elephant in the room for 'soloists,'" says Bonamass

Joe Bonamassa
on Non-Boring Blues Chording   BY MATT BLACKETT

"THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM FOR 'soloists,'" says Bonamassa, "is that we play chords more than we do leads. There are a couple of rules when you're playing rhythm guitar, especially when you're jamming with other people: One—turn down! The other thing is, concentrate on where the kick drum is and where the rhythm section is and just melt into it."

To illustrate his point, he plays **Ex. 1**, a standard blues move in *G* that he makes trickier and more interesting with the addition of a bass line. Use a hybrid-picking technique and make sure the bass notes are steady, which is harder than it looks. A little palm muting on the low string will keep the low notes thumpy.

"I like to throw in two- and three-note chords along the way," he continues while chording through **Ex. 2**. Pay attention to what Bonamassa calls "horn stabs" on beat four of our I chord (*G7*). Chop the second stab short and quickly slide back down to the third position. When he gets to the IV chord, *C7*, he changes things up again with organ-ish mini-chords and grace notes. This idea of not doing the same thing on every chord of a I-IV-V is a huge part of Bonamassa's appeal, and he shows it again when he gets back to the I chord. Now, with bass notes still thumping away, he superimposes ascending triads until he hits the V, this time with 9th chords that he embellishes by hitting the 13 with his pinky. Back down at the IV, he further maintains the listener's attention by throwing in the first single-note line of the progression, before chording out on the G.

To see Bonamassa put his accompaniment money where his mouth is, watch his DVD, *Live from the Royal Albert Hall* where he backs up Mr. Slowhand.

"It's rare that the moment when someone's life peaks is captured on film," he says. "But those six minutes playing with Clapton were my peak. It was the thrill of a lifetime, and when Eric was playing, I just did these things [plays sparse octaves]. If it sounds full when you're backing someone up, you don't need to do much." ◣

Ex. 1

Ex. 2