

# Tim Miller



**John Wheatcroft** continues his exploration into legato approaches in modern jazz guitar and casts an admiring eye over Tim Miller.



Tim Miller with his Rick Canton electric, acoustic and MIDI guitar

enough original concepts and approaches it's no exaggeration to say that Miller is one of the most unique and forward-thinking voices in jazz guitar today.

Tim Miller received his first guitar at age 10 and was initially drawn to the instrument after hearing (that well-known jazz guitarist!) Eddie Van Halen. Over the following years, Tim expanded his listening to include players such as Eric Johnson, Ted Greene and Pat Metheny, although the big revelations for him were hearing the aforementioned Holdsworth and the discovery of a book that has become legendary in guitar education circles: *The Advancing Guitarist* by Mick Goodrick. Goodrick went on to mentor Tim, and the pair also performed together in various duo situations. In a joint venture they also created another great book, *Creative Chordal Harmony*. Both Miller and Goodrick currently work alongside one another as professors at the prestigious Berklee College of Music.

Tim's list of collaborations includes drummers Paul Motian, Terri Lyne Carrington and Gary Husband, trumpeter Randy Brecker, saxophonist Jerry Bergonzi, keyboard player George Duke and a whole host more. He has released a pair of albums with his own trio and he really excels in this environment, exploiting the almost infinite harmonic freedom, the rhythmic interplay with the drums and the ability to create sonic colours and generally inhabit the extra musical space to great effect.

Miller's legato technique is exceptionally smooth, controlled and accurate, allowing him the facility to execute fast tempos with a relaxed grace and a real sense of bounce and forward propulsion to his lines. Mick Goodrick's significant harmonic sensibilities have most definitely influenced his choice of voicings, but Tim is absolutely not afraid to navigate uncharted waters in his own composition and arrangements in the pursuit of new sounds.

There are 10 lines for your pleasure this month. As always, these are the tip of the musical iceberg, so if you like what you hear then please look further into his style and do some transcribing yourself. This is possibly

the single most effective thing you can do to access new sounds and really get inside a player's style. What's more, it opens your ears to hearing and recognising scales, chords and harmonies wherever you hear them; this adds vastly to your musical arsenal and will help you become a better all-round musician.

Even though the longest of these examples is only five bars long, the note density and the

**“ I DON'T THINK ABOUT SCALES AS A TECHNICAL THING. I THINK OF SCALES AS MELODIES ”**

*Tim Miller*

relentless nature of the phrasing means that there are short lines within each longer phrase. Jazz players often reject the principle of licks, preferring to think in small melodic fragments that combine to create a cohesive whole, rather than an entire musical phrase with the outcome decided upon before the first note is even played. With this in mind, you can learn a huge amount by cutting these examples up into one-bar and even one-beat fragments, exploring them as 'cells' in their own right and creating an infinite number of variations. As always, enjoy. **BT**

**NEXT MONTH** John examines the playing style of a true jazz legend, the great **Eddie Lang**

## ABILITY RATING

☆☆☆☆☆ Advanced

### Info

**Key:** Various

**Tempo:** Various

**CD:** TRACKS 60-77

### Will improve your...

✓ Legato technique

✓ Melodic sophistication

✓ Rhythmic control

**T**im Miller is most definitely a standout player on the current jazz scene. A staggeringly fluent guitarist, Tim's super-clean and articulate legato technique, coupled with his keen harmonic awareness and unique approach to tone combine to create a remarkable modern sound. You may notice traces of last month's artist Allan Holdsworth, but with more than

**Get the Tone**

Tim's Rick Canton signature guitar combines electric, acoustic and MIDI pickups. However, we're focusing here on his more conventional overdriven electric lead tone so ideally aim for a bridge position humbucker with a smooth and balanced moderately, high-gain drive with absolutely tons of reverb and delay and you'll be in the right ballpark.



**TRACK RECORD** Both of Tim's solo albums, *Trio* (Import 2006) and *Trio – Volume 2* (Import 2008), are full to the brim with inspiring playing and beautifully-composed modern jazz pieces. His online guitar school is available at [www.internetguitarlessons.tv](http://www.internetguitarlessons.tv) with free sampler lessons. His book co-authored with Mick Goodrick, *Creative Chordal Harmony For Guitar* (Hal Leonard) is highly recommended.

**EXAMPLE 1 THREE NOTES PER STRING PATTERN IN C DORIAN**

CD TRACK 60

Our first example comes from Tim's concept of configuring scales three notes per string, skipping through strings six, four and two, or five, three and one, to create what we call a '3x3' pool of available notes. This idea shifts the concept to both locations, while remaining in C Dorian throughout (C-D-Eb-F-G-A-Bb).

*♩ = 95*

**Cm7**

**C Dorian**

E B G D A E

11-10 8 12-8 8-11-10-8 10 7-8 8 6-10-8-5 6 5 7 3 3

11-10 8-10-11

3 7 3 5 8-12 8-11-10-8 10-8 8-11 10 10-8 12 12-8 12 12-8 10

5-6 3 5-6 8 10-11 10 10 10-11

4

**EXAMPLE 2 SHIFTING POSITIONS WITH WIDE INTERVALS**

CD TRACK 62

We continue with the '3x3' concept in this example, although we've transposed up a tone to D Dorian (D-E-F-G-B-C). Due to the string-skipped note dispersal, the intervals become quite wide and take on an interesting and unexpected twist when we impose some pattern-based sequencing into these forms. The major challenge here is the position shift in bar 2, so follow the suggested fingering and build up speed over time.

*♩ = 72*

**Dm7**

**D Dorian**

E B G D A E

7 5 7 5 5 8 7 8 7 10-13-12-10 12-10 14 14-10 12 7 9 7 7 7-8 10-13-12 13-12 10

9 9-5 9-5 9-5 5 7 9 14 14-10 12 13

14-10 14-10 10-12-14

4

## EXAMPLE 3 16TH-NOTE PHRASES WITH GUITAR AND DRUMS

CD TRACK 64

Tim's legato technique is remarkably fluid, articulate and even, so the challenge here is to maintain the consistent 16th-note flow to the notes while ensuring the accents align with the strong beats in the bar, especially when these notes coincide with hammer-ons or pull-offs. Harmonically, we have an open playing field as we're dealing with just guitar and drums here – although Tim still manages to imply a specific sequence with his selection of cohesive chord tones.

*♩* = 140

N.C.

Implied harmony (A7) (E7#5) (A13) (C9)

(E♭m7) (D♭maj7) (Falt)

## EXAMPLE 4 REPETITIOUS CHROMATIC 16TH-NOTE PHRASES WITH GUITAR AND DRUMS

CD TRACK 66

There's more guitar and drum action here, one of Tim's favourite settings for solo improvisation. While it's foolish to state that the notes are not important, we can say that the rhythm has at least an equal, if not more important, role to play in lines of this nature. Again, Tim is an expert with controlled delivery of a continual stream of notes, so developing your technique to a comparable level will take the three Ps: perseverance, practice and patience.

*♩* = 140

Implied harmony (D7) (D7#5) (G♭maj7) (D7) (D7#5)

(G♭m/maj7) (Bmaj7) (Bm7)

**EXAMPLE 5 UNACCOMPANIED DISPLACED ARPEGGIOS WITH HYBRID PICKING**

CD TRACK 68

There is a noticeable Eric Johnson influence to this example, utilising open-voicings through a descending sequence of major triads. Miller is a great hybrid picker, a technique that is becoming ever more present in the modern jazz guitarist's arsenal. Take the time to learn this example verbatim, and then perhaps attempt to convert these chords and arpeggios to their parallel minor equivalents.

*♩ = 85*

F F/C E<sup>b</sup> E<sup>b</sup>/B<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup>/A<sup>b</sup> F<sup>#</sup> B/D<sup>#</sup>

E B G D A E

1

a m a a m a a m a a m a etc

E E/B A A/E D/F<sup>#</sup>

E B G D A E

4

a m

**EXAMPLE 6 UP-TEMPO LEGATO LINES**

CD TRACK 69

With all this talk of smooth control and advanced harmonic concepts, how about some fast stuff? No problem. Here's how Tim might sail with remarkable fluency through a familiar set of chord changes, employing his considerable technique to the full. Notice how Miller negotiates our initial implied II-V-I in G major (Am7-D7-Gmaj7) with a very modern sounding G Lydian line (G-A-B-C<sup>#</sup>-D-E-F<sup>#</sup>). The B7 alt idea in bar 3 is definitely one to consider for the lick vault!

*♩ = 144*

Gmaj7<sup>#</sup>11

Conventional harmony (Am7) (D7) (Gmaj7)

E B G D A E

1

9-10 7-10-12 10-12-14-10 9-10 7-8 9-10-7 9-7 9-6 9-7

B7alt Emaj7 C7alt Fm7

(Fm7<sup>b</sup>5) (B7) (C7alt) (Fm7)

E B G D A E

4



**EXAMPLE 9 MELODIC LINES THROUGH CHANGES**

CD TRACK 75

Here is our most conventional idea in terms of jazz vocabulary with a selection of melodic ideas based explicitly around the strong chord tones of the underlying sequence. While Tim enjoys playing in a piano-less trio, his knowledge of harmony means that, when he wants you to, you can really hear the chords ring out. Your task here, as you get these lines up to speed, is to analyse and understand the intervallic relationship between the harmony and the melody notes.

*♩ = 140*

Fm7      Bbm7      Eb9      Abmaj7

E  
B  
G  
D  
A  
E

1

Dbmaj7      Dbm7      Abmaj7/C      Bdim      Bbm7      Eb9      Abmaj7

E  
B  
G  
D  
A  
E

4

**EXAMPLE 10 MIXING ARPEGGIOS**

CD TRACK 77

Our final flurry of semiquavers sees Tim in full-blown string-crossing arpeggio mode. You might wish to follow his lead and consider using a combination of pick and fingers (hybrid picking) or you could go at it with a pick plus hammer-ons and pull-offs. Either way is a plausible and legitimate approach to take.

Remember that the audience doesn't care one little bit about such details. All they care about is the music, so whichever method you choose make sure the notes flow, the rhythm is not forced or lumpy and the dynamics are even and smooth throughout.

*♩ = 150*

Ab7#5      Db7#5      Dbmaj7      Eb      B7#5/A

E  
B  
G  
D  
A  
E

1