

Ted Greene

The renowned teacher left a legacy of passion and knowledge for his students

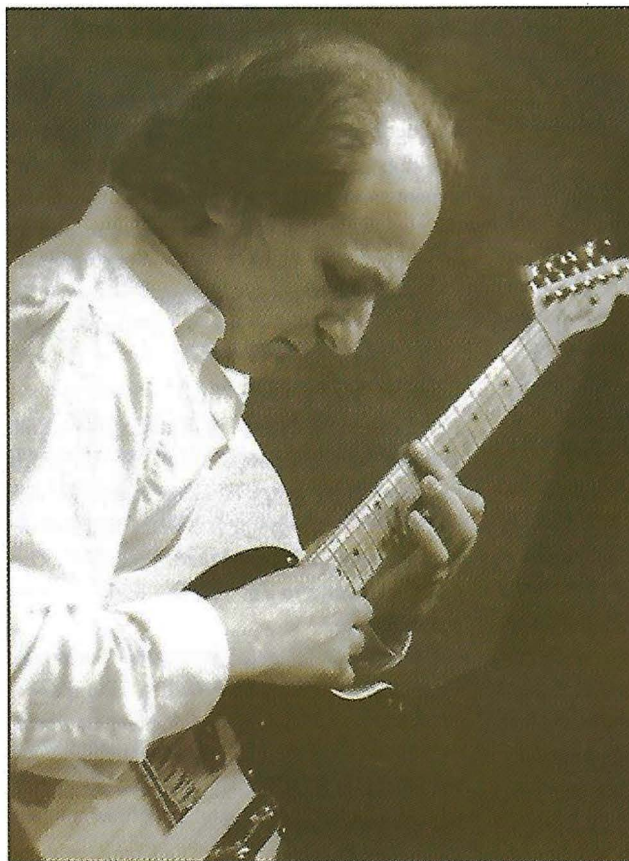
BY JASON GAROIAN

Ted Greene was one of a kind, a teacher's teacher. Although he only released one album under his own name, 1977's *Solo Guitar*, his contribution to music, through guitar teaching, is immense. The brilliant guitar instructor passed away at his home in Encino, California, on July 25, 2005, at the age of 58, leaving behind legions of inspired students and a catalog of superb teaching materials. *Chord Chemistry*, the comprehensive chord book which is his best-known work, has secured him high rank in the pantheon of guitar geniuses. A consummate teacher and scholar, Greene's commitment to music and his students is a testament to what is possible in the world of guitar pedagogy.

PINPOINTING A STUDENT'S MUSICAL PERSONALITY

Greene was a gentle, caring spirit who extended himself far beyond the typical teacher-student relationship. "If you kept coming back and you became friends with him, he would go that extra mile, doing whatever it took to help you," says Tony Darren, a longtime student and friend of Greene's.

To Greene, teaching wasn't just his job. According to his students, he felt he was entrusted with their musical development, and he took great care with that appointment. Extremely sensitive to his students' level and interests, Greene would quickly pinpoint a student's musical personality and assist them in their musical evolution. He'd get a sense of what someone liked by playing records and chord progressions for them. In Darren's lessons, that attention even extended to chords. "He knew what I liked," says Darren. "At the time, I didn't know these chords, but he'd play major sevenths, major ninths, 6/9s, and



I thought, 'I love that chord.'" Greene would compile tapes for Darren and introduce the new voicings in increments.

GUITAR GURU

Greene's home studio was lined with stacks of books, records, and videos, and he had piles of amps and guitars. No distinction was made between living space and workspace. He could always be found with a guitar in his hands, most often his '52 Fender Telecaster. Famous guitar players would seek him out for a lesson when they were in town. "Going

to Ted's was like going to Yoda's den," says Darren. "He always had bare feet, he never had shoes on, and he never sat in a chair. He'd always sit cross-legged on the floor. And then, when we'd listen to music, he'd close his eyes and just kind of bob his head up and down and really get into it."

Even though Greene was an expert guitarist, he was always able to meet people at their own level. If a student wasn't getting something, he would find a different way to communicate the concept. "His mind was like an iron trap, and it worked a million miles an hour," says Darren. "Sometimes I couldn't keep up with it. Then, he'd break [the

concept] down and simplify it to its most basic element. He wouldn't stop until you understood it. You wouldn't meet a sharper guy, that's for sure. He was definitely firing on all cylinders."

While writing out a lesson, Greene would have Darren play the material they'd covered the previous week. Never skipping a beat, he'd correct Darren without looking up from the paper. "He'd say 'No, no, what was that chord?'" Darren recalls. "And I'd say 'minor-seven-flat-five.' And he'd say, 'No, no, play it again.' [If I made a mistake] he'd pick it out in a minute, but he'd never stop writing the next lesson."

A FOUNTAIN OF KNOWLEDGE

Greene covered so much ground in his hour lessons that most people found it

necessary to record them just to keep up. "I used to have hours and hours of those tapes," says Mike Rao, a guitar instructor at Blue Bear School of Music in San Francisco. "The time would go by really fast. You never knew what you were going to walk out with. It was really intense."

In addition to the tapes, Greene's handouts are the stuff of legend. His students remember how he regularly churned out comprehensive learning materials. "He'd have chord-melody arrangements laid out for 'Prelude to a Kiss,' 'Misty,' 'Stella by Star-

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light’—every jazz standard you can think of,” recalls Rao. “He’d written all this stuff out by hand in the same way that he’d written all his books out. [The chord diagrams and fretboard charts in Greene’s books are handwritten.] I still have a lot of that stuff. Once in awhile I’ll Xerox it for a class, and I’ll mention to the students to make sure they look into his books.”

WRITING THE ROSETTA STONES

For those of us who didn’t have the opportunity to study with Greene directly, he left behind four excellent instructional books: *Chord Chemistry*, *Modern Chord Progressions: Jazz and Classical Voicings for Guitar*, and

Single Note Soloing, volumes 1 and 2 (all Alfred, www.alfred.com).

His magnum opus, *Chord Chemistry*, shows how Greene could see the fretboard from a multitude of angles. Both thoughtful and exhaustive, this book is recommended reading for anyone looking to secure an advanced understanding of guitar theory.

SHARING HIS PASSION

Greene set an example that will continue to provide inspiration for future generations of guitarists. He was a gifted teacher and player, and he will be sorely missed. In the words of Darren: “I’ve never met anybody like him before or since. It’s sad, because you’d think,

‘I can always go to Ted if I need a little injection or something.’ Well, that’s just not going to happen anymore. There are so few people that I’ve met that are that passionate about something and they want to share that—and there’s certainly nobody like Ted.” ■

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Ted’s Advice

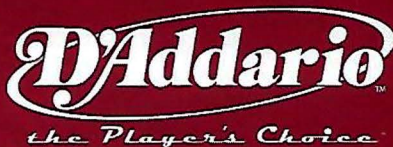
Greene’s wisdom lives on through the advice that he offered to his students.

- “Being a great guitar player is a lifetime commitment.”
- “Don’t compare yourself to famous or more accomplished guitarists. Compare yourself to yourself.”
- “Shed your musical prejudices in order to appreciate all types of music.”

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