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Monte Montgomery's guitar-playing is so distinctive, dexterous, and seemingly *ingrained* that it sounds like he might have had the instrument in his cradle. So it's surprising that he could have just as easily played the trumpet.

His first instruments were trumpet and piano, and he said he only took the guitar seriously "when I no longer had a piano or a trumpet at my disposal, and my Mom had an extra guitar. That's what I had. I often joke about, 'Mom, what would have happened if we hadn't lost that trumpet?' ... I think fate had other things in store for me."

He's similarly matter-of-fact about his decision to abandon electric guitar for an acoustic. "I could do a lot of things on acoustic I was relying on electric for," he said in a phone interview earlier this week. "So why not leave the extra guitar at home and the additional two heavy amps I was carrying around for my electric, and just play acoustic? It really was kind of just that simple."

The playing by Montgomery, who will be performing at the Redstone Room on November 17, is anything but simple. In 2004, *Guitar Player* magazine named him one of the 50 greatest guitar players of all time, and he's been called the acoustic Hendrix.

I'd cast him more as the child of Hendrix and Michael Hedges, a union evident with the unmistakable echoes "Voodoo Chile (Slight Return)" on the blistering "Can't Fool Everyone" from his most recent album, 2008's self-titled disc. Like both of those pioneers, Montgomery employs techniques and effects to transcend the normal uses of guitar – combining sounds clearly originating from an acoustic with a rock player's aggression and bag of tricks, leading to a palette and range scarcely imagined by most guitarists.

The 44-year-old, Texas-based Montgomery – who came to national attention with a 1999 set on *Austin City Limits* – said that style developed over time and somewhat by accident: "I suddenly had the ability to make my acoustic sound like electric, with distortion and all that. I didn't initially set out for that. I just didn't want to lug around a bunch of gear."

On his 2008 record, Montgomery does all sorts of wicked things to his instrument, and the Jimi comparison feels right from the outset – and not just because of a 10-minute version of "Little Wing." In the instrumental section that is the second half of opener "River," Montgomery's work is undoubtedly nimble and technically impressive, but it's also an outgrowth of the song, with masterful control of tone, and his bandmates aren't merely wallpaper to the main show.

The album was largely recorded live, with few overdubs, and its polish in that context is almost frightening. "I like to take songs and take them out on the road and work them and find out what works well musically ... ," Montgomery said. "You get to a certain point where you're just so comfortable, the song is concise, it's ready to go."

He also credits his longtime relationship with drummer Phil Bass: "When I hint at something, he's there. We have this weird kind of kinetic relationship. I don't have look at him or cue him; he knows what I'm doing."

Perhaps the best summation of Montgomery's talents is the propulsive second track "Let's Go," in which the guitarist is judicious with his talent. Where "The River" feels instrumentally boastful, the fireworks explode within the chorus of "Let's Go," with the guitar matching the song's

feverish escalation and squall fragments of distortion echoing Montgomery's barely controlled vocals.

The song demonstrates that Montgomery is more than a guitar wiz. While his lyrics tend toward the banal – particularly when they're front-and-center, as on "Love's Last Holiday" – his vocals are soulful and expressive. Despite a too-direct chorus, Montgomery's singing and the tune unearth poignance on "Midlife Matinee."

And his compositions are solid and often exciting, not mere frameworks for noodling. From the abundant funk of "Moonlight Tango" (with digressions ranging from delicate to muscular) to heartfelt ballads, Montgomery rarely engages in guitar heroics at the expense of the song.

"I have an ear for melody, and I know a good song when I hear one," Montgomery said.

As for balancing performance joy with the needs of a song, he said, "I like to make it interesting for me first. ... I like to find different little things to do to songs that put my little stamp on it."

Monte Montgomery will perform on Wednesday, November 17, at the Redstone Room (129 Main Street in Davenport). The show starts at 8:30 p.m., and the bill also includes Lojo Russo. Tickets ($12 in advance, $15 the day of the show) are available from RedstoneRoom.com .

For more information on Monte Montgomery, visit MonteMontgomery.net .