



[Wes Montgomery](#)
(March 6, 1923 – June 15, 1968)

In my younger days when I was first looking for music to get hooked on, Wes became my crack. I was first leaning towards certain classical pieces but was not sure. When I bought “A Day In A Life” and listened to those runs he did on The Joker, I was hooked on Jazz and been hooked ever since.

Wes was a true Jazz professional. He used his talents and skill to come up with a style and technique that is still used to this very day. Many fellow jazz guitarists consider Montgomery the greatest influence among modern jazz guitarists. Pat Metheny has praised him greatly, saying "I learned to play listening to Wes Montgomery's [Smokin' at the Half Note](#)." In addition, Metheny stated to *The New York Times* in 2005 that the solo on "If You Could See Me Now," from this album is his favorite of all time. [Joe Pass](#) said, "To me, there have been only three real innovators on the guitar—Wes Montgomery,

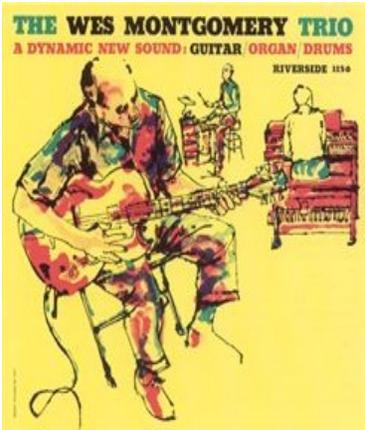


Studio album by Wes Montgomery



Charlie Christian, and Django Reinhardt," as cited in [James Sallis](#)'s *The Guitar Players* and in his Hot Licks instructional video. Kenny Burrell states, "It was an honor that he called me as his second guitarist for a session." In addition, [George Benson](#), [Stevie Ray Vaughan](#), [Eric Johnson](#), [Joe Satriani](#), [Jimi Hendrix](#), [David Becker](#), [Joe Diorio](#), [Steve Lukather](#), [Larry Coryell](#), and [Pat Martino](#) have pointed to him numerous times as a great influence.

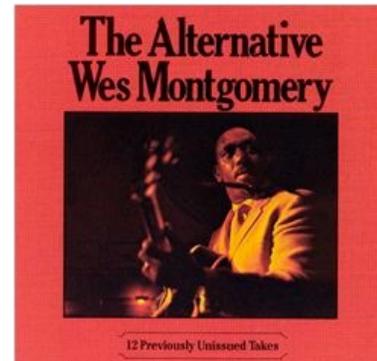
[Lee Ritenour](#), who recorded the 1992 album *Wes Bound* named after him, cites him as his most notable influence; he also named his son Wesley. With such praise, can you see now why I got so hooked?



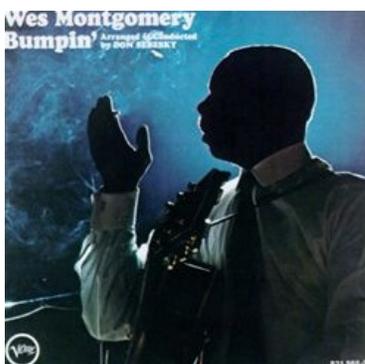
Like many before me and after, when you heard something so different, it touches your soul because you never heard anything like it before be so inspirational. It is like a drug you never had that makes you feel so good. Of course you want more of it because you want that feeling again. Jazz is no different where many dove into it and because legends in their own right. I did my little contribution and decided I was better as a fan. Like with most other segments of music, there is a dark side. Mine was dealing with the drug scene that came with the Jazz world. As much as I loved playing, I did not like the drugs involved and gave up that part of my life.

I was never far from Jazz. Always learning about new artist and their techniques. I guess that is why my collection grown so big in preparation for Jazzerainious. I have nothing more than Wes to thank for providing that initial influence and the others I have mentioned that help me along the way through all kind of times throughout my life.

It is funny how hindsight can be so 20-20 . Many of these artists have no idea the influence they leave on others. When you hear their stories about who influence them, they made it sound like it was their father because the influence was so strong. You can tell based on the way they played. Wes's history was no doubt a great influence on him and his style of Jazz.



Born in [Indianapolis, Indiana](#). According to [NPR Jazz Profiles](#) "The Life and Music Of Wes Montgomery," the nickname "Wes" was a child's abbreviation of his middle name, Leslie.^[2] He came from a musical family; his brothers, [Monk](#) (string bass and electric bass) and [Buddy](#) (vibraphone and piano), were jazz performers. The brothers released a number of albums together as the [Montgomery Brothers](#). Although he was not skilled at reading music, he could learn complex melodies and riffs by ear. Montgomery started learning the six string guitar at the relatively late age of 20 by listening to and learning the recordings of his idol, guitarist [Charlie Christian](#), however he had played a four string tenor guitar since age twelve. He was known for his ability to play Christian's solos note for note and was hired by [Lionel Hampton](#) for this ability.



The great John Coltrane asked Wes to join his band after doing a jam session. Wes kindly refused and kept at it leading his own band until his death. Again another great one gone before his time at just 46, from a heat attack.

In Jazz there are few igniters. You don't need many because their influence will spark many to carry on. Jazz will live on as it evolves and changes along with the times it entertains in. I have thanked God for many things in my life, I will add another. Lord, thank you for these artist who have influence me to be a better musician, fan, person and citizen of this country. Most of all, thank you for Wes Montgomery.

Bill Sommerville