

MY INTERVIEW WITH TED GREENE

By Robert C. Jones.

I conducted this interview with guitar legend Ted Greene in February 1995. I had planned on finding an outlet to publish it, but never did. Sadly, Ted left us 10 years after this interview, on July 23, 2005. I just recently came upon this file on an old backup hard drive and decided to share it here. Enjoy!

-RCJ



Photo courtesy Leon White

Combine the logic of *Star Trek*'s Mr. Spock with the passion and soul of Ray Charles, the unassuming and humble nature of a Gandhi, and the expanse and depth of a modern day Da Vinci, and the product might well be chord alchemist and pedagogical guru Ted Greene. A thoughtful and soft-spoken artist, Ted loves sharing his fretboard knowledge with those fortunate enough to make the pilgrimage to his humble home. His four books, including *Chord Chemistry* and *Modern Chord Progressions*, have been cited as essential texts by venerated players and teachers. The treasury of chord voicings found therein stretch the mind, muscles, and joints (some of his fingerings I refer to as "Greene-achers"). On his stellar recording *Solo Guitar*, Ted practices what he preaches, expressing his sublime yet stunning contrapuntal solo-guitar abilities. I caught up with this modern-day Renaissance man at his studio in Encino, California, where we spoke about music, history, and the Zen of guitar instruction.

RCJ: *Where did you come up?¶*

TG: I was born here [in Los Angeles] and moved to Cleveland as a kid, but I grew up in New York, in a suburb called White Plains. I then came back out here in late '63 and have been here ever since.

RCJ: *Do you come from a musical family?¶*

TG: Pretty much. My mom played pretty decent Gershwin-esque piano and my dad played a pretty mean radio. The whole family is bonkers over music.

RCJ: *Your recording Solo Guitar consists mostly of Gershwin and show tunes. Is this linked to your parents' musical influence?*

TG: Yep, they had those shows on right from the beginning. In those late forties/early fifties—I was born in '46—a lot of what America listened to was Tin Pan Alley's product, and a lot of that was inextricably bound up with show tunes. The Great American songbook. We didn't have Elvis or Hendrix, not to mention Jimmy Reed.

RCJ: *Did you have any formal music training as a youngster?¶*

TG: No, it was pretty bad. Let's just say that I tried to play piano. I loved hearing my mom play piano, but I just couldn't do it. Baseball was much more seductive. But then I did take guitar lessons in the fall of '57, from a man named Sal Tardella, one of the great legion of Italian East Coast jazz guitar players. He was a great player and he helped me a lot. Got me reading music. Got me playing some cool little chords. And even got me a Duane Eddy book when I longed for that. I was glad I had lessons.

RCJ: *When did you decide to make music a full-time career?*

TG: In late '64 I started teaching house-to-house. Then in '65, I got hired to teach by a guitar store and I started to know right around then that I just had to do it. So I quit college in '66, handed in my books, and never graduated. I don't regret it.

RCJ: *Many of us start out playing the guitar and then have a kind of epiphany when one day we hear a special recording or see that certain player whose performance totally floors us, changing our lives forever. Have you had this experience?*

TG: Yeah, quite a few, but I'll just mention two of them. One of them was when I was back in New York, in the summer of '64. Everybody there was raving about this guitarist named Linc Chamberland. He was a local legend from suburban New York. People started telling me about his playing this unusual, old guitar. Turned out it was a Telecaster with these slinky strings. This guy played it all. He was so great, it just tore me up how good he was. I'd been playing a lot of years already, but I just didn't have a clue how he was doing what he was doing and getting such a great sound out of such ratty-looking equipment, especially when I had this shiny, beautiful new Gibson.

And then I came out to LA where probably the strongest spiritual musical experience of my life took place. I was in a guitar store and I heard this sound coming from the back. It sounded like two or three guys playing and the tone was better than anything I could ever have gotten out of my guitar. I went back there and it turned out to be this guy who, at the time, was a well-respected player—a fellow named Jay Lacy—sitting there with a Telecaster, playing all these things that...uh...I never recovered! I mean, I had to have a Telecaster! I've played one ever since. I had to learn chords, learn how to play the melody on top like he was doing. Solo guitar, you know? So he gave me lessons. He was a good teacher as well as a great player. He played Chet Atkins [style] too. I almost fell off the chair! I'd never seen anybody play the Chet Atkins style in front of me. I'd heard it, but I just couldn't figure anything out in those days. Except that I loved to play, I knew that.

RCJ: *Why now do you still prefer to play a Telecaster rather than the archtop-through-Polytone set-up that so many jazz guitarists use?*

TG: ‘Cause I was a rhythm and blues guy, man! I just adore that music. What did Steve Cropper play? A Telecaster, you know? I mean, it just seemed like you could get so many different sounds out of these things [*holds his Tele*] without feeding back at the volumes that bands were starting to play at. Whenever I tried to play my archtop-type guitars at band volume, I had those terrible feedback problems. And then I started to get hooked on that bridge-pickup sound for certain kinds of music. But what I was floored by was how sweet and beautiful the neck pickup is for jazz. Plus you could play so high. And you could take them apart and custom wire all kinds of other sounds. Underneath the pickguard you could hide more pickups. Everything about it—except for the three-piece bridge—was just total fun! Before I had heard those two people play them, I thought Telecasters were junk. Then I heard guys get a good sound out of them. Now I think they’re gorgeous! I just love the old Telecasters. Some new ones are great. I’ve got a lot of guitars that I like. As you see, I’ve got Gibsons all around [*points to a few of the Gibsons he has about*]. I love Gibsons. I just really am crazy about guitars. Amps? I’m kind of the same way. I love Fenders. All series. The tweeds. The browns. The whites. The blacks. Those dark, dark brown ones in-between are great. They all sound so different, though. The different circas and series are really different sounding. Love Gibson amps. I love Magnatone amps. Love Ampeg amps.

RCJ: *Though you’ve authored books on single-note playing, you’re best known for your inventive chord voicings. What led you to approach the guitar as primarily a harmonic instrument?*

TG: The simplest answer would be that it’s the sound I love the most. A lot of things led me to that. I was primarily working as a single-string player in the sixties. I loved chords, but it was just so exciting to solo, you know? Crank the amp up and get that “new sound.” But then I’d hear a song with beautiful chords. I remember being disgusted after a certain period of time with the whole way that the contemporary music scene in the sixties was going. Playing in clubs where kids were taking really serious drugs and being “hurt.” I was one of those kids myself at one point—just a year or two older than them—and I started to feel bad. I thought the music had something to do with it too. You’d see them there just lost in a fog. The music was so loud...and so many drugs. I mean, it all seemed to be part of one package. So I said, “No more of this. I gotta work on something a little quieter, so I don’t ruin my ears and hurt anybody else.” I went into a cave and hibernated. Sure enough, there was the classical thing which I’ve always dug. And the tunes. All the tunes in American music. Both of those required some knowledge of harmony which, reluctantly, I finally started to study.

RCJ: *Those of us who have studied the material in your instructional books have encountered two rather unconventional left-hand techniques you employ when fingering some chords. The first involves playing two notes on adjacent frets and strings, using just the side of the slanted index finger. The other involves fingering two notes within the same fret but on adjacent strings, using only the tip or pad of one finger. How did you develop these somewhat difficult techniques in your own playing?*

TG: OK, real simple. George Van Eps is the pioneer. He was my teacher. George, way back in 1939, wrote this book where he shows what he calls the “fifth finger” which, I hope he doesn’t mind, some of us call the “slant finger” technique. Classical folks call it “cross barring.” The pad thing of holding two strings down [with the tip of one finger], I think George came up with that many years ago. The first I ever heard of it might have been from Barney Kessel in his book from the late sixties. All the LA-based jazz players—Barney, Howard Roberts, all those guys—were influenced by George in the technical area. They all admired his ability to do many things that they couldn’t do. They did other things that he didn’t

do. They were jazz players. George is...he's...you can't type him! He's just kind of a contrapuntal guitarist. So I didn't invent either one. I didn't pioneer anything there, really.

RCJ: *Does the Telecaster neck help facilitate these techniques?*

TG: Any decently set-up guitar is prime territory for this stuff. Even on a nylon-string with a wide neck, if you practice, you can get it on there, as long as you're not too far up the neck and it's not too outrageously wide.

RCJ: *Listening to you play, one immediately recognizes the importance you place upon voice leading. Talk a little bit about your concepts of voice leading, especially when arranging a tune for solo guitar.*

TG: I like the idea of multiple possibilities that aren't overwhelming, so what I try to do is find formulas. Whenever two chords connect, I make it into a formula. I actually discuss this in *Chord Chemistry* in a chapter called "Moving Voices (Voice Leading) and Systematic Thinking." It was just something that seemed to offer so much more possibility than just the standard shapes that I'd seen in books. This was contingent, though, upon having a lot of voicings of the chords, so I had to develop a little system to find more voicings. That wasn't too tough. It's not hard to find more voicings if you really want them. To voice lead is very easy if you make everything into something that's just fraught with logic, not dependent on having a good day with your ear. For instance, take moving from an Em7 to a Bb7, two chords you wouldn't normally associate. If you spell those two chords, Em7 (E-G-B-D), and Bb7 (Bb-D-F-Ab), and look to see how the voices should move, a few things jump off the chart right away. The B and Bb might go together. Notice there are two Ds [so no movement is required there]. The E is going to the F, and the G to the Ab. Nothing is moving more than a half-step. The truth is, if you write down any two four-note chords, you can connect them up pretty smoothly. There's some way to do it in 99% of the cases.

RCJ: *When I was in music school, all the guys would say, "Ted Greene's voice leading...he's a genius!"*

TG: That's not genius, you understand, that is knowledge. Bach had all this knowledge. So we study voice leading, we get some knowledge if we live well, and...geniuses? I've met a few. That's a birth thing. I know I wasn't one because I had no ears for three years. I just couldn't find stuff. I was dying to play like Chuck Berry as a kid, believe me I was. Other young kids at dances, a little older than me, could play it. I saw one or two guys do it. "Johnny B. Goode," right there, a year after it's out! I just couldn't find it, man. So genius is crazy! Aptitude, now that's another story. I do have an aptitude for organizational things. That's my strength. My mom and dad—especially my dad—have very organizational-oriented kinds of minds. I guess he threw those genes down on me, and I'm pleased that he did because that was my salvation to find some stuff. But genius? If that were true I would have just found them.

RCJ: *Are you at a point now in your playing where you can improvise an arrangement of a tune and be satisfied with the voice leading, or do you work out all of your arrangements ahead of time?*

TG: It's changed drastically. I used to work out everything in advance because I just couldn't think fast enough to make it happen on the spot. I had to work on them, but that's fairly common, a lot of people don't have real strong brains that way. So I had to do them over and over. Ironically, that led me to be disgusted with it because I'd spent all the time—and used to love the way they sounded—but

eventually some of the glow wore off since I had to play them so much just to learn them. So I just put the solo guitar thing aside for a long time and just let it slide. I was disenchanted but, again, part of that irony chain is that when I went back to do it again, I finally knew enough about the neck and the tunes that I could improvise them. That's what I try to do now because it's a lot more fun. A lot more fun. I mean, if I play the same song in the same key with the same chords over and over and over, it starts to lose something. There are a few Bach pieces I can keep playing that way. The best trick that I know of for myself is to tune the guitar at different pitches because then it sounds fresh. The same piece you've always heard in E minor is now in F# minor. Wow, [looks at his guitar], this is like the little harpsichord or something!

RCJ: *Let's talk a bit about teaching. Having taken a lesson from you myself, it's obvious that not only are you good at what you do, but you love teaching as well. What is it about teaching that you love?*

TG: The connection, I guess. I was always, as my mom described it, an enthusiast. I just always liked to get together with people and say, "Hey, did you hear James Brown's new record? Let's listen to James Brown," or whatever it was. So it was just a way to connect. Also, I just fell into it as a means of supporting myself as a young man, but then it became the challenge of organizing the instrument, too.

RCJ: *So what makes a good guitar teacher?*

TG: A few things. He or she has to find out what the student really (a) loves, (b) wants, and (c) needs. Mix that stew together and see which of those should come out higher. Some people need certain things, but you can tell they don't want them, and don't love them. That's going to be difficult. If they're very discipline-oriented people, which is rare, then it won't be too bad. But the common thing is that everybody wants to sound great. Some people relish work, but most people would like to have it sooner than later. So I may get somebody to practice the things they love by way of the things they need, because they can't just go right to sounding like Pat Martino or Stevie Ray Vaughan in one day. To try to tap into what a person loves, sometimes you have to sneak the stuff that they need by them. I'm not above doing that if that's what it takes.

George Van Eps has a fun story. A guy came to him once and George starts to give him a lesson when the guy says to him, "George, I don't want to learn all about scales and chords and all that stuff!" And George, in his quiet way says, "Well I guess you'd better put it back in the case because I don't know that there is anything else." You have to enjoy working with people. You have to enjoy getting excited or seeing them get excited. It can't be a gig where you and/or a student do not find satisfaction. It won't last. The people I know who've taught and resent it don't enjoy doing it. They do it to make a living, or who knows why? That's no good. You really have to enjoy the connection. You have to enjoy thinking and solving problems, which I do. I love to solve problems. It's fun. You have to like staying home, like being self-employed, having a different tax situation, and not being able to get credit. You have to give up the spotlight, too, in a way.

RCJ: *If one of your students can't make his or her scheduled lesson time you require that they send a sub rather than cancel and pay for the lesson. Why do you have this policy?*

TG: It's the "no-harm, no-foul," rule as [sportscaster] Chick Hearn would say. If they do that—and almost every week somebody sends a sub—it's a cool way, man. I didn't invent it. One of my students did it first before I even thought of it. He just one day, sent somebody in his place and I thought, "There it is. A solution."

RCJ: *A solution to what?*

TG: Well, a solution to blood money. To people burning my effigy on their lawns because they didn't get a lesson they paid for. I need to eat so I want to be paid for the times that they book, and it helps me keep my rates down. But I don't like taking money for nothing. It's not really a good way to live. This way, let's say you booked a lesson and couldn't make it, so you send a pal. Who's hurt? The only way it could be a hurtful thing is if the guy either really didn't want to come and you had to kind of push him into it—which we hope you wouldn't do—or I couldn't help him. But if I couldn't help him, I wouldn't charge him. It's not a big risk.

RCJ: *How has your teaching method evolved over the years?*

TG: The main idea is that we're dealing with human beings here. It's the whole human part of it more than the musical part. Every now and then I get real good at it for a little flash, but I'm pretty much an impatient sort by nature. I'm trying to cultivate patience. I can speak slower now if I need to. It's almost like a bumper sticker, "BE PATIENT OR DIE." And then you get students who—you know this is going to sound strange but it's really true—you don't like, or they don't like you. It's just an initial phenomenon, and it fades. Because when you get to know some of these people you go, "What a sterling person! Where was I? Who did I think I was?" Maybe they were having a bad day. Maybe you didn't like the way they looked at some atavistic, subconscious thing stored down. I think to myself, "Am I just some guy in the playground you were always fighting with?" You know, just crazy stuff! The whole personal part of it is a much larger part now than it was when I was a kid.

I always used to cram for my lessons in the old days, as the teacher. "What am I going to teach them today?" I'd always have a lesson ready. I don't do much of that anymore. They bring so many different agendas in that you just try to go with what they need at the time. I mean, the music has been de-emphasized. It's still about music, but it really gets down to understanding them and how they learn, and what they need, and how not to push the wrong buttons if possible.

Recently I had an experience where I just didn't act very well towards a student, not intentionally, but I was a bit out of control. My student pointed it out to me because he was very sensitive. I felt like, lower than pond algae. I was just way down. But he was good. I apologized, told him I'd try harder not to let that happen again, and we went forward. And we're on a good keel again. But it's tough sometimes. Maybe I've just explained something for the seventh time in a row, and it hasn't worked. Sometimes half of that is frustration towards myself. "Ted, why can't you find a clear wording of this?" "This is G. Here's it's seventh. What could the name of that note be?" [Student responding] "Um...C#?" "No, it's the seventh!"...you know?

RCJ: *Have you found over the years, especially with a popular instrument such as the guitar, that student interest in studying jazz theory, harmony, reading, etc., has in any way declined?*

TG: The opposite, by far! Guitarists are much more knowledgeable now. Magazines, videos, more teachers maybe, although there's definitely a shortage of guitar instructors. I'm humbled by a lot of my students and wish I could play like them. A lot of them come in and they're raging already in some area of guitar. They have something else they don't know and they hope I can help them with it. It's quite astonishing.

RCJ: *Do you see jazz as an intellectual music?*

TG: Well, let's talk jazz for a second. If you speak of New Orleans and then Dixieland—they're almost the same—you're talking raucous contrapuntal music. If people love it, they usually love the raucousness and the intertwining melodies and the stomping vibe it has. Then it moves into Swing. It's hard to not like Swing. You usually have to have a bad association with it not to like it because it's got many of the finest things that music can have to attract the human race. It's got melody. It's got harmony. It's got terrific zest and groove. Hence it was the popular music in the thirties. Children and adults "went to the same ballroom" so to speak. It was the only time in US history, other than a tiny little pocket of the Twist in '61 and '62, when both kids and their parents were dancing to the same stuff. But Swing was it, man, in that sense.

So, "Is it intellectual music?" No, not exclusively. That's the cool thing about that period in particular. It could appeal to the guy who likes his music brainy. In a great big-band arrangement there was plenty going on to attract the mind; the different strands, the different sections, the antiphonal nature [of the music], the call and response, and then a great solo. All of that. But if you'd just had four drinks and said, "I just want to move, man," if it was on that level, you could still feel the beat real strongly. Then you get to Bop. Now there's the first time that jazz became kind of intellectual because, how does it differ from Swing? People don't dance this fast [taps his hands at an accelerated tempo]. It stopped being a body thing. We just don't dance that fast. It was the beginning of the death-knell for jazz being America's popular music. But it had to be. The creators of it were burning with the passion to play that kind of music, for many reasons. The sociological one being that they [the black jazz musicians] were just tired of the white man taking the fruits of their labor and being seen as the innovators, when they were the true innovators. We can't deny that black men invented this music and white men prospered more often. In the Swing era most of the renowned figures at the highest echelon of earning power were white. Although [white clarinetist] Benny Goodman stood up [for the black musicians]. He was the first guy to integrate the band. In the South, when the white hotel owners would say to Benny [about a black band member], "He can't stay here," Benny would insist, "If he can't stay, then we don't stay. We're going home." He was cool that way. I know I'm slightly off the track of your question, but I just had to throw it in.

Also in the Bop period, they stopped having accessible melody as well. You could sing Swing riffs, for example, "In the Mood" [scats the head]. But it's hard for the average layman to sing "Scrapple from the Apple," "Conformation," or "Billie's Bounce." What they [the creators of BeBop] did was calculated. [Saxophonist] Charlie Parker was an immensely-intelligent man, and so was [trumpeter] Dizzy Gillespie. Charlie Christian had already laid some groundwork for asymmetrical phrasing. All these intelligent men, [pianist] Thelonious Monk, [drummer] Kenny Clarke—all those guys—they decided that what they would do is disguise the songs. They would know what they were playing, but nobody could sit in if they weren't hip to what was going on. That way, they would get rid of most of the people who would be profiting in an easy way. The showboating kind of guys who might get the crowds' appeal, but not be as strong a musician. In particular the whites, though they eventually accepted certain white guys like [trumpeter] Chet Baker. Basically, it was a way to keep lesser-qualified musicians from joining their party. They were doing it strictly for themselves. They didn't think they were going to make a lot of money. In fact, there was a record ban in the early period of Bop. A lot of the early Bop was never recorded. They were full of resentment about it, but they were mostly full of joy at the discovery of a new sound that they could be stimulated by. They were bored with the old stuff, too. So, yeah, jazz became kind of intellectual there.

But when the Cool period came along, it stopped being intellectual. It started to be sophisticated, and that's a little different. It took on an aura because it was played in the homes of people who either fancied themselves, or actually were, sophisticates. It became the background music for intelligent people. But

it wasn't music for intelligent people in the sense that you had to listen with your brain to dig it, because Cool is a very relaxed period of jazz. The funky jazz that came in right about that period, what I call Gospel Blues, man, that stuff, you'd be hard-pressed to find Americans that don't like that. Like [plays the opening riff of "Moanin'"], I mean, it just sounds great! That's, in a way, the coolest, creative jazz of all because it's the most universally appealing. So that's not music that's intellectual.

By the period of [trumpeter Miles Davis'] *Kind of Blue*—the late fifties and early sixties—jazz is really easy to listen to on many different levels. True, there are some solos that, for a while there, will probably lose somebody, especially when it gets to the [saxophonist John] Coltrane period. That's for musicians more than the non-musicians. And jazz has pretty much stayed there, if you want to separate it from, say, jazz-fusion or jazz-rock. That came back to the fold because, why? The big thing again, rhythm. When they started using rock, R&B, or funk rhythms with jazz, of course it would appeal to more people. And it does. I'd bet you Pat Metheny has sold more albums than Tal Farlow did by far. Way more. And he deserves it.

RCJ: *How do you respond to the attitude prevalent among some jazz "purists" (such as virtuoso jazz guitarist Jimmy Bruno) that rock is a "boring and infantile music"?*

TG: I understand it and try not to be mad at them for it. There are many reasons to feel the way they do. Picture you're a guy like Jimmy Bruno. You've spent maybe a thousand hours a year of your life studying the instrument. Your peers know that you can play—and maybe are astonished if you're as good as he is. But the average person comes up to you [at a gig] and says, "Hey, you guys know 'Gloria'?" So I can see how a guy like Jimmy or a lot of the older generation—the pre-rock guys—might hear rock as noisy. It is noisier, there's no doubt there. And less-sophisticated, no doubt there. Maybe they're afraid of condemnation by their peers if they admitted that they liked some of it. Although, that changed a lot with highbrow endorsements, like when Leonard Bernstein and those guys in the late-sixties started to say, "The Beatles are doing fantastic things!" The whole art community swung over towards the Beatles, including the so-called intelligentsia. A lot of musicians may have resented it, though a sizable percentage of them ended up playing rock later because they were won over by people like The Beatles. Some of them probably grew to like it a little bit.

But I can see how a certain kind of jazz ear longs for [drummer] Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers and hears people going [plays the chords to "Gloria" and rolls his eyes]. It's just not subtle enough for them. Maybe Jimmy's like that, that would make sense. But that's not me. I mean, I love rock, if it's quality rock...whatever that means.

RCJ: *What do you see as the role of scholarship and academics in the study of jazz guitar?*

TG: That's a nice question. It's a fun subject to think of. Although, if I'm attending MI [Musician's Institute] and spending eight-grand and am not learning well, it's not fun, I guess. You get one guy who goes to music school and he is just enraptured. He makes friends with the other students. They're all working hard as they go home and do their homework. They're all progressing. They understand the classes. They see that they're learning and going forward, and they're being shown why these classes are important for their future careers. That's got to give you a good feeling if you're a young person. There's a sense of security there, that you're going to have a career. Some of the schools have emphasized the career thing, being able to commercially get out there and perform and deliver. And that's good, as long as the students who are being asked to do it aren't doing it with any kind of resentment. For example, take a jazz purist, a guy who, that's what he lives for. But he's playing country on Saturday nights and Top 40 on Friday nights, and he hates this music. That's a drag. He probably

shouldn't have gone to music school. He should have found something outside of music to do to make money so he would only think of music with the beauty that he wants. Just do it for fun.

RCJ: *Once one of my professors in music school told the class that if anyone there was intending to make a career performing, he or she would do better to withdrawal from school that day, to go out into the “real world” and just gig, gig, gig, as much as possible. How do you feel about that advice?*

TG: I don't agree across the board. I don't think most statements of that nature are really that well thought out—with all due respect to the prof. We're dealing with individuals here. For one guy, going out and playing will kill his self-esteem. He'll be psychologically scarred for years, if he ever recovers. He can't cut it yet. He's out there too soon. He's on the gigs and he's way-in over his head. He got the gig because he's got good gear, he's handsome, he can play a little of the music, or sings the rock tunes. Let's say he's playing a casual. The later sets, when all the rock stuff happens on most casuals, he can cut that. But he can't cut any of the jazz stuff, and all the other players are treating him with somewhat-less-than respect because of it. That guy should be home woodshedding so he's a little more prepared. He doesn't have to go to college necessarily, but there has definitely got to be study to play serious music like that.

For somebody who is exceptionally gifted ear-wise, there won't be too much of a problem to look forward to. They'll just keep growing with every gig they play. They'll learn some new sounds and be able to adapt quickly. But most of us have to stay home and study a little bit. So, for certain kinds of people, music school or college is real good because it forces them to do work (a) they might not otherwise have done, or (b) they might not know how to organize for themselves. Although these days it's a lot better of course. If a guy just did every column in, say, *Guitar Player* magazine, for the last decade, boy, would he know some stuff! That's tons of stuff with educational emphasis. I'm not saying that's the way to do it, but there's that, and there are videos, too. I mean, take a Joe Diorio video for example. A guy would have to personally seek out and study with Joe for years to get those secrets.

RCJ: *So if you had a young student come to you and say, “Hey Ted, do you think I should go to music school for guitar?”, what questions might you help that student ask himself before he makes his decision?*

TG: I'd be asking him a lot of questions. What does he want to do? What style(s) of music does he want to play? Does he want to have solo gigs? Does he want to play with another harmonic instrument or does he want to carry the weight? Does he want to be a heavy melodic soloist or does he want to concentrate on the harmonic content of the music? Does he want to play with large aggregations where he has to take a supporting role, or does he want limelight? Because if he wants limelight, he's definitely got to have more to offer, things that capture the public's attention. You can't be a quiet, reflective player and expect all the agents to just be thrilled to book you on the Tonight Show. So, I'd want to find out what the kid really wants to do. You just ask a logical chain of questions. Sometimes they say, “Well I just want to get better.” If they sat that, I usually try to tell them to keep their money and not go to school. There are plenty of ways to just “get better” without spending all that money, meaning no disrespect to the schools—if they're doing a good job.

RCJ: *Have you ever considered making teaching at the college level your full-time gig instead of the private thing?*

TG: Yeah. They've asked me and I've thought about it. But it's fun to wake up and be at work already, you know? You're already home, you don't have to wear socks! You can set your own rules. You don't

have to worry about somebody needing to use the room. It's more fun being self-employed. Though I do miss the camaraderie. I taught in music stores for 11 years before I went private in '76. It was fun, but there were a lot of problems. The guy in next room might be teaching a loud solo, while you're trying to teach a quiet song to a kid whose got a classical guitar or something.

And when you teach clinics [or classes], you could be addressing one faction of students and missing a whole other. But one on one, you look at the person and you say, "By the way, could you explain it back to me?" That's something I often do. I tell them, "I'm the student now. Teach it to me." And if they can, then you know they've learned it.

RCJ: *Texas guitar-virtuoso Eric Johnson has said: "One person who should be better known is Ted Greene, who is incredible...he should be president! If a lot of people had the opportunity to hear cats like him, it would really touch them in their lives." How could we get to hear more of you so that can happen?*

TG: Wow! I'm a fan of his so it's nice to hear that. I'll have to battle with my inner demons and get out there and make more records. I really would like to share music with people. As a kid, my dream was to be a player first. I'm still planning to go out and play, even in the next year again, and see if I could keep it consistent and enjoy it. It's just that, I can't seem to please myself musically for extended periods of time. I go through wonderful raptures, periods where I'm happy with my playing for a while, but then it starts to sound not exciting anymore. I get very disappointed. I just have to find a way to get myself on that track again.

There was a period where I really enjoyed my own playing, I really did. One of the highest times I ever had in my life was playing in front of a hushed crowd, quite a few-hundred people, and I just felt absolutely beyond euphoric. Every note sounded gorgeous. I felt like I could do anything I wanted and that everybody wanted to hear it. If it could always be like anything close to that, I'd be out there still. But [there have been] too many nights of saying, "Hmm, this doesn't sound that good," or "They don't really want to hear this, do they?" or on and on, you know?

RCJ: *Do statements such as Eric's ever challenge you to keep your ego in check?*

TG: I know where my strengths are. I do a few things that I don't hear other people do. But then again I hear almost everybody who's been playing for twenty or thirty years do something that other players don't do. I understand why some people would think I'm a great player and others would just say, "He's all right. He's moving the fingers a lot." One guy might hear that record I did and go, "He had some nice chords in there, man. That's not bad." Another guy might say, "Well, I heard some of this at my dentist's the other day!" Then another guy might hear it and say, "Wow, man! That guy's kinda got some other voices moving around," and he might like that. It's really such a personal thing. It's not the most accessible style of guitar, I know that. I do play other styles that are more accessible; R&B, and a kind of Ray Charles Gospel-influenced style. Ray is my all-time favorite in some ways, my biggest influence, though it hasn't come out much in my playing. One cut on my record, "Old Man River," showed a little of that. When I play out and I play things of that nature I can connect with more people. And then the average person might say, "Gee, we like this guy's playing," and that is heart-warming. As to why somebody like Eric Johnson would think that, I don't really understand. If he'd said Danny Gatton, I'd understand. Danny to me was the ultimate all-around exceptional guitarist. The hot-rodder of all hot-rodgers! Or if Eric had said that about Lenny Breau, I could understand it there too, because Lenny had such a refined excellence. I can't imagine why Eric would feel that, so I'm just flattered!

RCJ: *Talk a little more about your relationship with George Van Eps.*

TG: He's a very good soul, a good man. I studied with George in 1972 and it was really a glorious experience. Not because I learned so much at the time. I was a pretty bad questioner. I'd just sit there and try to wipe the drool off my body! I didn't know what to ask him really, I'd just go into an emotional state. This happened to me throughout my life with teachers. They'd start playing and I would just get the "raptures" and forget to think. When I first heard George I was into black jazz players. The Kenny Burrells and, my favorite of all time, Wes Montgomery.

I had an experience where I heard George in a club and it was another one of those, as you said, "epiphany"-type of experiences. I wanted to study with him, I asked him if I could, and he let me. He's an extraordinarily intelligent guy. He was hurt a little by some of his students who tried to steal his material and publish it, so he wouldn't let you tape a lesson. He wanted you to love the music the way he did, and it was easy for me to fit that criterion. He would play and I would just love it. I never heard anybody play as much guitar as George does. He can play more guitar—solo, sitting down by himself—than anybody probably who ever lived. He just has studied it longer and harder, and maybe loves it more, too. He would show you whatever you wanted if you kept after him about it. First he had his plan. But after every lesson I'd mention to him that I came to learn this one piece that I had heard him play in a club, a little lullaby he wrote for his grandson. That's what I really wanted. And by the third lesson—it was so beautiful—he said, "Oh, hell!" He just threw all the materials that he had arranged for our lesson off the desk. He saw that I understood what we were doing and must've said to himself, "This guy's going to get all this stuff on his own." It was just a great moment. Then he started showing me pieces, and that was all we did for the rest of the time. But he wouldn't let me tape them, so I had to really stretch my molecules to retain some of it. I got along great with him and tried to be respectful because he deserved it. I was thrilled to write a cover story on him for *Guitar Player* magazine once.

George has probably pioneered more stuff for solo guitar than anyone. It's pretty easy to say that. He taught Johnny Smith and Tony Mattola, both of whom became top-flight solo guitarists. Howard Roberts, who plays great solo guitar on his old Capitol Records—a cut here, a cut there—he was George's student.

RCJ: *Have you ever done any performing with him?*

TG: Oh, no! I wouldn't even dream of calling him for something like that. Although there is a young fellow who does do that. His name is Howard Alden. He's a fine player. He complements George well. I have a feeling he gets along just great with George and it's good for both of them. George is the top guy, harmonically. He doesn't often show what he knows, all the knowledge. I'll give you an example of what I'm trying to say. On an album called *Soliloquy*, his last album for Capitol, he does some cuts where he's into very modern things. It's not just the old thirties and forties sound, it's really advanced stuff with a lot of wild progressions. You can't imagine that it's coming out of the guitar! And then you can't imagine it's the same guy! His fondness is for the older sounds, but the guy has a lot of other knowledge.

RCJ: *Talk a bit about Lenny Breau.*

TG: Oh, man! Probably the greatest all-around player I've ever seen. Lenny had covered more ground—other than Danny Gatton—of any player I've ever been exposed to. It's funny—great in a way. Danny Gatton's favorite guitarist, by far, was Lenny Breau. So it took one to know one. Of course they both died young of tragic circumstances. It's funny, too, because they don't sound anything like each other. Danny's a hot-rod guitarist, treble pickup a lot of the time. Played great jazz, but wasn't as famous for his jazz. Lenny, on the other hand, was primarily famous for his jazz, playing in a quiet, mellow

sound. But Lenny could really hot-rod it sometimes with his technique. He could bar on any fret—any fret—and play pulloffs at a really ridiculous rate, in any of his favorite scales, over the bar. Little hands, but really strong. Lenny brought in the “harp-like” harmonics even though Chet [Atkins] discovered and invented them. Lenny took it real far, Chet was the first to say that. Lenny explored the field of comping and single-line playing at the same time, with independent rhythms. I think he’s the pioneer there. Lenny just kind of almost invented a new way to play the guitar and ever since a lot of us have been trying to do that. So, if that was all he did he’d go down for that, but he did so many other things well.

RCJ: *Where do you see jazz guitar headed?*

TG: All over the parking lot my good fellow! Everything that’s happened is still out there being developed. There are going to be a ton of guys that keep the Bebop spirit alive. There are going to be a ton of guys going after the Coltrane and post-Coltrane thing. There are going to be a ton of guys with that blues, Grant Green, Kenny Burrell thing. And there are a ton of guys like the Methenys, Sterns, and Scofield, who’ve said, “I’ve heard Hendrix and lived to tell about it.” There are just so many schools that are going to keep going and, who knows? Someone like Bill Frissell has his own approach which is quite different, quite modernistic. He and John Abercrombe, they’re kind of kindred spirits, off-beat the way they play the instrument. Stanley Jordan, he’s become more of a jazz player. At first I wasn’t convinced that he was really going to go that way, but I think he really tries hard to play what he would—in a respectful way—call jazz music. He’s gotten a lot nicer tone in recent years. Allan Holdsworth, now he’s one of the only innovators in guitar. I mean he’s a true innovator, brilliant guitarist. It scares me when I listen to the man he’s so good.

RCJ: *Any new books or recordings in the works to look forward to?*

TG: Yes. I’ve developed a system—it’s nothing profound—but it is thrilling because it’s, in a way, complete. You can find all the chords through it. You don’t miss any! I’m excited about releasing it. It won’t be overwhelming because I’ll put in preferred chords since some voicings just aren’t as good as others. I’d like to say it’s going to come out in ’95. I’m going to work hard on it. I’ve got 50 or 100 other books started on all kinds of stuff—bass-energized triads...easy systems...it can be organized. Everything in music can be organized. It’s a blast! Also, coming up in a month, I have a recording with a singer friend.

As far as solo playing and recording? I have to see if I can get horny for my own playing again. Maybe. I’d sure like to.

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