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## TEN QUESTIONS WITH FRANK GAMBALE



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Frank Gambale may not be a household name in the traditional sense but for those of us that have been paying attention, you don't have to look very far to find Frank's name being thrown around within the world of Guitar, Jazz or Guitar Instruction. In fact, he's been an important "player" in the world of guitar dating back to the early 80's. Back in the 80's, Frank released several solo efforts as well as his first instructional video, [Monster Licks and Speed Picking](#), to much critical praise. As a GIT graduate, Frank also spent some time teaching at his alma mater. Frank's instructional technique truly excited players in revolutionary ways. In the later part of the 80's, Frank joined forces with Steve Smith (of Journey fame) in Vital Information and also worked with Mike Varney's label on a unique project featuring him, Brett Garsed and Shawn Lane.



Clearly, Frank has kept himself quite busy and now as we fast forward to 2011, we find Frank out on the road touring with Chick Corea's Return to Forever and doing what he does, so very well. Currently on tour, be sure to visit Frank's [site for more information](#). So now, let us catch up with Frank - he's been busy we know but what's he been up to recently. Frank takes the time to answer our 10 Question segment...

**Guitar.com:** Hey Frank, thanks for taking the time to chat with us. What is your daily practice routine?

**Frank Gambale:** When I was younger my routine was rigorous. I remember at least two times in my life when I was practicing 12 hours a day for years at a time. I was absorbing as much as I could. I was copying songs from records. I was into learning all the parts including the keyboard voicings, the horn parts, the vocal harmonies...as well as the guitar parts...I was really interested in how all the parts fit together. These days, with a lot less time to spare I find myself focusing on things that I need or music that I have to learn for a show...or writing my own new music. I think it's important to think about what you want to achieve if you have an hour to practice. Take 10 minutes and think "what do I play on an

E7#9 chord or I want to learn the chords and melody to Passages". Then off you go, you have a mission and a timeline! I work well with deadlines.

**Guitar.com:** What is your process for writing tunes?

**Gambale:** It's a labor of love. Sometimes songs roll out of my head to recorded track virtually complete. Others can take years to complete. The important thing is to dedicate time to the writing process. When I am going to make an album, I try to block a month and that's all I do. I wake up, get my coffee and go fire up the machines, the guitars, keyboards and begin. After an hour or so something usually comes...at least a good start. It's best for me to try to finish the body of the song while it's fresh...that can be over a few days but even better if in a single day.

I usually start with a beat in mind or I'll write a bass line...or sometimes I'll write on my grand piano with a music pad and a pencil. I'll improvise until a chord sequence and melody come to me. When I finish a tune I'm both happy and sad. Happy because I have created a thing of beauty, an entity, a work of art. The sad part is that I must do it again but I can't repeat myself. I have some 200 songs published. That's a lot of work...fortunately it's work I love.

**Guitar.com:** Do you have a home studio? What recording gear do you prefer?

**Gambale:** I have a work room with wonderful natural light and windows. I like to write in the daytime also. I use a G5 and ProTools. I have to say I love working with ProTools. It's so user friendly and after a short learning curve, I can do anything and everything with this setup. I have an array of outboard gear and mics, too. The keyboard synthesizers and guitars and amps are set up permanently so that I can just go in and play, write, record.

**Guitar.com:** Tell us about your new signature Carvin guitar.

**Gambale:** It's a beautiful instrument. It's a chambered body with f-holes. It is made from the finest materials available, with the best craftsmanship available. The result is an incredible instrument. 25" scale, two humbuckers, two volumes, two tones with pull-up tone controls for single coil, 3-way pickup selector. Solid maple top, mahogany body and neck, ebony fretboard with beautiful pearl inlays. The front humbucker is a signature pickup that we worked on. With semi-hollow guitars, the front pickup can get real muddy with distortion, so we worked hard to get the windings right to where we had enough volume and gain and roll off for the lows, without compromising the tone. There are some cool videos of me playing the instrument and even one of the guitar being built at the Carvin factory. The links are at my website [www.frankgambale.com](http://www.frankgambale.com).

Because Carvin sells direct to the public, there are no middlemen. The same guitar from any another manufacturer would cost more than double the price for the same materials and design.

**Guitar.com:** You have a new record coming out in February 2012. What can we expect?

**Gambale:** I am so excited about this record. It is *the* album I have wanted to make for about 30 years now. It's called Frank Gambale Soulmine featuring Boca. Boca was the missing link for me. Her voice and her collaboration on all the tunes and production were amazing. It's an all-vocal album and my guitar weaves through all the tunes in a wonderful dialogue between the voice and guitar. It grooves hard with Victor Wooten on bass and Joel Taylor on drums. There are some cameos but I did most of the keyboards and guitars on the album and some backup vocals. Boca did all the lead vocals. We are looking forward to touring extensively next year to follow up and support the album. I think my fans are going to love hearing me play in this context.



**Guitar.com:** Your signature DV amp comes out this month. What's special about it?

**Gambale:** The FG combo 1x12 comes out first. Soon followed by a 2x12 and an amp head, 2x12 vertical slant cab and a 4x12 slant cab- all signature stuff. I worked hard with the folks at DV Mark to create the amp I have always wanted. The whole line, which incidentally, sounds totally different to their own DV Mark line, are based on the idea of combining solid state power section with tube preamp. The results are spectacular clarity and volume from the small combo. The distortion is a "clean" distortion, meaning that it is only the preamp that distorts. It sounds incredible to me. The 2x12 and the amp head, which will follow shortly also sound amazing.

I already used the speakers on the Return To Forever IV world tour that's almost finished and they sound amazing. Another huge advantage to this gear is how light it is. Picking up the cabs, I feel like Superman. I can pick a 4x12 with one hand...the crew on the RTF IV tour were very grateful! They don't use conventional magnets. They have to be heard to be believed, and the lightweight will have everyone talking.

**Guitar.com:** Your pioneering work on sweep picking has helped place it in the 'must-know' category of techniques for many guitarists. How do you feel about that?

**Gambale:** Well, naturally I am pleased to have contributed to the guitar lexicon. I didn't realize the effect it would create when I was developing it. It is just so logical and practical that it could not be denied. The biggest hurdle was playing cleanly and in time. Now of course, it's second nature and I don't think of the mechanics of the technique, I just play and improvise. It's a wonderful technique that solves some very real problems for guitarists who are willing to put the time in.

On the USA portion of the Return To Forever IV tour, Dweezil Zappa opened for us and we got to hangout and play. He has really embraced the technique and sounds great. He made a point to mention to his fans that it is through studying my method book and video, that enabled him to play some of the otherwise impossible lines that his father Frank Zappa wrote. Even Frank Zappa himself never played the parts that Dweezil is playing because they were "too hard" for the guitar. Dweezil has overcome the physical, technical problems by embracing Sweep Picking. When I realize that my pioneering work has helped thousands of guitarists go beyond the normal physical barriers that standard techniques have, to be able to break through and enable so many musical phrases that weren't possible before, I am very happy about that.

**Guitar.com:** How does teaching others benefit your own playing?

**Gambale:** It doesn't...hahaha...just kidding! I always say that you can learn something from everyone. I still believe that's true. It also helps solidify your own musical concepts in your own head. That clarity is especially necessary to teach and impart the knowledge. What is most important is for the information to be delivered in a comprehensible way to the student from the teacher. Teaching is meaningless unless the student gets it!

**Guitar.com:** What should a guitarist seeking lessons look for in a teacher?

**Gambale:** Hmm...I'd say that it is best if it is someone who the student admires. It should also be someone who teaches the student what they want to learn...alongside what the student needs to learn.

**Guitar.com:** The RTF tour was a big success and now you are moving into Chick Corea Acoustic and Electric gigs. Do you approach these formats differently, and if so, how?

**Gambale:** The RTF gig is both acoustic and electric. If I had a choice I would only play electric guitar. Acoustic guitar presents a lot of problems live in this particular context, that have to be overcome every night on every different stage. Monitors have to be just right with the right EQ, volume has to be just right so that there's no feedback but enough to play solos over drums and the energy of the band etc...that's a lot of hurdles, none of which exist with electric guitar. Having said that, acoustic music is a beautiful part of the RTF show. Generally it is just harder work to get the acoustic instruments right on large stages in concert.

As for the playing approach, it's slightly different. With the acoustic guitar there is little sustain and much less dynamic range. There is a different touch involved. It's best playing with experienced players who come down, way down low at the beginning of acoustic solos so as to have room to build.

Guitar.com: Frank, as always, it's been a pleasure. Thanks for taking the time. We hope to catch up with you on the road with RtF. For more information be sure to check out Frank's site @ [FrankGambale.com](http://FrankGambale.com)

<http://www.guitar.com/articles/ten-questions-frank-gambale>