

"Ted Talks Tele" (Transcript From Ted Greene Lesson Tape 67, April 06, 1989) Nick Stasinios

Nick: I'm just curious, you used to, just about your guitar, the sound that you're getting, because I'm beginning to fight for a sound again. You don't have that big humbucker down there anymore.

Ted: I do on my performing guitar, but for teaching I just wanted a stock Tele, so I could kind of show it.

Nick: So, you wouldn't have to bastardize your poor ...

Ted: You know what it was? I wanted a guitar that I could tune to normal pitch and I reactivated this and I liked the way it looked with the stock look to it. It was kind of a childlike thing that I enjoyed, just the visual thing. This was many years ago, before I moved in this place, I reactivated this so it just had the stock pickup in it and then I noticed I could get a pretty nice sound out of it. I thought, well that's a good example, too, later it occurred to me for, you know, people who want to buy Teles to say, "Look, you can take a stock Tele and get a nice sound out of it. You don't have to put a Gibson pickup in it," even though I still prefer it.

Nick: Have you experimented with the other brands of pickups that might look like a Tele pickup, like a Seymore?

Ted: Seymore rewound me a pickup once, but it was louder than this, but I don't care for the loud pickups. They lose that beautiful mid. They have a cloudy mid-range. Meaning like if I do this! I take the highs [plays an example]. I get a much darker, explosive ... [audio interruption - Side A ends]

Ted: A nice Tele with the neck pickup that's been dipped so it doesn't sound too microphonic when you hit the cover. A lot of them will sound real clicky when you touch it. You have to dip them in wax. Those pickup repair guys do that if they have that feature.

Nick: They don't come that way in other words.

Ted: Sometimes, it depends on the guitar. You just have to pick it up and see if they dipped it.

Nick: A real early one, it's not? If you get a later one ...

Ted: Most of the early ones are dipped enough and most of the late model ones are dipped enough now, too, because they got hip to it again. There's a big period in the middle where they're all bad in that respect. They still sound great! In fact, for rock and roll, it's a little better, in the sense that it's so microphonic sometimes that when you hit your switch it has that big clang because there's a big plate underneath the lead pickup and you hear either of these pickups come on with that, it's like, it's exciting! And it adds a little echo. It's a funny kind of, almost an echo to the sound because it's so microphonic. It's weird! Certainly for a ... It's dangerous, too, because it can squeal on you if you have too much treble on stage. I used to run into that all the time. If you isolate a microphonic pickup, put Kleenex under it folded.

Nick: So, if you took this pickguard off, you'd see the cavity for the ...

Ted: You'd see a big cavernous, amazingly drilled out thing. It's almost totally hollow under here.

Nick: Really? Why'd you do that?

Ted: I did it, not to take too long. I'll say it very quickly ...

Nick: Okay, I just want to know because ...

Ted: It was a progressive ...

Nick: ... I'm thinking about putting something together.

Ted: It helped the sound, but it was not, I wasn't scientific. I kept putting in different pickups and switches and just through natural attrition, ended up with no wood left.

Nick: Must have been some big hardware you put under there!

Ted: I've had this guitar since '65. It was my main guitar in rock bands for years and then it was my main jazz guitar when I was out doing a few kinds of gigs. I mean, it's been through so many changes. You see this big thing and holes in the back. This thing's been through some stuff.

Nick: I guess it doesn't look like Zappa's guitar!

Ted: He had one that was in a fire or something, huh?

Nick: He had one that looked like it was tortured. It really looked bad!

Ted: That Strat! I remember seeing it.

Nick: You didn't hollow it out just to get that hollow body sound?

Ted: No! What happened is, then I bought another Tele, saying "I should have one back up. God forbid if anything happened!" This was in about '71 or something here. And, you know what happened, Nick? Didn't sound the same. I hollowed it out. I figured maybe because this one's hollow, right? So, I hollowed the other one out even more than this. It still didn't sound the same. I found out much later that it's a combination of the wood in the neck and the wood in the body that creates a lot of the sound.

Nick: So, if you get a big fat neck and a body is...

Ted: A fat neck and a lightish body, not a heavy one.

Nick: A lightish or light body?

Ted: Yeah, the fat neck will give you sustain, enough sustain, you know like just a reasonable amount. It won't sustain like a big heavy body, which is amazing sustain on those. But I notice with the heavy body one ...

Nick: I'm sorry, I ... run it by me ...

Ted: Okay, let me ... here are a few parameters. There's some parameters that go like this. There are a lot of factors. There are about 10 or 12 factors of categories that influence the sound. Here's some big interplays. If you have a light body, you need a lot of mass in the drive train. Either heavy tuners, we talked about your 335 once, how we noticed you have the heavy tuners.

Nick: Right!

Ted: Meaning big tuners or big neck or heavy bridge or big block of wood in there like on a 35 or 45, you know, that big piece of maple. Something massive in the drive train to give it good sustain. Without it? I picked up non-tremolo Strats with a thin neck, like the early 60's. They just died! They just kind of go ... [Ted plays a string and rolls off the volume]. They just die! There's not enough mass!

Nick: Extreme!

Ted: Anyway, if you, that'll give you a warm sound, light bodies are finally recognized as having the prettiest tone compared to the heavy ones, but it's really slightly a misnomer because a heavy one will give you a gorgeous sound in the bass. It's better defined, it rings longer, it has more mass. It's like your Boogie, when you put it on that heavy bass setting that night. I will never forget that! So, the thing is the treble sounds thinner, but there's a way to compensate if you do ever get a heavy guitar, you put huge frets in the neck and that makes treble strings sound rounder and fatter.

Nick: Really?

Ted: Yes!

Nick: Huh! I'll have to remember that! Maybe I'll re-fret my Gibson with bigger frets.

Ted: If you take a heavy guitar ...

Nick: Because my treble, you know how my bass is now.

Ted: It's great!

Nick: I was just wondering what it'll be like.

Ted: It will give you more sustain and more roundness, a big fret. You can even notice it on something like an SG from the mid 60s. They had nice round, big frets, those Gibson SGs. Those are little thin guitars that don't weigh much.

Nick: Yeah, I know!

Ted: The tone has a certain roundness to it even though the family of electric sound is not really happening because the neck pickup is way in here, it's almost like in the middle. There's still a roundness that were that guitar to have a pickup shoved way back here, and it would be a deep body, that would really sing. But I shouldn't say sing, it sings already. It would have a round, rich, womanly kind of tone, if you will, that throaty sound. This sound! [Ted plays]

Nick: You had mentioned, if I put together a Tele, to get a particular mini-something, mini-Kruger or mini-something?

Ted: I've heard good things about Gotohs and Spertzil tuners. Those are the new big ones that everybody's raving about.

Nick: What's the second one?

Ted: Spertzill! They will know what you mean in the store.

Nick: Spertzo?

Ted: I think it's like Spurt-zil, like Z-E ... Z-I-L. Spertzel, something like that. They're locking tuners.

Nick: Are they big or small?

Ted: I believe they're the size that would fit on any neck that they make for it, like Fender size. People have said good things about it. But Gotohs are great! They're smooth, unless they've heard of it in the last few years. A few years ago, I still tried them. The smoothest feel! Like Yamaha's tuners are real nice and Ibanez's are not bad.

Nick: So, I need to get a massive neck, a light body ...

Ted: You don't mind a big neck, right? You could play a big ...

Nick: I don't mind!

Ted: You prefer?

Nick: Yeah!

Ted: So, either a wide or deep, preferably a deep neck, you know, like a Les Paul depth.

Nick: Not something that's wider, but deeper?

Ted: Especially depth really helps because then you've got all that extra mass all the way underneath the string; each string has all that stuff to ride on. That really gives the warm sound, boy!

Nick: What is your impression of the early remakes?

Ted: Like a Fender Reissue Tele? Excellent! Not big necks, but they still sound really nice.

Nick: They don't have the big necks like they used to?

Ted: No, they did market surveys, I don't know how scientific they were. Maybe they just asked ten rock guitarist players. In the 80s, the early 80s, when they redesigned and they decided that was one thing they would change without telling anybody, figuring they would put it in the ad, saying "Hey, we slimmed down the neck for you guys!" who they'd probably lose as many people who loved, who would expect the big neck. They made me one, with my reissue back there, they made that neck bigger, but most of them are thin. They thought people liked that the best, which is generally true, Nick. If you ask most guitar players, they will not like your neck on your 35, less wood, you know?

Nick: Yeah, but it's going to affect the sound, too!

Ted: It doesn't make it sound as sweet. But, if the guitar has other things going for it, you don't need it. Again, if it's a heavier ...

Nick: What other advantages would there be if I were to pick something like that up rather than ...

Ted: Than make one?

Nick: Yeah!

Ted: Just ascetics, man! They look great!

Nick: I don't care if it looks like shit just as long as it plays great. I mean, here's Ted's 'old', you know, it looks like it's been out in the backyard a few days.

Ted: It was once! In the sun! In about 100 degree weather! I tried to change the color once when I was a kid.

Nick: Really? Well, that explains it! What about the Custom ["Thin Line"] Teles, you know, the little "f" hole deals?

Ted: Oh, with the "f" holes! Those are hollow, semi-hollow bodies ...

Nick: Those are really kind of funky sounding ...

Ted: Those are cheesy sounding, man, because they don't have enough mass. They're like feather light. So, they don't a tremendous response unless you get one with a real good center block. If you get lucky and get one with a good mass down the middle, it will really sustain well. Some of them are a little iffy.

Nick: Huh! I thought it was much too much on the design ...

Ted: And also, if you drill out for extra pickups, it starts to get really flexible.

Nick: Oh! The neck?

Ted: Yeah! Because there's not much support there!

Nick: You feel the neck might come off or something?

Ted: It's not that! It's like, if you ever played an SG and played a chord down here, pulled the neck a little bit? You go up a half step!

Nick: And it goes "Waah!"! [As I pulled my guitar neck in an upward motion]

Ted: Yeah, that's how I felt.

Nick: My Gibson just ... just sounds too harsh, you know. I mean it's got certain good qualities about it, but I guess in the direction I'm going I'm thinking about hastening up the process and getting me something that's solid body. That's why I was looking at this [Yamaha SE200] because it had a different sound. It is different! It's closer to what I wanted than ...

Ted: I could get a very nice tone, that guitar, when set up.

Nick: This is more of a dream than anything else. I wouldn't buy this, considering on replacing on what I really want to do.

Ted: But, if it were set up, you might be real surprised if you're going to get a very sweet sound. It's a long scale guitar. It's a Strat type, you can tell by the fret length, or by how many frets are on the end of the neck. There are 21.

Nick: What do you think about the neck?

Ted: I liked it! If it were playing easy, I would have gone... I would have said "Wow! What a nice one!"

Nick: So, just a matter of bringing the neck back and ...

Ted: Probably the nut is going to have to be cut because it's still going to be too high at the nut. But you can get some hobbyist files and do it yourself and save the dough.

Nick: Yeah, I'd do that.

Ted: You just got to get real thin ones.

Nick: What do you mean?

Ted: Hobbyist! Little! Either Exacto saws...

Nick: Why don't I just take it off, across a piece of sandpaper to take it down?

Ted: Oh, Underneath?

Nick: Yeah!

Ted: Oh! You got to knock it out then.

Nick: Yeah!

Ted: That's a drag, man! You could break it if you knock it out unless you're real careful.

Nick: Usually I'm pretty careful. I can do that kind of stuff.

Ted: I think that that could work. Yeah, you got to be careful if you do that. I usually like to file each groove down. Just take it away until we customize each string.

Nick: I'd be afraid I wouldn't be exact. At least on a plane, I'd be a little more exact, I would think.

Ted: Well, the thing is, if you go too far, you just put some crazy glue and baking soda in there and it just hardens it, and you start again. I'm serious, that's what the repairmen do.

Nick: I didn't know that!

Ted: They'd mix it in and it looks like the nut. You don't start all the way from the top of the groove, but just put some at the bottom. It'll be roughened up already, but you can roughen it a little extra with some sandpaper, so it will adhere real good. A couple drops of mixed solution of crazy glue and baking soda and just drop a couple drops in there, splash it in there and let it harden for a few minutes.

Nick: And away you go again!

Ted: That's what they tell me, anyway. I haven't tried it one hundred percent, but I tried it one day and it worked pretty well.