

“Who Is James?”

Hello, my name is James Hober and I will be explaining Ted Greene's V-System to you as well as I can. Who am I and how did I come to be the one to expound Ted's V-System? I was a poor student of Ted's.

I'm laughing right now because the one thing that Paul Vachon told me not to say in my introduction of myself was that I was a poor student. Paul is the indefatigable and leading contributor to tedgreene.com. But sorry, Paul, I was.

Don't get me wrong: I'm a very serious student and teacher of the guitar, having been playing for over forty years and teaching for over thirty. But I have to confess that, decades ago, when I studied with Ted, I practiced the material he gave me only so much, whereas I was practicing other things fairly intensely. I probably took a few dozen lessons from Ted. Others studied much more with him. I took a lesson at most once a month. Others took weekly or biweekly lessons, sometimes for years or even decades.

When I came to Ted for my first lesson, I already had a BA in music and had been studying and playing guitar for quite a while. Ted, in addition to being an outstanding guitarist, seemed to be a very different guitarist than I was, strong in areas that I was weak in, and so that drew me to want to study with him. He asked me what I wanted to study. A normal person probably would have said something like, "chord melody" or "solo guitar," since Ted was a genius at that. But I said, "basics." You see, when I was a teenager I studied a tiny bit of karate. I never made it past the very beginning, white belt level. But they told me that a black belt meant "master of the basics." So that's why I told Ted I wanted to learn basics, even though I already had considerable music theory knowledge and guitar background.

Ted started giving me papers of V-2 or V-4 chords on various string sets, maybe on the top four strings or on the bottom four, etc. He didn't say much about what V-2 or V-4 meant. Just that "V" stood for "voicing group." Some of these chords I already knew and some I didn't. I got better at knowing and using them. Then I got into V-1s, V-3s, and V-5s. But I started to want an overview. I wanted to see the big picture. I knew that the V-System dealt with four note chords. So I asked myself, "How many four note chords are there, if I exclude transpositions, homonyms, and inversions?" To find out I started writing out a chart:

- 1) C - Db - D - Eb cluster of half-steps
- 2) C - Db - D - E C#m Maj7 b9 (no 5th)
- 3) C - Db - Eb - E Eb7/6/b9 (no 3rd or 5th)
- 4) C - D - Eb - E Eb maj 7/6/b9 (no 3rd or 5th)

and so on. It took quite a while to meticulously work out a listing.

At my next lesson, I was ready to impress Ted with my chart. I asked him, "So Ted, do you know how many four distinct note chords there are?" And he instantly blurted out, "Forty-three!" I was floored. Not only had he already systematically pursued this arcane trail, he also had the knowledge at his instant recall. He quickly wrote out for me all 43 permutations in a different way than I had.

I think he realized I was serious about getting an overview of his system. So in time I asked him, "How many of these V-1, V-2, V-3 things are there?" He replied, "Fourteen." And then he wrote out the following for me:



Later I was to find out that he wrote similar things for several of his students. I now call this a "fixed soprano tour." For a given chord, in this case G7, the soprano is held constant, in this case on the flat 7, and a G7 chord from each of the fourteen voicing groups is shown.

He had explained nothing to me about the V-System. And yet in a single line of music notation he had concisely described and implied the entire V-System...sort of. There was more. But that's all he would say. I went away determined to investigate further, just as I had been in discovering the 43 four note chord qualities.

I began to study this line of music notation, this tiny seed from which bursts forth an enormous, intertwining tree of guitar harmony. Notice that as you go from V-1 to V-14 the basic trend is to go from the most compact to the most spread out (although V-13 and V-14 are less spread out than V-11 and V-12). To me this is typical of the Ted Greene approach: use logic to generate possibilities but don't be so strict that you lose practicality or musicality. Probably the reason V-13 and V-14 ended up on the far right is that they have more notes concentrated in the bottom close together, which sounds muddy, especially when played in the low register of the guitar. So you can see, as you move to the extreme right towards V-14, you come upon chords that are less used. And also, as you move to the right, you generally have to stretch more. However, V-1s, the most compact chords, on the extreme left, also can demand difficult stretches.

The big question I had was, "How do you know which category, V-1 or V-2..., a given chord fits in?" I studied the line and eventually came up with my own answer! I worked it out in detail and wrote it up on a few pages. At my next lesson, I showed Ted my papers, my interpretation of his system. He looked at it somewhat dubiously. I don't know what didn't seem right to him. I thought, "He must have another way of

thinking about this, but it must be similar to what I'm showing him because my way works." He asked if he could photocopy the papers I had made. I said yes. We never really discussed the issue again!

I don't think I had many more lessons with him but I remember the last one. A friend of mine couldn't make his lesson with Ted so I "subbed" for my friend. When I showed up at the appointed time, Ted seemed surprised to see me. I explained that I was there instead of my friend. He looked at his appointment book and it showed that he was to meet with Steve Vai at that time, not for a lesson but for some other reason. "But Ted, I'm much more important than Steve Vai," I joked. We laughed. Luckily, the famous Mr. Vai never showed up and I got a lesson.

The only time I saw Ted after that was at an incredible Sunday morning concert he gave at Spazio Restaurant in Sherman Oaks, CA. Very few people were there for that extraordinary performance.

I didn't find out that Ted had died until years afterwards. I didn't go to his memorial service since I didn't know about it. One day I did a web search for "Ted Greene" and found out that he had died. I was very sad. Eventually I found tedgreene.com.

After much more time, I thought to myself, Ted's V-System is really important and should get out to the world. I wrote up an explanation of the V-System based on the idea and papers I had shown to Ted. I submitted it to the web site for *From The Students*. But it did not appear in *From The Students*.

Soon after Barbara Franklin, Ted's long-time girlfriend, and Paul contacted me and said, "We've been trying to find you!" I was shocked that they knew my name. I soon found out that Ted had written a couple of very cryptic personal pages about the V-System. Included with them were the pages he had photocopied from me, heavily annotated with his comments. He approved of my method and intended to credit me in his forthcoming book. Of course he died before that could happen.

Barbara and Paul had not been able to figure out much from these scrawled pages. Mostly Paul had figured out some of my method but not much of Ted's. So they showed the pages to me and I went to work on deciphering them. It was detective work, challenging brain work and also fun. I even made use of my knowledge of computer programming to work out some details. I have figured out a lot about the V-System and I'm going to explain it to you, step by step.

After I figured out a lot, I stopped working on it for a while. My mom died. Barbara died. Other issues took up my time. Paul was very patient. I apologize to you who have been waiting. We are now going to bring you Ted Greene's V-System! It is a revolutionary organization of guitar harmony.

I've put quite a bit of time into figuring out the V-System and writing it up to present to you. I've done this because I think the V-System is important and should get out to the world. And out of gratitude to Ted. I apologize for any errors and for not presenting things exactly the way Ted would have.

When I think of Ted, I think of a man with tremendous heart, musicality, and feeling. It was a great honor to be a student of his, to be among maybe twenty people watching and listening at Spazio on that particular Sunday morning to several hours of some of the finest solo guitar ever played on the planet, and to have known this extraordinary musician and man. I hope that my explanation of his V-System does it justice and reveals the value of detailed investigation of chord spacing. Thank you for reading, practicing, and learning.

---James