

Charlie Hunter: New Meanings in Virtuosity

By Tristan Hancock



Introduction

Charlie Hunter, a unique eight-string guitarist, has made a relatively fast ascent to commercial success (at least in jazz terms). I identify this rise as beginning with his Blue Note debut *Bing, Bing, Bing* (1995), which was his first recording where he plays an 8 string guitar. However Hunter's ability to play his newly invented instrument did not reach maturity until later. In this study I have identified a personal playing style that he developed during what I have labeled as his mid period. This was approximately from 1998 when Hunter moved from the Bay Area to New York until 2003 when Hunter began releasing albums through the independent label Rope-a-Dope. In this study I will show that over this time Hunter was consistently refining and redefining his concept about what his newly invented instrument was capable of, and as a result of this he evolved his compositional style.

To support my arguments I will use interviews with Hunter and transcriptions I have made of his compositions. Very little material regarding the techniques and methods that Hunter uses are currently available for reference. Hunter's music does not fit into any easily explained category, and he has actively avoided referring to his music as part of any specific genre. His music is as individualistic as his instrument.

In this study I will first look at Hunter's history and influences, then explore his development of both the eight-string guitar and the musical language required to be able to play it. I will focus predominantly on the mid period of Hunter's development, as the true nature of the instrument was not realized until this time. I will also examine how as a new musical language and aesthetic was developed, a parallel concept was created as to what could be regarded as a virtuoso performance.

When a new instrument is played, the creation of new music is inevitable. In studying Hunter's music I have investigated his appropriation of existing material from a range of musical sources and the unique sound that resulted from his application of these materials to his 8-string guitar. I will also identify how Hunter's approach to composing new songs developed from this process.

History and Influences

Charlie Hunter grew up in the musical melting pot that was Berkeley, California. His mother repaired guitars and amps and was a connoisseur of blues, rock'n'roll, and soul. He describes the effect that growing up in the Bay Area had on his own musical style:

“ I was exposed to everything from the Dead Kennedy's to P-Funk to Art Blakey. In the Bay Area, you have all of these different musical cultures living together and all of these different musical cultures and their music gets semi-assimilated into this non-polarized state of being where hybrids are free to grow, and there are all of these genres and cross genres to play in and around.” (charliehunter.com)

Although he went to Berkeley High which was acclaimed for its prestigious jazz program, it was not until the age of 19 that Hunter discovered jazz and the jazz finger style guitar greats; George Van Eps, Joe Pass, Lenny Breau, and Tuck Andress (as well as many other instrumentalists) and began his journey to eventually further their legacy. He acquired a seven-string guitar and focused on learning and performing with it. Poet/Rapper Michael Franti formed the hip-hop group The Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy and invited Hunter to join.

Craving a better bass sound and separation for the treble strings, Hunter enlisted luthier Ralph Novax to create more seven-string guitars, fanning the frets of the guitars to give each string its own length and splitting the pickups to route the lower strings through a different speaker. One guitar even had a fretless bass side.

Eventually, dissatisfied with the Pop music scene Hunter left the group and began performing regularly in a jazz context, both solo and in groups, releasing an independent album *The Charlie Hunter Trio*. At this point Hunter and Novax extended his concept even further by creating an eight-string. Soon after this he acquired a contract with Blue Note Records.

Most likely because of his cover of alternative rock group Nirvana's *Come As You Are* (rearranged in 6/8) as well as the novelty value of his instrument, he got performance dates on the alternative music tour *Lollapalooza*. As a result of constant touring and his exposure to a wide range of audiences, young and old, Hunter soon became Blue Notes biggest selling current artist until Norah Jones in 2001.

History of “Mid” Period

Hunter, feeling unchallenged by the Berkeley scene moved in 1998 to New York State to meet new musicians and expand his musical experience. When speaking of this time he describes the process as “gone from being a boy to being a man.” (Sun Mc Elderry) As his confidence on the instrument increased, he began putting himself in more challenging positions. This time, beginning in 1998 and finishing in late 2003, as I have previously mentioned, can be seen as the mid period in the development of Hunter’s instrumental technique and composition style. In studying Hunter’s work I have focused on this period specifically as it represents the culmination of his initial musical concept on the newly created instrument.

In recordings made previously, Hunter had functioned predominantly as an accompanist behind horn players. The Return of the Candyman (1998) is a move away from this role to becoming a soloist in his own right. The addition of percussionist John Santos, Vibraphonist Stefon Harris and the drumming of Scott Amendola to Hunters playing meant a new range of skills and aesthetics were required to fill out the sound. In regards to aforementioned mid period I regard this recording as a transitional point from his earlier formative style.

Having developed his confidence on the eight-string guitar Hunter recorded the album Duo (1999) with drummer/percussionist Leon Parker. Hunter when about playing in a duo setting says; “It’s scary and challenging at the same time.... You have to be on at every moment. Every limb is doing something. There’s no rest and no time to recoup your energy. After one hour you’re totally expended.” (www.charliehunter.com) Hunter’s music began to include the use of more world music rhythms, and was the beginning of moving away from the swing and backbeat shuffles found on his formative albums.

After having toured as a duo and preparing his next album, Hunter is quoted as saying “I think now I’m strong enough to really lead a band and make an impact” (Sun Mc Elderry). At the same recording session Hunter recorded an album of solo guitar pieces as well which he later released independently on his own label Contra Punto. And while 2000’s release Charlie Hunter re-introduced horn players on a few songs, the new stripped back percussion-centric aesthetic remains apparent.

Songs from the Analog Playground (2001), Hunter’s final release for Blue Note, is a collection of covers of pop songs and originals with guest vocalists. The group comprised of two percussionists Steve Chopek and Chris Lovejoy playing half a drum set each and saxophonist John Ellis. By this time Hunter had immersed himself in Brazilian percussion music, and performed on percussion regularly.

Deciding to move in a more independent musical direction, Hunter released 2003’s Right Now Move on small independent label Rope-A-Dope. This album is Hunters first recording in a quintet and is the largest of his ensembles thus far, comprising of John Ellis on saxophone, Gregiore Maret on Chromatic Harmonica, Curtis Fowlkes on Trombone and Derrick Philips on drums. The arrangements lush, detailed and intricate, and a wide range of world musics influences the songs. This album, while the culmination of the mid period, is also a transition towards a new sound and concept. However continuing study on Hunter beyond this point however, although interesting, is beyond the scope of this study.

Development of the Instrument Concept and Musical Language

Hunter's eight-string guitars from the period 1994 to 2003 are based upon a unique design which Hunter and Ralph Novak co-created. When discussing this design of guitar it is important to recognise that it is actually (at least in both concept and sound) two separate instruments (the guitar and bass), this is the fundamental concept that Hunter based the instrument upon. The bass strings are tuned to E, A, and D which are the lowest 3 strings on a standard 4 string bass guitar, while the guitar strings are tuned A, D, G, B, and E; the 5 highest strings of a standard tuned 6 string guitar. The bass and guitar strings vibrations are picked up by two separate magnetic pickups, which are then in turn are sent to two separate electric amplifiers. Hunter also makes use of analogue effects to alter and separate the two sounds even further.

Initially the concept began as Hunter explains "an instrument that could give me the range of the bass and the guitar, but also still be playable" the eight-string limit was decided because "ten strings is too much for me. So I just settled on the eight-string". Hunter had a background in other instruments and used them to create an approach to his new instrument, when talking of this he says, "I'd played a little drum set and some bass as well, so I kind of had an idea about trying to create an instrument that could put me in a situation where I could do all of those things." (puremusic.com)

Because of the uniqueness of Hunter's eight-string guitar and the lack of any previous masters on the instrument he was essentially starting from scratch. As a result Hunter spent a lot of time experimenting with what the eight-string guitar could do. Initially most of what he played was coming from a guitaristic perspective, applying the concepts of Joe Pass and George Van Eps to the instrument. Hunter has also identified linear player Pat Martino (although he has since admitted that he has so far failed to apply Martino's style to the eight-string (Downbeat 2005) as an influence, and his album Bing, Bing, Bing (1995) appears to contain Martino's influence in the use of long 16th note lines at a fast tempo. Hunter attributes his striving to play these kinds of lines on his own immaturity as an instrumentalist: "When I was 25 and I first got the instrument... my goal was ... I've got to play all the bass stuff and all the guitar stuff, and really nail it, and ... my idea about the instrument was coming from this very kind of macho (attitude)... (I wanted to) play what I thought of at the time as what I had to be playing, which was very linear guitar style and really active bass style." (ASCAP Audio Portrait)

And it was only in the process of performing and composing that he discovered what the instrument was really suited for. From the start Hunter tried to see how many parts he could get happening at once, and then as he became more accomplished on the instrument, he began to focus on trying to evolve something new and original rather than simply imitating a six string guitar and bass. Hunter says: "The longer I studied this instrument ... the less and less I feel that I have to be the guitar player or be the bass player. I'm trying to evolve it into something which is coming from those worlds, but is neither of those things." (ASCAP Audio portrait)

This need to evolve and simplify the guitar and bass parts comes because of the physical limitations involved in actually playing the instrument. Hunter explains that it is a balancing act "Playing this way can be strangely limiting, the more soloing I do, the less complex the bass lines become, and vice-versa." When talking about the demands on the left hand when playing he says, "With the left hand, it's a matter of juggling. At any given space and time... (the fingers) can be in different places, making mind over matter happen. (Seth Rogovoy)

To really understand the limitations and difficulties relating to instrumental performance that Hunter alludes to, I will briefly detail the left hand technique. While Charlie Hunter's right hand technique resembles, at least superficially, that of a classical or finger style guitarist, his left hand

technique is unique. Firstly there is the demand that when a bass note shifts in relation to the chord or melody note played above it (or vice versa) a new unique fingering combination is required. The purely mechanical aspect is challenging to say the least, and the wider stretches required by the larger fret board make many chord combinations difficult. The process of committing all the possible finger positions to memory is long and time consuming. Then, building up the capacity to articulate and execute these musical ideas in a rhythmic context, let alone improvise or be musical requires a lot of practice, as Hunter explains:

It's too damn complicated; that's the problem with it. The right hand is kind of the execution hand, rhythmically. If you think about it, there's all of the rhythmic combinations, the counterpoint between the thumb and the fingers—thumb playing the bass, fingers generally playing the guitar. Tons of that kind of counterpart going on. Then you have the left hand, which is the conception hand, dealing, in any given millisecond throughout the music, with your four fingers having to act as a team. Then you put those two hands together and that creates a third set of combinations between those two hands. So, basically, through experience you just learn millions and millions of these kinds of combinations. The more you learn, the easier it is to get to the music. (All About Jazz 2005)

Hunter has developed certain positions and systems to simplify this process, for example he will usually use the index and middle finger to fret the bass part and the ring, pinky and whichever finger is not being used to fret the bass part, to play the guitar part. Unless he barres (to fret more than one string with the side of the finger) the guitar frets Hunter is generally limited to playing 3 note chords, or 3 note per string scalar patterns. The preference for using index and middle finger on the lower and fatter bass strings is also in part because the other smaller fingers are not as strong.

The right hand technique mainly uses the thumb for executing bass lines on the lowest three strings and the fingers are used on the top five 'guitar' strings. While he uses all four fingers of the right hand to play chords, melodies are plucked out with the index and middle finger. As identified before, initially Hunter's playing style used the ring finger as well but, as his rhythmic and tonal concept progressed, the need to play fast 16th note lines diminished, thus the fingering technique simplified.

So far we have looked at coordination as merely being able to play the required note combinations. Separating the feel of the two musical lines is also difficult. This is done to make the two separate lines believable, as though they originated from two independent instruments. Classical guitarists have similar sorts of demands, however the music in their repertoire is generally less rhythmically demanding, as there is less syncopation involved.

Hunter's instrument's tone has evolved parallel to his technique and instrument concept. Hunter's tone at its basic level comes from the attack of his fingers on the strings, and as he simplified his fingering technique, his ability to make the notes ring clearly and consistently improved. Recognising that players of the Hammond B3 electric organ had a similar musical concept (the ability of playing bass lines, chords and melodies simultaneously), Hunter began an intense period of transcription and the study of organ greats like Big John Patton, Lonnie Johnson, and Larry Young (Guitar Player August 1998). This study encouraged Hunter's use of rotary speaker effects, to imitate the swirling Leslie sound. Another factor is that the rotary effect also, when used, disguises much of the mistakes that can occur with a less than perfect technique.

In the period between 1997 and 1998, Hunter's bass sound is predominantly low frequency, and has little definition in the higher frequencies. He achieved this by using nylon wound bass strings. This was done to emulate the characteristic dark bass pedal sound found on an organ. His use of a

volume pedal also imitates the dynamic foot control that organists use.

In live performances during the period of 1999 onwards in his smaller duo groups with either Leon Parker or Adam Cruz on drums/percussion Hunter began to use his voice more when improvising, including scatting in unison or harmony (thirds, sixths and fourths with his guitar lines. Hunter also began to imitate hollers, grunts and other idiomatic vocal techniques found in African American musics. This use of the voice (when soloing) was based on his own study of Eddie Harris's book *Intervallic Concepts* which he used to practice sight singing to improve his own internal musical concept (*Guitar Player* 1998), as well as providing another "voice" to his growing musical arsenal, which he would use to develop his live solos and arrangements. These vocal skills feature very little in his studio recordings, and when they do they are relatively quiet.

At some point during 1998 – 1999 Hunter began performing exclusively seated due to the onset of tendonitis. This altering of playing position meant that his current guitar was uncomfortable to play, therefore Novak redesigned a wider body for the guitar more suited for seated playing. Also during this period Hunter's use of guitar-centric effects such as wah wah pedals and distortion began to decrease, and the in Hunter's album recordings between 1998 and 2003 had neither of those effects. This may be in part because of him finding other outlets for those sounds in other groups such as *Garage A Trois*.

Hunter recognises that the guitar, as the world's most widely used instrument (*Live at the Traft*), has a wide range of musical styles developed on it. He over the years spent time studying and emulating the diverse guitar styles which have developed in genres such as jazz, rock, blues, country, Brazilian, Afro-Cuban, African and Middle Eastern musics.

Another aspect of Hunter's musical progression is found in the conceptual development of his bass line construction. In his first four albums; *Bing Bing Bing*, *Ready, set... Shango!*, and *Natty Dread*, predominantly simplified bass lines are found. These bass parts are usually based on walking and 1/5 patterns and are mainly played over swing, latin and funk rhythms. The walking bass lines are rhythmically simple (four to a bar) while the more synchopated patterns are generally based on the root and fifth of the chord. And on songs where the composed bass line was more elaborate, it would only be played if another instrument played the melody. Then, during Hunter's improvisation section in the song a simpler bass line would be played. It was only in Hunter's mid period works from 1998 onwards where a confidence is found to maintain a more complex bass line while soloing, for example the song *Two for Bleu* from 2000's *Charlie Hunter* where the Hunter plays a synchopated three over four bass line lasting four bars. Hunter then improvises with predominantly eighth note based lines over it, and occasionally sixteenth subdivisions. A previous example to this recording was the song *Mean Streak* from the album *Duo* which during the melody has a four bar synchopated bass line, however Hunter does not improvise over it and solos instead over a synchopated (similar to a tumbao rhythm) walking bass pattern, This may be from lack of confidence in holding the bass lines rhythm whilst improvising at that point in time, or more likely because the bass line during the melody section has large leaps in intervals which would impose position shifting in the left hand.

During Hunter's middle period of development between 1998 and 2002 the development of bass and rhythm seems to be in the fore, this is shown with Hunter's commissioning of guitars with longer scale necks and experimenting with tuning up a half step so that the bass strings had both a better sound and string tension.

Another musical area Hunter worked at during this period is his understanding of rhythms. Hunter having played drumset since he was young began focusing on other percussion instruments (like the Brazilian *Pandiero*). Hunter talks about his reasons for practicing drumset: "It's not like my drum set playing is great at all, or that I would even think about playing in front of people, but it's a great kind

of a cross reference, because that taught me how counterpoint works, how rhythms work together, and how it's supposed to feel when you play one rhythm over another rhythm" (puremusic.com)

Whilst touring and performing with drummer Adam Cruz, Hunter was encouraged to take up practicing latin percussion instruments in order that he could learn how play the correct feel for the rhythms (tumbao for example) that he would need to play on his guitar. Hunter began to intensively study the pandiero which eventually he would perform with and make it part of his performances. His 2001 quartet with percussionists Steve Chopek and Chris Lovejoy and saxophonist John Ellis made percussion and rhythm an integral part of the performance, playing samba style pieces with all of the band members playing a percussion instrument.

By the release of 2003's Right Now Move Hunter had created a recognizable musical style and language on the eight-string guitar and began looking to developing his composing and arranging skills further. Hunter created a quintet comprised of John Ellis on saxophone, Curtis Fowlkes on trombone, Gregoire Maret on chromatic harmonica, and Derrick Philips on drums. This particular group with its wide timbral palette and dynamic range afforded Hunter an opportunity to experiment with different sounds and effects whilst arranging. Because there was less of a need for Hunter to solo, as there were other instrumentalists, Hunter was able to focus on further developing his bass playing and arranging skills.

It is important to realize that when looking at the eight-string guitar, that while its technique is derived from guitar, bass and the drum kit , it is none of those things in isolation, but rather a new hybrid instrument that has taken and distilled the essential elements of each instrument. This statement by Hunter seems to reflect his attitude about both his instrumental technique and the music he creates "That's the cool thing about being influenced by lots of things, to hybridise them to your own sensibilities." (charliehunter.com)

New Instrument New Music

Because Hunter's instrument is the first of its kind, every thing played on it can be considered as new music. The unique musical approach required to play the eight-string guitar, as well as the actual sound that the instrument makes creates a unique musical style- even when reinterpreting old material. Hunter recognises that it would one thing to make a new instrument and create a few songs on it that are impressive, but what Hunter has strived to do is to learn and apply pre-existing musical languages onto the eight-string guitar and truly master the instrument in any context. Like any instrumentalist Hunter feels this is still a work in progress and is striving to push the boundaries of his knowledge and technique.

Hunter eschewed the tried and true tendency of a lot of jazz artists to essentially record and play either standards or tunes composed during the jazz eras of the 1940's and 50's. When he did play other artists music, it was interpretations of the music of his generation, Nirvana, Bob Marley, Stevie Wonder, James Brown, Donny Hathaway and the Beach Boys. When explaining his own music he says "I like to think of what I do as improvisational-oriented pop music" (charliehunter.com) and makes the point that this approach was exactly the same as the great jazz musicians during jazz music's most popular eras like Charlie Parker and Miles Davis. Hunter attributes his musical style to his love of many styles of music: "Coming from all these different places, I lose the dogma of all those different places and try to make something happen that's about me, that's honest, the by-product is something that people of my generation can relate to." (Seth Rogovoy)

Releasing at least one album a year since 1995, each comprised mainly of originals (excepting 1997's Tribute to Bob Marley Natty Dread) Hunter has composed and released over 60 original compositions under his own name and not including those released under the many side projects and collaborations he has also been involved in.

Development of Compositional Style

My study and transcription of Hunters compositions revealed reoccurring musical devices. In particular I identified a characteristic song form of Hunters that became increasingly more prevalent in the mid period (between 1998 and 2003) of his artistic development. I shall refer to this form as the contrapuntal form. The existence of an archetypical composition suggests that Hunter has developed a systematic method of writing, and furthermore I believe that this composition process is a direct result of Hunter's study and practice on his instrument.

First I will explain the contrapuntal form; it has two themes, and these themes are arranged in a AABA pattern over 16 or 32 bars. The A section is a fully composed contrapuntal theme with two separate melodic lines played with the guitar and bass voice. The bass melody is often stated first as an intro section. The B section however is either improvised or composed material played on other instruments. When describing his compositional approach Hunter says "I'll have an "A" section and he'll (the saxophonist) have a "B" section, or his "B" section will actually become the "A" section, or whatever. We'll just mash stuff together to make tunes." (All about jazz 2005). This technique is similar in aesthetic to the musical collage techniques in Hip Hop and other electronic sample based music, Hunter explains "I'm really into coming up with and playing different kinds of grooves ... I try to distil all the music I love into something that sounds organic and natural." (charliehunter.com)

In the period of 1999 to 2003 Hunters focus on improving the bass aspect of his instrument intensified, therefore the bass lines being composed during that time were of greater complexity. Hunters practice routine involves creating and learning a bass line then combining it with a melody or chordal patterns. Because he is always practicing melodies within the context of a bass line he is essentially composing and arranging songs each time he practices. Because the amount of practice needed get a bass line and melody working together (and then being able to actually improvise over the bass line) requires so much work, the obvious result is that Hunter writes using shorter simple song forms, as longer and more involved pieces would result in the necessity to practice more than he already has to

Another instance of Hunter's composition being influenced by his instrumental study is during his study of particular musicians or musical genres, where after having transcribed what the musician's play, he then adapts it to be played on his instrument. In the magazine *Guitar Player* (August 1998) Hunter talks about transcribing almost every solo organist Larry Young ever recorded. This resulted in the arrangements and compositions of Hunter's reflecting Young's 'modern' jazz aesthetic. Another example is when, after listening and being influenced by West African musicians, Hunter composed the song Mali from 2003's *Right Now Move*. When explaining why he appropriates and hybridizes different cultural rhythms and sounds into his own compositions, Hunter explains that he is only the next step in a musical evolution that began in Africa, and sub-sequentially spread to the Americas. "I view it all as one thing, they're new world versions of the original rhythms... All that music is linked by an African clave of some kind whether it is a swing beat, a funk beat, a New Orleans beat, a samba beat or 3/2 rumba clave. It's all got a common heritage, like all human beings on the planet" (as quoted from *One Way Magazine*)

Another feature of his compositional style is that he would write and arrange songs for the particular ensemble that he was performing; in some cases this meant rewriting whole sections of the song if performing an older song with a new group. Hunter's compositions have usually evolved through the process of performances and the different and often impromptu arrangements have been experimented with resulting with an array of completely differently arranged live recording of the same song.

Hunter's compositional techniques, influenced by the limitations imposed by the demands of his instrument and his study of different musical genres outside the jazz 'mainstream' resulted the creation of songs that were accessible to wider audience than a typical 'jazz' group.

Analysis of transcriptions

The following transcriptions are essentially prescriptive and should not be seen as actual records of the live performance. However in the case of *Two for Bleu*, *Oakland* and *Mali I* have for the sake of personal interest I tried to be more descriptive in my notation and have transcribed the solo's in the B sections. All of the transcriptions are examples of the previously explained contrapuntal form and in studying them one can see the progression and development of a simple compositional style that, as Hunter's instrumental ability improved, his composition evolved.

Pound for Pound

The tune *Pound for Pound* from 1998's *Return of the Candyman* is one of the first instances of a separate bass line concept that is not walking or root 5th patterns that Hunter plays the melody against. The A section is essentially a repetitive two bar groove in C minor that is a call and response between the bass and the guitar side. Hunter superimposes a four bar pentatonic melody over. The groove is simple, relatively sparse and un-syncopated and is a perfect vehicle for improvisation on the eight-string. The B section is a four bar turn around moving downstep from Eb Major to Db Major to resolve back into the C minor groove. Hunter usually improvises a walking bass line though these changes, however when soloing he generally plays 1 bass note per bar as written. The final section is a pentatonic rhythmic motif which Hunter walks a bass line under

Return of the Candyman is also Hunter's first album without a saxophonist; this was a step in a new direction for the guitarist in many ways, including the addition of new instruments when asked about this group he says "I not only wanted to play in a more percussive setting this time out, but I also wanted to dig into new realms of tonality and timbre." (Charliehunter.com). The line-up included a vibraphonist as well a drummer and percussionist. The quartet (named *Pound for Pound*) represented not only a change in line up, but was Hunter's first east coast group. The use of a phaser pedal on the guitar signal, as opposed to the usual rotary simulator effect, is also a contrast against his previous recordings.

Mean Streak

This song is an early attempt by Hunter at interpreting Cuban music that was finally recorded with Leon Parker in 1999. Hunter had performed in many different bands but decided to record it because of how well it worked with Parker's playing. It begins with a syncopated bass line melody with large leaps that then is joined by a short chromatic melodic line (also syncopated) played on the guitar side. The B section is a contrasting section with pedaled bass notes and a retard section where Hunter and Parker slow the song's tempo down together, before a return to the A section.

Because of the wide leaps in the bass part Hunter improvises a more chromatic bass line during the solo section (similar to walking), this is done to avoid the bass part imposing too much on the guitar part, which would have required more left hand position changing, which generally Hunter avoids.

Two For Bleu

The groove in the A section is based around the subdivision of three over four, the melody plays off the melodic bass line and the groove is created by the interplay of the two melodies. As an improvisational vehicle for the eight-string the song *Two for Bleu* poses some problems in the syncopation, complex-

ity and length of the bass lines. To actually be able to play these types of songs all melodic material for improvisation needs to be practiced and pre-prepared with that specific bass line. This is most likely why the majority of Hunter's melodic material during his solo is pentatonic based.

The melodic material and harmony are very basic by themselves the A section is essentially D minor with an Esus vamp for a B section. The arranging for the horns is very simple and was likely arranged in the studio whilst recording.

Rhythm Music Rides Again

This song has a simple repetitive four bar Latin groove implying a ii-v chord sequence, the melody is syncopated to sound like it is played behind the beat. The B section is a progression that is implied by a pedaled bass line that the saxophone and guitar simultaneously improvise over. The effect of this is a contrast to the rhythmically tighter A section with a 'looser' time and harmonic feel. With rhythm being the primary concept of the song it is unsurprising that the majority of arranging has gone into the creating of percussive hits and transitions between sections. Hunter's approach to arranging is simple and effective, as a result allowing the improvisers freedom to sound like themselves.

Oakland

Striving for a better bass sound Hunter commissioned Novak to make a longer scale instrument the album to complement the songs from Right Now Move adapted the melody previously called AC/DC as seen on the DVD Live at the Tralf and created a bass line to be played against it. This documented process of an evolution of one of his songs gives us an insight into his compositional style. The bass line is more articulated and has smaller subdivisions (sixteenth notes) and extreme position changes, as in the case of the rapid tritone trill played at the higher region of the bass frets.

This recording is arranged in both the melody and solo sections. The guitar and harmonica play the melody in octaves and in the second repeat the sax and trombone play guide-tone pads. The B section is an improvisation by Hunter over a chord progression implied by pedaled notes on bass. Then a return to the A section with accompanying pads by the horns.

The solo section is two choruses of the whole band soloing sparsely at same time, this is paralleled in that the song throughout, features the voices of the band members making interjections and responses to the music similar to the audience in an African American church. The A section Melody is played twice, then Hunter plays a bass solo based on the changes to the B section is repeated, the horns and harmonica come in to create a crescendo of pads which then leads to the song's melody.

Mali

Mali begins with a harmonised melody repeated by the group. The band follows Hunter for rhythm, and each of the three horn players are given an opportunity to solo at the end of the phrase. The groove begins in Ab minor, however when the melody enters the key moves down a half step to G minor. The melody is played by harmonica and guitar in unison. The saxophone and trombone in the second A section fill out the harmony by adding pads and close each A with a fast answering phrase in octaves. The B section is in double time feel the harmonies are more complex and

are based mainly on chords against different pedal notes. Some of the melody is harmonised in seconds creating a rich and thick ensemble sound. This period in Hunter's musical career was the most rewarding in terms of arranging and composition, however it was not financially viable to continue performing with this group and he was forced to disband it after a year of touring. By this time Hunter had begun composing on piano, this can be seen in the more complex harmonisations played by the other instruments in the B section. By freeing himself from the limitations inherent in the technique of playing the eight-string guitar he was able to create new ideas that he could then re-apply back onto his instrument.

Conclusion

In this study we can see that Charlie Hunter's musical evolution is most easily understood as the parallel and interdependent progression of his instrumental and compositional skills. I have shown this by first looking at the history of Hunter's musical development, and the subsequent invention of his eight-string guitar. In studying the music of different groups that Hunter has played in we can see an evolution in the kind of musical ideas and techniques that he has appropriated and adapted for his instrument. Techniques that eventually distilled into a cohesive and recognizable musical language.

When examining his technique we can see that because of the physical demands that the playing style requires, Hunter has had to form new standards of aesthetics about instrumental performance rather than imitating previous bassists and guitar players. This constructing of new aesthetics is also seen in the musical styles and materials that Hunter chooses to play. Hunter's methods of composition are also shown to intimately related to the practice and performance on the eight-string guitar, the simplicity of song form and the often lyrical nature of his melodies is a reflection of what the instrument itself is capable of.

This study is revealing of a creative individual musician who is in a state of perpetual change, searching for new sounds and possibilities that result in a unique contribution to the music world. Hunter has created a new instrument, and as a result had to discover and develop the role that his instrument would play in an instrumental ensemble. This process of discovery has continued past the studied period of 1998 to 2003 and has now gone in many different musical directions, which in the future, once Hunter has re-distilled these new influences will be able to be recognized as yet another new hybrid of musical expression.

Notes

1. Hunter's guitar effects during the mid period included: Ernie Ball stereo volume pedal, Hughes & Kettner Rotosphere, Keeley compressor, amp tremelo and reverb (used a reverb pedal as well). In Hunter's formative period distortion and wah were used
2. Charlie Hunter has consistently worked in side projects groups including;

T.J. Kirk: a Jazz Rock band that plays homage to James Brown, Rahsaan Roland Kirk and Thelonius Monk which released two albums on Warner Music. (disbanded in 1998)

Garage a Trois: an eclectic quartet with Skerik, Mike Dillon and Stanton Moore

Groundruther: an all improvised duo with electronic percussionist Bobby Previte have a rotating third member (so far Greg Osby and DJ Logic have been recorded)

Collaborations with artists writing in studio include:

D'Angelo, Zap Mama, Chinna Smith, Michael Franti and Spearhead, Les Claypool, William S Burroughs.

Bibliography

Dery Mark, Fresh licks, Guitar Player, October 1992
Ellis Andy, The Dirty Thirty, Guitar Player, January 1997
Gold, Jude, Dr Rhythm, August 2003
Levy Adam, Growing Pains, Guitar Player, August 1998
Mc Elderry Sun, Sound check, Madison Magazine - May/June 2000
Micallef Ken, Bridging Brain with Booty, One Way Magazine, issue 3, 2003
Olsen Paul, Living the Music, All About Jazz, 26 September 2005
Rogovoy Seth, Charlie Hunter's Hybrid Jazz, Berkshire Eagle on March 23, 2001
The Editors of Guitar Player, Discs of Destiny, Guitar Player, January 1997
Unknown, Blindfold test, Down Beat October 2005

Discography/ Videography

Charlie Hunter Quintet, Right Now Move (Ropeadope, 2003)
Garage à Trois, Emphasizer (Tone Cool, 2003)
Charlie Hunter Quartet, Songs From the Analog Playground (Blue Note, 2001)
Charlie Hunter, Solo Eight-String Guitar (Contra Punto, 2000)
Charlie Hunter, Charlie Hunter (Blue Note, 2000)
Charlie Hunter and Leon Parker, Duo (Blue Note, 1999)
Charlie Hunter and Pound for Pound, Return of the Candyman (Blue Note, 1998)
Charlie Hunter Quartet, Natty Dread (Blue Note, 1997)
Charlie Hunter Quartet, Ready, Set ... Shango! (Blue Note 1996)
Charlie Hunter Trio, Bing, Bing, Bing! (Blue Note, 1995)
Charlie Hunter Trio, Charlie Hunter Trio (Prawn Song, 1993)
Videography

Charlie Hunter Quintet, Right Now Live (Rope-A-Dope)
Charlie Hunter Quartet, Live at the Tralf (WNED-TV)

Internet Resources

charliehunter.com – interviews, movies, biography, live concerts, media links, and message board
archive.org – live concert recordings
puremusic.com – a conversation with Charlie Hunter.
Ascap Audioportraits: ascap.com/audioportraits/charlie_hunter.html