



CHITARRE 316

The Style Of Brent Mason

Howdy and welcome to this last installment about country guitar. In the previous articles we've talked about some of the most common techniques in country guitar and to so we've studied some of the most influential guitarists in this genre. To conclude this series we'll talk about the guitarist who has dominated the Nashville scene in the last 30 years: Brent Mason

Brent is a session guitarist who is well known by country guitar fan for playing on many country artists' records. His career started around the mid '80s when Chet Atkins invited him to play on one of his records. From that moment on his career went skyrocketed!

Within a few years Brent started playing on more and more records until he started doing an average of an album a day. The quality of his playing and the speed at which he can create original parts and tones enabled him to win the Academy of Country Music Award as Guitarist of the Year. Not once, but twelve times. In addition he has won two prestigious Country Music Awards as Musician of the Year.

Brent is currently one of the most recorded guitarists in the history of music (if not the most recorded). Just consider that from the '90s onwards Brent appeared on 9 out of 10 songs on country radio.

So what is that makes Brent so special?

Brent's playing style is quite complex and varied. Here are some important points:

- **Thumb-pick:** Brent has always used a thumb-pick. He started when he was 6 years old and he has never looked back. This has led him to study the technique of Jerry Reed and Chet Atkins to then apply it to his own style. There's a lot to say about his picking hand but to keep things simple... Brent normally plays alternating the thumb-pick with the fingers (e.g. thumb-pick, middle, thumb-pick, ring). The index gets used only when playing double stops to pop the strings. He hardly uses the thumb-pick to alternate pick. He uses it as a pick only in the rhythm parts or in particular phrases, but the big chunk of the work is done combining the thumb-pick and the fingers.
- **Creativity:** Brent is incredibly creative. In all my years as a country guitar lover I transcribed more than 500 songs played by Brent and I hardly ever found the same lick twice. In the summer of 2011 I was doing some work with him in Nashville and watching him doing 'his thing' was absolutely incredible. The first thing to know is that in Nashville people record all at the same time, in the same room (old school). There isn't really time to rehearse. You listen to the demo of the song you're about to record then you go into the studio and record it. The record is normally the second take.

Within 10 minutes the song is pretty much done and you can carry on with overdubbing if needed. There isn't the time to sit down and find a good part to play. In this scenario, Brent is able to create signature riffs, rhythm parts and solos that he plays with atomic-clock precision.

- Tone: Brent has an incredible ear when it comes to guitar tones. He's able to hear things that the majority of humans (including me!) are not aware of. When talking with many Nashville sound engineers about Brent I was told: "Brent has the ability to provide the perfect sound for the song that you're recording. We don't have to work to make it come out, it's already there!". One of the things that Brent uses extensively is the Boss GE-7 (EQ) at the beginning of the effect chain. This allows him to work on the frequencies that make the guitar part come out in the mix.

Basically, the truth is that Brent is some sort of alien.

To study his style I composed a solo on a Tracy Byrd groove. I played the solo with the a thumb-pick but it's playable with a more common hybrid picking approach as well. In the transcription I wrote the picking directions (f = finger, thumb-pick or pick is always played as a down stroke).

I hope you enjoyed this series and that it has been a chance to discover a style where there's a lot to learn. Thanks to the Guitar Institute of London and Chitarre for giving me this opportunity and also thanks to all the readers for the numerous emails I'm getting. Have fun and keep rockin'!

TONE

In the last few years Brent has been using a black face ('60s) Fender Bassman head in combination with stomp boxes. To get closer to his tone you'll need a nice valve amp (better if Fender), a compressor, a Boss GE-7, a light overdrive and a slap back delay.

RECOMMENDED LISTENING

Alan Jackson - Who I Am

This Alan Jackson record is probably the one that gave Brent the most fame. One of the most famous guitar solos appears on "I Don't Even Know Your Name" where Brent plays electric and acoustic solos. If you decide to learn it don't forget that I have a free lesson on it on my website!



♩ = 182

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(2)

(2)

X

f = finger of the picking hand (any)