

The Improvised Counterpoint of Freddie Green

In jazz music, the role of the rhythm guitar player is typically that of a musician outside the spotlight. While soloists shine, the rhythm guitar player just keeps time. Other members of the rhythm section—the bass, the piano, the drums—all may take their own solos on a given tune, but rare indeed is the rhythm guitar solo. Of course, rhythm guitar is not an instrument itself but rather a function. Guitar players often step out of their duties as rhythm guitar players to step into the position of the featured soloist. Yet this changing-of-hats does not hold true for all guitar players; some are known for their consistent dedication to acting solely as rhythm guitarists.

One good example of a dedicated rhythm guitarist is Freddie Green, who played with the Count Basie band for 50 years. Nicknamed "Mr. Rhythm" for his steadfast post in Basie's rhythm guitar chair, Freddie Green was a staple of the ensemble from 1937 until Green's death in 1987. Despite playing only a handful of solos during this long tenure, Green, in the words of Jim Ferguson, "invested rhythm guitar with such strength of personality as to elevate it to the level almost of solo work."¹

The implication of the Ferguson's quote is that solo work somehow carries more weight or importance than rhythm guitar playing. Count Basie himself, however, reveals quite the opposite when he remarks, "I've always built my band from the rhythm section to the tenors, then on to the rest, for the living pulse of the band is naturally in the rhythm section."² Considering that Basie rarely employed a solo guitar player but always kept Freddie Green on the payroll, we have further confirmation that Basie ranked rhythm guitar above its solo counterpart with regard to the make-up of a swing band. Jazz guitarist Jim Hall reinforces this sentiment by imploring fellow guitar players, "Don't just listen to guitars. But if you have to listen to one, study the way

Freddie Green plays rhythm with Count Basie's band. If you pruned the tree of jazz, Freddie Green would be the only person left."³

Hall's advice to study Freddie Green above all others would be simple enough if it were not for the fact that rhythm guitar playing is extremely difficult to hear precisely in the mix of a big band. The mid-range timbre of the rhythm guitar nicely fills out the sonorities of a rhythm section but often gets obscured when wind and brass instruments come into the sonic picture. The challenge of transcribing a rhythm guitar part becomes even greater with older recordings, such as those during the height of the swing era in the 1930s and '40s, when the limited dynamic range and frequency response of the recording equipment further clouds the often subtle background sounds of the rhythm guitar.

Because of the problematic task of accurately hearing the rhythm guitar in a recording, an ambiguity exists as to exactly what and how Freddie Green played. In fact, a fair amount of controversy surrounds Freddie Green's technique. As a result, this controversy has hampered efforts to properly analyze his style. It is my goal in this paper to take a critical look at these opposing theories on Green's playing, and in so doing, hopefully develop a more faithful explanation of his rhythm guitar style.

HISTORY:

Before delving into the stylistic characteristics of Freddie Green's guitar playing, I would like to first describe some salient biographical details from Green's life so that we may better understand the setting and context in which his style developed. The musical education that Green received, both formally and informally, differs greatly from that of the modern jazz guitar player. As will be shown, it is perhaps partially because of Green's non-traditional training, at

least in terms of present-day jazz guitar pedagogy, that Green was able to develop a playing style that blended so perfectly with the rhythm section of Count Basie's band.

Most of the information about Freddie Green's early life comes from Stanley and Helen Dance's interview with Green on August 9, 1977. While this primary document was not available to me, a summary can be found on Michael Pettersen's web site, which also includes specific quotations from Freddie Green.⁴ As well, Lewis Dickert, in his PhD thesis on Freddie Green, provides exact references to the particular page numbers of the 254-page transcript on which specific pieces of information can be found.⁵

In this interview, Green explains that he was born on March 31, 1911 in Charleston, South Carolina to a moderately musical family. His father played the pump organ and Green's mother sang in the Methodist Church choir; while Green had two half-brothers, neither of them had any musical inclinations.⁶ Thus for the early part of his life, Freddie Green seemingly had no more of a musical environment than surrounded many growing up in this era.

This musical environment suddenly changed, however, soon after Freddie Green's father passed away when Freddie Green was merely ten or eleven years of age. In 1923, at the of twelve, Green moved to New York City to live with his maternal aunt. At first, the family lived in Hell's Kitchen, but eventually they moved uptown to Harlem.⁷ Living in Harlem during his teenage years in the 1920s put Green right in the middle of the Harlem Renaissance at a very impressionable age. Green himself admits to frequenting many clubs and theaters during this period, both to dance and to hear the performances of top musicians such as Jelly Roll Morton and those in Jimmie Lunceford's band.⁸

Despite the fertile musical ground of Harlem during this era and Green's obviously keen interest in the music around him, he was pulled away from New York City on the death of his

mother in 1930. Freddie Green consequently left Harlem and moved back to Charleston, where he remained for a few years and married his childhood sweetheart.⁹ It seems to be on his return to Charleston that Green first began to take a serious interest in music-making himself. At some point while in Charleston, Green began "fooling around with the ukulele."¹⁰ Quickly, however, Green seemed to realize that bands during this period were looking for banjo players not ukulelists. In this early jazz age of acoustic recording, of course, the banjo was preferred over the guitar as the accompanimental instrument of choice in rhythm sections because of the banjo's loud and percussive tone.¹¹ Therefore, Green soon procured a banjo in order to get gigs with local bands.¹²

Freddie Green's switch to banjo not only allowed him to play with larger ensembles but also facilitated his return to New York City. Green was apparently aware that the musical opportunities while living in Charleston, South Carolina were fewer and had less potential than those in New York, and as a result, Green was looking for some way to return to the big city. The opportunity to make this return (against the better wishes of his wife!) presented itself in 1932 when the Jenkin's Orphanage band invited Green to tour with them as their banjo player. When the band stopped in New York City, Green simply just stayed in town, later sending for his wife and child to come up from South Carolina.¹³

Back in New York, Freddie Green soon realized that his switch from ukulele to banjo was not the only instrumental change he would have to make if he wanted to continue playing in bands. During the 1930s, recording and amplification technology was quickly evolving, and with it the tastes and styles of jazz evolved as well. It was not long before the guitar replaced the banjo in the rhythm section of jazz bands from this period. To ensure his usefulness to bands as a rhythm section player, Green gave up the banjo sometime in the early 1930s and began playing

the guitar. Of course, such constant instrumental transitions were not as easy to make as they may appear in hindsight. We get a small peek into his probable frustration when Green says, "As soon as I picked up the banjo, the guitar came in. Now I had to go through this again, the added strings, you know."¹⁴

Having finally moved over to guitar, the instrument on which he would play the rest of his life and build his reputation, Freddie Green began a steady progression of gigs and musical experiences that would further shape his playing style. One seminal example is his duo work with pianist Willie Gant. Lacking any other members in the ensemble, Green found himself forced to support the piano rhythmically without the option for Green himself to solo whatsoever. Says Green, "I had to be the drummer also, because we didn't have any drummer at all."¹⁵ By his own admission, Green was also still adapting to the relatively new instrument in his hands. "I didn't know the guitar well enough then," he confessed years later.¹⁶

It was through Freddie Green's regular job with a quintet at the small Greenwich village Black Cat Club, however, that influential jazz producer and talent scout John Hammond heard him first play. Hammond arranged for Green to audition for Count Basie's band, and in 1937, Green became a regular member of the Basie band.¹⁷ Green's rapid ascent to this job, considering the few years he had been playing guitar, apparently caused some apprehension for Green. This apprehension manifested itself in Freddie Green's musical style, as Green stuck to rhythm guitar playing after early efforts at single-string solos were not received well by the Basie band. Green recalls, "I didn't want to lose this job. So I started playing rhythm. I thought 'Well, they won't complain to me anymore about the single-string thing. I'll just play rhythm.'"¹⁸

Sheer fear of losing his job, though, was not the only motivating factor for Green to eschew solos in the Basie band. Musical reasons also made themselves obvious to Green as he

played with the ensemble. In Green's own words, "I stayed out of the way because Jo Jones, Walter Page, and Basie were doing something else. That's one of the reasons I started playing rhythm, because they would play some stock things. Basie would do something, and Jo Jones would answer him, and then Walter Page would come in."¹⁹ It was thus the motivic interaction between the existing members of the Basie band, already highly developed by the time Green joined the group, that encouraged Green to provide a musical support structure in the form of straight-forward rhythm guitar playing instead of to contribute to an already complicated web of musical interplay.

Although Freddie Green's memory of his ease in transitioning to the stable role of rhythm guitar player seems clear in his own mind, perhaps this recollection is blurred somewhat through the lens of time. Green was apparently a close friend of Charlie Christian, who gave Green an amplifier that Green began to use in order to solo on stage.²⁰ Harry "Sweets" Edison, trumpet player for the Basie band during this period, remembers that "...when Freddie would lay out of the band to take his solo, the whole rhythm section would fall apart."²¹ As a result, the band members started to sabotage Green's amplifier, breaking wires and pulling out the electronics in order to cause Green to be unable to solo at all.²² Therefore, Green's musical sensibilities as well as his desire to minimize conflict in the band and secure his salary led to his position as a dedicated rhythm guitar player.

TECHNIQUE:

A fair number of instructional materials are available in published form that describe the mechanics and techniques of Freddie Green's guitar playing. I would like to draw the reader's

attention to three of these publications, each of which represent an introduction to Green's playing style by three separate authors and publishing companies:

1) *Swing & Big Band Guitar: Four-to-the-Bar Comping in the Style of Freddie Green*

by Charlton Johnson (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard, 1998)

2) *Basic Rhythm Guitar: Comping in the Style of Freddie Green*

by Corey Christiansen (Pacific, MO: Mel Bay, 2003)

3) *Rhythm Guitar the Ranger Doug Way*

by Douglas Green (Anaheim Hills, CA: Centerstream, 2006)

The first two publications represent the only available instructional materials to aspiring rhythm guitarists from major publication companies in the style of Freddie Green. Green's name itself is used in the titles of the books themselves, leaving no doubt as to the intentions of the authors. The third book, while not directly referencing Freddie Green in the title, purports to take a heavy amount of influence from Green's playing. For example, the author writes on page 15, "Freddie Green was the master, and when in doubt refer to him!"²³

Using a combination of these items, one might imagine a guitar student would be led towards achieving a rhythm guitar sound much like that of Freddie Green. Together, the publications provide a lot of chord charts, musical examples, and explanatory text, as well as supplementary multimedia materials such as an audio CD a video DVD. Moreover, the three publications are fairly unified in their approach as to how swing-era rhythm guitar should be played, so a student would be faced with a minimum of contradiction or potential confusion when using these three sources.

The problem, however, occurs when the methods and techniques in these publications are compared to actual audio and video recordings of Freddie Green playing rhythm guitar. The

chord voicings that Green seems to use look and sound very different from the voicings as described in these instructional materials. In other words, it becomes readily apparent to a viewer or listener that the comping style as described in the three publications listed above does not approximate that of Freddie Green despite some of their titles to the contrary.

In order to better understand this problem, it is necessary to understand how rhythm guitar comping is portrayed in these three pedagogical works. The basic premise in each publication is that the guitarist should play three- or four-note chords. The voicings always include notes on the third and fourth strings plus a bass note on either the fifth or sixth string and sometimes another note on the second string. A casual glance through the fretboard diagrams in each publication confirms this rule. The most common voicing is a three-note chord with the bass note on the sixth string and the remaining notes on the third and fourth strings.

This conception that Freddie Green mostly played three- or four-note voicings is echoed in many other places. Lewis Dickert, in his PhD thesis, also supports this commonly-held view. Dickert writes, "[Green's] chord voicings focused primarily around three-note and four-note voicings. Green's three-note chord voicings typically were found on strings six-four-three and five-four three."²⁴ As well, the *Guitar Player* story dedicated to Freddie Green after his death muses about "his knack for weaving seamless foundations of three- and four-note chord voicings."²⁵

To play some of these three-note voicings, a typical guitar player will often use the first or second finger of his left hand to play the bass note on the sixth string. Doing so causes the thumb of the left hand to usually lie on the back of the guitar neck. In fact, Charlton Johnson explicitly tells the reader of his book, "The thumb plays a supportive role in fingering, and, as

such, it must be centered in back of the guitar neck so that all four fingers can benefit from its support."²⁶ This left-hand position is also the standard technique used by classical guitar players.

Yet photographs and video of Freddie Green tell a different story. The promotional photo in Douglas Green's book (no relation) is just one of many examples that show Freddie Green with the thumb of his left hand curving around the side of the fretboard such that the back of the guitar neck lies basically in the palm of his hand.²⁷ In photographs and video, it can also easily be seen that Freddie Green held the guitar in a way that encouraged this left-hand thumb position.²⁸ Specifically, Green positioned the guitar such that the body was closer to lying flat on his lap with the strings facing upward. In this case, Dickert correctly notes that, "Green...held the guitar at approximately a forty-five degree angle in relation to his body."²⁹ Due to the angle of the guitar, tilted away from the chest of the player, it becomes very difficult to place the thumb in the center of the back of the guitar's neck. The left-hand wrist would be overly curved and awkwardly bent. A less potentially painful position for the left hand in this case is to do what Freddie Green does: shift the thumb up so that it is instead perpendicular to the fretboard rather than parallel. This left-hand position is very common among blues or folks guitarists where formal training was rarely available.

With his left hand in this position, Freddie Green could easily employ the thumb to either mute or fret the sixth string. The rest of the fingers of his left hand were therefore available to play notes on the rest of the strings or assist in muting. Since the fifth and sixth strings never seemed to be played at the same time in Green's style, even as described by the previously mentioned publications, Green was using his first four fingers (i.e. all except the thumb) to play the top four strings of the guitar.

It is now necessary to recall the instrumental history of Freddie Green. His first instrument was the ukulele, whose four strings are tuned exactly like the top four strings of a guitar except transposed up a fourth with the lower string up an additional octave. The main point to note is that chord shapes on the ukulele transfer directly over to the top four strings of the guitar. When Freddie Green switched over from banjo to guitar, he must have soon realized that chords on the guitar could be voiced just as they had on his old ukulele but with two new lower strings.

Worth noticing as well is that the tenor banjo, on which Freddie Green first learned to play rhythm in bands, also has only four strings. Albert Romani has written a very detailed article that connects chord shapes on the tenor banjo to those voicings used by Green on the guitar.³⁰ Romani bases his argument on relating chord shapes from the four strings of the banjo to voicings on the lower four strings of the guitar. I would like to postulate a simpler version of Romani's basic thesis: since the strings of the tenor banjo map more closely in pitch to the top four strings of the guitar (not the bottom), Green may have simply switched over to playing the top four strings of the guitar, using his thumb only for notes on the sixth string and mostly avoiding the fifth string. It is possible, moreover, that Green even tuned his banjo similarly to his ukulele in order to ease his transition between the instruments. If he did so, then Green's banjo would have been tuned exactly note-for-note like the top four strings of a guitar. While the tenor banjo is traditionally tuned in fifths, alternate tunings such as GDAE are common nowadays among multi-instrumentalists and were certainly known during Freddie Green's days. While I can offer no documentary support of this conjecture, it would be hard to prove one way or another barring any further evidence.

The main point to garner from the preceding discussion is that Green's left-hand technique differed significantly from a "trained" guitarist. To play the three- and four-note chords as described in the previously-mentioned publications with Green's hand position would involve using the thumb to fret the sixth string. I would imagine that some if not most guitarists who are interested in sounding more like Freddie Green are perhaps unwilling to potentially change their basic hand position so that the thumb is used to fret the sixth string. What then can a guitarist do to bridge this gap in technique?

ONE-NOTE CHORDS:

The answer lies in taking a closer look and listen to the actual voicings that Green uses. While the three educational materials I cited earlier offer three- or four-note voicings, all of which involve notes on the fifth or sixth strings, it is my stance that Green almost exclusively used one- or two-note voicings and certainly avoided voicings that included any notes on the fifth or sixth strings. If Green were to play a three-note voicing, it would consist instead of notes on the fourth, third, and second strings. To look at it one way, Green is basically playing ukulele and banjo voicings on the guitar.

A similar notion of Green's minimal chord voicing appeared in an article by Michael Pettersen in the October 2000 issue of *Down Beat*.³¹ In this article, Pettersen states that "95 percent of Green's lines were played solely on the fourth string."³² In other words, Freddie Green, according to Pettersen, did not play chords but instead played only single notes. Listening to the available recordings of Freddie Green where his guitar can easily be heard reveals that Pettersen's statement is mostly accurate. Certainly, the note on the fourth string of Green's guitar comes through the texture of the band most clearly.

Pettersen further revised what he calls his seemingly paradoxical "one-note chord" theory (how can one note be a chord?) in an article published in February 2004 of *Down Beat*.³³ Here, Pettersen concedes that Freddie Green was typically forming chord shapes but only pushing down on the fourth string such that only one note would sound. By making this concession, Pettersen addresses the critics of his one-note theory who say that they see Green fingering larger chords; Pettersen thus creates a compromise situation whereby he suggests Green does finger those larger chords but the listener only hears one or rarely two notes.

It may seem surprising in hindsight that many jazz guitar players have misunderstood how sparsely voiced Freddie Green's rhythm voicings were. Green himself admitted, "I don't try to play those big 'concert' chords. I play just a couple of notes, sometimes just one, but it sets the sound of the chord. When you try to play those big chords, it can make the whole band drag."³⁴ Yet, as I have previously shown, most of the available technical and instructional literature on Freddie Green discuss three- or four-note voicings using the sixth and fifth strings, despite Green's own protestations to the contrary and the aural evidence of his recordings.

Because of the revised view of Freddie Green's comping as mostly a single-note line, prior analyses of Green's musical style in theoretical terms based on three- or four-note chord shapes are rendered obsolete. Theories of which notes work or fit into which chords are still valid, but a different approach must be taken when thinking of rhythm guitar playing in the Freddie Green style as opposed to a style based on filling in harmonies with complex chords. Single-note playing creates a distinct line instead of a homogenous block of sound. While many musicians may think of rhythm guitar playing as concerned with the vertical aspects of the music, Freddie Green's style evokes the more horizontal aspects. It is the succession of Green's notes, the flow of evenly-spaced single tones, that characterizes Green's rhythm playing.

If Freddie Green is executing a constant string of single quarter notes, then he is not the only member of the Count Basie band to be playing such a pattern. As most listeners and players of jazz well know, the bass line of most swing-era music consists also of a steady stream of quarter notes, commonly known as the "walking bass." As an registrally higher version of this walking bass, Green's lines can be thus thought of as a "walking tenor." In essence, the rhythm guitar and bass work together. In fact, one may guess that a main reason Green avoids playing notes on the lower two strings of the guitar is to avoid conflicts with the bass, which often is walking within the same octave as the lower notes in the guitar would if a guitar player were to use the fifth or sixth string. Sound engineers will readily relate that small intervals in the lower frequencies quickly cause a recording to sound muddy.

When music theorists talk about two lines moving independently against one another over the course of time, they evoke the notion of counterpoint. Most jazz theory for rhythm guitar, however, seems to concern itself mainly with notions of harmony, i.e. which set of notes can be played over which chords. Harmony and counterpoint are of course inexorably linked, kind of like two sides of the same coin, but it seems that one side of the metaphorical coin has been favored while the other neglected.

Admittedly, many analyses of Freddie Green's playing have discussed issues that bring up concepts from counterpoint. In his PhD thesis, for example, Dickert tells us that "good voice-leading is essential" when describing how to imitate Green's style.³⁵ But Dickert fails to explain exactly what this "good voice-leading" is. Do sevenths on a dominant chord typically resolve downward to the third of the tonic? Do passing tones usually connect consonant sonorities? Are any particular patterns or sequences of notes preferred over others? Of course,

as has been previously argued, Dickert is working from a fundamentally flawed position since he conceives of Green as playing mainly three-note voicings.

Dickert seems to have been on the right track when he writes, "[Green] controlled the soprano voice of his chords in such a manner that a separate line, or counter-melody, often evolved. The creation of this melodic concept often took precedence over the exactness of the given chord changes."³⁶ While I agree with Dickert's assessment that Green creates a separate line, what is particularly odd about Dickert's statement is that it should be patently obvious to a listener that Green's separate lines are created on the fourth string. Since, as was previously mentioned, Dickert is working from the standpoint that Green used three-note voicings on the sixth, fourth, and third strings, then Dickert is somehow implying that Green created this separate line (the "soprano voice") on the third string. Somehow, Dickert has failed to realize the most obvious aspect of Green's style.

ANALYSIS:

Michael Pettersen has compiled a fair number of transcriptions of Freddie Green on Pettersen's own web site, www.freddiegreen.org. These transcriptions follow Pettersen's "one-note chord" theory and thus show Green's mostly linear playing. I have selected thirteen of these transcriptions for analysis. In addition, I have transcribed five examples of Green's playing from the 1962 album *Count Basie and the Kansas City 7*. Legendary recording engineer Rudy van Gelder did a fine job of sonically separating the rhythm section from the rest of the band as well as capturing the whole ensemble with a lot of detail. My transcriptions also include transcriptions of Ed Jones's bass playing so that we can more closely look at how Green's rhythm lines interact with the walking bass. N.B. Measure number references relate to the measure

numbers in the supplied transcriptions and do not necessarily correlate to the measure numbers of the tune itself.

As an introduction to Freddie Green's style, Michael Pettersen has provided a few tips for aspiring Freddie Green emulators in an online article entitled "For the Experienced Jazz Guitarist Only: Freddie Green Fundamentals."³⁷ Since Pettersen offers one of the few, albeit simple, analyses of Green's style with consideration to the linear view of Green's playing, it is worth discussing Pettersen's tips before progressing to my own conclusions.

One tip of Pettersen's is to "Jump no farther than a major third," a tip which echoes the sentiments of another tip that states, "Use stepwise motion often."³⁸ While in general, Green certainly uses stepwise motion, he often does jump farther than a major third. Take for example the transition between mm. 20-21 in "Four Five Six." Here Green jumps a fourth from A over the F7 to D over the Bb. The same exact jump (between the same notes and chords) occurs between mm. 48-49 in "Cute." As well, we can often observe Green jumping a fourth within a chord between the root and the fifth. Notice this change of position on m. 31 of "Magic Flea" or in m. 21 and m. 81 of "The Kid from Red Bank." Other examples exist (m. 16 of "Four Five Six", the leap of a fifth in m. 11 of "Moten Swing", etc.) to disprove Pettersen's limit of the major third. Therefore, we should only say that Green prefers stepwise motion and avoid making any hard and fast rule over the range of leaps.

Pettersen also advises the Freddie Green disciple to "Use an occasional passing note on beat 2 or 4."³⁹ While this tip does not conflict with Green's style, Pettersen again overly limits the scope of the tip. Green often uses larger-scale passing motion. For example, in bars 21-22 of "Shoutin' Blues," Green uses a passing note on beats 3 and 4 to transition between the fifth and third of the chord. In this case, since the D7 chord lasts two measures, the entire second half of

the first measure supports the dissonant note. Or take for example bars 21-22 of "One O'Clock Jump," where Green now moves up from the third of the chord to the fifth through a dissonance on beats 3 and 4. A similar motion occurs in bars 21-22 of "How High the Moon." In fact, it seems more likely to me that Green's passing motions typically involve two beats, not one as Pettersen implies.

An underlying implication of Pettersen's statement about passing notes is that Freddie Green mostly uses them as unaccented dissonances. The passing motions I have described on beats 3 and 4 may perhaps be considered unaccented in a larger hypermetrical sense, for example. Green, however, uses a fair amount of accented passing notes, too. In "Tally Ho, Mr. Basie," a dissonance on beats 1 and 2 of m. 25 transitions between the root and third of the chord. An even more obvious example occurs in m. 13 of "One O'Clock Jump" where the single passing note moves on beat 3 between the third and fifth of F7. More appearances of the accented passing motion can be seen in "I Got Rhythm," such as on beats 1 and 2 of bar 22 and beats 1 and 2 of bar 24. We can thus can a better sense that while Green employs many passing notes, he does not seem as concerned as to their metrical placement as Pettersen would have us believe.

Although passing notes are the only non-harmonic tone that Pettersen discusses, Freddie Green employs a broader palette of dissonances. Neighboring notes are also common in Green's playing, both in accented and unaccented settings. Take for example m. 18 of "Count's Place," where the Bb acts as an accented upper neighbor to the As it surrounds. A similar accented upper neighbor occurs in "The Kid from Red Bank" in m. 30. These neighbors also manifest themselves as both diatonic and chromatic embellishments. For instance, the Ab in m. 211 of "The Kid from Red Bank" shows a lower chromatic neighbor.

While I could provide a laundry list of non-harmonic tones in Freddie Green's playing, this list would be fairly boring to read. Instead, I would like to focus on common stylistic traits and motives in Green's playing. The first motive I would like to point out is a figure that emphasizes the ninth of a dominant seventh chord and leaps to or from the seventh. Green uses this pattern often when moving from a dominant or applied dominant to its resolution. The second half of bar 8 of "Corner Pocket" shows one example. Here, Green moves from a Bb on an Ab7 chord to the Gb, thus emphasizing the ninth and seventh of the Ab7. It is almost exclusively on dominant chords that Green uses this leap to and from the ninth and seventh. Ninths are seen in other places in Green's playing, but more often as passing or neighbor notes. More examples of this motive can be found in m. 8 of "How High the Moon," m. 14 of "One O'Clock Jump," m. 124 of "Every Day I Have the Blues," or m. 54 of "Cute."

Another consistent characteristic in how Freddie Green plays over dominant seventh chords is his strong preference for the tritone between the third and the seventh of the chord. This trait is particularly evident in the way Green plays the blues or blues-based tunes. Compare the transcriptions of "Wee Baby Blues" and "Count's Place," both of which are tunes in C blues. Green uses very similar notes for each song, leaning heavily on the Bb and A as well as their tritone partners E and Eb respectively. The choice of whether to use ^b7 of the key or ^3 of the key on the tonic seems mostly dictated by issues of range. For example, in "One O'Clock Jump" and "Four Five Six," both tunes in F blues, Green chooses the A as his primary note, probably more because it lies in a middle register similar to the Bb used in the C blues tunes.

Yet another classic Freddie Green phrase can be found in mm. 30-31 of "Secrets." Here, Green moves from a dissonant fourth over D7, down a semitone to the leading tone, and then finally to its resolution on G. This snippet provides a good example of the counterpoint in

Green's playing, for he has created what classical musicians would call a 4-3 suspension over the dominant, although the dissonant note lacks a proper preparation. In the "Secrets" example, the G in m. 30 might perhaps be analyzed as a dissonant passing tone, except that this figure appears often in Green's playing. In fact, I would argue that it is his ubiquitous cadential gesture. Examine mm. 34-35 in "Shoutin' Blues" or mm. 34-35 of "Count's Place." In other situations, Green seems less concerned with the proper resolution of the leading tone itself than with the creation of the suspension figure. Bar 10 of "The Kid from Red Bank" shows a jump down from the leading tone to the fifth of the following C7 chord. Conversely, in "Oh, Lady Be Good," Green jumps up from the leading tone in bar 6 to the third of the following tonic. Notice also in the two prior examples how the initial dissonance is not traditionally prepared. Green thus shows a fairly free use of dissonance, both in its preparation and resolution.

The derivation of this $\hat{1}-\hat{7}-\hat{1}$ motion over the dominant seems to arise out of the more common $ii7-V7-I$ progression, where these same scale degrees form the seventh, third, and root of the chords, respectively speaking. Take for example bars 12-13 from "Every Day I Have the Blues." Here we see the same lower neighbor figure to the root of the tonic chord, but the figure is now more congruent with the harmonies over which Green plays. Bars 26-27 of "How High the Moon," bars 6-7 of "Secrets," and bars 28-29 of "Tally Ho, Mr. Basie" also display the same cadential motive over $ii7-V7-I$. In a sense, therefore, we can guess that Green is perhaps substituting his $ii7-V7-I$ figure over a pure $V7-I$.

One of Green's most effective devices is his ability to find notes that can be held in common throughout changing harmonies. Often, Green will even pedal a single tone, particularly scale degrees one or six ($\hat{1}$ or $\hat{6}$), over chord changes that do not necessarily imply the note Green is playing. In "Secrets," for example, Green holds the B through three bars of

different harmony in mm. 25-27. He holds that same B for even longer in bars 33-36 over a different set of chords. We can notice a similar trick in mm. 5-8 of "I Got Rhythm," where Green stays on $\hat{1}$ (Bb) despite the F7 chord in the second half of bar 6. In "Tally Ho, Mr. Basie," a tune based of the same chord changes as "I Got Rhythm," Green again pedals that Bb $\hat{1}$ through almost an entire statement of the A section in bars 33-40. In these instances, the rhythm guitar part acts not only as a rhythmic glue but also as a harmonic glue by simply keeping the same note going.

The use of pedal tones is not the only situation where Green's playing conflicts with the underlying chord changes. Because of Green's very goal-oriented linear style, he tends to often appear to ignore local chord changes in favor of moving in a linear or scalar way to a cadential point. Take for example bars 48 and 72 of "What'cha Talkin?" Here, the first G on the beat seems more linearly conceived as a lower neighbor to the A in the next bar than a 9th over the F7 chord. Each measure in both examples seems moreover to give a double neighbor figure to the eventual resolution on A than to be concerned with the local chord changes. In fact, it is Green's linear and scalar thinking that potentially leads to some of the figures previously described. Look again at mm. 23-25 in "Tally Ho, Mr. Basie." What may be initially described as an accented passing note in bar 24 is more the result of a broad line leading from the previous bar to the goal note Bb in bar 25. Thus, while Green is certainly aware of the harmonies over which he is playing, he also shapes lines that, via their motion towards points of harmonic arrival, can cut through the chord changes of the song.

Because of the highly linear playing of Freddie Green, a sort of first species counterpoint results from his rhythm guitar line and the bass part. It would be specious, however, (no pun intended!) to imply that Green and a given bass player had worked out the counterpoint

beforehand. Green himself says, "I do a lot of chord changes but there is no question of working them out beforehand with the bass player. I don't do anything in advance. It's always on the spur of the moment."⁴⁰ Thus, I would like to characterize Green's playing instead as improvised counterpoint. Through the use of a recurring set of motives and stylistic characteristics, the two lines of Green and his bass player often result in a sort of jazz version of classical counterpoint.

Perhaps not surprisingly, many of the features of classical counterpoint exist sometimes in the lines Green will create. Good examples of parallel sixths and thirds between guitar and bass are easily found. Take for instance bars 9, 21 59-60, or 66-67 in "What'cha Talkin?" where the guitar part forms parallel sixths with the bass. Notice also the parallel thirds in bars 9 and 13 of "Lady Be Good" or the parallel sixths in mm. 59-60 of the same song. A good example of a voice exchange occurs in mm. 11-12 of "Lady Be Good" between the guitar and bass as well.

Of course, much of the interaction between Green's guitar lines and those of the bass player does not adhere to rules of strict counterpoint. Parallel ninths and sevenths abound, cross-relations occur near cadential points, leading tones are doubled, etc. But why should Green's counterpoint be forced into some theorist's straight-jacket? Many of Green's devices end up increasing the effectiveness of his line. For example, cross relations such as the one in bar 18 of Count's Place (A versus Ab) are so fleeting that the ear hardly notices. Moreover, these dissonances eventually get resolved, perhaps not in a textbook fashion, but usually in a way that makes sense in terms of the overall line.

Thus, what seems to be more important to Green's jazz counterpoint is the general shape and direction of the line. The instances of contrary motion, such as in bars 9-10 of "Secrets," give strong independence to the parts and help give a sense of movement despite the static harmony. When Green pedals a single note, the oblique motion of the bass line suddenly has

perhaps even more license and liberty to play chromatic and altered notes because of the solid foundation of the pedal tone itself.

CONCLUSION:

Although many jazz guitar players seem certain of Freddie Green's technique of playing rhythm guitar, audio and video evidence points to a simpler method. Green often uses a "one-note chord" style that acts as a counterpoint to the bass. This counterpoint may not adhere to the rules of classical theory, but it shares many similar features while at the same time having a more free conception of voice-leading. The result is a sort of jazz counterpoint, improvised by Green, which can be characterized by the following ten traits:

1. Extremely consistent four-to-the-bar "walking tenor" rhythm guitar style
2. Creation of counter-melody to bass line through notes on the D-string
 - "one-note chords" counterpoint the walking bass
 - parallel thirds or sixths with bass line
 - pedal tone to create oblique motion for bass line
 - voice exchanges between rhythm guitar and bass
 - increase of tension towards cadences (often through cross-relations)
3. Special handling of dominant seventh chords
 - emphasis on 3rd or 7th
 - leaps between 9th and 7th
 - use of characteristic tritone (between 3rd and 7th) as two-note accent
4. Cadential phrase of $\hat{1}-\hat{7}-\hat{1}$ over $ii7-V7-I$ or $V7-I$

- approximates classic 4-3 suspension
5. Highly linear motion
 - consistent use of stepwise motion
 - leaps of a third or fourth are rare; no leaps bigger than a fifth
 - chromatic passing tones and neighbor notes
 - finds possibilities to use falling chromatic lines
 6. Bridges one chord to the next
 - holds common tones between different chords
 - uses chord tones from prior and upcoming harmony
 7. Free use of dissonance as needed, both in preparation and resolution
 8. Emphasis on $\hat{6}$ and $\hat{1}$, especially when playing over the tonic harmony
 9. Passing motion, both unaccented and accented
 - often between 3rd and 5th of a chord
 - exists on both a metric and hypermetric level
 10. Develops goal-oriented lines that sometimes conflict with underlying chord changes
 - thinking "chordally" versus thinking "scalarly"

As has been shown, Green's unique playing style most probably evolved from his non-traditional instrumental training. His experiences on the ukulele and banjo certainly influenced his left-hand technique and the register in which he voiced the guitar. Green's style can thus be seen as an outgrowth not only of musical necessity but of historical circumstance. In a sense, Freddie Green has pruned the tree of rhythm guitar playing, leaving only a single note. But it's the right note and played at the right time.

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* transcription by Trevor de Clercq

** transcription by Roland Mueller, edited by Michael Pettersen

† transcription by Michael Pettersen

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