

# CHAPTER 8: HARMOLODIC SKETCH

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**Style:** Frisell Americana-Ambient | **Key:** G Major | **Tempo:** 88 BPM | **Time:** 4/4

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## OVERVIEW

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*"Textural, spacious, and beautifully understated."*

Harmolodic Sketch channels Bill Frisell's unique voice: open triads that ring like bells, unexpected melodic turns, and an almost ambient approach to jazz guitar. The "harmolodic" reference nods to Ornette Coleman's concept—melody, harmony, and rhythm given equal weight. This tune teaches texture, patience, and the power of simplicity.

**Playing Tip:** Think like a painter, not a typist. Every note is a brushstroke.

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## THE FORM

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32-bar form emphasizing space and texture:

**Section 1 - Intro (Bars 1-8):**

|       |       |       |       |  |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|--|
| Gmaj7 | Gmaj7 | Cmaj9 | D     |  |
| Em7   | Am7   | D7    | Gmaj7 |  |

**Section 2 - Open Triad Solo (Bars 9-16):**

|   |    |    |   |  |
|---|----|----|---|--|
| G | G  | C  | D |  |
| G | Em | Am | D |  |

**Section 3 - Chord Melody (Bars 17-24):**

|       |     |       |       |  |
|-------|-----|-------|-------|--|
| Gmaj9 | Em7 | Cmaj7 | Dsus4 |  |
| Bm7   | Am7 | D7    | Gmaj7 |  |

**Section 4 - Outro (Bars 25-32):**

|       |     |       |       |  |
|-------|-----|-------|-------|--|
| Gmaj7 | G   | Cmaj7 | Dsus4 |  |
| Em7   | Am7 | D     | G     |  |

**Key Harmonic Features**

- 1. Open voicings:** Wide intervals, ringing strings
  - 2. Suspended chords:** Dsus4 creates tension without dominance
  - 3. Simple triads:** G, C, D, Em, Am in Section 2
  - 4. Space as harmony:** Rests are compositional elements
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## SCALE PALETTE

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| Chord | Primary Scale | Frisell Color        |
|-------|---------------|----------------------|
| Gmaj7 | G Ionian      | Pentatonic fragments |
| Cmaj9 | C Lydian      | F# as color tone     |
| Dsus4 | D Mixolydian  | Avoid 3rd, use 4th   |
| Em7   | E Dorian      | Open string drones   |
| Am7   | A Dorian      | Sparse, melodic      |
| Bm7   | B Aeolian     | Melancholy turn      |

### The Frisell Sound

Frisell's vocabulary includes: - **Simple melodies** that twist unexpectedly - **Open string drones** under moving lines - **Volume swells** for ambient texture - **Americana intervals**: 5ths, octaves, sparse triads

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## TRIAD VOCABULARY

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| Chord | Open Triad Shape | Effect            |
|-------|------------------|-------------------|
| G     | 3-2-0-0-3-3      | Bell-like ring    |
| C     | x-3-2-0-1-0      | Open high strings |
| D     | x-x-0-2-3-2      | Open D string     |
| Em    | 0-2-2-0-0-0      | Full open ring    |
| Am    | x-0-2-2-1-0      | Open A bass       |

## Textural Cells

Practice these ambient cells over G:

Cell 1: D (open) - G (3rd fret) - B (open) - let ring  
 Cell 2: E (open) - B (open) - high E (open) - fade in with volume  
 Cell 3: G - D - G (octave) - sustain with reverb

## THE THREE CHORUSES

### Chorus 1: Melodic Simplicity (Version A)

**Concept:** Folk-like melody, sparse and direct

- **Bars 1-4:** Simple stepwise melody (D-E-G-A-B) with long notes
- **Bars 5-8:** Descending line resolving to G
- **Touch:** Soft attack, let notes bloom
- **Space:** Don't fill every beat

#### Dynamic Curve:

|       |   |       |   |       |   |        |
|-------|---|-------|---|-------|---|--------|
| pp    | — | p     | — | mp    | — | pp     |
| Bar 1 |   | Bar 4 |   | Bar 8 |   | Bar 16 |

### Chorus 2: Open Triads (Version B)

**Concept:** Bell-tone triads with ringing strings

- **Bars 9-12:** G, C, D triads in open positions
- **Bars 13-16:** Em, Am triads with volume swells
- **Technique:** Let strings ring into each other
- **Time feel:** Slightly behind the beat

## Triad Progression:

| Bar | Triad  | Technique          |
|-----|--------|--------------------|
| 9   | G open | Strum and let ring |
| 10  | Am     | Arpeggiate slowly  |
| 11  | C      | Volume swell       |
| 12  | D      | Sustain            |

## Chorus 3: Textured Chord Melody (Version C)

**Concept:** Melody with harmonic halo

- **Bars 17-20:** Melody on top string, chords underneath
- **Bars 21-24:** Chords swell while melody sustains
- **Voice independence:** Bass moves while treble holds

## Texture Map:

| Section    | Melody     | Harmony       |
|------------|------------|---------------|
| Bars 17-18 | High G-A-B | Gmaj9 voicing |
| Bars 19-20 | F#-E-D     | Em7 → Cmaj7   |
| Bars 21-22 | D sustain  | Dsus4 → Bm7   |
| Bars 23-24 | D-B-G      | Am7 → Gmaj7   |

## VOICING REFERENCE

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### Open Voicings

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Gmaj7:      3-x-4-4-3-x (open D string optional)
Cmaj9:      x-3-0-0-0-0 (maximum ring)
Dsus4:      x-x-0-2-3-3 (open D, suspended)
Em7:        0-2-0-0-3-0 (open strings)
Am7:        x-0-2-0-1-0 (sparse, ringing)

```

### Frisell-Style Voicings

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G/B:        x-2-0-0-0-3 (bass note with high ring)
Cmaj7/E:    0-3-2-0-0-0 (inverted, open)
D/F#:       2-x-0-2-3-x (walking bass potential)

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## TECHNIQUE: VOLUME SWELLS AND TEXTURE

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### The Volume Swell

1. Pick the note or chord with volume at 0
2. Slowly roll volume knob up
3. Peak at desired dynamic
4. Let decay naturally or roll back down

### Textural Techniques

- **Harmonics:** Natural harmonics at 12th, 7th, 5th frets
- **Behind the nut:** Ethereal high pitches
- **Muted strums:** Percussive texture
- **Tremolo picking:** Sustained, shimmering notes

## Practice Exercise

| Gmaj7 chord with volume swell |  
Pick chord at volume 0 → swell to 5 → decay → repeat  
Time: 4 beats up, 4 beats down

# PRACTICE ROUTINE

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### Week 1: Space and Patience

- [ ] Practice playing one note per bar (seriously)
- [ ] Master the volume swell technique
- [ ] Learn Version A with maximum space

### Week 2: Open Triads

- [ ] Learn all open triad voicings
- [ ] Practice letting strings ring together
- [ ] Work on Version B with bell-like clarity

### Week 3: Textural Chord Melody

- [ ] Practice melody independence over chords
- [ ] Work on voice leading between voicings
- [ ] Learn Version C with proper texture

### Week 4: Ambience

- [ ] Play through all three choruses
- [ ] Experiment with reverb and delay
- [ ] Record and evaluate for "Frisell-ness"

## LISTENING RECOMMENDATIONS

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1. **Bill Frisell** – *Good Dog, Happy Man* (the essence)
  2. **Bill Frisell** – *Nashville* (Americana textures)
  3. **Bill Frisell** – *Ghost Town* (sparse and beautiful)
  4. **Ornette Coleman** – *Sound Grammar* (harmolodic concept)
  5. **Brian Blade Fellowship** – *Perceptual* (modern texture)
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## TONE TIPS

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For Harmolodic Sketch:

- **Clean with character:** Slight amp warmth, not sterile
- **Reverb:** Hall or spring, medium-long decay
- **Delay:** Dotted eighth or slapback
- **Tremolo:** Optional, slow rate
- **Volume pedal:** Essential for swells

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## COMMON PITFALLS

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1. **Playing too many notes:** Frisell's power is in restraint
  2. **Rushing:** This tune breathes slowly
  3. **Over-processing:** Effects support, don't dominate
  4. **Ignoring dynamics:** Volume is a primary tool
  5. **Cluttered voicings:** Keep it open and ringing
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## THE HARMOLODIC CONCEPT

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Ornette Coleman's harmolodics suggests:

1. **Melody creates harmony:** Let lines imply chords
2. **Rhythm is flexible:** Time feel bends to expression
3. **Democratic music:** All elements equal
4. **Folk meets avant-garde:** Simplicity with depth

When playing this piece, imagine painting with sound—each stroke deliberate, each silence meaningful.

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## SELF-EVALUATION

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- [ ] Am I leaving enough space?
  - [ ] Do my triads ring like bells?
  - [ ] Are my volume swells smooth?
  - [ ] Does the tune feel contemplative, not rushed?
  - [ ] Is there beauty in the simplicity?
  - [ ] Would Frisell recognize this as his language?
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← [Blue Cycle](#) | [Next: Entangled Horizons](#) →

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