



Jazz On A Budget

By Jon Dalton www.cdbaby.com/cd/jondalton

One question I'm often asked by students, audience members and, more recently, over the net is how to get a great jazz sound (for those of you who already have this down; please permit me a little indulgence for the sake of our freshly emerging brothers and sisters). Many players who are new to jazz are coming from a blues or rock environment and are used to solid guitars, thin strings, big amps and effects pedals so it's hardly surprising if they miss the mark a little. Also newcomers to jazz are often a little shocked at the prices being asked for specialist high-end gear.

As with all things artistic there's no one simple answer but here's a few suggestions for great equipment that won't leave you hungry and homeless:

Guitars:

If you haven't played a full bodied arch-top guitar you owe it to yourself to give it a try. True, you don't need to play an arch-top in jazz (Ed Bickert got a great sound out of a Fender Telecaster and Cedric West out of a cheap CSL Les Paul copy) but many of the greats have used full bodied instruments and, to my mind, just holding an arch-top makes you think about and approach the instrument differently. Good results have been obtained from the following.

1, **Washburn J6:** This is a big 17" guitar similar in dimensions to a Gibson L5CES. I've known a number of players who have owned this type of guitar and report great satisfaction. It's been on the market for several years now and still continues to sell well. I've tried two or three, they're well put together and have a good reliability record. You may find the 17" body a bit too large in which case how about?

2, **Epiphone Emperor 2** (The Joe Pass Signature model): As you are no doubt aware Joe Pass was one of the best ever jazz players and would not have put his name to an inferior product. The Emperor 2 is thinner (half way between a full arch-top and a 335) than most and the ones I've tried have all sounded and played just fine. The Emperor 2's owners certainly don't seem to regret making the purchase including jazz legend Mundell Lowe who, despite owning a collection of expensive exotica, is often seen sporting this very guitar. If it's good enough for Mundell...?

My final suggestion is:

3, **Epiphone Zephyr Regent:** This is a relatively new Epiphone guitar (not to be

confused with a 50's vintage Zephyr Regent) that is essentially Epiphone's version of a one pick-up Gibson ES175 (or ES165 Herb Ellis model). Don't let the fact that it only has one pick-up put you off. Many jazz players actually prefer this configuration (Pat Metheny, Jim Hall, and Herb Ellis to name but three) and I can quite imagine that money that hasn't been spent adding an extra pick-up has probably been diverted to other important aspects of the instrument. I've not yet tried this guitar (can't find one!) but, if it lives up to its specs, this is the sort of box I'd quite happily take to gigs and, if it should be damaged or stolen, at least we're not talking thousands of dollars for a replacement.

All of the above guitars feature regular size humbucking pickups so, if you like the basic guitar but feel the instrument could be improved in the electrics department, replacing the pick-ups should be easy. The Gibson Classic '57 is in my opinion the best readily available body mounted pick-up for jazz and I've found pre-owned units without having to look too hard!

Also try using flat-wound (tape-wound) strings. Flat-wounds give a slightly less bright sound than regular strings and also give a little less sustain (which makes your runs sound more articulate). Some flat-wounds I've tried are just too dull and lifeless but I know that Chris Standring uses and likes Gibson "flatwires" (gauge 12-54) and I can also recommend D'addario Chromes. These come in gauges .011 to .013 which is the kind of weight you'll need to get that arch-top resonating.

Finally try a thicker plectrum than usual. Thick plects offer less click at the start of the note and put more energy into the string resulting in a smooth, even tone.

Amp choices are vast but for my budget choice you can't beat the little, all valve, Carvin Nomad combo (33w & 50w available). The Carvin's clean channel is buttery smooth and rich with great bass extension and a sweet pure treble and my blues playing friends tell me that the overdrive channel is Da' Bomb! The 50w 2x12 Bel Air shares similar circuitry. All three models have Accutronics spring reverb (and no, I don't work for Carvin!).

If you shop around you'll probably be able to equip yourself with a complete guitar & amp set up for less than \$1200.00 ask any jazz player...that's a bargain!



About the author

A top flight performer and composer Jon was active on the UK jazz scene for many years. He has performed numerous concerts to delighted audiences, and recieved a ton of great reviews. Much of Jon's work has been recorded for national and international broadcast on BBC Radio. In 1999 Jon relocated from England to Southern California to further his career in recorded music. Jon's music has already been selected for inclusion on the New York based Instinct Jazz label's compilation releases. His tunes have also been procured by publishers for film and TV use and have recieved nearly 100,000 plays in on-line business distribution. Jon's style is rooted in the classic archtop guitar sound of yesteryear. He plays a melodic almost "vocal" style and has been compared to Wes Montgomery, Kenny Burrell and Pat Metheny. Even so, his phrasing and presentation are all his own and completely contemporary. Jon draws on influences from outside of the jazz realm in modern dance styles and soulful R&B with up-to-the-minute sounds and state of the art production techniques. Jon's maintained a working transatlantic relationship with gifted and like-minded producer/arranger John O'Hara and "The Gift" is the fruit of their first collaboration. For more [click here](#)



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