

Ted Greene

A Very Talented Bunch of Guys

What guitar student hasn't seen Ted Greene's books? His *Chord Chemistry* has become a "must have" among serious players and his *Modern Chord Progressions* and *Jazz Guitar Single Note Soloing, Volumes 1 & 2* have been invaluable for countless students aspiring to play over chord changes. Certainly his guitar studies require focus and dedication but they yield truly valid rewards as well as being dandy reference books. Ted has carved a niche for himself by writing great instructional books that have helped fill a void for committed players. No teacher can do the work for a student but, through his comprehensive books, Greene facilitates many of the things a serious guitarist needs to know.

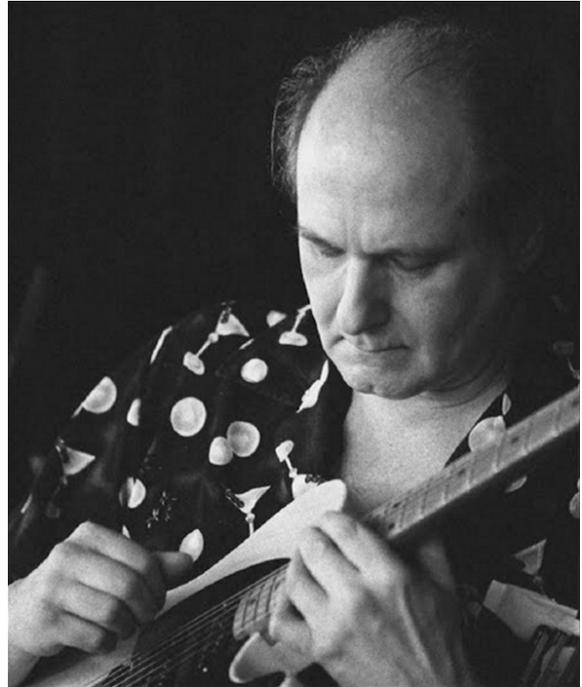
He's delightful to talk with and his soft-spoken demeanor almost belies his ability to dazzle you with his guitar scholarship. His knowledge of the genre is encyclopedic. He can rattle off the names of players, famous and obscure, current and past, esoteric guitar models, relate interesting vignettes, music theory, and just about anything else you'd want to know about the guitar world with the acumen of a true authority. I still haven't figured out if he's left or right-brained. I suspect he's one of those rare individuals who has both sides of his bio-computer in near constant confluence.

He claims he isn't a jazz guitarist but you'll get arguments about that from many of L.A.'s finest players who've gigged with him or just heard him play. Perhaps it's more accurate to say that he isn't *just* a jazz guitarist. His love and knowledge of rhythm and blues is a tip-off there. He can discuss that subject, rock and roll, country and even classical with the same alacrity that he has for talking about Wes Montgomery, his favorite player. In fact, his 1999 article, for the Web's *Virtual Guitar Magazine*, *Movin' Wes: A High Point in Guitar Artistry*, is a well-written analysis that should be required reading for anyone interested in jazz guitar. And talking to Ted about Wes was a rare pleasure because his astute understanding of Montgomery's style is fascinating and enlightening.

Writing is also among Greene's long list of talents. His articles and essays have appeared in *Just Jazz Guitar*, *Guitar Player* and many other domestic and foreign trade and commercial publications.

Today, Ted spends much of his time giving private lessons, writing for various music publications, creating new instruction books and playing gigs around L.A. He's so busy and dedicated that one top session player called him the "eighth wonder of the guitar world."

We had several talk sessions because Ted had so much on the subject to share. And I'm sure he hopes this interview will inspire readers to pick up their axes and not stop playing until they discover something new – or even old.



JC: *You're well known for your instruction books. Which books did you go through as a student?*

TG: The teacher I had used the Mel Bay books. I started with the blue book – book one.

JC: *The one where you start on the bottom strings?*

TG: That's correct. So, I went through several volumes of Mel Bay, quite poorly I might say, although there were great joys along the way, just to be playing anything that sounded like music. I did love those books – still do. The green one where you get into the key of D and B minor (laughs) was just wonderful. Hey, B minor, I've heard of this (laughs). That was a good thing for a guy who was my age at the time because I'd been exposed to classical music and enjoyed the sound of it.

JC: *What age were you?*

TG: I started at 11. Even though I was in the Mel Bay books, my teacher would bring along some song folios and take a song like "Embraceable You" and chart out a few little three-note chords for me to play. And that was ecstasy, too, just to hear something connect.

JC: *So you had a good teacher.*

TG: I frankly had a wonderful teacher who was a perfect guy for my temperament because if he'd been a little more strict I might have burned out in favor of baseball or something else. And it got me out of piano as a boy.

JC: *What was his name?*

TG: Sal Tardella. He was based around New York City and he'd come to your home. He actually had his own store, and when we'd go to the store, I'd see Gibsons hanging all the wall. I'd see a 355 and go, "Wait a minute," (laughs). So I knew I'd better practice or I'd never get one of those – even though I didn't practice as much as I should have. But what can you do? You're a kid and driven by so many other things.

JC: *I assume you eventually began gigging with rock bands.*

TG: That's exactly right. It was more R&B than rock but there definitely was rock in there too. Rhythm and blues was my love, which was black music that came out of jazz, if you know how R&B got started.

JC: *Yeah, sure, back when Jerry Wexler was on the scene and producing some great records.*

TG: Oh, he's a real hero to me. He can really put words together. His autobiography is just spellbinding.

JC: *There's a filmed documentary about him that I saw last year. It was previewed at a music industry function in Austin called South by Southwest. But I understand they're trying to find distribution money.*

TG: A film about Jerry Wexler – wow. That would be a dream. I have a film of some old Lenny Breau stuff where he's just out of his teens and looked kind of like Elvis, but he's playing some bebop on a non-cutaway Gibson. It's really something to see the formation of his style. You can see the evolution of it by watching this.

JC: *There's footage of him with Tal Farlow, too, in that documentary on Tal.*

TG: Yeah, I've seen much of it. It's wonderful to see Lenny walking with his case and meeting Tal. I have quite a few Wes things too. I really like that English TV show he did, and I love *Wes in Belgium* that I think is commercially available. I just hope his family is getting the royalties.

JC: *Let me ask you about Wes's playing. As you know, there are so many books of his transcriptions. Years ago, Fred Sokolow sent me his. One of the first I believe.*

TG: Yeah, I met him years ago. I think his was the second Wes book that was done.

JC: *Was the Kahn book the first?*

TG: No, the first was that black book Robbins published that was \$3.95 when books cost a dollar.

JC: *Oh yeah, that had "Bumpin' on Sunset" and "Tequila."*

TG: Yeah, Jimmy Stewart was the guy who did that. Remember Gabor Szabo?

JC: *Sure. He was a great player.*

TG: Right. His rhythm guitarist was Jimmy Stewart who put that black book together. Then came Fred's book, and Kahn's and then a Japanese book and a few others. I barely know Steve Kahn but one of my students knows him well and says Steve has "ears for days" so I'd trust his transcriptions pretty well.

JC: *When I talked to Fred about it he said Wes would often use the melodic minor scale up a half step over a resolving 7th chord and then up a fifth over a non-resolving 7th chord.*

TG: Are you saying that he thought like that or that he used those notes?

JC: *Just that he used those notes.*

TG: Oh, he absolutely used those notes, but if he thought like that I'm the Easter Bunny.

JC: *(Laughs) I think he was about as pure an artist as could be.*

TG: He was indeed a pure artist, which we both believe, but he had a little bit of a ground in theory, which I believe because of an interview I have with him where I actually heard him say the words, "G minor seven."

JC: *Laughs.*

TG: When I heard him say that I leapt off the floor because it enabled me to trash any of those idiot savant theories. And remember, his brothers were part of that scene and everybody there talked music. In the late sixties the jazz thing caught on with younger guys who were born at the end of World War II, and they were embracing some jazz ideas. But where were they going to learn it? A lot of them were confused at how to go about it because a lot of the jazz guys didn't know how to explain what they were doing. But a few of them could see, for instance, that it was a D9 shape under their fingers, and they knew that they were playing a sharp 11 – they might have called it flat five, but they knew.

Remember when you were a kid and your teacher would say, “You've got to learn these two European minor scales whether you like it or not?” And you'd say, “Oh, you're kidding, you mean it's just that? And, “Wait a minute, that altered thing you're doing. That's just another melodic minor.”

So all those hybrid theories of whenever you're on a chord, you have to think another chord's parent scale rose up out of the ashes. And it was fueled a little bit by George Russell's *Lydian Chromatic Concept*, which was totally oriented toward that thing. And that's a book that Bill Evans and others endorsed. But no way was Bill Evans thinking that way. There's a video of him talking about his playing, and another of him with Marian McPartland where he's discussing his playing and jazz concept. But he makes some huge leaps (laughs). You're on top of old smoky and suddenly you're deep into the jazz stuff. But that's okay, it's still great.

JC: *Yeah, speaking of Marian, I just got a CD of her “Piano Jazz” show with Bill Evans and another of her with Kenny Burrell.*

TG: Oh, I've never heard Kenny Burrell play anything other than tasty, tasty stuff.

JC: *Oh yeah, and he and Wes were close.*

TG: Right. I got to finally shake Kenny's hand for the first time at John Collins' funeral where he and Russell Malone played – very well, I might add. I was so struck by him. I wasn't prepared. I just thought he'd be a polite guy but he was so hip! He is a hip guy.

JC: *Yeah, and he teaches a college class on Ellington.*

TG: That's right. He's the head of jazz studies at UCLA. Mr. Kenneth Burrell (laughs). But anyway, I think Wes was a down-to-earth guy in that he knew it was a D9 that he was playing, but maybe didn't always know the exact names of everything. He was kind of what Joe Pass pretended to be. Joe liked to pretend that he was just this coal miner's boy who didn't know anything, except that you play what you hear and play from your gut. And he loved to play the buffoon in that way with the young kids who talked theory around him but who couldn't play the beautiful tunes that he loved.

JC: *Isn't that what it's all about - playing what you hear?*

TG: That's very true, but he came across like...well let me tell you about my one lesson with Joe Pass: I had prepared a legal-sized pad of questions on technical things, all mainly about what he

was thinking when he was playing. I went to his house and he was very cordial. I had played on the same bill as he did so he knew I could play. I wasn't necessarily playing jazz, just some romantic music – with a little jazz, but just a little – mostly floating ballads and so forth.

I don't think he respected my playing, or disrespected it either. But at the lesson he says, "Why don't we play a tune and if you see something you like just stop me." So, we're playing "Days of Wine and Roses" and we get to the Bm7b5 in the key of F. I say, "Joe, are you thinking sharp 4 there?" I wanted to know if he was thinking 2, or 3, cause it's gonna be a 2-5-1 of 3. I asked about the sharp 4, hoping he'd say yes, and that he wasn't making key center switches with every change, because on fast tempos when those changes come, some guys say they're always thinking 2-5 but I'm not so sure, because that's hard mental work.

Like, here comes the 3, but we turn it into a new 2, of the 2 and it's even harder to say than to think, but that's a tough call for a lot of players. So, I was hoping he'd say he was thinking in the home key and seeing all the roots in the home key because it didn't really sound decidedly modulatory, like a tune like "All the Things You Are" or something like that. So, "Joe are you thinking sharp 4?" He looks at me and says, "What's sharp 4?"

JC: (*Laughs*)

TG: And I did what you're doing. I started laughing. I'd prepared all these questions and all. So, when I regained my composure, I said, "Well, what are you thinking?" He said, "Nuttin, nuttin." And I said, "Well what would you do if Carmen McRae said, "Let's do 'All the Things You Are' in five flats?" And he thought for a moment and he took off like a bat outta hell after he located the first chord, walking the bass and playing the melody at the same time – really fast.

But, suddenly it all came to a screeching halt because he was down in the first position a lot and he ran out of room. And because he wasn't thinking – trying to show me that you don't have to think, but just hear, even the great Joe Pass got stuck. So, I made a mental note that he may not be thinking, because he's earned the right, but I've got to think or I'll just come to a crashing halt – because even he could come to one. And he acted like he was ready to stop, but I'd watched him carefully and he stopped because he couldn't tell where things went next because that's a hard set of changes if you're out of room. So, if you're not saying letter names at all, then how will you always know how far to jump up the neck, if you're at the first fret?

JC: *That's a great story. I suppose you could think G9 or Dm6 if you've got a Bm7b5, right?*

TG: That's the other thing I wanted to know because there are about five or six other names for that chord that are valid and I didn't know if he was going to throw me a curve. Dick Grove had everybody convert minor sixths into half-diminisheds. But I've learned not to do that in some cases because you can have more happening if you literally go into the key of a minor sixth and take its resources out.

And Wes was like Joe in that he knew enough theory so that he could talk about it, at least at a rudimentary level. If it's a D7b9#5, he'd probably say, "Hey, it's still a D7." I don't think he was saying, "Oh no, you've got to think a melodic minor up a half-step up." And those were the things that came from having to explain it to young students. I really saw that come about because that didn't exist when I was a kid. Nobody talked like that and nobody explained things

like that. It was just called a D7 and then you'd add some other things. And they didn't call them tensions either.

JC: *Remember that exercise Joe did in that orange book where he played a blues with just those two 13th chord forms? That was an example of simplicity. But I think, if you had to choose just one chord to use, the m7b5 covers a lot of ground. And it can function as a major, a minor or a seventh. It's an amazing chord form.*

TG: That's so true. And it's an altered dominant as well. And you know, it has a romantic 11b9 vibe as well. And sometimes it's a Lydian thing because it's like a Major6b5 and then if you add the extensions you've got a Major7b5 or sharp 11 in the right register. It's also a Lydian augmented thing from another root.

JC: *Show off (laughs).*

TG: (Laughs) Yeah, I don't want to go too far. And the reason I brought Bill Evans up – well, do you know about that George Russell book, *The Lydian Chromatic Concept*?

JC: *No, I don't.*

TG: It was one of the very first jazz treatises, and it cost forty bucks back when books were inexpensive. And I found it in a store in downtown L.A. and it had this beautiful color wheel that looked so fascinating, but I was certainly perturbed by his saying that the correct scale for G7#5 is Eb Lydian augmented. So, is it a different root every time I have a fancy chord?

JC: *I see what you mean. Did you go through the Jerry Coker book?*

TG: I went through his first book when I very young in the Sixties and I was quite upset because it still wasn't what I wanted. It didn't make me sound like Jimmy Smith and Wes.

JC: *Was that "Patterns for Jazz?"*

TG: No, but I did that one, too, and it was definitely worthwhile, but again, I couldn't become Joe Pass overnight through that book and I was looking for a book that would give me those cool sounds. I have thousands of guitar books, truly. I'd spend all my money on them. I got the Kenny Burrell transcriptions. Remember that blue book from many years ago?

JC: *Sure.*

TG: I would play through those books and get a few ideas, but none of them said, "look, if you want to play over an altered dominant, try these seven things here..." I wish they had but...

JC: *Would you take a major scale up a half-step to play over an altered dominant?*

TG: Me personally?

JC: *Yeah.*

TG: Joe Diorio would. Do you know his work pretty well?

JC: *Oh yes. I have quite a few of his things.*

TG: Have you heard him play live?

JC: *Sure have, many years ago in a dive on Maxwell Street in Chicago. Andy Nelson took me to see him.*

TG: He's really one of the best outside players ever. He makes it fun, exciting and musical, and he's a very romantic guitar player for a jazz guy. He plays ballads like a Gypsy violinist. His vibrato is heavy, he closes his eyes and slides everything. And he plays very little across the strings, almost all lengthwise a la Pat Matheny. He's a beautiful player – very exciting.

And have you ever seen Al Viola play live? He's a hard, hard driven and joyous being. He's moaning and laughing and plays loud. When John Pisano plays with him, John turns into a rhythm machine.

JC: *Al said when he does a big band gig, that it's a joy to grab his L-5 and just play time.*

TG: Yeah, he loves time and he swings really hard. It's really ironic because I saw him play at McCabe's about thirty years ago. That's a guitar store by day and a concert club at night. Don't remember exactly, but he didn't have a huge rhythm section, but he played all night over somebody's changes, but he was a Coltrane guy. He wasn't a swing guy. He was stretching and definitely in that Coltrane state of mind – all his lines were predominantly that kind of conception, not standard swing lines.

JC: *He kept up to date. He didn't become dated like some players, like Hampton for instance.*

TG: Oh yeah, but it's fine with me if guys stay dated – whatever a person wants. I never have a quarrel if someone wants to find his niche and do that the rest of his life. Other guys you respect because they just want to keep growing, like Coleman Hawkins who gets into new stuff. Even John Pisano at one time was playing light strings and bending notes.

JC: *Really?*

TG: Yeah, and when I first saw Larry Carlton do that, it was on a TV show with Johnny Rivers, playing Huey Piano Smith songs, but when it came time to solo, there was definitely this guy who'd played jazz, you could hear it, but he wasn't a jazz player then. He went through a lot of stuff too – playing loud, and he made his career based on those things the public wanted.

JC: *What's your opinion of GIT and the kinds of players they turn out?*

TG: The school - commonly known as MI these days? I'm currently out of touch with what they're doing, but one of my best friends is head of the vocal department there so he keeps me somewhat apprised of the politics and their attitude and what they want. It was bought out years ago by a Japanese businessman, and he wants to turn out rock stars so he can attract more kids. If he'd have turned out Van Halen, he'd be a zillionaire. You know, Howard Roberts started the

school and I think he had a special vision of benevolence in that I don't think it was any scheme for him to get wealthy. He just didn't strike me as that kind of guy. But, when you change ownership in any corporation, things change.

JC: *Do you think that's why Diorio left?*

TG: Oh, perhaps USC just offered him a nicer job. Also, the quality of students was probably better. Joe Pass taught at GIT, did you know that?

JC: *No I didn't.*

TG: When Joe was there it frustrated him in some capacities. As I said before, guys would come in and they'd know the names of many more things than Joe knew – this dominant and this fractured fifth etcetera (laughs), but Joe, at his root, knew the names of things but didn't choose to communicate in those terms most of the time because he was suspicious of academia and because he wanted guys to play with feeling and love and know a lot of tunes. But these kids didn't know a lot of tunes and it bugged the hell out of him. They'd come in and play their fast stuff and he'd say, "Play me a tune man." It would just irk him.

JC: *That explains something to me, because if you pick up his chord book, you'll see, 'Major Type Chords' etc. without any more specifics.*

TG: Right! It's actually a wonderful way to go. I found most students don't like details and find them burdensome.

JC: *And he'd say, "Over a II-V7-I, just play over the V7."*

TG: Yes, he did say things like that. He was just trying to get guys in the door with things like that. It surely wasn't his approach. You can hear him make all the changes most of the time when he was in the mood to.

JC: *Yeah, I lived with his book.*

TG: Oh, it's a great book. You know, Bill Thrasher is the guy who's responsible for that book. Bill just sat and transcribed everything Joe had played into a tape recorder and formulated the words. He was Joe's running buddy. The original *Joe Pass Guitar Method*, which I have a copy of luckily, is probably, oh, 600 pages or so. It was really huge.

JC: *I'm talking about the orange book.*

TG: I know you are. It turned into the orange book because the publisher decided to keep it down to 110 pages or so, which they even shortened later to about 90. But originally it was just massive and started at the very, very beginning. It was a beginner's method up through jazz.

JC: *If you have Andy Nelson's book, I believe you when you say you have thousands of books.*

TG: Oh, I do. I loved that book and it was great to watch Andy play when he'd do those clinics for Gibson. I remember he was always very well dressed and had a crew cut and a tie.

JC: *That's him. He was truly an unsung hero in the world of guitar, especially for Gibson and Epiphone. He did so many wonderful designs for them. And later, he went to work for Leo Fender. And you know, for a jazz guy, he always loved the popular stuff too. For instance, he loved Chuck Berry.*

TG: Really? Are you kidding?

JC: *No. Andy appreciated the fact that Berry wrote such great commercial songs, all with fun stories and lyrics.*

TG: That's absolutely true. His lyrics were just as cool as the music. And you know where his influences were – Louie Jordan and all those guys.

JC: *Oh, you bet, and Andy was the guy who turned me on to Howard Roberts, and his playing on the soundtrack of that Western series years ago, "The Deputy."*

TG: It was years later that I heard about that being Howard.

JC: *Yeah, Sundazed just reissued eight of his Capitol albums. In fact, I got to write the liner notes for the reissues.*

TG: Those were such fantastic albums because there was just so much brilliant guitar. But I guess the jazz press didn't rate them very high in those days because of the commercial sounding organ, and they were all short cuts. But the musicality was unimpeachable.

JC: *Howard said that Wes finally became broken hearted during his commercial pop period because the Hugh Hefner types would come in just to show their girlfriends that they knew the right time to yell, "Tequila." That's so sad.*

TG: Another thing Wes said to Howard and George Benson and probably all the guys was, "See those people? They've come to hear me play the songs they know, but when I start playing my own stuff and real jazz, they start talking." And I think that shows that he was such a sensitive human being.

Right after that he went with A&M because he, by that time, was touring, because the first pop hits were on Verve. "Goin' Out of My Head" was a crossover smash. And I read – it was either Creed Taylor, or Don Sebesky or Orin Keepnews was talking about this somewhere, that they sat him down and said something like, "You've worked two or three jobs all your life and that hasn't made you much money. You've had some acclaim and satisfaction but you have those bills and seven kids that you can put through college. Do this now, then you can go back after three or four years and play jazz again."

The only album I'd advise people to stay away from is the last one, *California Dreamin.'* That was the beginning of the shift. You can hear a change because he's not playing as much on that record. You know, he actually defended himself once in *Downbeat*. He said, "Don't judge it as jazz, I'm not playing jazz." What more could he say?

JC: *He and Benson went through a similar thing. Nat Cole, too.*

TG: It was exactly what Nat Cole went through. A lot of guys called him the greatest jazz piano player of the day. And who doesn't love his voice? And George Benson could defend himself real well, as he also did in a *Downbeat* article. He said, "I'll make a jazz album, but you give me the million dollars I'm going to lose touring behind a popular album." And the other thing George said was that he always was an R&B singer and I'm doing things that I like. But that was distressing in a way, because later, it took over and sometimes he'd go on the Carson show and not even play guitar.

JC: *Nevertheless, his recording of "Stardust" belongs in a hall of fame somewhere. It's an astounding vocal performance.*

TG: He's among the very greatest of jazz guitarists. But with Wes, they told him that he could be just anybody playing jazz guitar but the public didn't get it when he did a single-line thing. And his chord solos could be occasionally very effective, but basically they didn't buy that stuff either.

Johnny Smith never got rich from his recordings on Royal Roost. So, Wes, what do they know you for? Your sound to them is your patented thing of octaves. That's what they want. So we're gonna make records where you're not going to do your choruses or the other two things that you love, just stick with the octaves. And those A&M records are strictly that.

JC: *You're so right. Still, I think "Bumpin' on Sunset" is one of the greatest groove records ever made.*

TG: Oh, I love that cut. I adore that cut.

JC: *It's a great drive song.*

TG: Oh, perfect for the sun coming up or going down. But that's different. "Bumpin' on Sunset" is special for lots of reasons. It's almost in a world of its own. How many other songs did he make that we can hum that were uniquely melodic where he used the double octaves for the theme? And that was a new thing for him, to fret the outside strings. He finally got to use a finger rather than a thumb. Did you know he used his fingers for tremolo?

JC: *No, I didn't*

TG: Yeah, he used the back of his fingernails. That was his particular method. I thought he'd just continue to use his thumb.

JC: *I was listening to my favorite Wes album, "Smokin' at the Half Note," with Wynton Kelly. To me, Kelly was a great sideman but his solo albums don't jazz me as much as his work supporting other players. What do you think?*

TG: I have to agree. Wynton Kelly and Red Garland had that same kind of thing in the left hand. Wynton especially could do certain things that were just perfect. And I loved Wes with Jimmy Smith. Those had some heavy musicianship on display. And how about Oliver Nelson on the

first track, wow. And “Down by the Riverside?” Oh my God, what an arrangement! And the *Bashin’* album with “Walk on the Wild Side”...and the sound of Barry Galbraith’s Stromberg on “In A Mellow Tone.” That’s the best rhythm guitar sound of that era that I’ve ever heard.

JC: *Let’s talk about some of your other favorite players. You have such eclectic taste. You love Lenny Breau. Do you like Jerry Reed’s playing?*

TG: Oh, gee whiz. What can you say? If I have one all-time favorite influence that grows in time as far as my over-all musicianship, it’s his impact on me as a kid. He is the Ray Charles of the guitar.

JC: *Exactly! So few players seem to make that connection. It’s as if he’s playing Ray Charles licks on the guitar.*

TG: But I’ve never played a Jerry Reed piece. I love so many guitar things, that if I don’t limit myself, then I’ll never do anything of my own. I have to force myself not to learn Jerry Reed things, but I’m going to relent one of these days because they’re just too delicious. I used to hear him on Chet’s records.

JC: *I think Chet was a catalyst in that he brought good songs to players who wouldn’t have ordinarily learned such tunes. I’m talking about rockers or country players who wouldn’t have been exposed to standards or show tunes.*

TG: He was the most amazingly versatile guitarist that we’ve ever had. I wrote a legacy when he died that was published in Britain, and I talked about all of the styles he could play – more than anybody’s ever done.

JC: *He was a very respectable classical player. Carlos Barbosa-Lima just loves his playing*

TG: It makes sense. If you had to come up with one guitarist who could just please everybody with so many different things, he’d have to be the one. And although he wasn’t a strong jazz player, he played enough jazz, and played with jazz people well enough, that it sounded like jazz.

JC: *You’ve had some students go on to be successful guitarists, and you’ve taught some name players that I know you don’t want to mention, but it’s common knowledge that you’d get together with John Pisano, probably much like Jack Nicklaus having a consulting teacher or coach.*

TG: Of course, I don’t really teach John. He has such great, great ears and he doesn’t conceptualize music unless he needs to. He just plays. I remember once I played “Yesterdays” with John and I kept switching keys because I like to have fun, and I knew he could handle it. At least, I thought he could, because I didn’t know him that well at the time, but sure enough, he’d follow me and be in the new key right away. And we played a few choruses because I’d switched to a lot of keys. But when we got done with the tune (laughs), he said, and I swear this is true, “What key were we in?” And the use of the singular noun really said it all (laughs). But that’s John.

Occasionally he'll ask me to show him something because he knows other guitarists have traveled different roads and he's an open spirit that way. He's not sitting on a high horse saying nobody can show him anything. He's just the opposite of that. And I'll show him something he didn't necessarily think of first. But whenever I go to see John play, he's not using that stuff anyway. He's John Pisano - he's going to use what works for him. So, I never really think that I teach him.

JC: *Who else really impresses you?*

TG: I think Danny Gatton was about the finest all-around guitarist. I can't imagine playing better than that guy.

JC: *I have a recording of him trading fours with steel player, Buddy Emmons, that's one of the best musical dialogs I've ever heard. I think they're playing "Good Enough to Keep."*

TG: Danny was so brilliant that it's hard to understand the level his nervous system was operating on.

JC: *Roy Buchanan was great as well.*

TG: I love Roy's playing. Did you ever hear him with Bobby Gregg and Friends, in the early Sixties? They had a fairly popular hit, and *Guitar Player* even interviewed Roy in the very early Seventies, long before they put him on the cover. And in the interview, he mentions the cut, which is called "The Jam." He said, "The Jam" in '62, but because of his thick Southern accent they printed, "The Jail Men" in '62."

JC: *Oh, that's funny.*

TG: Yeah, he was playing a Tele and getting the best sound that I had heard to that date, and maybe still, for that kind of sound, I don't know how he did it.

JC: *Ever see that video tape of him playing "Misty," where he was being produced by Mundell Lowe? I think I saw it on NET.*

TG: Yeah, that's a fairly famous piece of tape from the early Seventies. He was getting a great jazz sound on that Tele too, but I'll bet I haven't seen that in 30 years. Did you know that Stones asked him to join their band?

JC: *Yeah, I remember hearing that.*

TG: He and Danny were cut from the same cloth in many ways.

JC: *They were cross-town friendly rivals back in D.C.*

TG: When Roy was on break, he'd call a bartender friend at the club where Danny was playing and ask him to leave the phone off the hook so he could listen to his solos. But they both influenced each other. There's no doubt about it.

JC: Ever hear Gatton play “Melancholy Serenade?” Gleason’s theme song?

TG: I’m probably one of the only guys in the country who played it at the same time he was because I’ve been playing that song ever since I was able to find the chords.

JC: That’s very hip. It’s like a “Harlem Nocturne.”

TG: Very similar. Very, very similar. It’s a very sexy tune. JC: You must like Hank Garland’s playing.

TG: A hell of a talent. Everything he touched he did so well. Even his playing on the Elvis stuff is just perfect.

JC: When did you get hip to Django and Charlie Christian, and how much influence did they have on you?

TG: Charlie Christian was zero influence in my early life in that he was just a name that I’d see in *Downbeat* or something because he wasn’t among the records that my dad had in our home. And I didn’t know that I was hearing him on Benny Goodman records. But I became a Charlie fan later. But my dad had a Django album that was the one he did on electric guitar where he plays “I’m Confessin’” and “Night and Day.” Do you know that one?

JC: Yeah, I think it was his last, around 1953, if I’m not mistaken.

TG: I adore that album. I think Django was the most explosive jazz guitarist ever. You just never knew when he was going to take you on an incredible journey. But back then it was so beyond me. And I’ve been a slow learner all my life. Sometimes I’ll get bursts where I’ll learn something fast but it’s pretty rare. Usually I’ll just have to pace slowly, and of course then, I had no ears to find anything in the jazz realm so I would just hear that record and that’s all. Years later, I developed an ear to recognize major, minor and a few things where I could hear a function. So, I’d go to the Django album and I could hear a few notes, but still not much. And it’s been a slow ride to say that Django even influenced me. Now Wes was an influence because I could grab those octaves. I couldn’t play his single line stuff but I could grab some of the chords.

JC: When did you become aware of Van Eps?

TG: Initially though his ’39 book. His method book.

JC: The one with the beige cover. I lived with that book too.

TG: So did I. But I thought, “I’m playing music by this guy who has a flattop and glasses and says I should never sit more than 45 minutes with the guitar – three practice periods a day.” And there were so many rules: you gotta sit a certain way and so on, but I’d play the notes and really liked playing those little chord scales. But then, somebody played me a record by him – just a few notes here and there. And it was one of those moments on one of his Capitol albums where it was kind of quiet, laid back and not much happening. So, I wasn’t too affected by it at the time.

But subsequently, I met a very influential man in my life, Dominic Troiano from Canada. He

was in town with a R&B band and encouraged me to go to Donte's on Monday night and hear George Van Eps. I said, "Oh, I don't know. It's gonna be white music..." Here I was a kid in love with Bach, who's not exactly an American Negro (laughs). But I just loved the black sound in jazz a little more. The organ was greasier – but then again, I'd hear Paul Desmond and Stan Getz and I'd flip because I loved that sound too. But I still loved those organ trios and uptown black sounding jazz cats.

I didn't want to go, but my friend insisted that I'd love it. So, shortly after I was there, Van Eps played a lullaby that he'd composed for his grandson. It was a solo piece and everybody was hushed, and it wasn't even jazz, just a waltz, but a gorgeous thing, and from that moment on I was the biggest George Van Eps fan on the planet. I went from nothing, to being a complete idiot over his playing. Then I studied with him. Remember when he and *Guitar Player* had a falling out? Remember those letters from way back?

JC: *Yes*

TG: He was on the advisory board. Tom Wheeler calls me one day and says that they want to do a cover story on George and that they thought I was the perfect guy to write it. Turns out that that wasn't exactly the case, because they had insulted him. He had a prickly side and he could get insulted. For one thing, he didn't like that they called him a left-handed guitarist because it confused things. But they must have tried to make whatever it was, right, because the story I heard was that they called him and told him about the cover story and so forth, and he listened to their whole spiel and said, "Not interested" and hung the phone up.

But, because I was his student, and because I was lucky enough to have a fine, fine bond with this man, when they proposed that I write the story, he agreed. You probably saw that cover story years ago but probably didn't notice that I'd done the story.

JC: *Sure, I remember it, but must admit I didn't realize you'd written it.*

TG: I was very fortunate to interview him and do a long cover story on him. And they left in virtually everything I wrote except my bad jokes (laughs).

JC: *I wonder if the album you heard was "My Guitar" on Capitol. Sundazed just re-released it. Anyway, I can see how Troiano was such a big influence, in retrospect, by turning you on to Van Eps, who became your teacher and friend.*

TG: Yeah, Dominic had a group that was very big in Canada called Mandala. He was really big news up there for a long time and subsequently had a group called Bush. He was a great musician and probably still is. He played a lot of things on the guitar that I dreamed of playing and never could find, and he was doing it right in front of me.

JC: *I'm still in awe that you studied with Van Eps.*

TG: I studied with him long enough to know how little I'd really done and how much work there was to do. I kind of knew that, but then I saw how much more there was that I didn't even know about. We ended up mainly working on song arrangements. He wouldn't let you tape a lesson but he'd let you stop and write things down. He'd always improvise the arrangements and would

never play them the same way twice unless it was a piece that he'd composed. And he'd say, "I'm not in playing shape, Ted." And I'd say, "The hell you're not!"

He played me "Mountain Greenery" that's still by far the best version I'd ever heard, even without other instrumentation. And he'd play it at what he called the jackrabbit metronome setting. His fingers were a blur – bass, chords and melody. Kinda like what Martin Taylor does now where it looks like he doesn't move a muscle and you think, "Martin, did they drop you out of some other time zone?" I think Taylor is going to evolve even further into a very passionate player because I think he wants to be an improviser more and more. And I'm sure he can do it. I think he's a tremendous talent.

Van Eps told me that he was intertwined at three different periods of life with Gershwin, as a child, young man and older guy. He used to say, "When I was a kid, my dad had an accompanist, and it was Gershwin, who used to bounce me on his knee. And then, I was in a club and Gershwin heard I was playing, and there he was. And then I worked in Hollywood on this film and, who's the composer? Gershwin." So, it was great to see him play Gershwin tunes live, especially toward the end of his life where he'd throw in all those reminisces.

JC: *Mitch Holder told me that when he was studying with Howard Roberts, occasionally Howard would send him to Van Eps for a lesson. Of course Mitch was thrilled but he said he realized, as you did, that it would take another lifetime to get to where Van Eps was.*

TG: That's really true. He had a good pride side to him. Some people are born to use pride in a way that pleases others, so he would challenge another guitarist to come up and tune any of his stings a few half-steps away and he'd keep playing.

We have a guy out here now, we call him the boy wonder although he's not a boy anymore, and his name is Jon Kurnick. I saw him with John Pisano once and he kept retuning the bass strings all over the place. He'd just laugh while they were playing and start turning the pegs. And wherever it landed, he'd just keep playing.

JC: *There's a story, probably apocryphal, about a farmer years ago, who ordered a guitar from a Sears catalog and learned to play it just as it came out of the box. When someone gave him a guitar in standard tune, he couldn't play it (laughs).*

TG: Oh my God! Wow! That's a riot (laughs).

JC: *He thought it was "factory-tuned" (laughs). It's probably an urban legend. But it is funny. I loved your Joe Pass story about his thinking of "nuttin" when he's soloing. What are you thinking of?*

TG: You mean single lines? Nowadays, in a jazz setting?

JC: *Exactly.*

TG: Okay, I'm taking the first notes that I can hear that seem desirable to me and then using those to develop an idea. I'm not consciously trying to be Sonny Rollins, but I like that idea because it's fun. I've finally learned enough about the instrument to where I might find some

things that sound logically developed from the initial idea. But now and then I'll get bored and let athleticism play the main role, meaning I just let the fingers go wild and see how I feel about what just came out and then run with that. Now and then it's just fun to be free and let the fingers do it for a while. Sometimes, another strategy I use is to choose a zone, a part of the neck, and that would include way down low or way up high, just to break things up in the course of an evening.

JC: *The first thing you mentioned, the development of an idea from a few notes is something I remember Howard Roberts writing about.*

TG: Sure, it's thematic or motific development. You just play the first notes that you can hear that you think are great, and sometimes those are prompted by visuals, because, for me, the guitar is such a visual instrument. Say it's time to solo and you look down at the neck and your hand is around the eighth fret and you think, "Okay, the first change is Fm11b5." So, I'll see a few pictures in there of where the chord tones are and hope I'll hear something. (Sings riff) And if I liked it, then I'll try to develop it if I can. And it's fun to try.

JC: *I remember the guy who turned me on to Coker's "Patterns for Jazz," years ago, said that the book was full of nice things to rely on, so to speak, when you're not really improvising. And that very few artists really improvise all the time. What do you think?*

TG: I think that's true. Very few players are blessed with non-stop creativity. Although, you could watch Keith Jarrett in the Seventies when he'd go on with his eyes closed and be moaning and so forth. When they'd ask him what he was doing he never explained very well, for my money. I love his artistry but I'm not sure he could explain what he's doing. But he was one of the few who was creating non-stop. He was one of those brilliant prodigies as a kid. If he heard something once he owned it for the rest of his life.

JC: *Kessel has an exercise on his video that I think is excellent. He said to play a chord, any chord, even if you don't know what it is, then sing a riff over it. Then try to play the riff, and you'll be surprised at how well your brain will put those chord tones in your riff.*

TG: He's always advocated those exercises and he's so on the money. It's absolutely true. And on the opposite end of things, take a guy who's giving himself "tough talk" in the best sense, with no lying to oneself, it's still amazing how little we've mastered the instrument. Nobody masters it, especially if you go after jazz.

There's too much and too many permutations and places where other fingerings can be used and so on. We just don't live long enough. That's why I try not to listen to Keith Jarrett too much because then I want to be Keith, and it's the same problem I have with about 20 top guys. I just want to do what they're doing and study every note. But that's a destruction path for me because I might be able to do some of it, but then I'm not going to be able to fulfill the things that I've already set out for myself.

JC: *How do you like Jimmy Bruno's playing?*

TG: Bruno's a fantastic musician – amazing. Now, I don't agree with a lot of his theories – and I don't hate them either – but they're a little less than I want as far as what a student needs to

understand or they'll be lost on stage when the pressure's on. He wants them to just hear. But a lot of them can't. But as a player, wow!

I think people like to take slings and arrows after they've put somebody on top, and have praised them on the way up, and then... whoever the player is, Al Di Meola, or whomever, if they're famous for having technique, it seems as if a whole bunch of people will be saying bad words about them because of that. It doesn't seem fair.

JC: *I don't see how anyone could say that about Bruno because, although he's as clean as there is, he plays with so much fire and passion. At least that's how he comes across to me. Although sometimes I wish he'd phrase more so we could breathe a little (laughs).*

TG: Some guys say, "Yeah, he's good, he's good, but I'd rather hear George Benson." And I can certainly understand anybody wanting to listen to Benson, but Bruno is a major, major great guitar player.

JC: *You've taught so much but will you comment on your learning process?*

TG: Bursts of creativity and progress have happened in my life when I've applied myself very strongly. Even if I've been grouching to myself because nothing was happening, at least compared to what I wanted, even if I'd been putting in the hours. I know that if I stay with something or take a different approach and just refuse to give up – even come back the next day and beat on it again, that the old line, nature abhors a vacuum kicks in. Nature rewards effort eventually if it's not for deleterious means.

I'm always excited by the future. It's like: "C'mon, Ted. You might still get it!" Because so many skills on guitar are often slow to come. Some of them I never thought I'd get (laughs). I actually said to myself: "Well, that's just not meant for you in this life." Like jazz soloing and playing independent lines in the right hand when I first heard a guy play Chet's style. And when I heard Chet himself. I thought, "That's just one guitar." But now it seems reasonable. Often, we have the tendency to get blasé once we acquire a skill. "Oh yeah, he's just tapping on the neck." But the first time you hear that tapping...

I heard a guy out here named Randy Resnick, who's a legend among a few other guitarists in L.A., like Jay Graydon and Dan Sawyer, some of the best players, because he wanted to sound like John Coltrane in the late Sixties and early Seventies. He tried for ten or twenty years to do it. And every means he devised had come up a little short. He had very high standards and really wanted to sound like Trane and he ended up coming up with the two-handed thing way back then. Of course Jimmy Webster had done it, but Resnick's version of it was with the lines of Coltrane and Dolphy's. So he sounded like an avant-garde jazzer way back then. And it was so far ahead of what we had heard other guitarists doing. And then he disappeared.

JC: *Have you experimented much with alternate tunings, like DADGAD?*

TG: I've played in different tunings for a long time but never DADGAD. I use other tunings and I have a pet tuning where I try to get Bill Evans' cluster chords. I like to sound like a jazz piano when I can.

JC: *Which tunings?*

TG: Just different ones I've devised. Sometime I want to perform four sets with each set in a different tuning. That would be fun for me and keep me from ever getting bored. I just might be terrified, that's all (laughs).

JC: *I like the G6 tuning, with the A and E tuned down a step, like Chet used on "Starry Night." Johnny Smith likes to use it, too.*

TG: Oh yeah. That's beautiful. I've never covered any of that stuff because I made a deal with myself a long time ago. I said, "Ted, you're slow, so you can't learn everything and you can't be great at everything, so make your highest priority stuff, your stuff, and just live on the sidelines with your hands clapping for the rest.

JC: *Any new books in the works?*

G: I've had books in the works for so long. I've got 50 or so of them started, and that's no joke. But I keep field testing and that's flirting with disaster because you never know how long you have on this earth, but I have it in my head to release smaller books with the heart of many issues that I've been able to distill for people who've had trouble understanding certain things. I certainly did when I was younger. For instance, a book about the diminished scale that clarifies, because it's not all that difficult and very approachable if people can understand how easy it is to just think of three different concepts that cover that whole thing. Things like that.

Then I have my chord system that I've been working on for decades. It's just something I stumbled on to and it turned into a system, so I'd like to publish that. But by the time I get ready to do that, books may not be the medium of common exchange, so I'll have to face that fact if that's the way it is. That's the great irony. You just finish your book and now books are obsolete. They're slowly but surely headed that way. I think we'll just be using brain cells someday, as the brain is a transmitter and receiver. They'll probably just tap into everyone's exact frequency. It'll be a dangerous world for the fibber (laughs). No woman over thirty will ask, "How does my dress look?" (Laughs) It'll be lines that don't exist, like records you'll never buy like, *The Lennon Sisters Live At The Apollo* (laughs).

JC: *(Laughs) Oh that's hilarious. What kind of gigging are you doing now?*

TG: I love parties. I know it's not fashionable to say it but I love the casualness and the warmth of a good party. Some of them are way too loud, I'll admit that.

JC: *That's interesting. What kind of material do you play for a house party, Wilson Pickett songs? (laughs)*

TG: Hey, sometimes I am (laughs). Here's what I have. I have a list – I've made hundreds over the years – but the most current I have has three columns: on the far left are R&B, gospel and certain kinds of pop tunes that fit into that category. Great music abounds everywhere, but rhythm and blues always called my name. Right from the Joe Turner and Ruth Brown years to the medium light Sixties, I was just glued to that stuff.

JC: *Louie Jordan?*

TG: I got that later. I came in with Joe Turner, and Louie was a little bit earlier. But when I did hear him, and I have some films of him, I just ended up laughing a lot. I love his attitude. And he was a fine musician too. I can see why B.B. idolized him.

JC: *What do you think about Louie Prima?*

TG: I love Louie Prima! I love that guy man!

JC: *(laughs) You know, a case could be made for him being one of the architects of rock and roll.*

TG: No question about it.

JC: *Who ironically, or paradoxically, wrote the icon tune of the Swing era, "Sing, Sing, Sing."*

TG: Yeah, isn't that something? And Keely's languid style...amazing.

JC: *Okay, back to your list. You have R&B and Gospel etc. on the left column.*

TG: And the Beatles in that column, too. Oh yeah, and the doo-wop songs, the ballads like "Glory of Love," "You Belong to Me," the Duprees version, a slow 12/8, and all that stuff – "People Get Ready." And then in the middle column, romantic tunes that could be jazz, like "The Way You Look Tonight." Tunes you can play and milk the last drop of sheer gorgeousness out of. And then in the far right column, that's where the jazz stuff is. Some of those are standards and a few of them are jazz heads. And that's the way I run the list.

So, if I'm playing for a group that's close to my age, I'm going in the left column. If I know that they grew up with musicals, I'll go down the middle of the page. When I see an older crowd, so often they don't have anywhere to go to hear a nice, live, beautiful, romantic music. And they don't want me to play jazz. Some wouldn't mind it because they heard big bands when they were kids, but mostly they really like beautiful arrangements and film music. And on the right, when I play a jazz room, I use that column.

JC: *Is this with a combo, with tracks, solo, or what?*

TG: Just by myself. But I love to back singers.

JC: *Your speaking of Gershwin earlier brings up a question. In that era we had such great composers, the Gershwins, Porter, Kern, Carmichael, Mercer, Ellington et al. Today, things have really changed. What happened?*

TG: You know what happened: discretionary income for the first time and the rise of the indies with things that the majors laughed at. Just like Gibson laughing at Leo at the '50 or '51 NAMM show. But they got pretty scared by late '51 and '52 because Gibson was calling up Les and inviting him back with that broomstick of his (laughs).

JC: *You nailed it when you said discretionary income because the buying power of teenagers*

kept getting younger and younger. And the record companies were selling widgets. They didn't care what was on their pieces of plastic.

TG: But I dug it. I still dig it and I understand what it is. It's pablum compared to the previous era but it was a new market. And for some reason a lot of the indie companies were from the South and/or involved with the black inner-city cultures of their respective cities. But every generation stakes out its territory and it's part of a rite of passage. I've written several essays about just what we're talking about just trying to sort it out: What is this music, where did it come from, why it still rules the world and exactly what happened? How did we get from people not wanting any excess passion in music in general to the Rolling Stones and beyond? All that kind of stuff.

JC: *Interesting. And often a reflection of what's going in society. I remember reading where the minuet, in its day, was considered pretty radical. And if you think about how mechanical it was, it was a precursor of the Mechanical Age.*

TG: Yeah, yeah, the dance forms were so transformed. When Bach wrote a courante, it was not necessarily a dance anymore. Those were some fairly ribald dances.

JC: *How much studio work have you done?*

TG: Not much. Just enough to get out of there. I did enough to earn some dough but it wasn't for me.

JC: *Ted, you've been a great interview. You have so much to share that I think we're going to have to do part two sometime. Thanks for giving me so much time.*

TG: Jim, it's been my pleasure. We need to talk more often. This has been great.

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