

# **ASTA National Convention – Tampa, Florida**

## **Session**

### **“Tools for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century String Player”**

#### **Presenters**

**Sean Grissom**

**Joe Deninzon**

**Dr. David Wallace**

**A presentation/demonstration/resource ‘Rock Jam’!**

**Friday, March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2016 - 1:45pm – 2:45pm -Room 1/2**

“Welcome to our session today and your students and colleagues are lucky because you’ve chosen to attend an ASTA convention and are interested in learning some new ideas to bring back with you – We Thank You!”

Joe Deninzon, Dr. David Wallace and myself are classically-trained players that have adapted the vocabulary and tools from the rich musical and technical pedagogy we were taught to play on our respective instruments – violin, viola, and cello – in order to create, perform and forge new uses and sounds in this new millennium that our teachers NEVER had to consider, let alone understand, or teach.

Each of us have been part of this ‘Alternative Styles’ movement, and from our own unique career paths, we have used what we’ve learned to build a body of seminars, presentations, compositions and performances that reflect these applications. In addition, together, we have had the opportunity over the last 6 years to put these practices to use as faculty members of the Mark Wood Rock Orchestra Camp.

Today, we want to give you a few ‘nuggets’ from our combined backgrounds that reflect the tools necessary to be a successful 21<sup>st</sup> Century String Player.

# “Looping” - The Musical Merry-Go-Round – or “Living in a Post-Pachelbel World”

**Presented by Sean Grissom**

EVERY string-player in this day and age should know about ‘going electric’, and the variety of foot-pedals effects out there make many aspects of music-making more accessible and more importantly – fun!

There is a parallel universe out there for traditional string players that has been accessed with the growing acceptance of ‘Alternative Styles.’ With the use of electric pick-ups/microphones, the world of sound effects through signal processing is now open to string players. You are no longer limited to purely acoustic effects such as ponticello, con legno, battuto , pizzicato, and other sounds achieved through bowing and plucking techniques.

One of the many electric products out there is the ‘Loop Station’, a device (with memory) that is a sophisticated endless tape loop. Instead of only one track (or musical part, this digital version for today allows for many layers of sound build-up (limited by the unit’s internal memory). But, the question remains:

“How can this benefit the String Teacher?”

1. **As a composition tool** – If you’re not a pianist, and aren’t that computer savvy, this is a great to write ensemble parts. You can play one part, then write others over and under the first part. Besides a ‘save’ function, the unit also has an ‘undo’ capability. This way, you can do *immediate* composing and editing, without the extensive setup of most recording situations.
2. **A lesson/practice tool** – This immediate feedback has many applications in teaching and practice situations. Imagine recording a practice assignment and then allowing a student to play-along, or having the student work with a ‘loop station’ from the creation of a ‘loop’ – that reinforces timing (allowing for corrections), intonation, blending, improvisation and composition – All from one assignment!
3. **A performance tool** – As a culmination and integration of this piece of gear, it should be apparent that it is an ideal performance tool. Say you have written a composition that has many parts/layers – what next? You could make a recording of it, but how would you present it in a live context? I know that for me, the easy part is to compose the piece, the hardest is to perform it live so that it comes across in a fluid, organic process, and not “Here’s one loop, then here’s another, etc...” So, the arrangement of the loops in the song structure becomes the performance focus.

All of these playing concerns are applicable in any musical setting. Imagine having players that are aware of the harmonic (vertical) and melodic (horizontal) issues of a piece, and are

## Questions:

# “THINKING OUTSIDE THE BACH: NEW SKILLS FOR NEW GIGS”

**Presented by Joe Deninzon**

As a string contractor, I see a growing demand for players with a diverse skill set beyond the traditional classical training.

Case in point, I was recently asked to book an amplified acoustic string quartet for a corporate party to play for an hour with a Ray Charles tribute act, followed by me playing electric violin for three sets with a top 40 band. There would be no rehearsal and I could not use previous quartet arrangement I had written for the Ray songs, since they would not fit what this band was doing.

I had to hire string players who could read lead sheets and chord charts, had the right equipment (acoustic instruments with pickups, preamps, quarter inch and XLR cables), and could improvise and take solos in the jazz/blues/Gospel language of those songs.

I asked the bandleader for a set list. Then, I put together lead sheets for each song with chord symbols, and the main themes and melodies written out. At the gig, the singer changed some of the keys, and added songs that were not on the list he had given me. This did not faze my musicians, who were able to transpose on the spot and either knew some of the surprise songs he threw in or were able to play along by ear.

After the Ray Charles set, I strapped on my 7-string electric violin, put it through my wireless unit, my pedalboard, and my amp. For the next 3 hours, the band played music ranging from Benny Goodman and Frank Sinatra, to Earth Wind and Fire, Michael Jackson, ACDC, the Weeknd, Taylor Swift, Walk the Moon, and many other songs. I had to know the string parts for the disco tunes, the horn hits, what effects to use, and how to come up with cool background parts for songs that originally had no string lines in them. Nothing was written out.

I find myself asking; what are the first steps one can take to develop the diverse skill necessary for this and other such gigs?

Aside from listening, transcribing, and immersing yourself in a wide variety of music, here are excerpt of two very different songs I played that evening, and practice techniques to develop your ear and improv skills,.

The first song is Ray Charles’ “Georgia on my Mind.”

## Georgia on My Mind (excerpt)

Ray Charles

VS    ♩=60    GMaj7    F#m7b5    B7b9    Em    Em/D    C#m7b5    Cm7 F7

Bm7    E7    Am7    D7    Bm7    E7    Am7    D7#9

This is the first half of a verse, a typical example of what you would see on a lead sheet: the chord changes and the vocal melody. You should look at the chord changes above line, NOT the written notes. The song has many ii-iv-ii V7 progressions, common in thousands of jazz songs

Having a loop pedal or a recorded version of these changes to play with is highly recommended.

- 1) Go through the 8 bars playing quarter notes of just the roots, 3rds, 5ths, 7ths.
- 2) Go through the 8 bars arpeggiating each chord. Playing quarter notes, then 8<sup>th</sup> notes on each arpeggio.
- 3) Practice playing “guide tones” for the iii-IV and ii-V7 progressions: The 7<sup>th</sup> of the minor chord descending a half step down to resolve as the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the V7 chord. Here, I have indicated where these chords occur.

# Guide Tones on My Mind

Ray Charles

ii V7

VS GMaj7 F#m7b5 B7b9 Em Em/D C#m7b5 Cm7 F7

iii VI ii V7 iii VI ii V7

Bm7 E7 Am7 D7 Bm7 E7 Am7 D7

- 4) Imagine you are a one-man string section. Using the guide tones as reference point, come up with a whole note/8<sup>th</sup> note string line following the harmonies that compliments the vocals. I recommend a chorus pedal to get the “string section” effect in a live setting.
- 5) Try improvising by ear. First with quarter notes, then 8<sup>th</sup> notes, then alternating one measure of playing with one measure of silence.
- 6) Write out 10 different solos, memorize them, and practice mixing and matching phrases from those solos.

The next song is “Back In Black” by AC/DC which I played with the band later that night.

## BACK IN BLACK (excerpt)

INTRO E5 D A AC/DC

E5 D A

This is a take-no-prisoners hard rock song! Unlike the previous song, my instinct here would be to play this on electric violin, and crank up the distortion pedal!

- 1) Practice the main riff written in the above example. Use the lowest range of your instrument to make the “power chords” sound heavier.
- 2) For soloing, use the E minor pentatonic scale or blues scale written below. Unlike the Ray Charles song, you can use one scale over all the changes and it will sound right.

## E MINOR PENTATONIC SCALE

- 3) Once you are familiar with the scale, solo a few times only using the first two notes, E and G, then add A, then add B, then D.
- 4) Practice soloing using nothing faster than quarter notes, then 8<sup>th</sup> notes, 16<sup>th</sup> s, etc.
- 5) Take one rhythmic motif, stick to it, but change the notes around for each phase.
- 6) Try soloing in short, one-bar phrases, alternating with one bar of silence.

**Tools for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Musician:  
Teaching Students to Unlock Musical Styles  
David Wallace, D.M.A. / [Doc@DocWallacemusic.com](mailto:Doc@DocWallacemusic.com)**

In today's string world, students are eager to perform many genres of music. Teaching these students is a daunting prospect, especially if we feel like we lack the experience or expertise to support their desired learning. Good news! Just as our teaching of general musicianship, ergonomic technique, and effective practice transcends style, so does teaching the necessary skills for unlocking and mastering diverse musical styles.

Here are some essential skills and concepts that we can explore and encourage at all levels of learning:

**Fundamental Aural Skills**

Develop our ear-hand connection and coordination by:

- Playing by ear: play simple familiar melodies or call & response phrases.
- Exploring alternative fingerings: play melodies you can play by ear in different positions; on a single string; with one, two, or three fingers.
- Transposition: transpose phrases or entire songs into other keys.

**Transcription**

Transcription is one of the best routes to mastering the nuances of a musical style.

- Transcribe phrases, melodies, solos, or entire songs. Transcribe with playing; not just pencil.
- YouTube & Video transcription.

**Immersion:**

- Listen, listen, listen!
- Read – biographies, liner notes, articles
- Research

**Spending Time with Experts and Learning Communities:**

We can't know it all. But we can:

- Refer students to specialists (while remaining general practitioner)
- Send students to camps, festivals, fiddle contests
- Further students' explorations with online communities and resources.
- Learn alongside our students

**Composition:**

Writing new works is one of the best ways of understanding any kind of music. Do it! Make your students do it!

# Mastering the Lyrical 8-bar Rock Solo

A transcribing, transposing, and improvising exercise  
based on David Gilmour's first guitar solo from Pink Floyd's "Comfortably Numb"

- 1) Transcribe Pink Floyd guitarist David Gilmour's first guitar solo from "Comfortably Numb" by ear.
- 2) Check your work against the published transcription, then adapt it for your instrument, adding articulations, or revoicing it as necessary.
- 3) Memorize the solo.
- 4) Playing by ear, transpose the solo to all 12 major keys, following the cycle of fifths.  
[iRealPro playalong tracks available here: <http://www.docwallacemusic.com/ultra-cool-scale-and-arpeggio-workouts>]
- 5) Improvise your own lyrical 8-bar solos using the same changes.

Electric Guitar

Basic melody line:

Violin

Viola

Violoncello

David Gilmour, guitarist

E. Gtr.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

E. Gtr.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

C

G

C

G

A(sus4)

slow, even bend

8va rake

## **Resource:**

### **“Going Electric” and you ‘Don’t need a Strad!’ - Demonstration and Hands-On Participation of Pick-Ups and the use of electronic effects and equipment - Presentation by Sean Grissom**

**PICK-UPS**, for the most part, are piezo-electric (magnetized ceramic transducers) that convert sound vibrations into an electric signal. For bowed stringed instruments, most are attached to the bridge, since that is where the instrument’s most intense vibrations occur. There are a variety of styles and prices to choose from. I will demonstrate two brands – from a beginner to a professional option.

With the pick-ups provided, the following will be demonstrated:

1. Placement – different places, different sounds.
2. Attachment – with mastic ... and no, it won’t damage the varnish.
3. Volume control – pros and cons (control or variance).
4. Feedback – the acoustic player’s nightmare!
5. Support Equipment – O.K. ... so what do I plug this umbilical cord into? Amps are NOT a substitute for the sound of your instrument. They are an *enhancement* of the sound qualities created. There are different models and configurations to choose from. It’s best to go to a music store EARLY (all the ‘rockers’ are still asleep!) to test amps.

**EFFECTS** – Much can be done to a sound signal by electronic manipulation. Acoustically, we are shown techniques to vary the sound/tone of our instrument – there are various pizzicato techniques, and with the bow, there is ponticello (which creates a ‘phase’ effect), con legno, battuto – in addition to the many subtleties of bow placement and attack such as spiccato, marcato, and on and on and on .....

Well these and many others can be achieved electronically. Over the years, I have bought and used MANY of the guitar effects pedals on the market. There are also the ‘multi-effect’ units that combine numerous single effects. For the advanced player, these can be useful, but if you are just starting out, it can be a bit overwhelming.

I have whittled down the effects to what I believe are the basics for a string player to start out with. They are:

1. **Equalizer/PreAmp (lets you adjust, select, and craft your tone)** – YOU are the maker of your sound! I will use a DOD Bi-Fet Preamp (FX10) that boosts the signal for soloing, and can shape the tone of your signal. Also, I will demonstrate another EQ/PreAmp by Fishman (GII) that shapes the pick-ups signal.
2. **Delay (gives you a controllable echo and the basic chance to play solo canons!)** – I use a BOSS Delay (DM-2) – it’s simple and rugged.
3. **Pitch Shifter (lets you simultaneously play notes from a ‘unison’ to an ‘octave’ – above and below – with the option of adding the overtones in-between ... Lots of FUN!)** – I have a BOSS Digital Pitch Shifter/Delay (RPS – 10) – along with the ‘Looper’, this was life-changing ... sonically.
4. **Chorus (slightly doubles the sound, like an accordion, and fattens the sound)** – I have a BOSS Super-Chorus (CH-1).
5. **Overdrive/Distortion (by distorting the sound – clipping – it creates that rock guitar sustain and energy!)** – One of my oldest and dearest pedals, I like the BOSS SUPER Feedbacker & Distortion (DF-2) – you can hold an overtone note AND solo over it!
6. **Loop Station (but, of course...)** – There are many brands to choose from, but I prefer the BOSS Loop Station (RC -20XL) Phrase Recorder. It has over 16 minutes of internal memory (enough for a whole album!). In addition, I have the bigger (RC-30) that I use for recording tracks that can be separated/isolated for studio recording (check out the BOSS Loop Championships on YouTube to see how much you can do).

### **What does ALL this mean?**

Today, the boundaries of string-playing – be it conventional, classical, improvisational, or whatever – with the help of technology, is beginning to catch up with our imaginations. We can play, write, and create ANYTHING that we want. String players don’t have to embrace ALL of what I’ve shown today, but that is not the point of these session. The point is to introduce these possibilities, and to apply what you already know – and to s-t-r-e-t-c-h our boundaries a little more – Thank You!



### Materials used today:

#### Pick-Ups:

1. Sensor by Super-Sensitive Musical String Company
2. The Realist (made by David Gage. Ned Steinberg)

### Sean Grissom Resources:

1. The Electric Violin Shop – tel: (919) 806-3311  
[www.ElectricViolinShop.com](http://www.ElectricViolinShop.com)
2. David Gage String Repair – tel: (212) 274-1322  
[www.davidgage.com](http://www.davidgage.com)
3. Super-Sensitive Musical String Company – tel: (941) 371-0016  
[www.supersensitive.com](http://www.supersensitive.com)

Effects: All (other than DOD) are made by BOSS/Roland Corporation

[www.Bosscorp.co.jp](http://www.Bosscorp.co.jp).

### Joe Deninon Resources:

1. Wood Violins [www.markwoodmusic.com](http://www.markwoodmusic.com)
2. Plugging In: “A Guide to Gear and New Techniques for the 21st Century String Player.”-by Joe Deninon <https://www.facebook.com/plugginginbook/>
3. Digitech effects: [www.digitech.com](http://www.digitech.com)
4. D’Addario Strings [www.daddario.com](http://www.daddario.com)
5. Line 6 effects: [www.line6.com](http://www.line6.com)
6. TC Electronix effects: [www.tcelectronic.com](http://www.tcelectronic.com)
7. Tech 21 Amps and Effects [www.tech21nyc.com](http://www.tech21nyc.com)

### David Wallace Resources:

Recommended applications for transcription:

- Transcribe! [Available at <http://www.seventhstring.com>]
- The Amazing Slow-Downer [Available at <http://www.ronimusic.com> ]

Recommended Application for play-along improvisations and song transposition:

- iRealPro [Available at <http://irealpro.com>]

Additional resources for mastering and teaching different musical styles, improvisation, and composition are available at <http://www.docwallacemusic.com>:

<http://www.docwallacemusic.com/ultra-cool-scale-and-arpeggio-workouts>  
<http://www.docwallacemusic.com/publications/articles>  
<http://www.docwallacemusic.com/publications/curricula>



# SEAN GRISSOM

**“Cajun Cello®”**



**What do you call a Texas-born, classically-trained cellist who just happens to be one of the hottest street/subway entertainers?**

**A smash act! Sure fire foot-tappin' fun! A one-of-a-kind performer!**

When Sean Grissom and his electric cello step into the spotlight, your audience is in for a memorable entertainment experience.

After moving to New York City, he completed a Master's Degree program in Music Performance and the teacher-training program in the 'Suzuki Method'. In order to earn pocket money, he and his cello took to the streets and subways and struck a resoundingly successful chord with New Yorkers.

But don't think for a moment that Sean's unique musical offerings have been limited to the sidewalks and subways of New York. He is an international attraction with his hit one-man show "O'Cello", travelling and performing before enthusiastic crowds from Japan, Canada, and throughout Europe. For the last fifteen years he has hosted and performed in a 'Holiday Vaudeville' show at Washington D.C.'s Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. He is the sole winner of the Toyota Comedy Festival's 'World Series of Busking'. In addition, he has played for the crowds at the U.S. Tennis Open, Lincoln Center, and the 2010 Inauguration for New York City Mayor Mike Bloomberg. Everyone, everywhere, loves Sean's super hot, jazzy style of Country, Swing, Rock, and Cajun sounds – all delivered in his offbeat, entertaining manner.

Sean has produced and released thirteen recordings that range from Cajun Bach to Celtic to The Beatles and Classic Rock, along with his original compositions – all proving that you can never have enough cello – the latest being 12 new originals entitled "Songs Without Words – Vol. 3". He has published compositions under a "Solo Cello Encore Series", "Cello Finger-Picking" alternative-style series, and an improvisation book "What! For Cello?" - along with several string orchestra pieces – all available through ENDPIN Music Pub. and distributed by LugwigMasters. Sean is an Artist/Endorser for Super-Sensitive Musical String Co. and is the inventor of the 'STOPPIN' – a floor protector that is available through Super-Sensitive. He is also a popular lecturer, teacher, and clinician, having made presentations at ASTA, state and local organizations, as well as being on the faculty of the Mark Wood Rock Orchestra Camp.

**Contact: ENDPIN Music Publishing - Tel/Fax (212) 580-0366**

Joe Deninzon has been hailed by critics as “The Jimi Hendrix of the Violin,” because of his innovative style on acoustic and electric seven-string violin. A musician who transcends many genres, Joe has worked with Sheryl Crow, Bruce Springsteen, Phoebe Snow, Everclear, Ritchie Blackmore of Deep Purple, Smokey Robinson, Aretha Franklin, Robert Bonfiglio, and LesPaul among many others. He has performed as a solo electric violinist with the New York City Ballet for Richard Einhorn’s “Red Angels.”



Joe is the lead singer and violinist for the progressive rock band, Stratospheerius ([www.stratospheerius.com](http://www.stratospheerius.com)). The group has released their fifth CD, “The Next World,” on Steve Vai’s Digital Nations label. Joe can be heard on over a hundred CD’s and jingles as a violinist and string arranger. A 14-time BMI Jazz Composer’s grant recipient and winner of the John Lennon Songwriting Contest, he has recently written a solo piece commissioned for violinist Rachel Barton Pine and recently premiered his “Concerto for Seven String Electric Violin and Orchestra” with the Muncie Symphony Orchestra in 2015. His original music has been featured on CMT, MTV, VH1, Comedy Central, National Geographic, the Travel Channel, the History Channel, and the Will Ferrell/ Adam McKay-produced film “Virginit Hit.”

Joe is also a member of the Sweet Plantain String Quartet ([www.sweetplantain.com](http://www.sweetplantain.com)), which combines Latin Jazz with hip-hop and Classical music, and has toured throughout Sweden, Italy, Greece, Russia, and the U.S.

Joe has also released a CD with his Acoustic Jazz Trio featuring guitarist Steve Benson and bassist Bob Bowen, titled “Exuberance.”

As an educator, Joe has taught rock violin at Mark O’Connor’s String Camp and Mark Wood’s Rock Orchestra Camp, and made repeated appearances performing at the Grand Canyon Music Festival, where he co-founded the Grand Canyon School of Rock in 2006, an annual program for local high school students.

He regularly travels as a clinician and has contributed articles to Strings, Downbeat, and Making Music Magazine. In 2012, Joe wrote a book on electric violin techniques for Mel Bay Publications, entitled “Plugging In.” Chris Haigh’s recent book, “Discovering Rock Violin” lists one of Joe’s recorded solos among the “top 20 greatest rock violin solos of all time.” Strings Magazine named him among the most notable electric violinists of the past 30 years.

Joe holds Bachelor’s degrees in Violin Performance and Jazz Violin from Indiana University and a Master’s in Jazz/Commercial violin from Manhattan School of Music.

[www.joedeninzon.com](http://www.joedeninzon.com)

[www.twitter.com/joedeninzon](https://www.twitter.com/joedeninzon)

[www.youtube.com/user/jdeninzon/videos](https://www.youtube.com/user/jdeninzon/videos)

[www.stratospheerius.com](http://www.stratospheerius.com)

[www.facebook.com/stratospheerius](https://www.facebook.com/stratospheerius)

"As at home in the world of Grappelli and O'Conner as he is in the world of Steve Vai and Jimi Hendrix, Joe Deninzon may very well be our next national violin treasure!!!" -Jedd Beaudoin, Sea of Tranquility



**Dr. David Wallace** is a fiercely eclectic musician, an award-winning composer, a master teaching artist, and Chair of Berklee College of Music's String Department. David's concert appearances include solo performances with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and the New York Philharmonic, as well as international tours with

the *Teaching Artist Ensemble of the New York Philharmonic*.

David performs regularly with his flute-violin-harp trio *Hat Trick* and his Texas-style swing band *The Doc Wallace Trio*, each of which is releasing a new album in 2016. David has been broadcast as a soloist and chamber musician on NPR, WQXR, KTV (Korea), CBS, ABC, PBS, Tokyo-MX, and NHK television. The New York Times compares his solo improvisations to "Jimmy Page fronting Led Zeppelin."

Known for his mastery of many styles ranging from all classical genres to fiddling, rock, and free jazz, David has also gained widespread acclaim for his ability to connect with audiences in diverse community settings, including schools, hospitals, psychiatric facilities, houses of worship, and prisons. *Symphony* magazine hails his book *Reaching Out: A Musician's Guide to Interactive Performance*, as "an invaluable manual for all musicians, classical or otherwise." As a composer, David has received commissions from Carnegie Hall, the New York Philharmonic, the Juilliard School, violinist Rachel Barton Pine, the Marian Anderson String Quartet, and the Robert F. Ryan & Qin C. Ryan Foundation.

Through the New York Philharmonic's radical Very Young Composers program, David has mentored over a hundred children whose original compositions were performed by members of the orchestra. He received his D.M.A in viola performance from the Juilliard School where he served as a Morse Teaching Artist Fellow and as Teaching Assistant to legendary violist and pedagogue Karen Tuttle.

This summer marks David's third year directing Berklee's summer string program, the [Berklee Global String Intensive](#). He continues his tenure as a charter faculty member of Mark Wood Rock Orchestra Camp and MyTalentForge.com. Learn and hear more at [www.docwallacemusic.com](http://www.docwallacemusic.com) and [www.youtube.com/docwallacemusic](http://www.youtube.com/docwallacemusic).