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MASTER CLASS

VIBRANT VOICINGS

Ted Greene's Tips and Examples

BY TED GREENE • INTRODUCTION BY ADAM LEVY

Guitarist and teacher Ted Greene died this past July, aged only 58 years. His name may not be familiar if you're not a Los Angeles-area native, keen jazz buff, or longtime GP reader, because he only gigged locally and released just one album during his lifetime—1977's *Solo Guitar*. He was, however, well known by many guitarists within driving distance of his Encino, California, home. Drive, they did. A throng of students came weekly, from miles around, to study with the man who coaxed extraordinarily rich sounds from his vintage black-guard Telecaster.

Greene's dedicated study of harmony gave him a deeper understanding of the subject than perhaps any other player. From Bach to bebop, he had it all under his fingers—and, when the voicing called for it, under his thumb. He shared his wisdom in his books *Chord Chemistry* and *Modern Chord Progressions*, published in 1971 and 1976, respectively. They are chock full of sophisticated music theory and knuckle-busting forms, which led some who knew of him only through his tomes to peg him as pedantic. Studying privately with Greene over a few years, in the late '80s, I knew him differently. He clearly prized heart and soul in music as much—or more than—hip chord substitutions or proper voice-leading.

I moved away from L.A. in '89, and asked Greene if I could to continue my studies with him via the mail. He said it wasn't the norm, but he'd give it a shot, so I sent him a complex arrangement I had been working on for "Somewhere," from *West Side Story*, along with a check for the lesson. A few weeks later, his lesson came. I had expected to find my arrangement returned, marked up with red-pen corrections. Instead, I found my "Somewhere" intact, my check returned, and a three-page, hand-written letter.

Greene wrote that he felt he couldn't fairly assess my work without hearing me play it in person, or at least on tape. He added that clever

arrangements alone aren't usually the stuff that gives people goose bumps—and Greene was all about the goose bumps. (Check out his album *Solo Guitar*, and you'll know what I mean.) He encouraged me to consider writing simpler arrangements, adding that the joy of playing music for people lies in reaching them someplace below their brain. By playing a little more simply, I might find it easier to focus on elemental things such as my tone and sense of groove, rather than worrying about making each

MASTER CLASS

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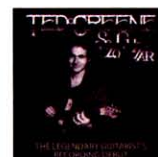
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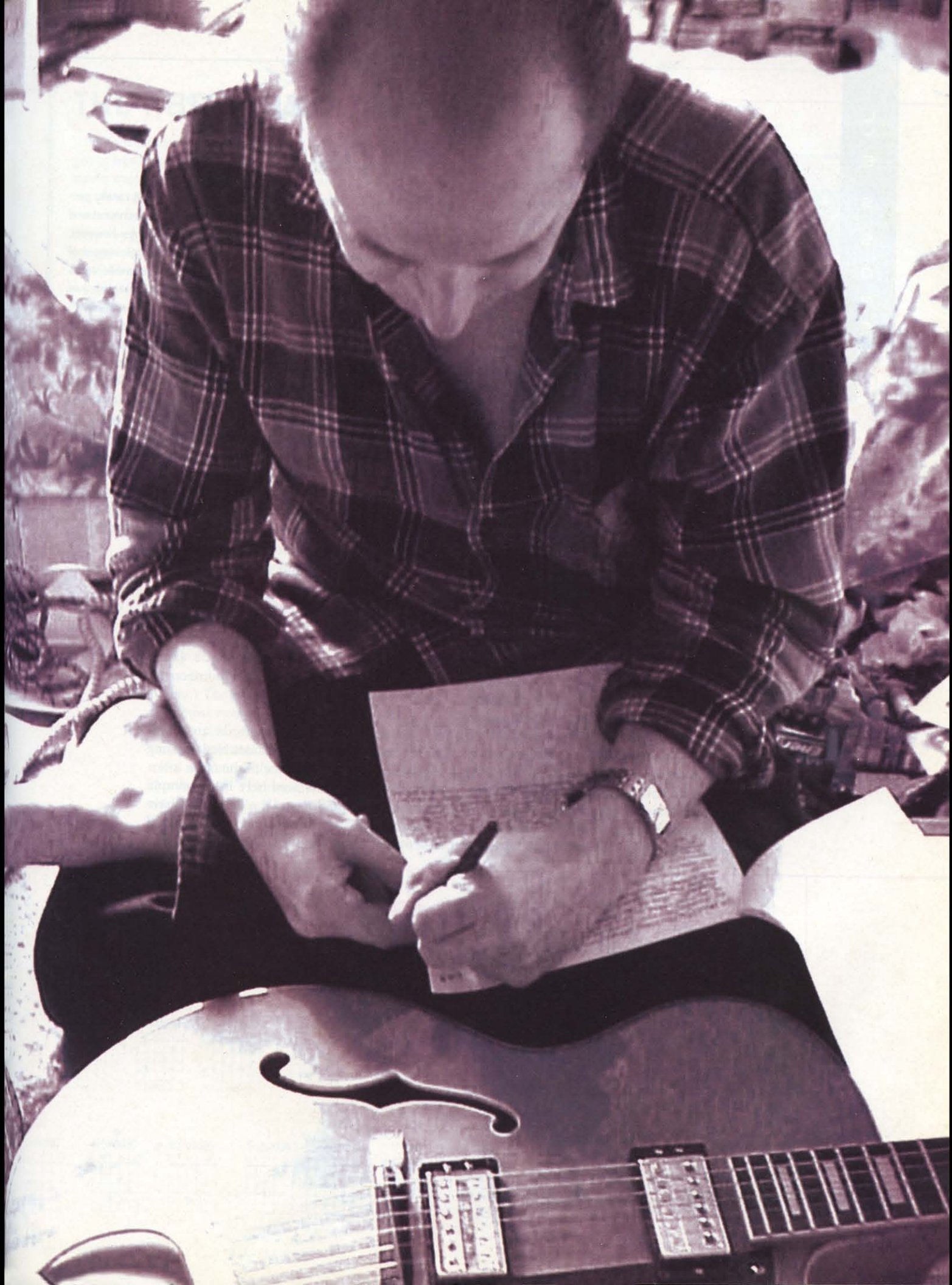
THE SOLO ALBUM

"I was 15 years old when I came across Ted Greene's recording, *Solo Guitar*, which is now available on CD from Art of Life Records [artofliferecords.com]. I was absolutely stunned by what I heard.



Ted's command of the instrument was supreme, and it was clear he had the deepest ears that music could flow through. He was not only defying the technical physics of jazz chord-melody voicings by playing melodies, chord changes, and bass lines all at the same time, he was making them flow together *organically*. I would invite my friends over to listen to this record and tell them that it was just one guy playing the guitar. They thought I was lying to them.

"I had the opportunity to meet Ted several times, and the first time was at a friend's place, where Ted sat and played the 'Star Spangled Banner.' He went through it about four times completely, brilliantly reharmonizing the melody differently each time. Each rendition was unique, and probably would have taken the most accomplished of jazz players hours if not days (and your average player probably weeks) of work to master, but Ted improvised it all on the spot. He did this repeatedly and with casual ease, as if trying on different coats to see which one went better with his shoes." —Steve Vai



THE TEACHER OF TEACHERS

crazy stretch I had planned out. I might also have an easier time connecting with listeners, he said. I took this to heart, and soon noticed more smiles and tapping toes on my solo-guitar gigs.

The classic Greene lesson that follows originally appeared in June '80 GP. As you play the examples, try to make each chord ring clearly. Once you feel comfortable with some of the voicings, incorporate them into your own songs and arrangements. See, that's another interesting thing about Greene—he rarely taught by giving students sheets full of isolated chords. His photocopied handouts usually featured nice arrangements of jazz standards, or cool 12-bar blues comping patterns. He seemed to believe learning was more valuable when it focused on real music, not exercises. See how much music you can make with Greene's lovely major-family voicings. That's where his legacy truly lies.

When new students come to my home for their first lesson, one of the most common things I hear is: "I'm bored with the chords I play—if I just knew some better voicings...." Well, that's what this article is about—chords and voicings. For those who don't know, the word "voicing" refers to how the notes of a chord are arranged. For instance, here are two different voicings of *Em11* [Ex. 1]. The notes (the letter names) of each chord are the same, but the order is different, that's all. Of course, the sounds of the two chords are slightly different, too, which is one reason learning more about voicings is so worthwhile.

Let's start with voicings of major chords. The basic major chord contains the 1st, 3rd, and 5th tones of the appropriate major scale—notes that can be referred to more simply as the

"Because Ted Greene only recorded one album and rarely performed or toured, he is mostly associated with the technical and theoretical aspects he covered in such detail in his books. However, with that cry at the tail of those chimey chords, that joyful sense of time, that gorgeous tone, and the delicate touch that made notes ring like bells, there was a depth of feeling in Ted's playing that made him by far one of the most soulful guitar players ever.

"The fearlessness with which Ted approached any piece of music revealed the endless orchestral possibilities of the guitar, and he would always point out how you *can* train your fingers to play just about anything if you want it bad enough to put in the time and effort. In each lesson, he not only expanded my awareness of the guitar but he taught me to think bigger than just a guitarist—he taught me to think like an arranger. Texture, counterpoint, register, and simultaneous contrapuntal lines suddenly became part of my vocabulary.

"Above all, Ted is one of the very few musicians I met who was a living example of the dignity and beauty of the teaching career as a way of life, not just as a means of making a living. This played a huge part in my becoming a guitar instructor." —Pino Morrone

1, 3, and 5. For example, a *Bb* major chord contains *Bb* (1, or root), *D* (3), and *F* (5) from the *Bb* major scale [Ex. 2]. Some good sounding voicings of this chord are shown in Ex. 3. (Note that Roman numerals indicate fret numbers.)

DOUBLING TONES

As you may know, major chords are often voiced with one of the tones doubled. Among the many possibilities, some of the more interesting ones are illustrated here in the simple chord progression in Ex. 4. (You'll probably have to use a fingerstyle plucking approach, instead of a pick to sound some of the chords in this

EX. 1 *Em11* and *Em11*

EX. 2

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
<i>Bb</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>Eb</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>G</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>Bb</i>

EX. 3

EX. 4

THE RESTAURANT GIG

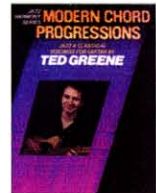
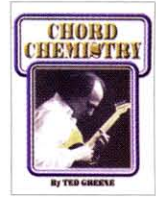
"I took one lesson from Ted Greene in 1986, and the depth of his genius was astonishing. I knew it would take me about a year to master what he gave me. A few years later, I heard that Ted was playing a rare solo gig in a small restaurant. So, along with two other GIT instructors, we found him crammed in the corner next to the dessert tray playing the most amazing improvised counterpoint medley—a solo guitar tour de force that spanned multiple styles and stretched for 45 minutes in an unbroken stream. There we were, watching, deeply inspired and humbled in that moment, yet no one else in the restaurant even noticed that there was live music.

"For the last couple of years, I invited the ever-humble Ted to GIT to teach. He was hesitant at first, because, believe it or not, he was concerned that 'nobody would be interested' in what he was doing! Quite the contrary—when Ted taught at GIT, he would hold court with students limitlessly for hours on end. I'm certain he would have gladly taught on through the night. Ted unselfishly and humbly shared the brilliance of his life's work as eternal gifts to the electric guitar community. Ted showed us all what is possible."
—Beth Marlis

THE BOOKS

"Ted Greene is probably the most important teacher and guitar innovator that has ever come to earth. He taught and inspired real students of the guitar with his unreal talent and unbounded passion for the instrument. He was a legend when I started out and will always be a legend. I once asked him how he thinks and he just laughed and said, 'I just do my thing.' But anyone who ever saw Ted play—which was rare as he was so shy—was left with their jaw on the ground. He made it all look so easy, yet those of us in the 'know' know better.

"The wealth of info and technique in his books will always be the standard escape route for any player who wants break out of 'the box' on guitar. *Chord Chemistry* [Warner Bros.] is a book that will live forever. His books have always been and will always be on my music stand in my living room. Ted was a giant and the nicest cat a guy could ever meet. I am sure he is giving lessons in heaven with a long waiting list. May God bless him and may his legacy be treated with respect and awe."
—Steve Lukather



article.) Here is another simple progression using some three-note major chords [Ex. 5]. Again, note the smooth connections.

ADDING TONES

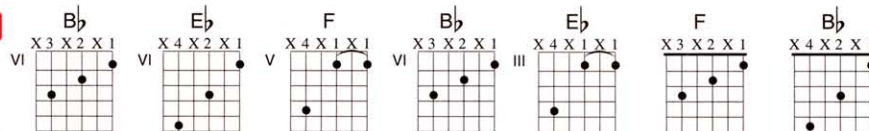
One of the most common tones to be added to the basic major chord is the 9th tone of the major scale. (The 9 is also known as the 2 because it is the same note, but an octave higher.) The resulting chord seems to be loved by almost everyone and has found its way into many styles of music. Here are some of my favorite voicings (in the keys of A and E) for what is commonly referred to as the "add9" chord [Ex. 6]. (The notes designated by open circles are optional.) And here are some tasty voicings in various keys on the top four strings [Ex. 7]. Notice that the first three chords in the

immediately preceding group are a variation on the basic C-D-E progression, which leads us to a fundamental point: All variations on the major chord can replace the simple major triad, according to your own tastes.

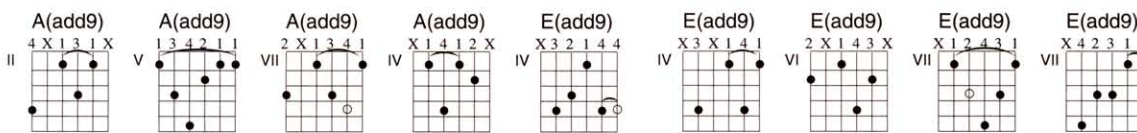
ALTERNATE FINGERINGS

I wonder if there are any curious and observant rascals amongst you readers. If you're one, you probably noticed that these two grips [Ex. 8] are the same voicing—that is, they each contain the same pitches in the same octave, but they're played in different places on the neck. The guitar is one of the only instruments in which such funniness occurs. If you were really astute, you might have also noticed earlier two other pairs

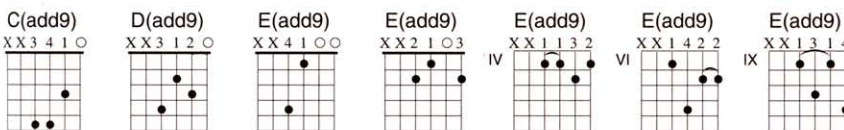
EX. 5



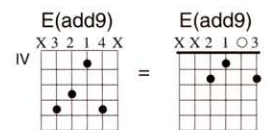
EX. 6



EX. 7

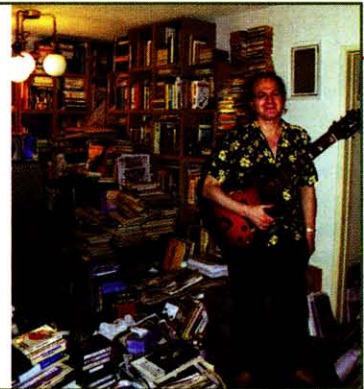


EX. 8



THE STUDENT

“Ted was an ocean of knowledge to learn from. One thing that made his playing especially beautiful was his humility and his pure love for music played on guitar. His solo album is a masterpiece, and demonstrates how he was a pioneer and expert at playing two parts at once, using this talent to carry a tune to its most orchestral and musical completeness. He was the eternal student, forever inspired and never feeling like he had mastered the guitar, yet it was no secret to us, his admirers, that perhaps more than anyone else, he had.” —Eric Johnson



of chords that were identical voicings with different fingerings [Ex. 9].

adjacent strings at the same fret. (The fourth grip is a ridiculous stretch!)

THE FRIENDLY MAJOR 7

Another good scale tone that is often added to the basic major chord is the 7 (that is, the 7th tone of the major scale). The resulting chord contains the 1, 3, 5, and 7, is commonly called the major-7th chord, and has the common symbol *maj7*. In Ex. 10, numbered for convenience, you'll find some of the most popular voicings of this oft-used friendly color. Compare the first and fifth voicings. Also compare the sixth to the second; the seventh, eighth, and ninth to each other; and the last to the second.

And here are some slightly more unusual voicings that have thrilled me ever since I first had the pleasure of making their acquaintance [Ex. 11]. Make sure that your guitar is really in tune for these voicings, because some of them contain two notes right next to each other on

ENRICHED CHORDS

As is the case with the add-9th chord, the major-7th chord may replace the basic major chord whenever you desire the extra spice that the added tone seems to impart. Notice that we're not really using chord substitution when we play *Cadd9* or *Cmaj7* in place of the basic C major chord; it's more like we're enriching what's already there. I call this, simply, *chord enrichment*.

When you add both the 7th and 9th scale tones to the major chord, a major-9th voicing results, the symbol for which is *maj9*. As with its siblings, add-9th and major-7th chords, the major 9th chord is simply an enriched major chord. Enriched chords are commonly referred to as *extended chords*. When playing Ex. 12's voicings for the major 9 (which I've selected because they sound particularly rich and

EX. 9

EX. 10

EX. 11

EX. 12

THE RESURRECTOR

"Solo Guitar made a big impression on me. What hit me first was Ted's intro to 'They Can't Take That Away from Me.' It was full of great chords—chords that, at least up to that point, I didn't know—and his arrangement made the old standard sound fresh. He made 'Summertime' sound good, too—which isn't easy, because that's one evergreen that has been done thousands of times. Ted was very orchestral in his playing, and was one of the first to use artificial harmonics in an advanced way. I first heard the album when I was preparing to do my first tour with John McLaughlin and Paco de Lucia in the late '70s. I visited John in his flat in Paris and we listened to Ted's record together. John didn't like a whole lot of other guitar players, but he sure liked Ted." —Larry Coryell

vibrant), there are a few details you should keep in mind, so I've numbered them for convenience. In the fourth voicing (which is hard to fret but very pretty), the 2nd and 3rd fingers may be reversed. In the sixth voicing, there is no 3 in the chord. The ninth voicing is another difficult-but-pretty one, and in the tenth grid you'll find another difficult grip; one that requires double-stop technique (in which you use a single finger to fret two notes), as the 2nd finger holds notes on both the fourth and fifth strings. Finally, compare the eleventh voicing to both the first and tenth voicings.

STEEL 6 CHORDS

The major-6th chord is formed by adding the 6th scale tone to the basic major chord: 1, 3, 5, 6. It has a unique sound—very sweet; loved by many, shunned by some. Steel guitar players usually play richer, fuller voicings of this chord than do most of us "regular" guitarists. One reason is that one common tuning of the steel guitar lends itself to nice major-6th voicings. But if you're willing to work, you can achieve quite a few of these voicings on a regular ol' 6-string, too.

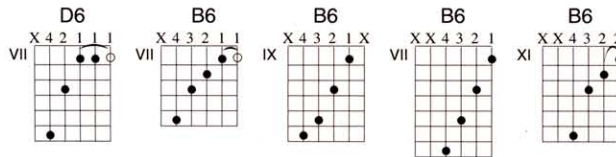
The final two examples in this lesson list some of my favorite voicings for these pedal steel-type chords. The fourth voicing in **Ex. 13** is a real stretcher. (Do you hate me yet?) In the last one, use the *side* of the 1st finger for the notes on strings one and two. George Van Eps, who taught this to me, calls it the "5th finger principle." Try arpeggiating these voicings—they sound especially good that way.

And last but not least, here are some of the many other voicings of the major 6 that are available on the guitar [**Ex. 14**]. The first four A6 voicings correspond directly to the next four (compare the first to the fifth, and so on)—the same notes simply played on different strings. Of course, as with the other major extensions, you can use the major 6 in place of the basic major chord whenever your ears say "yes." B.B. King, for example, often uses a major 6 for the tonic (key chord or I chord) in blues progressions.

I hope that this article has helped reveal some of the ways in which the guitar is particularly suited to provide unusual and beautiful chord voicings. If some of these fingerings look impossible, don't forget how tough basic chords seemed when you first learned them, and how you can now play them almost automatically. Good luck! 🍀

For more on all things Ted Greene, visit his online tribute page at tedgreene.blogspot.com.

EX. 13



EX. 14

