 45 through 47.

#### 5.4. Use of Double-stops

A "double-stop" on the guitar is the use of two strings struck simultaneously, often played in parallel, oblique or contrary movement. The use of parallel thirds and sixths when playing scales or chromatic passages represent the most typical use of double-stops for guitarists in general. Double-stops allow the guitarist to give the impression of "chord soloing" while using a two-note voicing, which also enables the player to move quickly around the fretboard while adding energy and interest to the piece during the single-line solos.

The following figures display Lowe utilizing these double-stop devices. The chord symbols represent the implied harmony when associated with the bass and the overall harmony in the measure. LaClair, in his dissertation regarding Jim Hall states that "the ambiguity of these voicings creates tension as the listener anticipates closure" [8].

On the song "Sophisticated Lady" double-stops moving in thirds are used over Cmaj7. Lowe plays the 7 and 9 of the chord and moves them in diatonic fashion, descending to the 6 and root of the chord on measures 11 and 15, while on measure 19 a chromatic double-stop is added (figure 12).



Figure 12. "Sophisticated Lady." Double-stops over Cmaj7. Measures 11, 15 and 19.

More double-stops occur in measures 33 to 34 on the song "Ill Wind" (figure 13) and this approach of playing lines in parallel motion using two strings reinforces Lowe's style and use of the technique. Lowe creates a line utilizing diatonic and chromatic material that derive from major diatonic scale of the key with additional chromatic tones such as the Gb (last use beat of measure 33) on the example below. The notes D, Eb, E (lower voice), together with the notes F, Gb and G work as chromatic approaches that target the harmonic change from Bb6/9 to Am7.

In figure 14, Lowe makes considerable use of double-stops in parallel motion and with the use of chromatic notes between chordal notes of the implied harmony, meaning that even though no actual chord is played here, the lines played together between guitar and bass resemble harmonic cadences and, more specifically, an Fm chord. This technique is also found in the song "In a Sentimental Mood" (Figure 15), which helps support this element as one of Lowe's primary stylistic comping techniques.

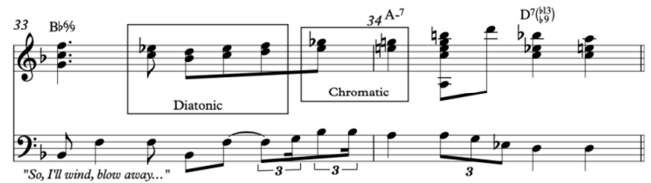


Figure 13. "Ill Wind." Double-stops over Bb to Am. Measures 33 and 34.



Figure 14. "In a Sentimental Mood." Double-stops. Measure 10 and downbeat of 11.



Figure 15. "In a Sentimental Mood." Double-stop. Measure 18 and downbeat of 19.

#### 5.5. Single-line Comping

Melodic single-line movements, when played by a guitarist behind a soloist, can add contrast to the original melody, reflect important tones relating to underlying harmony, and also can be used to support and/or "direct" a vocalist or instrumentalist.

On "Wonder Why", Lowe employs open-voiced, three and four-note arpeggiated chords during his comping for Vaughan. These voicings are often derived from root position or second inversion - drop 2 approach. By employing drop 2 voicings Lowe adds flourish using lines on the top strings without losing the supporting sound of the chord (as it continues to ring) (figure 16). Due to the drop-D tuning Lowe is better able to voice five-note (figure 17) chords in root position, while being able to add melodic ideas on the upper notes of the voicing.



Figure 16. "Wonder Why." Drop 2 and its flourish idea. Measure 21.



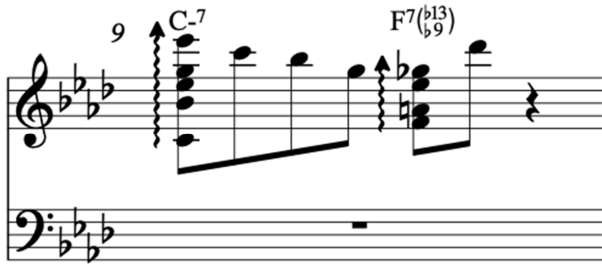


Figure 17. "Wonder Why." Five-note chord and its flourish idea. Measure 9.

A concept of arpeggiated chords is found on the song "In a Sentimental Mood" in which the chords are Fm, /E, /Eb, /D then Bbm, /A, /Ab and /G. On the last A section (fig. 18) the arpeggios become evident, even though the notes are slurred as Lowe keeps his fingers down (holding the strings). So, although he holds the chords shapes, he picks one string at a time allowing all notes to ring until he changes to the next hand position needed for the play the subsequent chord.



Figure 18. "In a Sentimental Mood." Arpeggios. Measure 45 through 48.



Figure 19. "Easy To Love." Riff based idea. First A section, measures 35 through 42.

Lowe occasionally employs background "riff<sup>7</sup>" lines behind the vocalist and walking bass. On "Easy to Love" he plays a two-measure repetitive riff based on the minor pentatonic scale of the chords of the A sections. Figure 19 displays the riff played on the first A section. During the first two times of each section the riff is played in Fm, then it modulates a whole step to Gm, the third of the Eb major

scale. As shown below, after the melodic idea, the riff concludes with harmonized notes and a dominant chord.

### 5.6. Rhythmic Devices

When discussing rhythmic devices, this dissertation has used common jazz terms such as "space" and "fill-in" ideas. Lowe makes use of pauses (silence) to create space between lines or chords. On slower tempo pieces Lowe has the tendency to play more material like chordal and scale-based ideas like on songs such as ("In A sentimental Mood" or "Vanity"), however on faster tracks such as "Great Day" Lowe plays less material, thus allowing more space for Duvivier. One can argue that every musical activity is a rhythmic activity - either long (slow) or short (fast). Due to that concept, this chapter will take into consideration examples of selected passages (specific measures) played by Lowe that best define this aspect of his style when comping.

The next example shows the development of the rhythmic ideas played by Lowe on track number two: "Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye". The song is performed two times through, so the section A is repeated four times (the song form is ABAC). In order to examine Lowe's voicing tendencies, each segment of the A section chord changes is observed. Thus figure 20 is a chart demonstrating the eight measures of each A section played. Lowe chooses similar harmonic framework, but adds more drama by using increasing numbers of notes - filling more space with different rhythmic and color ideas. One can note the less active A section played (top of the chart) and the last A, which contains much more activity (bottom).

As a song is played for the second time, so is reputed the sections of the song, Lowe typically utilizes additional material - change on chordal texture, single line passages, double stops, and by doing so more he increased activity rhythmically. However, the overall harmonic approach often remains similar.

Next is an example of "leaving space" and "playing it simple". On the figure 21, the ending of "Sophisticated Lady", has been highlighted in order to show the "pad" background that resonates from Lowe's guitar. After playing a Cmaj7 chord utilizing open strings (the notes of open strings on the guitar have a very unique timbre but are often neglected by jazz guitarists), he remains on it as the song's tempo becomes slower and bassist Duvivier plays his arpeggio-based line, leaving space for one measure. Then, after hearing the note that concludes the bass line, Lowe inverts his chord, thus playing the fifth of the chord on his lowest string while Duvivier plays the root and fifth at the same time. The notes in parentheses indicate Lowe's previous strumming of open strings. A very definitive ending occurs in the key of C major, as the cue intended for Vaughan is obvious.

<sup>7</sup> RIFF is a motivic idea, usually short, repeated few times behind the main melody of a song.



**Figure 20.** "Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye," Lowe's comping for each consecutive A section.



**Figure 21.** "Sophisticated Lady," Outro, leaving space for bass line. Measures 49 and 50.

Another moment of note when observing Lowe's diverse rhythmic devices on "My Favorite Things" is the beginning of the C section, when the guitar and bass leave space for Vaughan by utilizing long rests, *fermata* and *cesura* (figure 22).



**Figure 22.** "My Favorite Things," use of space. Measures 61 through 64.

### 5.7. Unique-elements

Any use of unorthodox techniques such as playing behind the guitar bridge for specific sounds, use of harmonics, etc. will be taken in consideration for analysis. For instance, Lowe's use of Drop-D tuning allows him to explore unique textures, expand his techniques and add unique fingerings and shapes.

Technically, Lowe developed a strong and accurate left hand 4<sup>th</sup> finger, which he would use to add melodic flourishes over sustained chords. He could also play many extended voicings as he desires, consisting of uncommon fingerings. In figures 23 and 24 one observes the numbering in which “4” represents the 4<sup>th</sup> finger of left hand. This in combination with the open lowered 6<sup>th</sup> string in D, provides a “robust” sound, and is often employed by Lowe. This uncommon sound is part of the guitarist’s harmonic and timbral vocabulary, and is used extensively.

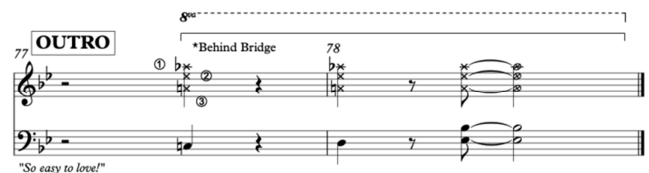


**Figure 23.** "Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye," Lowe's use of left-hand 4<sup>th</sup> finger: Measure 22 and 23.



**Figure 24.** “Ev’ry Time We Say Goodbye,” Lowe’s use of left-hand 4<sup>th</sup> finger, F13 diagram refers to the chord on upbeat of 3 in measure 42. Measure 42 and 43.

Lowe explores extended techniques in search for new timbres. In “Easy to Love,” after leaving space for Duvivier and Vaughan to bring the song to its conclusion, Lowe executes three consecutive attacks with his pick behind the bridge (figure 25). This creates a percussive sound while adding interest to a “Count Basie” style ending. Lowe plucks the first, second and third strings. This study notes the rhythmic placement of the bass, which moves in scale wise motion until reaching the notes Eb and Bb harmonically.



**Figure 25.** “Easy To Love” Picking behind the bridge. Measures 77 and 78.

Two different notations of *glissandi* (slides) were used to describe the *appoggiatura* embellishments used by the guitarist: 1) The use of lines (/) are often applied before chords and describe a chromatic approach consisting of sliding the chord voicing from one fret of the guitar to the adjacent one that will be the “target”, or desired harmony of

the moment (figure 26); 2) The use of specific grace notes, notated with smaller note heads and attached to a *legato*/slur sign (figure 27), is occasionally applied over single string lines or double stops. This technique implies a “blues” feeling, while adding extra “swing” character to a performance.



Figure 26. “If Love is Good To Me.” Use of grace notes for single lines and on chords: chromatic approach notes. Measures 1 and 2.



Figure 27. “In a Sentimental Mood.” Use of grace notes with double-stops. Measure 10.

## 6. Conclusions

This study uncovered a significant number of musical techniques and tendencies that characterized Mundell Lowe's style. This was accomplished through comprehensive transcriptions and analysis of Lowe's guitar work on all ten tracks from Sarah Vaughan's album, *After Hours*. Exploring each song from this album has provided an understanding of Lowe's knowledge of the instrument as well as orchestration. Furthermore, the biography of Lowe's early life elucidates a distinct process in his evolution as a musician, and numerous musicians have stated in interviews that Lowe personally helped many aspiring guitarists and his body of work inspired countless others.

By studying Lowe's treatment of turnarounds, intros, and outros one can see his ability to implement numerous reharmonization techniques. He displays various degrees of dissonance and variations of chord quality.

The interplay between Lowe and Duvivier demonstrates noteworthy musical dialogue and empathy between the two musicians. Also evident is both the guitarist's and bassist's knowledge relating to the standard structure, melody and harmony (also timing, feel) of each the particular song. These concepts are essential when comping behind a vocalist who is interpreting the lyrics. Important to note is that all of the tracks were recorded live, without rehearsal, and they all consist of extended endings, intros, and occasional key changes.

Lowe has a unique approach to his use of chord voicings and shapes. He often chooses the four “inside” strings of the guitar to execute his harmonic work. These configurations produce a thicker texture without resulting in a “muddy” tone in the bass register. Lowe prefers the tensions 6 (13), and 2 (9) for his major chords, while minor chords are often colored by 2 (9) and 4 (11) intervals. While considering the main melody of the vocalist he has the tendency of adding b5, #5, b9, #9, #11, 13 and b13 to his dominant chords. Lowe occasionally delays a dominant 7 chord by implying a sus4 over the harmonic outline. Lowe at times utilizes open drop-D tuning to provide thicker-textured voicings on chords consisting of a D root. Moreover, the use of this tuning allows Lowe to play a combination of root and fifth intervals of a chord using his index-finger as a “bar” shaping a power chord (root and fifth) on the low D and A strings, while adding flourish lines on the higher strings using the remaining fingers of his left hand - a device employed frequently.

Lowe's approach to chord comping frequently involves half-step, glissando movement. This technique also provides a percussive sound to the guitar, while creating rhythmic interest. Also in evidence are rhythmic variations that generally increase in complexity with each succeeding chorus of a song. Lowe's use of silence is another important aspect of his style - frequently “laying-out” or playing sparingly for several consecutive measures of a given piece.

Double-stops are often featured by Lowe on the ballads and uptempo pieces for melodic contour while corresponding to the harmony and song's key. When using double stops Lowe tends to favor lines with notes a 3<sup>rd</sup> apart from each other. By using this interval he phrases diatonic scales in ascending and descending directions. Chromatic double stops were found when Lowe used this technique to approach chord tones. While the bass would play root of the chord, Lowe would complement the harmony by playing third and fifth, root and third or fifth and seventh of the chord.

Motivic and “riff” development is an integral element of Lowe's accompaniment style. The influence of classical music cited by Lowe during the interview is ingrained in his playing. Lowe's studies of counterpoint are especially evident. He often uses techniques such as transposition, embellishment and sequence in his harmonic and melodic material.

While comping (or also during his only guitar solo) Lowe rarely uses wide melodic interval leaps. He most often incorporates diatonic scale tones, chromatic approaches, and arpeggios. Additionally, the use of pre-set chord shapes is a technique that Lowe uses to great advantage. The technique involves the placement of a left-hand chord shape that is maintained while a rapid, arpeggio-based line is played, hence facilitating its execution. Lowe's use of chords integrated with single-line phrases is also typical of his style, and occasionally these techniques combine to create a pedal point in the top voice of a chord while other voices are moving below.

Important to Lowe's unique sound is his use of slurring

notes and chords together for articulation. By slurring (dragging his hand position and fingers around the guitars neck) he is capable of connecting notes while maintaining a *legato* sound. Techniques such as slides, hammer-ons and pull-offs are essential, and Lowe features them often.

The exploration and analysis of Lowe's stylings in this research will hopefully serve as a catalyst for future scholarly study into his music. His work with Sarah Vaughan has truly set him apart as a sideman and exemplified his unique style as an accompanist. As he expressed in a video lesson released in 1996 for the Hot Licks collection (VHS), comping is one of the most important skills that a guitarist must develop in order to make a living in the music business. He continues: "an important part of your education should be learning to accompany, where there is a singer, or where is an instrumentalist. The art of accompanying is a great asset in terms of making money" [15].

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