

BY JUDE GOLD

Über JAMMING

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ohn Scofield isn't easy to pin down for a guitar lesson, even if it's with several hundred thousand *GP* readers. Sure, Scofield has been busy touring the world in support of his 28th solo album, *Überjam* [Verve], but that's not the reason he's hesitant to commit to a

Master Class. Nor does he resist the idea because he's afraid that people will pirate his sound by decoding his signature style. Actually, as you'll soon find out, Scofield couldn't be more generous when it comes to sharing his

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**John Scofield's
Supernatural
Soloing Secrets**
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angular riffs and melodies.

"I just worry about giving too much importance to a particular lick or a run," says Scofield of his lesson tactics. "I've never been into the 'lick factory' approach to teaching guitar, because a lick or phrase by itself may be cool, but out of context it usually has no meaning. It's what you play before and after the lick—the set-up and the release—that makes it sound fresh."

Scofield should know. Having shared stages and studios with such legends as Miles Davis, Charles Mingus, Chet Baker, Gary Burton, and Billy Cobham, he has learned the art of jamming from the very best. And if there's one thing the New York guitarist is über-enthused to teach, it's how to play transcendent leads that shatter the confines of grids, scales, and other such intellectual approaches to improvising,

"In a way, the whole idea of soloing from a scale is wrong," asserts Scofield. "It's like putting the cart before the horse. A scale may be technically appropriate for a given key, but most great players don't actually use scales to improvise, and jazz musicians never have. Improvisation comes from *melody*, not from scales."

Flying Colors

Strum the chord in Ex. 1. What do you hear? If your ears identify a garden-variety *Cmaj7*, you're certainly not wrong, because that's exactly what the notes spell. What Scofield would like you to hear, however, is a world of melodic possibilities.

"There are ways to take your basic modal jam and add more colors," says Scofield, who rarely limits himself to just the *C* major (Ionian) scale when he's improvising in the key of *C*. "There are notes in a major key that aren't defined, which means you can tweak them for new

sounds. For example, why not sharp the 4? It will give your solo an interesting Lydian vibe, which you can also think of as a 'sharped 11' sound."

Scofield demonstrates by playing Ex. 2, which starts with the 2nd finger on the root, *C*, at the 8th fret. Up until its last note, this run is an innocent *Cmaj7* arpeggio. The enigmatic *F#* that completes the ascent implies *Cmaj7#11*, adding a layer of melodic intrigue that will surely catch people's ears.

The Fourth Dimension

"I also do a lot of stuff with fourths in major keys," reveals Scofield. "They sound cool and they're easy to bring out in the Lydian scale [plays Ex. 3]. See the stacked fourths starting on the third note? *F#* is followed by *B*, then *E*, then *A*, and finally *D*. I love that sound."

Scofield is indeed deriving his fourths from the *C* Lydian mode, which is simply a *C* major scale with a raised 4th degree (*F#*). If you know your basic pentatonic shape, however, you'll notice that Ex. 3, aside from its opening note, shares its fingering entirely with the *B* minor pentatonic scale presented in Ex. 4. In other words, if you can find the root of a major key on the low string, just drop down a half-step (one fret) and play a pentatonic scale. You'll bring out the given key's Lydian mode—not to mention all those glorious fourths—using a simple fingering that you've probably been using since your first guitar lesson. Hip.

Ex. 1



Ex. 2

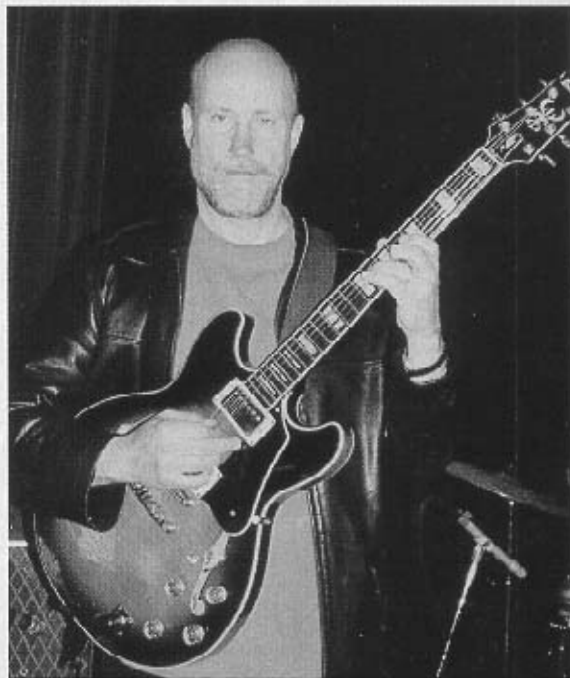
Freely Cmaj7

Ex. 3

Freely Cmaj7

Ex. 4

B minor pentatonic scale



"Sound is what drives my solos, not verbal concepts," says Scofield. "I never think, 'I'm going to use a Lydian Dominant scale and then go up a half-step,' even though that may be exactly what I end up doing."

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In Ex. 5, Scofield sticks entirely to the *B* minor pentatonic shape, generating more tasty fourths in the key of *C* major. Since this descending phrase never tags the tonic, *C*, you may want to strum a *Cmaj7* before you play through it. Otherwise, your ears may be tricked into hearing it as a *B* minor run.

Ax Sense

One of the trickiest things to teach in a guitar lesson—whether in print or in person—is phrasing. Scofield, like many jazz greats, has an uncanny knack for playing relaxed notes that massage the groove by landing slightly behind the beat. No matter how fast the flurry, Scofield never seems to hurry.

One way to improve your phrasing is to consider accents. Even when Scofield is playing sixteenth-notes—that's four pitches per

downbeat—he typically bears down on selected notes, as in Ex. 6, which is another improvised *C* Lydian run. Over a medium-tempo rock or funk groove, try bringing out Ex. 6's four accented notes—two of which are followed by slurs—by picking them harder than the others. In time, this approach will help you learn to hear chains of notes and transform mechanical sounding runs into truly melodic statements.

Hops, Skips, and Jumps

Another hallmark of Scofield's solos is the melodic leap. "I like the way wide intervals sound," says Scofield, illustrating with the jagged motif in Ex. 7. It breaks up the *C* Lydian scale with several angular jumps. "This has a dramatically different sound from what you get just traveling up the scale in a more linear fashion."

The Open Road

One way Scofield gets a jam into high gear is by kick-starting it with snarling grips that feature

jangling open strings. "If you play only barre chords, you'll play only in bars," puns Scofield. "Wait, I'm just kidding. Don't print that."

Too late. What Scofield *does* want printed, however, are the two fat grips in Ex. 8, which he employs on "Boozer" from his *A Go Go* album. Test-drive them for yourself and use them to create a funky I-IV loop in *C#*. Start off by staying on each chord for two measures, and dig the ringing sound—the I chord has two open strings, the eighth-position IV chord has one.

"I try to use open notes anytime I can," says Scofield, serving up another sample of open-string comping in Ex. 9. "This is like my progression on 'Jeep on 35' [also from *A Go Go*]. It's got lots of what I call *rub notes*—notes that create minor or major seconds, or sharpened ninths."

In *A9*, the rub note is the open *B*. Energized by Scofield's trademark half-dirty tone, the open string creates a dissonant major second against the *C#*. Similarly, in *D9* an abrasive minor second is created as the open *B* grinds

Ex. 5

Freely *Cmaj7*

Ex. 6

Cmaj7

Ex. 7

Wide intervals *Cmaj7*

Ex. 8

(I) *C#7#9,13*
X3 1 2 0 0

(IV) *F#7#9,13*
X2 1 1 4 0

Ex. 9

A9 *D13* *Em7*



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against C4, and in Em7, a major second clangs between the open high E and the fretted D.

Catch of the Day

"I also like to use open strings as notes within a melody," offers Scofield. "Here's my newest open-string lick [plays Ex. 10]. I'm not sure what you call it—it's kind of a joke scale with a 'Japanese restaurant' type of sound—but it's got tons of rub notes. The key is letting

each note ring for as long as possible so that the notes that follow overlap. Arcing your fretting-hand fingers as you play will help."

Know Your Neighbors

"It only takes one or two outside notes to add excitement to a diatonic line," says Scofield. "I think of these notes as *approach tones*—notes from outside the scale that are used to approach neighboring scale tones. For example, if you're soloing over an Am7-D9 progression, you *could* confine yourself to the A Dorian mode, which I might do for a while. Eventually, however, I usually

throw in a couple of chromatic notes that sound quite striking against the A-minor background."

Scofield brings this tactic to life by playing Ex. 11, which is based primarily in the A minor pentatonic scale. The phrase starts on beat two of the measure, but waits until beat four to add two delicious approach tones—E♭ and C♯.

"I like that creepy-crawly stuff," says Scofield as he crams a fistful of approach tones into Ex. 12. This squirrely descent drops you from B to F# without ever stepping off the second string, and it sounds great over the simple A7-D7 progression in the background. Despite its many accidentals, this lick is easy to learn once you realize that your 3rd finger simply shifts down a half-step every other note.

"It's really just upper-neighbor/lower-neighbor the whole way down," notes Scofield. "In fact, I've practiced that stuff for years and still do. Here's another simple exercise you can try [plays Ex. 13a]. You're chromatically dropping down the neck using alternating descending and ascending major seconds. Once you've got it down, try expanding the interval to a minor third."

Ex. 10

Modal cascade

Fm9(maj7, #11)

Ex. 11

♩ = 60

Slow funk

Am7

D9

Ex. 12

♩ = 60

Slow funk

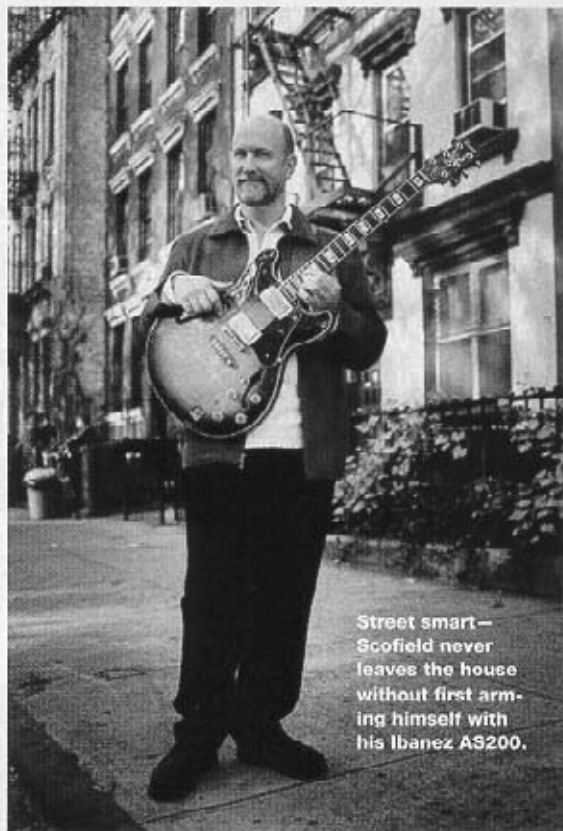
A7

D7

Ex. 13a

Descending major seconds

audio version available!
truefire.com



Street smart—Scofield never leaves the house without first arming himself with his Ibanez AS200.

