

Jimmy Bruno

Sharing the Knowledge

JIMMY BRUNO SAYS HIS LATEST record, *Maplewood Avenue*, was a happy accident. "I'd built a studio in my house and was testing it. I asked (vibraphonist) Tony Micelli and (bassist) Jeff Pedraz to come over and play. We played a couple of times and it sounded really good. Before we knew it, we had a CD. We thought about adding drums, but it sounded so good, and I'd always thought about doing a record with no drums, kind of a Red Norvo thing."

The record is full of the flying bop and swing that has made Bruno one of jazz's best guitarists of the past decade. And now, another happy accident is allowing Bruno to share some of that knowledge. Although active for years in the instructional video and book market, he has taken it to the next logical step with the online Jimmy Bruno Guitar Institute.

It all started when retired AOL executive David Butler wanted to take lessons from him. "He was living in Florida at the time and rented an apartment here in Philly, where he could be close to take lessons. He liked it so much and started thinking about a way to teach more than one guy at a time. So he came up with the basic idea of a video-based website. There'd be a series of lessons as if it were a private student coming. I put enough stuff up so people could take a right or left turn and go in different directions. And we decided there had to be a way to give feedback."

Butler implemented a system that

allowed people to record a question, a tune, anything they wanted, just like a private lesson. "I watch them in the mornings and I respond," said Bruno. "Everyone has access to the questions and answers, so it's kind of like a master class. We had no idea it would go as well as it has. We have a couple thousand students."

Anyone familiar with Bruno's teaching system knows it tries to whittle things down to the essentials. "The academic approach sometimes gets overly complicated," he said. "What gets left out is music and sound.

Unless you can hear notes and chord changes and transfer it to your instrument, you can know all the theory and concepts, and it won't make you a player. You need to develop an ear and connect it to your instrument. That's basically the philosophy of how I teach."

Bruno developed those thought lines, and his chops, at a young age. His love of music came from his father, who was a guitar player, and his mother,

who was a professional singer. He started studying guitar formally at 16 and learned about jazz by playing with older musicians. "Once I developed my ear, it wasn't difficult. In my early teens, I played five to 10 hours a day. When I started studying formally from the age of 16 to about 22, I was

playing eight hours a day. I was really into learning how to try and play like a horn player.

I loved guys like Charlie Parker and Coltrane.



In those days there weren't a thousand guitar players, like there are now. It was players like Wes, Hank Garland, Johnny Smith, Tal Farlow, Howard Roberts, Jimmy Raney, Joe Pass, and Pat Martino, and not a lot more."

Though Bruno's been associated with plenty of famous guitar makers, he now favors his Jimmy Bruno Model by Roger Sadowsky. "I've played very high-end guitars for most of my career and they're great instruments, but for practical purposes—going on the road and playing through weird amps—I like the sound of a really good laminate guitar. I don't know what Roger did to it, but he made sure everything was comfortable for me. We went through

six prototypes as I chose the scale length, the pickups, mahogany neck versus the maple neck... I can plug it into any amp or situation and with very little twiddling get the sound I want. It's a great tool."

Bruno is using two amps—a Henriksen head with a cabinet with two 10" speakers or a single 12". And on occasion he'll use an Acoustic Image with a Raezer Edge cabinet. "I go back and forth because they're both light and have plenty of power. It's kind of like whatever's in the car, I use! I like them both."

While his online teaching keeps him busy, Bruno has a couple more records in the works.

"We're going to do a live record for download only. I also plan to do a record that involves an orchestra, maybe playing a bunch of old Italian tunes. Do them in a really modern way. I'd like to do the arrangements myself."

— John Heidt