



CHITARRE 313

The Style of Albert Lee

Hello everyone and welcome to this second installment dedicated to country guitar. Last month, as an introduction to this genre, we talked about Vince Gill and the way of bending the strings unique to this style. This month we'll talk about another country music legend: Albert Lee.

If the name Albert Lee doesn't ring any bell, please allow me to introduce him to you. Albert is a British singer and guitarist who achieved international success in the US around the mid '70s when he was asked to replace the legendary James Burton in Emmylou Harris's famous Hot Band. During his subsequent career he has played with Jerry Lee Lewis, Eric Clapton, Joe Cocker, Dolly Parton, Everly Brothers, Brad Paisley and many others. Nowadays, although close his 70th birthday, Albert is still active and every year his on tour with his band Hogan's Heroes.

During my professional experience I've had the chance to work with Albert a few times, sometimes for masterclasses, sometime for live shows and other times for TV shows and every time has been a great privilege. Regarding his joining Emmylou's Hot Band, Albert told me that in those days they used to hang out a lot together. He wasn't in the band but they were quite good friends so when James Burton had to leave the band to go back to Elvis the obvious choice was Albert. So, 1976 he became a member of the Hot Band and in those years he wrote very important pages of the country guitar story, pages destined to influence all future generations.

Albert had a very different sound compared to his predecessor James Burton or anyone else at that time (Jerry Reed or Chet Atkins). One of the things that distinguished Albert was his use of hybrid picking to emulate the banjo. In fact Albert had developed a way to play arpeggios, scales and phrases with open strings using the pick plus one or two fingers of the picking hand (which is called hybrid picking). In those years that was a big innovation because nobody was really playing in that way, at least to that extent.

What's unusual about Albert's playing is that whereas most 'humans' would prefer using pick plus middle finger, Albert uses pick plus little finger! He explained that this choice wasn't for a specific reason or because he wanted to be original but simply because it was the easiest option for him. I believe that this is something quite important to keep in mind when we're learning a new technique: follow what's natural (and not what's natural for others!).



Nowadays hybrid picking has overlapped into many styles, from metal (Kiko Loureiro) to jazz (Bill Frisell) and this has brought not only a higher technical proficiency but also the development of two quite different sounds and approaches. This sound difference comes from a very small detail that escape many people at first: the use of the nails or the flesh. Country guitarists tend to play hybrid picking with nails (if the natural nails break too easily many - including me - use acrylic nails). This gives a better definition and a brighter sound. Rock/fusion guitarists tend to use the flesh which gives a more rounded and darker sound.

As an introduction to this technique I composed a solo in the style of Albert Lee where hybrid picking gets used quite a bit. The chord progression is in C and it's a typical 2-step country (where line dancers dance!). The lick which most relies on hybrid picking is in the first four bars. In the transcription I wrote the suggested picking directions but it's important to remember that those picking directions are not compulsory! It's just a starting point! If it's more natural (just for the sake of argument) to use the pinky instead of the middle finger then it's better to follow our natural tendency. Sometimes what's easier and right for others is not easier for us!

Enjoy it and I'll see you next month!

TONE

Albert has been using his Ernie Ball Music Man Albert Lee Signature guitar for many years. Basically that's like a strat which Albert normally plays in position two (bridge + central). When I played with Albert I saw him using many different types of amps and always getting his tone so this forces me to say that any valve amp with a good clean sound will do the job. Anyway, when he's on tour he uses a Fender Tone Master head with a 4x12 cabinet.

RECOMMENDED LISTENING

Albert Lee & Hogans Heroes - Live At The New Morning 2007

This is a double live album with Albert and his band Hogan's Heroes. It's a really good album which perfectly capture the sound of the band live. In addition to Albert's traditional repertoire (like Country Boy) there are many rock 'n' roll tunes which over the years have become part of the band's repertoire and contribute to making this album easier listening for somebody new to the genre.

Dario Cortese



♩ = 165

G⁷

m a m a m m m m m m m m

TAB: 6 7 6 0 | 0 0 2 0 3 2 0 2 0 | 0 2 0 3 0 0 2 0

4

C

m m m m

TAB: 0 0 2 0 3 2 0 2 0 | 3 5 7 5 7 5 | 7 5 8 5 7 (7) 5 7 5

full

7

C F

TAB: 5 5 7 5 7 5 | 9 8 10 8 10 8 | 11 8 11 8 10 9 10 8 | 12 10 12 10 14 13

full

11

8va

C G⁷

TAB: 15 13 16 13 13 16 13 13 | 15 15 (15) 13 13 | 17 15 13 15 12 13 | 14 12

full

14

C

TAB: 13 13 15 13 15 | 13 15 13 16 15 13 14 13 | 13

full