

HOW TO PLAY LIKE... ELDON SHAMBLIN

BY KEITH BAUMANN

IN 1937 A YOUNG OKLAHOMA GUITARIST named Eldon Shamblin joined Bob Wills & His Texas Playboys. For Shamblin, performing with this legendary Western swing outfit was a dream come true. Shamblin was self-taught, and his rhythm style was highly influenced by the big band music of the time. His early guitar work with the Playboys was

solid and swinging, but in 1940, when Wills requested that Shamblin include a lot of bass runs in his guitar part during the recording session for "Take Me Back to Tulsa," Shamblin responded with a unique two-beat traveling-bass rhythm arrangement. This approach not only became his trademark sound and cemented his reputation in history as one of the greatest rhythm guitarists ever, it forever defined the Western swing guitar style.

Although playing open-string bass runs was not unusual for dance band guitarists of the time, Shamblin used his knowledge of jazz and large-ensemble arranging to harmonize his bass lines with a series of mostly close-voiced chord forms. The

example below is a typical Shamblin-style arrangement that can be used on a "San Antonio Rose"-type (I-IV-II-V-I) progression.

In measures 1 and 2, we see how Sheldon creates a descending bass line starting with a *D* chord, moving through two inversions of *D7* (*D/C* and *D7/A*). At measure 3, alternating bass is used on the *G* barre chord. Descending to the 7, *D*, of *E7* (*E7/D*) sets us up nicely for a half-step bass drop into *A9/C#*. Measure 5 features a slick maneuver where *Em/B* shifts smoothly into the *A* dominant harmonies in the next bar, which resolve, finally, back to *D* major in bar 7. On the second pass, we see a variation used: Measures 9-11 start with a first-inversion *D* chord and descend down to bar 11's *G/B*, using bar 9's *Am/E* as a passing chord.

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Shamblin, wrangling a Strat in 1975.

1

D F#m/C# D/C D7/A G G/D E7 E/D A9/C# Em/B

6

A7 A9/C# D Em D/F# Am7/E D7 D/C

11

G/B G/D E7 E/D A9/C# Em/B A7 A9/C# D Em D/F# D

The musical notation consists of three systems, each with a treble clef staff and a guitar tablature staff. The first system (measures 1-5) shows a descending bass line: D (5-4), F#m/C# (4-2), D/C (3-4), D7/A (5-4), G (3-5), G/D (5-5), E7 (7-6), E/D (5-6), A9/C# (4-5), and Em/B (7-5). The second system (measures 6-8) continues the progression: A7 (5-7), A9/C# (4-5), D (5-7), Em (7-9), D/F# (9-7), Am7/E (9-7), D7 (7-5), and D/C (5-4). The third system (measures 9-11) shows: G/B (2-5), G/D (5-5), E7 (7-6), E/D (5-6), A9/C# (4-5), Em/B (7-5), A7 (5-7), A9/C# (4-5), D (5-7), Em (7-9), D/F# (9-7), and D (7-7).