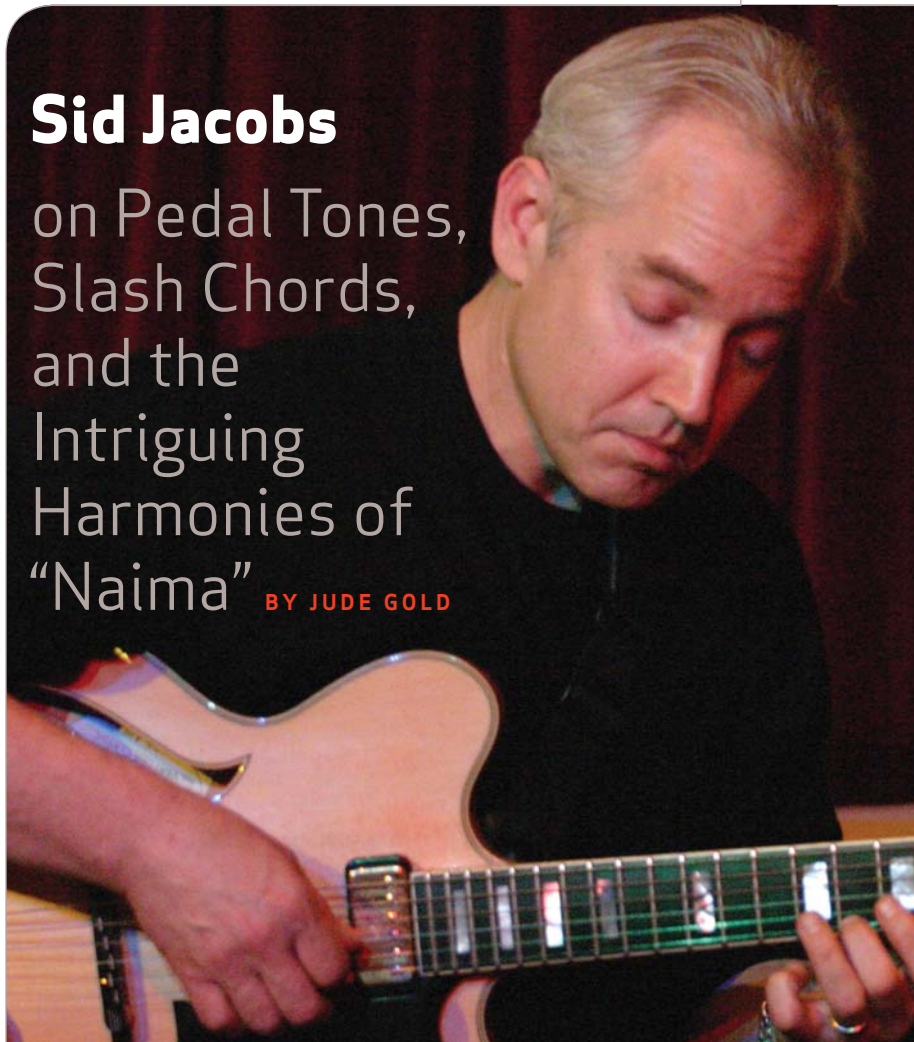


Sid Jacobs

on Pedal Tones,
Slash Chords,
and the
Intriguing
Harmonies of
“Naima”

BY JUDE GOLD



counting—Jacobs miraculously channels Lenny Breau, Bill Evans, Bach, and more, often within the same musical phrase.

Today, Jacobs is talking about pedal tones. “Listen to this note,” he says, striking the low-*E* string on a Hofner Verythin archtop. “When you hit a low note like this—especially if you play it on an acoustic piano—it’s easy to hear that there’s a lot more in there than one single pitch. There are overtones in there. Without those harmonics and partials, the note wouldn’t sound natural.”

Three notes that reside within a ringing low *E*, says Jacobs, are the harmonics heard at the 7th, 5th, and 4th frets of the same string. Pluck those three harmonics in succession, and you’ll hear *B, E, G#*—a second-inversion *E* major triad having the same pitches as the *E* triad fretted in **Ex. 1**.

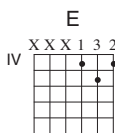
“If we hold a pedal tone root under that major triad [**Ex. 2**], it sounds very normal, because that major triad exists in that pedal tone. It exists in *nature*,” says Jacobs. “The bass note is very powerful—it’s generating the three notes of the triad. Things get weird when you put a different triad over that same note [**Ex. 3**]. In this example, the *E* triad within the bass note says ‘I am king,’ while the *E \flat* triad fretted above is saying, ‘No, I am king.’ So, you have this interesting bi-tonal struggle going on—two territories vying for supremacy.”

As is demonstrated by the *E \flat /E* symbol we gave the chord we just played, sometimes the best way to describe a bi-tonal harmony is simply to name the harmony that is sounded by the upper voices, and then, on the right side of a slash mark, name the bass note separately. One of the most famous and influential studies of bi-tonal “slash chord” harmony is John Coltrane’s entrancing ballad “Naima,” off his seminal 1959 release, *Giant Steps*. The tune makes for a beautiful and approachable chord melody on guitar because the theme is so simple (lots of held notes) and the tempo is so slow.

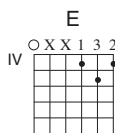
“I usually don’t move a song away from its original key,” says Jacobs, “but I couldn’t resist moving ‘Naima’ up a half-step from *E \flat* to *E*, so I could use the open low-*E* string

ALONG ONE WALL OF SID JACOBS’ Hollywood teaching studio resides a stable of beautiful hollowbodies—everything from a custom 7-string Benedetto featuring a high-*A* to a ’71 Gibson Johnny Smith that Jacobs bought new as a teenager. Along the opposite wall stands a towering shelf of books by or about everyone from Stravinsky to Slonimsky, Miles to Zappa, Woody Allen to George Carlin. In this room—and on Jacobs’ fretboard—many eras of music and thought collide, and the ideas that result are captivating. A performer who has worked with everyone from Eddie Harris, Buddy Montgomery, and Brad Mehldau to Luciano Pavarotti and Ike and Tina Turner—and an instructor at GIT (Guitar Institute of Technology) for the past 20 years and

Ex. 1



Ex. 2



Ex. 3



