

SPOTLIGHT: DAVE ILLIG



by Mark Stefani

Houston-based jazz guitarist, Dave Illig, is a player on the rise. His story is one that many aspiring guitarists and readers of *Just Jazz Guitar Magazine* can relate to, because Illig is a self-proclaimed regular guy with a day job and a family to support. Yet his lifelong quest to study guitar and his strong work ethic has put him in a position where his skill has become obvious to anyone who hears him play.

Like so many other guitarists, Dave was first attracted to the instrument as a teenager, growing up in his home town of Sandusky, Ohio. A close friend showed him a few chords before school let out one year, which led to his first acoustic guitar and an entire summer spent working on those chords. A few scales and blues licks later, and he was up and running.

Dave credits guitarist Sam Doman as a major influence in his early stages, and the man most responsible for his first forays into the world of jazz guitar. They did some duo work together, Sam got him some gigs, and Illig's playing rose to a new level. Before long, he was teaching guitar at Mossman Music, while performing with some of the top bands and artists in the area. This lasted for many years.

Unfortunately, although he was playing guitar professionally, Illig found little time during this period to devote to jazz. To compound matters, he was also raising a family and devoting time and energy to his other love, flying airplanes. In 1990, Dave relocated to Houston after being hired by Continental Airlines. After working some pretty uninspiring gigs on the side in local venues, he found himself "burnt out" and stopped playing guitar for twelve years. His interest was finally rekindled in 2002, due partially to a reunion with his old friend, bassist Don Mossman, and one of Illig's best guitar students, Keith Barber. Not

wanting to embarrass himself, Illig started woodshedding, and one thing led to another.

There are many influences present in Dave's guitar work. Most obvious is jazz legend Wes Montgomery. Also evident is the blues impact and phrasing borrowed from George Benson and others cut from that cloth. Illig also cites jazz guitarist Robert Conti as having a major impact on his recent evolution, along with an improved study regimen which includes his efforts to transcribe notable artists. The improvement is apparent to anyone who heard Mr. Illig a year ago, and Dave recently recorded a CD that documents just how far he has come as a player.

"Destinations" is an appropriate title for this recording, produced exclusively in Illig's home studio. The entire imagery combines his love for guitar with his full-time job of piloting Boeing 737s, which has understandably resulted in an extensive travel schedule.



The recording includes some familiar tunes, like Montgomery's "Tear It Down," "Four On Six," and "Sundown," ballad standards like "When Sunny Gets Blue" and "Willow Weep for Me," Coltrane's "Impressions," "Autumn Leaves," "Blue Bossa," and others.

The CD also features a blues duet track with Dave's 17-year-old daughter, Stephanie, an excellent, acoustic fingerstyle guitarist in her own right. For those interested, the CD and audio clips are available from www.daveillig.com.

One of Dave's primary missions is to share his story with other aspiring jazz guitarists, so that they will be encouraged to stay positive and work hard in their quest to reach their goals. When it comes to what he would do different in retrospect, Illig strongly suggests looking for a "mentor or teacher" who can help get you there, especially if you are "putting out a lot of effort and not getting the results you want."

With regards to his philosophy as an artist, perhaps it's best summed up by Mr. Illig's own words: "Being an accomplished guitar player is not out of reach for anyone. It's about playing, not modes, scales, and diatonic harmony. Learn some tunes, learn to jam, have fun!"