

Ted Greene: Chord Chemist

Ted Greene is one of the most respected guitarists alive. What's interesting is that Greene rarely plays live. Greene's reputation is built largely on the strength of the four books of music theory he's written. The first, *Chord Chemistry*, written in 1971, is still selling out in bookstores across the nation.

Primarily because of that book — containing perhaps the most comprehensive list and in-depth study of guitar chords ever printed — Greene has attained the reputation of "theory monster."

"That guy understands the harmonic relationship between every note that exists," says ace guitarist Ry Cooder, who had enlisted Greene's aid in transposing some of the difficult material for his own *Jazz LP*.

Despite the fact that he can execute the most complicated music, Greene started out, as many a star-struck youngster, wanting to be like Elvis. "I even had a pink and black guitar because those were his favorite colors," Greene remembers. "Then I got turned on to Chuck Berry — that was a big moment — and later to B.B. King. That guy's phrasing still knocks me out. Then I went through what I guess you could call my 'blues phase,' though that's not really accurate because of all the music that I've absorbed. Rather I'm still most comfortable playing blues."

Greene's next inspiration was Wes Montgomery. "If I hadn't heard anything for the next 10 years, he would have kept me going. Wes

was responsible for my learning theory, too. I couldn't figure out what he was doing. And right then I knew that if I didn't learn, I'd never really be able to play. I didn't want to do it, but there it was."

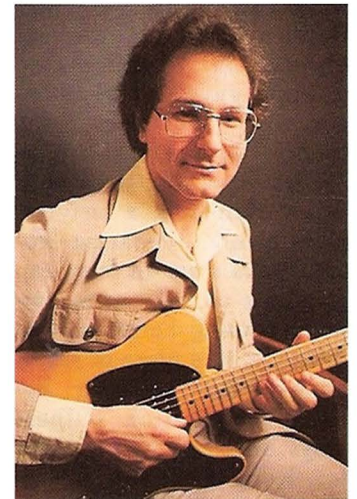
Greene went into theory, totally committing himself to a complete mastery of the guitar, and the result was *Chord Chemistry*. With the success of the book, Greene became one of the world's most sought-after guitar teachers. Today, the last person on Greene's waiting list may sit over two years before receiving the first lesson, and then only after meeting "the master's approval."

"They have to be serious, and they have to practice," Greene laughs. "Those are my only criteria — ones, unfortunately, that a lot of people don't meet. I do take teaching seriously. It's partly for selfish reasons. Teaching has been very satisfying, and it makes me learn. Kids today are so damn good. When I was coming up, if

you could just copy the guitar solo on Bill Doggett's 'Honky Tonk' you were considered good. Now you have to *create* your own sound."

And what is Greene's sound? He shrugs noncommittally, then smiles. "I guess you might call it corny. I love film music, especially the stuff from about 1937 to 1957. Phenomenal stuff. It goes through a multitude of moods that seem to fit any image one can conjure up. I grew up hearing Gershwin, and I still love that. I love to play tunes like 'Over the Rainbow' or 'Send in the Clowns' — *straight*, though, not jazzed up. I'm not a jazzier, that's for sure. I mean I can play it, but there's an entire elitist element here that turns me off."

What about rock 'n' roll — the music that's being played on AM radio today? "I really don't have much relationship to it. Most of it sounds like a recycled version of what I heard years ago, only it's not played as well. People want heroes so badly that they take whatever's in vogue and glorify it — especially in music. Today the guitar has become a symbol of power. As a result, all types of subconscious messages now come into play when you think of a



Greene: the master of the art.

guitar player, such as, 'Hey, that guy has all the money and all the chicks . . .' And the odd thing is, none of that has anything to do with music." —STUART GOLDMAN