George Van Eps Interview by Ted Greene

Unedited Transcript of the Audio Recorded Interview, 1981
Also present is George's friend, Ed Megill.
[Recorded on 4 audio cassettes, 8 sides.]

TG: [*Ted is adjusting the tape recorder*:] This thing on 'source.' Okay boys, you working? Hey.

GVE: Yeah. Yeah. The needles are going. Ah, you see what I mean, Ted?

TG: Yes, I do. I do. So, when you see that chord, what you---let me see if---. I'm gonna repeat it back to you in own phraseology, see if I've caught what you're saying so that I can distill it. The chord is a chord, you know—we say it's linear or, you know, a chord, and then there's the shades in between. But you're saying within that chord different intervals suggest different multi-types of thought that you can superimpose on there or take as an essence itself out to---

GVE: Yeah.

TG: And that's what you prefer to do instead of seeing it just a block.

GVE: Yeah. But I don't really see it, and I hear it more than anything, and I'm conscious of the interval all at the same time. It's a---it's a---. Like I said earlier, Ted: I didn't invent it, I didn't strive to find it, I didn't hunt for it. It just evolved that way. It's like the tuning of the instrument itself. That evolved over a period of time.

TG: Both evolved out of practical demands, shall we say.

GVE: Yeah. And every note can be something else. And every triad can be something else. Every 4-note voice can be something else, because every 4-note voice contains 4 triads.

TG: That thing you said in the book, about the quartets and the quintet thing?

GVE: Yeah, sure. And in---yeah, sure. And then you have the duets in there. You got lots of duets. And they're all important. And some of the---oh, and some quartal structures harmony situations, one voice will be doing something, and two voices in another area—another musical area—will be having an argument! They're doing a duet with their, you know, their voicing their opinions. And so, there's a lot more than just a note, a numbered notation, or a lettered notation going on there. And I don't say that I think of those *all* at the time. It's become one big ball of wax: I'm conscious of the interval; I'm conscious of the nucleus, what it's suggesting; the area it's being used in—maybe it's not A minor at all.

TG: Maybe it's being used as a D dominant or an F# minor 7.

GVE: Yeah. Or maybe it is just a waystation for the place it's going someplace.

TG: Like that chord with the two 3rds…?

GVE: Yeah. So, they're all in motion. In other words, the whole thing is in flux.

TG: So, that's how you decide what---. Once you told me that every chord has what you—if I remember correctly—when I was taking lessons, you said that every chord has a firstly and a secondly, and all that….

GVE: Oh, yeah: firstly, secondly, thirdly, fourthly. Yeah.

TG: That's how you decide what to---. I mean like if you're---if you're supposed to be playing in the substructure or subconscious level, if, like, say doing an F#m7 chord—at that point then that chord would---you might be thinking of it more as an F# as the "firstly name" so to speak, because---as the substructure, still you'd be extracting little lines and such.

GVE: Yeah. That would be in the rudimentary stage, you know.

TG: Is that how you determine, excuse me, the firstly and secondly? Or did I not catch it?

GVE: Yeah, but that's a---that---. The firstly, secondly, thirdly, and fourthly: that's very basic, and that's not original. My God, that's been used for years and years by many harmony and theory teachers. But the overall effect is more important to me than calling out notes or being conscious of what it actually is.

TG: That statement there makes a lot of sense….

GVE: Yeah, it's the---. This note and that note—I don't care what they are—they're going to produce a certain *flavor*, a musical flavor. A taste.

TG: Regardless of what you call them.

GVE: Yeah, yeah. They're going to come up with some kind of chemistry all their own. And this is…. They'll create a timbre all their own. Now, you put another voice in, you may knock out some of that timbre because now you've got a timbre going here, see. They're going to start arguing a little bit, see. And so, you'll change the flavor of it. And the importance of the timbre change is if you want something to stick out, you don't have to necessarily play it louder. Just start an argument, see. And then they'll fight each other vibration-wise, see. They'll start to disagree because the beat will creep in there, and there goes the timbre change. And---

TG: And that fits more of a depth of---I mean, more of a "wide" sound for the ears. Is that what you're saying?

GVE: Yes. In fact, I'll give you an example that one of the great composers said. Tchaikovsky in one of his symphonies—I can't remember what, so I don't want to be quoted on that—but anyway, a bevy of nine basses, the Philadelphia Orchestra was playing this and the bass had the dominant voice. And it was---the bass players weren't bearing down, but it stood out like a mop handle out of a shopping bag! And you know why? Eight of the basses were playing the right notes—I mean seven of the basses were playing right on-the-money in unison, one bass was playing a half-tone low, and one bass was playing a half-tone sharp.

TG: It was written that way?

GVE: Written that way. And the argument set up---it set up such a commotion, in beat-wise, that it shook the walls of the building.

TG: And yet the essential sound at the ear heard this---

GVE: You didn't hear it.

TG: ---dynamically…

GVE: Yeah, you didn't hear the one playing sharp and the one playing flat.

TG: Isn't that something!

GVE: Yeah.

TG: I never heard of that before. That's great.

GVE: So, well that's something. I experienced that by looking at the score. My brother, Fred had the score. I believe it's fourth symphony, but I'm not sure. And I couldn't believe it because seven basses were right on-the-money and the two of them were---. In other words, the two outside basses were a whole-tone apart!

TG: That's quite remarkable. I've never heard of something like that.

GVE: But they weren't playing quite as loud as the other seven.

TG: Oh, that makes sense.

GVE: Yes. The seven basses were marked double-piano [*pp*], in a soft passage.

TG: The others were triple?

GVE: The other ones were triple-piano [*ppp*], the other two.

TG: That's---. Smart fellow, that Tchaikovsky. He must have found out probably by mistake one day or something, too. Somebody played the wrong note and it sounded---

GVE: Yeah.

TG: Something like that.

GVE: Allan Reuss did that on a record, on Jezebel, a record we made with Frankie Laine. There were nine guitars on that day.

TG: Nine guitars?

GVE: Yeah. Barney Kessel, Al Hendrickson, myself, Allan Reuss, Bob Bain,…

TG: Who's got that kind of---

GVE: Tiny Tim,---oh gee, Howard Roberts,

TG: How'd they drag nine of you guys down…no offence. I mean, because---

GVE: Well, Mitch Miller produced the date, and we'd would walk through the door and Mitch Miller said, "I want you guys to play lousy as you know how." Well, that rubbed Allan the wrong way—Allan Reuss. He gave one of the flunkies in there ten bucks and said, "Get me a bottle of scotch," and he proceeded to get loaded. And Allan played Jezebel, the whole thing, either a half-tone flat or a half-tone sharp. He alternated. And it had a tremendous power---it added power to the other guitars.

TG: It's on the record? It's on the---?

GVE: It's on the record.

TG: I'm gonna go back and listen. I have that record.

GVE: There's one place you can hear it just a little bit, but very fleeting. But---.

TG: What about the idea of playing in two or three keys at the same time? Is that what you were alluding to before, or is that something other than what we've discussed at the moment? Like what we talked about bringing in elements of C minor into C? Is there some---. You once---. I got this from an article that I've seen in another Guitar Player, you know, that you mentioned that you said, "Even now I play in…." It ended up with playing in all keys at the same time. Was it a misquote, George or is that something? Help me understand.

GVE: No, Ted. It's like I said earlier: within the "sacred circle" are all the twelve keys.

TG: Right.

GVE: And so I think in those---I'm conscious of those keys all the time, since they all contain each other. One note contains every other note. So, the keys have to contain each other. So, that leaves you absolutely a mental freedom. You can do anything you want and go any place you want as long as it's done with taste.

TG: So you're saying you might just dip into any key for a second? It doesn't mean literally at the same time, but it means---

GVE: Yeah.

TG: ---concurrently successive you might suddenly just—because this note suggests that—suddenly you're here. Like Art Tatum would: suddenly he's here, suddenly he's there.

GVE: Yeah. Well, a good example is---. Of course, this is all locked into a device now, and it's going to be in the third volume. You play a G scale in 10ths, and then play an Eb scale against it. It's very…

TG: The soprano [*one at the tenths*?]

GVE: Yeah, yeah. Now that's "da-da-da-da-da"—that's straight basic, right up the scale, see.

TG: Seems like….

GVE: Of course that's driving it into the ground, you know, because you wouldn't---. You may just stay---you may just use two sections of that, or two steps of that. Or two "stations" of that, and then change it, Eb may go to another key, see. Or maybe the G part, maybe the G scale will change. But they will be in different keys, and yet they'll make perfect sense.

TG: But not like---nobody's playing in all 12 at the same time, literally at the same time.

GVE: No. Well, you might as well take a two-by-four and put it on the 88 keys on the piano! You know—there's all 12 at the same time!

TG: You see why I had to ask you about that and then…

GVE: Be sure. Yeah, yeah. Well, I don't think I explained that very, Ted, but I think you know what I mean.

TG: Oh, you *did* explain this very well. But I think the earlier article probably condensed, like you said, they chopped stuff, so made it seem real different.

GVE: Yeah. Yes, that's probably the article that made me look like a fool.
TG: No, they didn't make you look like a fool. I just…
GVE: I have it on a file. I save the one which was so bad. I have the original and then the one that they printed. And it---it's ludicrous. You know, I was telling, Ted, earlier—it's a---this is not exact, but it was something as stupid as this: "Did you know that C and Db are two different keys?" You know, a very dumb remark because they edited it with the scissors, you know, instead of by me with them.
TG: I'm going to ask you a devil's advocate question here, just because I'd know---I'd love to hear what you have to say about this. I know generally what may happen, but---. You have some unique ideas about tonality, and there are those that say that tonal music is dead or exhausted. Would you care to respond to that?
GVE: There are those that say tonal---?
TG: "Tonal music is dead, that we've exhausted the possibilities" is what they say. And I know in your book you---
GVE: I have an answer to that, and it's written over here.
TG: Is that the four book, 364 million…?
GVE: "Where does sound effect end and tonality begin?" See now, I don't need to answer a question with a question, but this is related to what you asked. I think this way: that there are those that are more interested in sound effect than music. Music.
TG: What's the distinction between the two? Excuse me.
GVE: The distinction is tonality, quality of tone, and notation—as against a sharp noise, a high-pitched noise, a chalk squeak on a blackboard, a shotgun, or potatoes falling down the cellar steps. Those are sound effects, you know. [*George makes noise with paper*.] The fire effect. All right. Now.
TG: So where does it end? Where is the line?
GVE: Well, I think---I can't agree with the tone being dead, because when that day arrives that's the end of music. Because music is all tone. It has to be. Except this isn't [*he points to a printed score*]. But it hasn't said anything yet.
TG: You see a paper---
GVE: It hasn't said anything yet. Somebody's got to reproduce it. But, you see what I'm getting at.
TG: What about atonal? Let me just interject the atonal component, because it may enrich this whole area of thought. I was going to next ask you, "What's the difference, the minor distinction between tonal and atonal music?" And that's---. Atonal might be the bridge between noise and sound effects and tonal.
GVE: Well, hmmm….
TG: It's kind of a tough question.
GVE: Some of the atonal music that has been written almost borders on the use of sound effects, but the sound effects produced by some of the abstract atonal music doesn't create a noise like hitting a table. They're using notation. But the explosion, the sound effect takes place in the mind through these.
TG: Similar effect, as you say, on the [?].
GVE: Yes, it creates a sound effect in the mind. And that part bothers me. Now, I've heard some atonal stuff that was pleasing, full of surprises and rather interesting. But I don't---maybe I'm old-fashioned, but I couldn't stand listening to a lot of it.
TG: Oh, I couldn't either.
GVE: Not 24 hours a day, you know. Because I would long to hear a—long before the 24-hour period is over—I would long to hear a simple progression where the voices had some continuity,

where they were friendly and they were all---they were having a little love affair with each other, and not abstractly trying to "blow your mind."

TG: Good. Very well put. Erich Korngold, the film composer, he agreed with you. He quite a musical hand himself.

GVE: Getting back to sound effects: you ever hear any of Cage?

TG: Ah, just for a few---I turned it off. I didn't---. It wasn't my cup of tea.

GVE: No, not mine either. And yet in Carnegie Hall, you know he gave a concert there and they raved about it. You know.

TG: Like I said, I don't---.

GVE: In one of the concerts he did in Carnegie Hall he had a—you remember the Cherry Bombs, the powerful firecracker?—he put one in a typewriter and blew it up. It was part of the score! You imagine the percussionist had a loaded typewriter with a Cherry Bomb!

TG: You know, I loaned someone $8.50 to go see that. No, I didn't! [*they both laugh*]

GVE: That's funny, Ted.

TG: Here's another one, just an area of thought: some musicians have decided because the #11 is part of Nature's overtone series—more so than the 11, it comes first and all that—that the Lydian scale, which contains this note, should be the basis of our tonal system, and not the major scale. How do you feel about that?

GVE: I think it should stay right where it is, because it's all a staunch member of the notation family.

TG: But some people say that we're missing the boat, that it should be the center, not the major scale, not the white keys, that, you know, we're missing it. It's really the F white keys. George Russell, in particular, the *Lydian Chromatic Concept*, you know that?

GVE: Yeah.

TG: This whole school of thought on that. Just curious about that.

GVE: You know what that's similar to, a statement like that? It's similar to, if the three of us went someplace, to a restaurant, and Ed ordered a ham sandwich, and you ordered a hamburger, and I ordered a cheese melt. And the waitress stands there and writes it down, and you say, "Oh no, change the order. I'm going to have a hamburger." And then Ed decided, "Oh yeah, change mine too. I'm gonna to have a cheese melt." She erases and writes that down. And you're going to have a---

TG: So we ended up with the---?

GVE: All she had to do is change the order one person, and it's the same damn order. So, the raised 11th and this whole---. Oh, but they're already---all these intervals…. Nothing should be used all the time. And I don't---like I say---. I had one fellow ask me, he said, "Are you into 4ths yet?"

TG: "Into 4ths"!

GVE: So, this is a guitar player at Sportsman's Lodge the other night. And he said---.

TG: You didn't play then, did you?

GVE: No, no. They had the big band reunion there Monday night. And so I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, you know the coming thing is 4ths." I said, "The coming thing?" I said, "I didn't know they ever left!" I'm behind the times, I didn't know they ever left. [*They laugh*] So, everything is usable and every---if it's used in college, every notation you can think of, is a *bona fide* member of the family, musical family, and anything overdone becomes boring.

TG: And we've chosen the major scale as our starting point in our tonal system, and we could have just as easily could have started somewhere else. We happened to---human beings in general like that sound and---

GVE: Well now, my concept on that is that the major scale didn't start the thing.

TG: I agree with you there. From history, it shows that---

GVE: The "mother scale" is the chromatic scale.
TG: Oh, I see what you're getting at.
GVE: All scales are born of the chromatic. Every musical attitude, everything, is born of the chromatic scale. Since piano, guitar, and harp and organ—we're not in quarter-tones yet. Did you ever play a quarter-tone guitar? I did once. The frets are too close together. It didn't---.
TG: I've heard the sounds it gets, but it didn't seem practical to me, for the fingers. Exactly.
GVE: Oh, no. Well, the distance between frets is ridiculous. You get halfway up the fingerboard and you think you're right next to the bridge, you know.
TG: Seems like an enormous amount of work to achieve something that wasn't there for---
GVE: And it's ridiculous, because quarter-tone harmony sounds just plain out-of-tune. And I had a demonstration on that once, and this guy was beaming from ear to ear. And my brother Bob was there too. And when we got outside we just decided this guy had a lousy ear. He thought is sounded good. It was just plain out-of-tune, that's all. And but---. No, the most important scale is the chromatic scale.
TG: That's good.
GVE: Because---and that's why I stress it through the textbooks. Because if you play the instrument chromatically you can play what comes into your head, within physical limits of the hands. That's the only barrier, is the limits of the hand.
TG: And you look at the major scale as being a selection process *from* the chromatic scale, yes?
GVE: Oh, that's---sure. The major scale is the chromatic scale with some of the notes left out, that's all.
TG: And likewise, all the scales, other than any Western scale, huh?
GVE: Every---any scale…. Yeah, like one fella wrote and [?] and he said. "I wrote out over a hundred minor scales." Of course that's fun, that's an academic exercise; see how many things you can make out of it. But he was confined—naturally, on piano—he was confined to the 12 tones, with one octave of the chromatic scale. And so that is the most important scale, because that's where everything else comes from.

[*End of Part 1*]

TG: Okay.
GVE: I think that answers it?
TG: Oh, yeah. More than I had even dreamed that you had… Every---just about every answer you give me has been more that I hoped for, which is good. I'll have plenty of fun editing this stuff down. There's so much material that we could make the whole issue about you, George. I don't think we could sell you on that, unfortunately.
GVE: No, I---yeah, it would sell like hotcakes, not like magazines!
TG: [*He laughs*] If they had one on Jimi Hendrix they should have one on you. Unfortunately you have to die before they would do that.
GVE: Yeah. You know, I don't know whether it as *Guitar Player* or not, but Tommy had an interview in a magazine about 3 months ago, and I still haven't finished it. It's half the magazine.
TG: Who was it?
GVE: Tommy Tedesco.
TG: Oh, yeah.
GVE: You know the article I mean?
TG: I just saw the---
GVE: Frets or Keyboard or….
TG: I just saw one in *Guitar Player* from last year.
GVE: or *Guitar*. You know the other magazine?
TG: *Guitar World*? Was Tommy Tedesco in there? I haven't….

GVE: It was one of those magazines. I still haven't finished it. I haven't got the magazine, but I started reading part of it at a show last year and then---
TG: Yeah, that's the one.
GVE: ---then Bob Miro had one at the house, so I read a little more of the article. But it goes on page after page. It's very interesting.
TG: That's what yours will.
GVE: Well, Tommy's funny, you know.
TG: He is a funny guy.
GVE: It goes on page after page. So, I have to find someone, another friend that's got the magazine so I can finish it! I've read about two-third of it.
TG: That's *Guitar Player*.
GVE: Is it?
TG: That was the issue that---
GVE: Yeah, there're a lot of pictures of Tommy in there.
TG: He is a character.
GVE: Oh, yes.
TG: That column of his every month is pretty funny.
GVE: Yeah. He was at the show again this year.
TG: Yeah?
GVE: Yeah, wearing that little black hat, cap.
TG: Playing so you can't see his right-hand move between a thousand notes?
GVE: He didn't play. He didn't play. Or did he?
TG: Yeah.
GVE: He did play?
TG: Yeah.
GVE: I didn't get to hear him.
TG: He plays a million notes, and you don't even see his hand move.
GVE: Oh, I know. I've worked a lot with Tommy. Tommy and I opened the first "Guitar Night" at Donte's.
TG: I was going to ask you about that. I might as well as you now. Okay. What---
GVE: Jack Marshall started that.
TG: Yeah. Was that a wonderful experience, or was that a pressure experience?
GVE: I tell you, we were both scared to death. We didn't know what we were getting into. We weren't supposed to start playing until 9:00, and Tommy got there at 8:00 and so did I. We weren't playing together, you know.
TG: Sure.
GVE: Ah, it was Frank Flynn and I, we were one group, and Tommy had bass and drums. And Tommy was so nervous, of course this was, you know, this was what, 1966. And Tommy wasn't as fearless then as he is now. He's a marvelous player. But he was so worried because he'd never done anything like that before. And Frank and I had worked together for 6 years on a Curt Massey show. So we had some things that we had---we had some skeletons. But we really didn't know what we were going to do, you know. But we had some basic formats, you know. Like, we didn't know what key we were going to play a tune in, but we knew we'd meet in certain places, you know.
TG: Somebody after 2 choruses or something like that, someone would---
GVE: It would start to gel, yeah, and then we'd get something going and make a hodge-podge that started come together at the end a little bit, you know, by shoehorning and then squeezing and everything, and try to make sense out of it. And but Tommy was so nervous, and he played

beautifully. Oh, he cast everybody because he played some of those things that go so fast you---like Ted said. You've seen him play?

ED: Yes.

GVE: I know you---and I use that term meaningfully because Tommy's—he's fun to watch because he, because, like you said, he hardly moves his right hand.

TG: Or anything---he's just up there…

GVE: Yeah. Well, yeah, right.

TG: But there's gotta be something going on.

GVE: Oh, absolutely. Oh, his computer's going 90 miles an hour. But---.

TG: He's going to, by the way, contribute some comments to this article. I was talking to him.

GVE: He is?

TG: Oh yeah. I'm going to get some comments from a lot of people if I can.

GVE: Well, he'll remember that opening night at Donte's. Jack Marshall talked us into it. Well, first of all he talked to Carey Leverette, and Sunny and Bill [*McKay*] were associated with the place. I don't remember their last name. And Jack gave Carey the business. The place was dying. Somehow Jack Marshall sold Carey Leverette the idea of having "Guitar Monday Night." We did---Tommy and I did the first one, and I was scared and so was Tom. We got through it all right, though.

TG: This is all the material I need through the years. Sunny…let's see what they say. Sunny McKay—Bill and Sunny McKay.

GVE: Yes, that's it.

TG: Downbeat caught you that night, a number of people. You know, the "Caught in the Act" routine that used to be in Downbeat?

GVE: Oh, I have never seen that.

TG: No?

GVE: No.

TG: Hmm, I'll have to make you a copy.

GVE: Leonard Feather was there, I believe.

TG: Before I leave I'll. Ask me about---.

GVE: Leonard gave us a nice write-up.

TG: But that was---.

GVE: Very complimentary.

TG: When you played, it was a packed house. And was it a real pressure scene, or did you love doing it, or?

GVE: Oh, I loved it.

TG: I mean, it seems like that was a standout like, everyone who was there remembers.

GVE: Yeah. It was only the first night that was scary because Frank had never done anything like that before, Frank Flynn, and I hadn't either. I'd played lots of solo things, you know, for guitar groups and things like that. But not with a---not in a nightclub atmosphere, you know, with bands, yeah, or with 4 or 5 men.

TG: So, that was one of the first major showcases for---

GVE: Yeah, so Tommy and I had looked at the marque on the way in, and it says, "Van Eps and Tedesco" and of course---or, "Tedesco and Van Eps"—anyway. There are our names and, our last names in big letters like this way, and that's what made us nervous I think. Because the people are going to pay money to come in and listen, you know. Oh gee. Nobody to lean on, you know. You go to the woods, you do it all by yourself, yeah.

TG: Luckily that you always know how to get out of the woods, not that I hear you going there, but I just know from your comments, you would---there would never be an extended series of being there. You'd certainly pull right out.

GVE: Well, like what we were talking about earlier, Ted, about "playing safe" on certain things and playing things that you've done before that you know are going to work. And so, if the going gets too rough, why then it's time to look down in the bag of tricks and see what you can come up with, you know, to bail out a bad situation. And there were a few spots that night. We did 3 or 4 sets, one-hour sets, and the evening worked out very well. So,4 the ice was broken and the next week when---Tommy didn't do it the following week, but Frank and I did it the following week, and a couple of evenings that week we got together and laid out some skeleton arrangements on things so that we---it left us lots of freedom, but we had more definite meeting places.

TG: Maybe a few endings worked out that worked out that would sound real---you would come back together for the end---.

GVE: Yeah, sure, yeah. And we'd have some intros and codas worked out, you know.

TG: Yeah. I hear that on that album, the first album you guys did together. And that's one of the most charming aspects of it, is that there's all this freedom in the middle, and then it's like they packed them all in box and rows, that's---.

GVE: Yeah, those are just skeletons. Each take was different.

TG: Really?

GVE: Those were just skeletons, but we had the skeleton laid down. We had the introductions and the codas ironed out, and a few meeting places in the middle. And where there was a firstly, secondly, thirdly, and fourthly choice in a certain place in a bridge or whatever, I'd ask Frank what he preferred under his solo. And he'd would say, "Well, now we're getting back---." He said, "Well, I would prefer the Cm6 and bring in the F7," and so forth. And so I would abide by that, I would honor that so it wouldn't throw him a curve. I wouldn't start to do a dance with the voices, you know, and get in his way, because it would spoil what he had in his mind.

TG: Yeah. I got the accompaniment part to one of his solos transcribed there. It was nice. It was a nice as---.

GVE: Oh, do you?

TG: Yeah. It's---

GVE: Oh, yeah. Hey, while we're talking, Ed: Ted brought these. The notes are so small. I'd have to have a magnifying glass.

TG: Yeah, I---I wasn't too---. You know, when I was doing it, George, I wasn't thinking that I would ever give it out---

GVE: I told Ed on the phone that you were doing that.

TG: But I was having so much fun, I just wanted to learn about that, and I did get a 7-string so I was able to---

GVE: Yeah. Marvelous. And like I said before, Ted, I'm sure that Mel would go for that.

TG: That'd be wonderful. It's be a good use of my time.

GVE: Well, and who knows, it might be a source of revenue, you know?

TG: Not a bad idea.

GVE: We can't tell. They might sell. Because after all, there are quite a few 7-string guitars out now.

TG: It's getting better, huh? I wanted to ask---

GVE: Well, Gretsch sold over 500, so we know there's that many.

TG: Are they going to produce it again? Or are they currently?

GVE: Well, we're negotiating with two companies. One is—Ed will remember this better that I do—one company is---is it Ibanez?

TG: Yes.
GVE: Ibanez. And what was the other one, Ed?
ED: Umm….
TG: Aria? Is it a company akin to that?
GVE: No, it's a Japanese company.
TG: Okay. Ahh…
GVE: No, no it isn't. I take it back. Ibanez is Japanese.
TG: Right.
GVE: Jimmy D'Aquisto.
TG: Oh! Production, huh, to do it in a production house?
GVE: Yeah. In fact, he's making one now for my approval.
TG: He's quite a builder.
GVE: Yeah. He made one for the fella who writes, Howie Morgen, that writes in Guitar. And I played Howie's guitar just for a little bit last year, last June in Chicago. And it was beautiful, but the thing that threw me a curve—they threw it at me---I walked down to where Howard was playing. He got up and handed me the guitar, and there's a crowd of people around, you know.
TG: As if they wanted you to perform, huh?
GVE: And it's an ultra-ultra-cutaway. In other words, the 14th fret, or rather, the 12th is nowhere near the beginning of the body. It's a very small body. But, you know the--. If I hadn't looked—there's where I made my mistake. If I'd closed my eyes I wouldn't have had any trouble. But quite a few places I overshot it terribly because there was no body there. You get used to having your hand hit the heel, you know…
TG: That makes sense.
GVE: And the heel was not at the 14th fret, it was way gone—it was 6 inches away from there.
TG: That's interesting.
GVE: So instead of jumping a 9th, why, I'd jump almost two octaves!
TG: So, the prospects look at least reasonably hopeful---
GVE: Yeah.
TG: ---that someone's going to produce one again?
GVE: Yeah.
TG: Oh, that's great.
GVE: I would, monetarily speaking, everybody says that if Ibanez makes it, it'd be a better deal because they manufacture 100 times over Jimmy, you know.
TG: They know what they're doing apparently, from their work so far.
GVE: Yeah, their workmanship looked pretty good.
TG: Yeah, I've been impressed.
GVE: In fact, I've got the templates are in that tube, and a drawing of the neck that has to get in the mail to Japan.
TG: Let me see. I might as well segue to equipment. I'll come back to the [?]. I do want to speed this up so I don't keep you guys all day. Let's see.
GVE: Ted, I told you; don't worry about that.
TG: I know, but George---
GVE: I'm just thinking: how's your tape holding out?
TG: Well, so far so good. And I've got two---. I brought enough, thinking that maybe one of them would break in each machine, which they wouldn't, but just in case, you know. But allow itself---
GVE: But, yeah, that stuff rarely happens, but.
TG: I never dreamed I'd be using all this tape, but it's wonderful.

GVE: What is that principle, "whatever can go wrong probably will" or something?
TG: Yeah, I generally don't believe in that, but I just plan, just in case, you know. It's a kinda thing.
GVE: Yeah. Well that's good.
TG: Where is that? Come on, Ted, be aware now.
GVE: Can you see that, Ed?
TG: Why did you go to the Epiphone company instead of somebody else to build the guitar? Were they the most esteemed in your mind at the time, the most qualified or capable?
GVE: I was---I got to know Epi very well: Epaminondas Stathopoulos
TG: Whew, what a name!
GVE: Yeah. And he was a marvelous man, and very open-minded. And I had experimented for a year and a half with this "7 concept" by taking one of my 6-string guitars and eliminating the top E string, and just stringing it with the second 6-string tuning to find out it's feasibility and practicality as far as notation is concerned. And I didn't want to make the 7-string a roving bass string that you tuned to whatever key you're playing in, because if you're in all keys you need something locked.
TG: Yes.
GVE: If you're going to think in all keys you need something locked. So, after a---. Oh, after about 6 months or so of this experimentation I had lunch with Epi down on 14th Street and I told him about the idea. And he listened very intently. He didn't interrupt me. And he said, "That sounds marvelous." I expected a different answer than that. I was flabbergasted. I really didn't know what to say next. I said, "Well, Epi, can we build one?" And he said, "I don't see why not." And of course, I had in the back of my mind the fact that Epi had working for him one of the finest neck makers in the world. He's an old fella 65 years old. What he didn't know about carving a neck wasn't known. And so we went back upstairs into the factory and talked to this old gentleman. I've forgotten his name. And we laid out the dimensions, and Epi—a very intelligent man—he said, "Now, with this low A string," he said, "it's going to vibrated much wider on the neck. The arc is going to be larger, see."
TG: Why would that be?
GVE: The heavier weight.
TG: Okay.
GVE: Weight, mass, inertia: that's what gives the strings the tonality, the pitch, rather.
TG: That makes sense.
GVE: So, because---for a string to be right, a normal weight string is under 23 pounds' tension. And when the string-makers make a string, like D'Addario—he's the best string-maker around now—they have the 25 1/2 inch string line.
TG: Right.
GVE: And they have the anchor up here; they have a bridge here and a bridge here. This bridge has a ball bearing roller on it, and they hang a 23-pound weight on it. If that string doesn't sound the note it's supposed to sound—because there's the gap from the bridge to the nut on the guitar—and 23 pounds, if it's an E string it's got to sound an E. So, all right.
TG: That's for a 13-gauge E, or?
GVE: Yeah, it's 2/10ths over 13. Yeah, all right. Now, I'm not just rambling on with this, but---
TG: No, I'm listening.
GVE: The weight, mass, inertia: each string, as you go down is 23 pounds, but what makes the B string sound a B is that there's more weight-mass. It vibrates slower, see. All right. And you notice. You pick the E string, then the B string, then the G string—and the arc vibrating from side to side. The strings' going like this, you know. And as you go down, you get down to the E string, and now it's very wide and you get to the A string and it's wider. All right. Now, if the

7th string is equal distant to all the others, why, you can't get your finger in between without having it buzz against your finger. If the 7th string has to sing and it's too close to the E string, why, it's going to buzz either against your fingernail or the pad of your finger, and it will stop of course. So, it has to be moved over a little bit. So, theorem is this—and I'm not good at---. There's the mathematician right there [pointing to Ed]. But you don't---. I mean, spacing strings: the correct way to do it, you don't go core center to center. You go periphery to periphery. Outside dimensions.

TG: Outside, yeah.

GVE: Yeah, and that gives the automatic spacing. Just---that's the difference in the arc.

TG: So you can put your fingers in there---

GVE: So actually, it's geometric [?] ---they move over a little bit. But it's just barely noticeable.

TG: I never knew that, but I see what you're saying.

GVE: Yeah. Well, if you took a 1/4-inch gauge and set the top E string. Now you've got to file a notch for the B string. Put the 1/4-inch gauge in there and file it. Then when the B string's in, put the 1/4-inch gauge in there and file the slot for the G string. When that G string is in, file a notch for the D string. And there's your outside to outside dimension—not center of the string to center of the string. Because if you put them quarter centers all the way across, when you got down to the E and A string, why, you got a tiny gap between them because they're so fat. Yeah. Anyway. Don't use 1/4-inch as a dimension. I just used as a round figure.

TG: Right, right. Just as a hypothetical.

GVE: Yeah. It's not that wide.

TG: So, you went to Epiphone and they, basically because of the neck maker and you knew this fellow, and---.

GVE: I knew I wouldn't get in an argument. Well, I figured I'll get less of an argument from Epi because, at that time, Ted, guitar—not only in the way it was being played, but the way it was being manufactured, the way it was being built—was traditional. "We don't change. It's been done this way for hundreds of years and that's the way it's gonna be done." You know, one of those things. Closed mind. Not Epi. And so 6 months later I had the delivery of the first 7-string. And it was a fair, it was a good instrument. But it was very green. The fingerboard was beautiful. Oh, the neck was marvelous. So, I played that with---I was with Adrian Rollini's trio at the time. I played that thing for about 3 months and the moment of decision was here, after 3 months. It had arrived. I took my marvelous deluxe [16?] down to the Epiphone factory. They sawed the neck off it, re-notched it, and slipped the seven---.

TG: [?]

GVE: Yeah, slipped an identical neck--

TG: Oh, identical?

GVE: Yeah.

TG: So, you had two early ones.

GVE: Oh yeah, yeah. Because during that 3-month period while I was testing it, why, the old man was making another neck, see. And so, that moment of decision, you know: "Is the instrument going to be any good?" Because it was a marvelous body. Marvelous. Balanced right so the treble---it wasn't boomy in the bass, and it wasn't tinny upstairs. Good timbre all the way through.

TG: And that's the one you still have?

GVE: Yeah. That's my favorite.

TG: Is that your favorite guitar?

GVE: Oh, absolutely.

TG: The production ones don't have as good a sound, huh?

GVE: No. No they don't.
TG: It's because of the lack of the acoustic property, would you say? Like, because they're all the hardware on there and, now with the spruce wood and such.
GVE: Well, Ted, the old theory that you can stretch a string across a two-by-four and put a humbucking pickup under it and get the same tone from a guitar, is not really true. For this reason: A good acoustic instrument to begin with, with a proper pickup, that isn't going to mute it in any way or stymie the tone, there is a feedback, even though the tone is coming directly from the string. We know that. It's going directly into the magnetic field.
TG: Right.
GVE: You can take a paperclip and put it over the pickup and you know you can hear what's going on. But---. The string is vibrating, it's going through the pickup. Now, the pickup---. The sound is also going through the bridge and coming back, and feeding back through the pickup. So, you've got a loop going. So, if it's a slab you don't have that loop.
TG: Now, the Gretsch…
GVE: Because the deck isn't singing.
TG: Right. The "deck." Like, the Gretsch has that big tuning---. I never did understand what that tuning fork apparatus was for on some---.
GVE: Oh, do you have one with a tuning fork?
TG: No, I just saw one once that had that---.
GVE: Oh, the best thing to do with that is to take it out and go fishing, use it for a sinker.
TG: Yeah, I turned down---
GVE: Oh, it's terrible.
TG: What was that supposed to do, add some sustain? 'Cause…
GVE: Oh, that. Somebody at Gretsch…. There's a fork out of one of them. I put a handle on it and gave it to Ed, because it's a 440.
TG: What was it---what was the theory?
GVE: They thought it was going to feedback and add sustenance. And of course, it doesn't do that.
TG: Yeah, it's 440.
GVE: Yeah. It's about an eighth beat or a sixteenth beat off. This one is right on the money. But---well, anyway.
TG: Is that sharp?
GVE: No, this is just a little on the flat side.
TG: I see. Shows you where my ears---.
GVE: On the dull side.

[*End of Part 2*]

ED: Ted, do you think you guys will go for another 45 minutes maybe, or an hour?
TG: At the very most. I'm going to try and accelerate this. But if you---
ED: I'm going to run down and check in real quick. Okay.
GVE: Oh, yeah. Sure. Well, the pictures are here, are they?
TG: Uh-huh.
ED: Oh I can wait.
TG: Whatever you have to do. I mean, I'll plan
GVE: Well, Ed brought pictures, and so you can---
TG: What would be good for you, Ed? [*recorder is turned off momentarily*]
TG: Well, let's see.
GVE: …because they're terrible acoustic instruments.
TG: You wanted to tell me why you tune this string down, and you decided---

GVE: It's not for range. Definitely not for range. Don't need it. It's just for the feel, Ted.
TG: That's interesting. And how did you decide on the A pitch, rather than the B pitch that "symmetrical minded" people might have?
GVE: Because it provided what I wanted. The instrument is still chromatically playable, and it didn't add a new note to the tuning—just added another A. So, there's no stranger there.
TG: Okay.
GVE: And it produced a parallelism and a triangulation.
TG: So, the same shapes that you loved already were now---. Is that what you mean? Or?
GVE: Yeah, with the transition it's so simple because if it was another note, like if it was Bb or…
TG: Well, B would be---
GVE: Yeah, but B is not far away, because you're getting into a bad area there, see, because a 5th is more practical than the 4th. That you're getting into too much consonant 4ths. Too many.
TG: Hmmm. I've tried it both ways. I like both set-ups, but on my Seven I've opted for the A also.
GVE: Yeah. Oh, I was all over, in that year and a half, experimenting on the 6-string guitar without the E string on it. I was all over the place, you know. I tried every note you could think of.
TG: Now, Carl Kress, he had some strange low tunings and things. Was that of any, at least audible, influence on you at the time?
GVE: That was 5ths. Carl's tuning was in 5ths.
TG: And did that---was that a---did that influence you in wanting to drop these, get more range like he was trying?
GVE: No, no. Not at all. Because what Carl wanted was to be able to play those, what he used to call, "lush" chords. And with the top string down an octave…
TG: Was---. The top string was down an octave?
GVE: Yeah
TG: That would get some backward-sounding [?], wouldn't it?
GVE: Just on a tenor banjo tuning you want---without changing any fingering at all, just put the top string down an octave, and the fourth string up an octave.
TG: So, what did his tuning end up being from the bottom up? Do you know, right off?
GVE: His low note was Bb.
TG: And then he went up to F, and then C and G and D. And the A was down an octave? Is that?
GVE: Yeah.
TG: Like the tenor A [?]
GVE: Well, yes. Now, Ted, to get back to what we were talking about: by adding a 7th string we not only added range, but you can play many, many, many 6-string voicings, of course on the secondary 6-string. Yeah, you can play the same thing. You're not doing it for range. But it provides many mechanical areas for voice-motion that aren't available any other way. And one of the things I did for the Gretsch demonstrations: every guitar player knows the low F major chord down next to the nut. Well, how many places can you play that? One. Sure. Well, you can play it four places on the 7-strings.
TG: I did some experiments and found that to be true.
GVE: Yeah. So, by adding one string it quadrupled the potential.
TG: I was startled by that.
GVE: Yeah.
TG: And I'm sure you were.
GVE: Now, some of the voicings: I've had people say, "Oh, by changing, by lowing the E string down I can play that voicing you played on the record." And they'll play it for me. I say, "No, that isn't it." Say, "Why?" I say, "Because there's one more note in there. You left if out."
TG: The 5th or something.

GVE: Yeah. Because they didn't have enough strings to play on.
ED: I'm going to go check in. I'll be back in a half-hour or so.
TG: Okay.
GVE: Yeah, okay, Ed.
ED: We'll take a couple of group pictures.
GVE: Yeah, all right. Good. Yeah. Yeah. Thanks, Ed.
TG: Yeah, I know what you're saying. I did an experiment recently—before I acquired the 7-string—tuning the A string down to E, and the E string down to A. So I was missing the A string…
GVE: Yeah.
TG: …the baritone A, or what-have-you, you know. And it was an interesting---it's a nice sound, and I could get many sounds like what you got, but then I would miss some of the ones that I had previously, so the Seven is still a better idea.
GVE: Yeah, and so the voicing that this fella came up with—I forget his name. It's unimportant anyway—it please him and he thought he had found "it." But then I showed him on 7-string that there was one more note in there. And so he went out and bought a 7-string guitar.
TG: I have an interview tape of you with a fella named Jack—I forgot his last name, it's awful of me—a disc jockey. It was right at the time that the "My Guitar" album came out, and you actually brought your guitar---
GVE: Jack Wagner.
TG: Yes. And you brought your guitar in the studio, unamplified, and he asked you—with all due respect to the man, I don't think he understood the significance of you and---
GVE: Yeah, it's [?] Wagner's brother, the guy.
TG: ---he asked you a few interesting questions, and then something about, "Would you play---" —I mean, there's no amplifier or anything, you could barely hear—but you played some chords that---it was orchestral voicings. It was 1, 5, 10, and then all the pretty stuff on top by adding. That's where I realized I should---and that was right at the time I was experimenting, still stubbornly not to go to Seven. And I still haven't totally gone to Seven, but I'm thinking actually---. I want to ask you about this: about adding another string on top as well, about going to Eight to extend the range out, because I love that sound.
GVE: That's possible.
TG: Like a G# or an A up there.
GVE: Yeah, sure. I experimented with that too.
TG: Did you like that sound? I mean, was that---
GVE: I found that the string, to go up far enough, didn't have any body. It was so thin. Like if you're all "slankies," all right, but you have to have a…
TG: A nine [*.009*] or an eight [*.008*]
GVE: …an eight [*.008*], yeah. And it just doesn't have the body. Its voice is so small compared to the E and B string, that it's completely overpowered, you know. So, and being a frustrated bass player….
TG: It was natural.
GVE: …I wanted to get down where my brother was playing, anyway, see. And so. A piano only goes an octave lower. And that---
TG: That's not the most pleasing octave, anyway.
GVE: No. And so I experimented with the thing above the tuning and below the tuning. And I decided on a low A, because that was the most practical.
TG: Lenny Breau is now playing a high-strung 7-string. They make these in Nashville with a---. It's kind of a classical guitar, with nylon strings. And it's almost---

GVE: That's beautiful. That's beautiful for him.
TG: Oh yeah, he sounds so wonderful on that thing.
GVE: Well, his cascading harmonics, you know, and that---. He's up in the---he's way up past the piccolo register with some of those top harmonics. And sure, that's great for him and his style of playing.
TG: He's quite a fellow.
GVE: But it wasn't for me, see.
TG: Yeah, I'm glad it wasn't, too. I mean, I like that sound.
GVE: Well, there's room for everything. And like the disclaimer—I've got lots of disclaimers in the book, in the first volume—but the most important one is that the material is not intended to be for everyone, or it's not supposed to be a---it's not a cure-all for everything. They're just the areas that I've been fascinated with. That's all.
TG: Yeah, I wish people could understand that more. A lot of people don't understand the significance of working with triads because they don't know what it will lead to. But I---.
GVE: Music is made up of triads. And when they compound---
TG: Yeah.
GVE: ---When you play an F# triad against a C tenth, now you're---it's still---. But now it's a "mighty" triad, see. It's taken on a completely different phase, and---.
TG: Yeah. You don't have to convince me. I don't mean that with any disrespect.
GVE: I know. No, I just meant that [?]
TG: Oh, yeah. That's---. I was almost talking off-the-cuff: I just wish we could---it could be conveyed more to people the significance of the triads, you know. The importance.
GVE: Yeah. And especially when we either open the triad here, or close the one here, or vice versa. By compounding triads, gee-whiz! Well, that's what music is made up of. Because they don't really lose their identity, and yet they do.
TG: That's great. Those last few statements—great. Fabulous. That should---that'll---that should be set in---.
GVE: They become members of an overall picture.
TG: Now let's---let me ask you about this.
GVE: They become parts of an overall picture, see.
TG: What made you switch from the pick to the fingers? You were a fine solo style guitar player with the pick before. I mean, unaccompanied things with---I've heard you do---.
GVE: Well, Ted, for many years I was stuck in the Dixieland typecast, in the Dixieland thing, and they expected banjo-type chordal solos, you know, with a moving lead or whatever—moving top line. And I couldn't play my way and be heard. So---this is before amplification, see. And then in 1934 when I started experimenting with the early amplifiers, why, I'd been playing fingerstyle but just in the parlor, you know, where it's quiet. I played finger-style all my life. I started that way, you know.
TG: [?] thing.
GVE: Five-string banjo with the---took the 5th string off, you know. And so, back in those days sometimes at the beginning of an evening, like in an [?] club or something—was very quite, you could play, if it was a small room, you could play something fingerstyle. But as soon as people had one drink, why, that went out the window, you know. Then you'd have to get out the pick. In fact, at one time I had a case, special guitar case made, that held a trumpet also. And so I'd play guitar—this was before---
TG: You're talking about trumpet?
GVE: Yeah.
TG: I didn't know that.

GVE: Yeah. Yeah. I started on trumpet.
TG: Before banjo?
GVE: Yeah, when I was just a kid. Now, I didn't get very far. But later on, I started fooling with it again because it's fun to play a lyric instrument. Because I actually think lyrically, see. So anyway, Bob Haggart and I, we'd play these jobs on Long Island and I'd play guitar for the first part of the evening. When it got too noisy, I'd get out the trumpet and then Bob would play guitar. Bob was a student of mine years ago. Good guitar player; excellent. And you know, he changed to bass because there were so few good bass players.
TG: Oh, he---that's the one you referred to. I've heard his name.
GVE: He changed to bass because there were so few good bass players around New York at that time—jazz bass—but there were umpteen gillion guitar players.
TG: Bob Haggart, with a T not a D, right?
GVE: Haggart. Yes. No, wait…
TG: I've seen his name in print.
GVE: H-A-G-G-A-R-T. I just got a very nice letter from him.
TG: Yeah, it is a T.
GVE: Yeah.
TG: I remember seeing that.
GVE: Haggart. Yeah. And so, I'd finish out the evening playing mostly trumpet. Of course, I couldn't play good, but I played loud, you know.
TG: So, let see. I've lost my train of thought. Oh yeah.
GVE: I'm sorry. I short-circuited your thing.
TG: The pick style. So mainly when amplifiers came in is when you felt that you could be heard and you could switch over. Is that what happened?
GVE: I've got some records, done in the 30's where I played solo fingerstyle.
TG: Really?
GVE: Yeah. One's a Ray Noble record, "Crazy Rhythm." [*See* youtube *at 1:39-1:56*] And I played the last bridge of the tune fingerstyle. I had it down here some place.
TG: Of course, like "Sweet Loraine" and things like that, [?]—those were all fingerstyle?
GVE: Yes.
TG: So, you'd already almost gone to a fulltime fingerstyle. Right?
GVE: Yes. Well, that's my first love anyway, because you've got five picks, you know.
TG: That's it. I was just going to ask you what you felt the advantages and disadvantages—not for others but for your own---. Like for instance: an advantage could be an economic advantage of the pick users.
GVE: Well, I don't care how fast a person's wrist is with a pick. You can't strike a chord all together. It's a broken chord when you slow it down and you hear them one at a time. Whether it's an upstroke or a down-stroke. And if it's done very fast it has a chop sound. Well, with fingers it can be struck all together, backwards, forwards, or whatever. Now also, one of the most important parts: you can make a line stand out by just a little more pressure with that particular group of fingers that's playing the line.
TG: That sounds---
GVE: By the way you attack it.
TG: That's not easy to do.
GVE: No, it isn't. No, but---
TG: Some people can do it.
GVE: Oh yeah, there are a lot of---almost all the good classic players have to be able to do that. So that's nothing new about that. But no, I became conscious of that when I was very young. My

dad took me into New York to Segovia's first concert in 1928 in Town Hall, and I heard the great master play. And boy, that---oh, what an impact!

TG: Was that an experience?

GVE: So the two great influences were Eddie Lang and---the *greatest* influences were Eddie Lang, initially, and then I heard the potential of the instrument when I heard Segovia play.

TG: Yeah, I was going to ask you---

GVE: That's full orchestra.

TG: Let me segue. You once mentioned that, you know---. Oh yeah, this is what I wanted to ask you: why do you think you didn't go the classical guitar route, when your favorite guitar album was that Segovia album, and such. What was it that made you say, "Well, that's not---."

GVE: Because this man was so great—I'm not a defeatist—but I figured he has got that field so corned that I'm going to stay away from it. Now, I spent eight years with a classical repertoire, you know.

TG: Did you really?

GVE: Oh yeah, sure.

TG: What period of time was this, roughly, George? Can you recall, or is that sketchy?

GVE: 1932 to 1940. And---

TG: So you were in your twenties?

GVE: Oh yeah, so I was playing both of them. Yeah. And I made a lot of records with a gut-string guitar. But---.

TG: You did?

GVE: Yeah.

TG: Is that in the resume, or does that just include your solo?

GVE: I made a bunch of records with Fred Astaire, you know.

TG: Boy, I wish I heard those recordings.

GVE: And---backing his vocal, you know.

TG: I've heard a few cuts where I could swear you—I mean later things—that I could swear it's you on there backing. And on some of the Cole Porter and Irving Berlin tunes, and such. Were you involved in any of those, like sound tracks?

GVE: Yeah. Some of them. I can't remember them, but---

TG: I hear little things and I, hmmm.

GVE: Yeah, we did a whole album—and of course albums then were only four records, you know, eight tunes—with Fred Astaire with the Ray Noble Orchestra backing Astaire. And they were all Gershwin tunes. They were the tunes from *A Damsel in Distress*. "Foggy Day," "Nice Work If You Can Get It," and tunes like that. Marvelous tunes to work with. And somewhere in each record, why, there was a---I would put down the Epiphone and pick up the other Epiphone, the gut-string guitar and play maybe 8 bars back of Fred, not solo.

TG: But still there was some moving things behind him.

GVE: Yeah, sure. And a completely different sound, you know, than the other instrument. But the bridge I played on "Crazy Rhythm" fingerstyle, that was done on steel strings. That was done on the Epiphone.

TG: That was back in the 30's, you said? In '39?

GVE: 1937.

TG: 1937.

GVE: Yeah, I have the record down there. It' in the cabinet.

TG: It's safe that way.

GVE: Oh, we have it on tape. That's one of the few things I've ever played that I liked. It's only a bridge.

TG: Who else were you listening to? I mean, Eddie Lang, you were just a boy.
GVE: I listened to everybody. Mostly piano players.
TG: Art Tatum?
GVE: Oh yeah, sure. Sure, Art Tatum. And going back further than that, of course my brother was the biggest influence. Then Frank Banta, Gershwin. Gershwin was my dad's accompanist for a while.
TG: So you got to see him play live?
GVE: He took Felix Arndt's place, the fella who wrote "Nola." Yeah. And Felix Arndt had to---. Nola got quite big and so he started composing. And just about---for having shows to write, things like that. So, Gershwin came in. He hadn't written "Rhapsody in Blue" yet, but he was toying with the idea, and he'd play things like that on the piano.
TG: Was that fascinating for you at the time? Did that just---.
GVE: Pardon?
TG: Was that fascinating? I mean, were you riveted by all this?
GVE: Yeah. I was 5 years old at the time. I used to bounce behind his---. He's sit at the piano and—marvelous man—he come all the way out to play in Plainfield, New Jersey from New York. It was about a 34-mile trip on the Jersey Central Railroad. And he always brought a bag of candy, penny candy for the boys, you know. And I, being the youngest and the lightest, he'd bounce me on his knee. He always kept time to everything. If you didn't keep time, why, it annoyed him. And so he'd bounce me on his knee keeping time while playing piano. You know, and I'd sit here and he'd bounce me up and down. It was great. Oh, I'll tell you how fussy he was about keeping time. There was a little old lady who used to walk past the house every afternoon about noontime, and she would whistle absolute tonal and continuity wise, abstracts. Wasn't in any particular key and it was nothing recognizable. You know, just abstract. Just [*he whistles*]. [*Ted laughs*]. But---but she would space them exactly right, see.
TG: The rhythmic feel.
GVE: Rhythmic. Yes, right. There was the same amount of air between this one as that one. Yes, or light, whichever way you want to look at it. But she would walk very erratically.
TG: At a different---. Oh.
GVE: This drove Gershwin crazy. This went on---he spent a week with us one time—that was the longest he ever been with us, lots of days. But she walked by every day at noon whistling and walking out-of-time. He stood it as long as he could, and the last day, he went to the---oh, he threw open the front door and he screamed. He said, "For God's sake, woman, keep time!" Scared the hell out of this little old lady.
TG: She didn't know what he meant.
GVE: No, but he---. No, she didn't; it just frightened her. [*Ted laughs*]
TG: She just ran. She looked at---
GVE: She jumped about that far off---
TG: That's great. That's a wonderful---
GVE: But he was very polite, though, "For God's sake, madam, keep time!"

[*End of Part 3*]

TG: Okay, let's see. This we covered very well. Okay, hmm. Yeah, if I recall correctly, you do like a very low and comfortable action. I remember picking---you let me pick up one of your guitars, and it was so easy to play. How do you respond to that theory that a high action gives you a better tone? And it better---it builds strength, and---.

GVE: Not on an electric it doesn't. Oh, on an acoustic, I don't use that low action on an acoustic. But, a very high action defeats its purpose, defeats its own objectivity. In this sense: that the open string will sound flat. If you do have to use open strings, there you're pulling on the clothesline. You got to push the string further down to the fret and it's going to go sharp.

TG: So, you'd have to set the bridge farther back, which means it would be---

GVE: Yes. And not only that, but even though you set the bridge back it doesn't really accomplish the purpose because you would have to set the *nut* back, or rather, push the nut forward, see. Yeah. You'd have to---. You can't just do it to one end of the string length. The compensation would have to be on both ends on a very high action. So, it defeats itself, and also, you're working too hard. Segovia doesn't play a high action.

TG: I don't like it. I was just curious. People say. But that answers my question. I'm going to kind of consolidate a little more---.

GVE: But one thing: Segovia and I talked about this one time in New York.

TG: You met the man?

GVE: Oh yeah. We were in Dick [?]'s apartment. And we were talking about actions. And he said—he speaks better English than he lets on, you know, because it's a great out, you know. He gets out of situations---

TG: That's clever.

GVE: And it makes perfect sense: if you're depressing, let's say the D string, and the G and the A string are sounding, they're vibrating—you're in a very dangerous area, because in pressing down the string it bunches up the flesh and expands the end of the finger, and now it's going to buzz, see.

TG: I was picking up a different dangerous side, in that there's more---. You're so far below where you have to come back up to again to make---.

GVE: That's what the other thing I was going to mention. Now, that's just with the left hand. Now, the right hand has to hunt for them, because the strings are going up and down like this for the right hand, especially if you're trying to get a very soft mellow tone and you've come away from the bridge.

TG: And it snaps---

GVE: Now the strings are dancing like this, and your fingers have to go in and find them.

TG: That makes sense.

GVE: Like you've seen the way the twine works on a loom when their threading it?

TG: No, I can't say I have.

GVE: And the threads, they throw the material through, they throw the shuttlecock through that's got the thread on it. And then all the strings in the loom change like this, see. And that's what's going on with the strings, you know. Segovia said, "You might as well be weaving a rug." It's too high.

TG: So he was aware of that.

GVE: Oh sure, yeah.

TG: George, on the Mellow Guitar album there seems to be this wonderful tone quality. It's almost out-of-phase, and it doesn't quite sound like one pickup being near, you know it was electric guitar---.

GVE: There's just one pickup.

TG: But is it right near the fingerboard, or is it somewhere---?

GVE: No, it was out about that from the bridge.

TG: I can't understand how you got that quality. There's something that's---

GVE: Well, I think I can answer that question, Ted. Lowell Frank was the engineer for Columbia at that time, and Lowell said, "Let's try an experiment. We'll take the electronics side and we'll

go right into the board." So we went in directly into the board from the pickup. Then he set a microphone, a 44 microphone, down about here. And I was---it was about here in relation to where I'm sitting now—far enough away from the fingerboard to get any string noise. And it went 50-50: 50% acoustic and 50% right into the board.

TG: That's why is sounds---. That's nice, yeah.

GVE: Yeah.

TG: Because it doesn't sound like a standard "jazz guitar" one-pickup sound. It has a different quality to it.

GVE: I have the pickup in the other room. I had to make the pickup.

TG: You made it?

GVE: Yeah, because you couldn't get a pickup for the 7-string so I made it out of an old Epiphone pickup. I got a hold of an Alnico 7 magnet, oversized, and wound the coil.

TG: Hand-wound?

GVE: Yeah. And I had to break the end out of the case to accommodate it. One end sticks out. I got it in there.

TG: So the pickup was attached close to the bridge.

GVE: Yep.

TG: And the acoustics. Boy, that is something.

GVE: Yeah, and it gets a good sound even now. It a marvelous sound. But of course, the Epiphone is the in limbo right now. I have to re-fret it. So, that's why I took the pickup off.

TG: Do you do that too? Do you know how to do that?

GVE: Yeah, yeah.

TG: You learned all those things---

GVE: Yeah, but I don't have time to do it. But after I finish the books and I get back to playing, why, then I'm going to re-fret—pull the frets and re-graduate the fingerboard, because there are holes in it.

TG: How did you learn to do all those kind of things, George? Out of necessity?

GVE: Well, I have to go back now, Ted. My mother and father divorced when I was five. So, our mother raised us four boys. Now, when we grew up, so to speak, we spent more time with our father. Our father had a banjo factory, see. So, we'd go down to the banjo factory and help out.

TG: Okay.

GVE: Well, I reached the point where I was fretting the banjo necks.

TG: Now I see.

GVE: Or doing some of it.

TG: So, you learned those things.

GVE: There were other people fretting too.

TG: That's a natural---.

GVE: Yeah. And graduating and shaving maple and ebony and so forth. So.

TG: That makes sense. What---

GVE: I---. Excuse me, Ted.

TG: No, no. I---excuse me….

GVE: I don't trust the average repairman to put---to lay the frets in the way I like them, because so many of them will not set the fret wire up right.

TG: What do you consider right? A crown---well, I won't put words in your mouth.

GVE: Well, sometimes, you know, the fret wire, it has the hat on it---

TG: Right.

GVE: Then the tang, you know---

TG: Right.

GVE: ---that goes in the slot. And there are no nicks in it, in the bottom of that tang.
TG: But you put them in to make it stick---
GVE: You have to put them in to lock them in. And a fret has to be locked in.
TG: Right.
GVE: And that's another thing some of the fret-makers don't do. Oh, they'll put the marks in the fret wire, and then chop them off just rough. And sometimes they don't even bother to curve them, and they just pound on them until they're curved. And when they do that, why, then they beat it straight in to lock it in. That's wrong. That fret's going to give you nothing but trouble, eventually. It's going to come loose. So, you pull the fret out as gently as possible without destroying the grooves. Now, you're going to have to make ample lock-down nicks. You're going to have to make a lot of them. And they're going to have to be quite deep, because this groove has been worked. So, you have enough [*salvage*?] left on each side of the fret so that you've got room to play from a side motion. So, you---with a felt or a rubber hammer you set the fret in place. Then you put a clamp over it, an arched block and you hit it sideways about an eighth of an inch. That knocks it into fresh wood. Locks it into the fingerboard in a fresh place. In other words, if you drive the serrations—that's what they really are—if you drive them in the could come out through the same hole.
TG: Same. That makes sense.
GVE: So, you push it sideways—now it's locked in.
TG: And if you leave enough overhang, then you don't have to worry about it---
GVE: Yeah, then you---with the diagonals you chop if off, then you finish it. Of course, your purfling is off the side, you know, and you bring it in flush so that the purfling is covered.
TG: Right.
GVE: And then you do the manicuring to take the---
TG: It's very sensible. It makes a lot of sense.
GVE: ---round it off a little bit. Well, that's the way they're---those frets will last until they wear out. They won't come out, that's for sure.
TG: Maybe you should [?].
GVE: I think almost all the factories to it that way now.
TG: Do they?
GVE: I'm pretty sure they do.
TG: What happens when a 7-string player tries to use a regular electric bass string for the 7th string?
GVE: Oh, frets out of tune.
TG: Why will it fret out of tune even if the bridge is set correctly? What is it, George?
GVE: Because the core is too big.
TG: And the core that's big---just the bridge has to be set way, way, way back to make it work. Is that it?
GVE: Even then it doesn't do it. And it doesn't have the proper tone quality.
TG: Because I've been trying with that. That's all I've been able to get a hold of, is these big---. And these things are all---.
GVE: Oh, I wish you had told me.
TG: These are all, like---
GVE: John D'Addario is winding 7-strings all the time.
TG: So, all I have to do is order them from him and he'll---.
GVE: Right. And it's the greatest 7-string in the world.
TG: I read your letter---
GVE: It's double-wound, yeah.
TG: These are double-wound too, but Stephen Still[?].

GVE: No, see, Ted, here we get back to that 23-pound weight. It won't work with a bass string. And it has a very heavy piano wire core, that bass string—the bass D you're talking about.
TG: The bass A. Wait. Oh, I see what you're getting at: the bass D string. Yes.
GVE: Yes, the D string.
TG: I just went for a .090 to.100 gauge, somewhere in there, whatever I could find.
GVE: Yeah, and that's too large in diameter, see.
TG: Too large?
GVE: Yeah, .088 is about---.
TG: I tried that first, but it was so flabby—tuned down a whole-step like your record—just so loose.
GVE: Yeah. No, but you get on of D'Addario's strings.
TG: Okay. So, .088 is the proper gauge, correct?
GVE: Yes.
TG: Okay.
GVE: I don't have any extra ones at the moment, Ted. Actually, I'd give you one.
TG: Oh man, that's---
GVE: In fact, I'm waiting for an order to come through from D'Addario.
TG: I want to switch over to something else because you, believe it or not you've already answered that: How did the string damper come about, and do you still use one? Do you still---.
GVE: Oh yeah, sure. It's here. I took it off the instrument because we're negotiating with a company that wants to manufacture it.
TG: Produce it---.
GVE: Yeah. So, well, I've been sitting here making drawings, you know. Those are some of the parts of the damper. And changes and shape, I've updated it a little bit, but not in function but just in the looks of it, because you can't change the function. Anyway, that came about way before Electra-glide instruments. And it is absolutely ideal for electric instruments. But I made the first one when I was still playing acoustically because if you're playing something complicated you can't stop and dampen the open strings, see. And they're going to sing along with you—sympathetic vibration—they're going to sing along with you. Not only that but the end from the nut to the fretted note, those little ends sing too. So, the overtone damper cuts those out.
TG: Cuts both of them. Yeah.
GVE: Yeah. There was a very good demonstration of that last June in Chicago, because Herb Ellis and Barney Kessel were playing together at Ricks.
TG: Barney fed back and Herb didn't? I'm sorry to put---I'm putting these thoughts out there.
GVE: Herb sounded so clean, and Barney—well, Barney played well; he always does. But I mean, that's Barney Kessel, you know—
TG: But there was a lot of sympathetic overtones?
GVE: Oh God, it was just singing like crazy.
TG: Yeah, I know Herb uses one of those.
GVE: Yeah, Herb made a little announcement to that affect. But anyway, Barney had. I made two dampers for Barney when I was making them myself. I made two for him and he put them on his guitar. And I no longer make, I sold the tooling and whole thing to Gibson. I leased it to them, rather, but I sent them my tooling. Barney called me up one day and he said, "Hey, I need another damper." I said, "Barney, I haven't got any." I said, "I signed a contract with them. Even if I had the tooling I couldn't make one." That's a no-no, you know. So I said, "What's the matter, Barney?" He said, "Well, I sold my guitar." And I said, "Well, but," I said, "did you take the damper off?" He said, "No." I said, "Well why didn't you take the damper off the instruments you sold?" He said, "Because they didn't want them without the damper on it."
TG: Which is a good testimony.

GVE: Yeah. And so the first chance I get I'm going to make---Herb needs another one. He's got three but he needs another one. And I'm going to make a couple for Barney.

TG: George, so many musicians, even successful ones, seem to have an anti-business, anti-capitalistic stance. Do you feel this is a sensible position? This is another somewhat devil's advocate question.

GVE: Start that again. Now, I was off on a tangent there.

TG: Sorry. Sorry---.

GVE: All right. No, that's all right. No, no. Go ahead.

TG: It seems like from things I can gather by putting my antenna up in the world for the last 10, 15 years, so many musicians, even successful ones, seem to have an anti-business, an anti-capitalistic stance. And I was just wondering: you've been in the inner workings of the business all your life and seen various facets how it's run, you know, the "inequities" but the "necessities" and such. Do you feel this is a sensible position for people to be anti-business and anti-capitalistic?

GVE: No, I can understand their feeling, but I don't think it's a sensible---. I think they can moderate their feelings a little bit. Because nothing is all good or all bad, you know. And I think if they would give just a little bit and try to understand, why, it would help them for one thing, and it would also help everybody else. Because they're not helping anybody by being deadly against this or that and what. I don't mean murder or anything.

TG: No, I know what you're saying.

GVE: But for one thing it is not a realistic evaluation of the situation, because we as players would be nowhere without the hardnose cigar-chewing businessman. Because somebody has to start paying the bills someplace, and so we need them and they need us. But when they start---. Now, I think what triggered this whole bit was when they started dictating taste, musical taste. Let them take care of the business, you know. Let them be as commercial as they want, but let us take care of the music. And I don't mean that we're the judges of what's going to sell, but at least don't be quite so hardnosed about it and force us to play, or to promote things that are musically not sound.

TG: Let me see. For instance—see if this is in line or I'm missing a point—like, a company hires, you know, signs you on. You're contractionally bound, so to speak. And then afterwards, since you're bound, then they start telling you what to do. You saying, "Once you're bound they should already have had enough faith in you as an artist to let you say somewhat of you---pretty much what you'd like to say. Otherwise they shouldn't have signed you on in the first place."

GVE: Yes. And of course they should have a voice, of course. Especially if they're going to pay the bills.

TG: Right.

GVE: But like you just said, there should be an understanding going in before anything is on paper, so that both parties have leeway. Sometimes a hardnosed businessman can sense better what the crowd is going to expect---

TG: Sure.

GVE: And it isn't going to kill anybody, even the purist of the pure dyed-in-the-wool artists, to throw in one little thing here and there that may have public appeal.

TG: It might help the public to like their other things better. Right?

GVE: Yes.

TG: That's what you were saying, it'd be better for them. Right?

GVE: Before you can pull the fish out you got to hook 'em.

TG: That's it.

GVE: Before you can land the fish, you gotta hook 'em.

TG: There seems to be a resurgence—thank God—in the solo guitarist field these days, you know. There seems to be increasing interest and such, and---. How did I break this down before? It seems like that is casting a ray of hope on the economic situation for great artists like yourself. And I was just wondering if you see---. Well, let's put it this way: since all your albums are out-of-print, is there a possibility somebody's going to---.

GVE: Not all of them, Ted.

TG: They're not all out-of-print?

GVE: No.

TG: What's not out-of-print?

GVE: One of the very early albums I made, you can get them---they're being pressed---.

TG: Oh, the Jump records?

GVE: Yes.

TG: Yes, that's right. I'm sorry. I forgot.

GVE: Well, I didn't mean to be picky about that, but---.

TG: Let me rephrase that. Since all of your Capital recordings---

GVE: And Columbia.

TG: ---and Columbia.

GVE: No. The Columbia, the *Solo Mood* things for Paul [*Weston*] ---

TG: Those are around?

GVE: Those are reissued.

TG: Is that right?

GVE: Yeah, on Corinthian Records.

TG: *Mood for Twelve*, too?

GVE: Yeah. Corinthian Records.

TG: That's nice to know.

GVE: Yeah, Paul has his own company.

TG: And the other albums, let's say the Capital, are there any chance of somebody---

GVE: There's three Capital albums---

TG: Right.

GVE: ---and we tried to get the masters back, because---. I'm just going to digress a minute.

TG: Okay.

GVE: Somebody said, "Well, why don't you re-record them?" Well, you can't.

TG: That's a new album.

GVE: You can't. The concept's the whole thing. I'd like to think I've advanced a little, you know. I don't analyze, I don't hear those tones the way I played them then. So you can't---. The old saying, "Never go back. Never look back." You can't. So, like *Mellow Guitar*, the Columbia album—can't re-record that. The whole mood would be different. The players would be different, the studio would be different. The whole sound would be different. Why, my concepts of the free places in the album—there were certain places where, because of the orchestra, you know---

TG: Did you write the---

GVE: Yeah, I scored those. But, I couldn't deviate too much because it'd be too much of a clash, see. Clash is all right up to a certain point. But so, hearing them differently, you just can't re-record them.

TG: But there's no chance of you getting the masters, or of say, a little label---?

GVE: We're negotiating. Paul's trying to get---. Paul got *Solo Mood* and *Mood for Twelve* back from Columbia. He bought the masters. Now, Columbia tells me and tells Paul, "You're not going to sell *Mellow Guitar*," because they may reissue it. So Paul said, "Well okay, reissue it---"

TG: Reissue. Right. One or the other.
GVE: "---Otherwise let me reissue it."
TG: Right. That's a good point.
GVE: And so there's where it's hanging right now.
TG: Well, great. At least it's---either way it's going to happen.
GVE: Same with Capital. Capital says they're going to reissue the---
TG: Well that's nice to know.
GVE: ---a couple of the albums. Yeah, but---.
TG: In terms of sales and the reasons that these things are deleted from the catalog: do you think there's a possibility that the big companies and the media could get behind these products a little more and create more exposure, which would certainly create the sales. [*When*] most people hear the stuff, they love it. It seems it'd just be an exposure problem. Is there a chance that these people can be convinced? Or is just like, "Well, popular taste is dictated by social mores and such, which are somewhat decant at this point—which is just between you and me. I won't---.
GVE: Yeah. Well, you know, the timing was bad too. They would sell better now. I get more mail about it now than I did back then when those were made. I get more requests wherever I go. Just this Monday night at the Sportsman's Lodge I had a couple dozen people ask about, "Are they going to be reissued?" you know. "Be sure and let us know." And so the timing was off. And I think they would go, but the reason they were killed and yanked out of the catalog was that the rock craze has hit full-force.
TG: Let me just stop you. Excuse me.

[*End of Part 4*]

TG: Ted, turn that volume down. Okay.
GVE: And you said something to me a year ago that I've never forgotten, cause you're the only one that ever, ever did it.
TG: Oh, I know what you mean. I still want to do that.
GVE: Tony Mottola was a student, and Al Hanlon, and a whole bunch of guys back east—and nobody ever made an offer like that. And I didn't expect them to make it---.
TG: This is for me. I'm just [*excited*]---it pleases me, that's why I got the tape running.
GVE: You hit me right between the eyes with that last year. Because like I just said, I've never had anybody mention anything like that before, or make an offer like that. And I remember what I told you last year: that it's a beautiful thought and all that, but I wouldn't take one penny because you did the whole thing.
TG: We may have a fight latter on about this, George. I'd really like you to sometime. I can't see that my future works couldn't be largely---.
GVE: Ted, in good faith and in all honesty, I couldn't accept it. I couldn't.
TG: Seems unjust. I mean---.
GVE: No. Look, you know, Ted. Teaching to me is a misnomer anyway. You can't teach anybody. A person has to teach himself. But I think a coach is a better description, because a coach can steer a person around some of the pitfalls and some of the things they can fall into. Because the coach has fallen into them, and he speaks from experience. And when he sees somebody else headed for some of those hazards, he can warn them. That's not teaching.
TG: But you've done more than that.
GVE: That's not teaching.
TG: You've done a lot more than that. I know what you're saying right now.

GVE: No, no. Because anybody---. There's an old saying, Ted that goes back thousands of years, and that is: "Every question contains its own answer." Now, you know what that means.

TG: I think so. It's there if you ask it.

GVE: If you're inquisitive enough, and dogged enough---

TG: That's a good word.

GVE: Yes. You'll find the answer. And that's all a coach can do, is to maybe shorten the distance between the question and the answer.

TG: But some people don't even know what questions to ask until they've come in contact with certain other people, you see.

GVE: Oh, the rub-off. Oh sure.

TG: You know, when I came to you I didn't even know what questions to ask you. But I'll tell you something: I used to have dreams, and you were helping me in my dreams. That may be fantasy; it may be conjecture; it may be symbolic—but I don't believe that it was. I just noticed *after* I studied with you. After. I mean months later. And it wasn't necessarily because of what I was working on. I'd have these dreams a few days later: acceleration, distinctive acceleration, you know. So, I'm not sure that---.

GVE: Ted, that's marvelous, yeah. Well, I appreciate that and that's more payment than I deserve. See.

TG: Well, maybe this will serve as something.

GVE: So, whatever you lay down on paper and whatever comes---whatever is released from your mind and becomes audible through your finger or anything you put down on paper—that's yours. That's yours, that's not mine.

TG: But if the germinal ideas were---the germs of the ideas, so to speak, were inspired by you, some credit—it seems like possibly more than just the acknowledgment in print—should be due. It seems---. I mean, Isaac Newton and Galileo and I mean, all the way back, innovators that haven't been treated right in society—it's one of the main faults—and I think---. The Wright brothers supposedly wanted---thought their---that the airplane would end war, but they weren't treated---. I mean, innovators: it seems like there's a line of injustice all the way down, and I certainly wouldn't want to do anything unjust to you, you know. And I think it's not just enough just to say, "Thank you." Thank you isn't enough.

GVE: No, you've done just enough. You've done just the opposite. You know why? Because you have built yourself up and worked hard, you built yourself up into a very sizeable piece of the music world. You're a big chunk of the music world. You're very talented. You're very intelligent. Now, that is more payment than I deserve. Because, egotistically I don't go around telling people that, "Oh, so-and-so studied with me," or "so-and-so." Now, that's just between you and I. That's a very private relationship, you know, doctor-patient, lawyer-client. And whatever transpired in the studio in Burbank, that's very private stuff. And the---. If you can make a suggestion here to somebody, and make a suggestion there—you know doggone well they're going to do it anyway. But if you can help them find a shortcut, "Well, this is a little shorter distance than what you want to do, or that," why---

TG: You underestimate your influence, George.

GVE: ---You're helping them. And then you see the gray matter. Now, you sit back and the coach sees the gray matter; he sees the person teach she, or himself—and that's the ego trip right there.

TG: I'm sure it feels good---.

GVE: Because---yeah. Well, it's an ego trip for the coach for this reason---ah, for another reason, and that is that he knows that at least—I'm getting ahead of myself, but I used to be afraid when I first started teaching that maybe I wouldn't be teaching the right stuff and the student just

wouldn't turn out the way I wanted. So, when you—when a teacher, coach, whatever—when he sees this intelligent person come out and wind up way above the level that you figured on, why, that's a real ego trip because that is when you have to fight and contain yourself and restrain yourself from going to the rooftop and say, "Hey, he was my student!" You know what I mean?

TG: I see what you're getting at, sure. Before I forget, I admit to asking you this anyway: Tony Mottola was a student. Jimmy Wyble, yes?

GVE: Yeah.

TG: It seems like it from what Jimmy produces now, that it's all a direct offshoot of---.

GVE: Tony Rizzi.

TG: Tony Rizzi.

GVE: Bobby Gibbons.

TG: Bobby Gibbons. Johnny Smith by chance, or no?

GVE: No, not Johnny.

TG: Not Johnny. Okay.

GVE: We're good friends. We've worked together.

TG: And Howard. I know you influenced Howard Roberts, whether he studied with you or not.

GVE: Yeah, Howard. Howard, that's it, yeah.

TG: Did he study with you, or? In his own way, by taking---.

GVE: Not formally.

TG: Not formally.

GVE: Not formally.

TG: Because a lot of his chordal work sure sounds like it.

GVE: Yeah. He bought that first little book that [?], and we can talk about that.

TG: I've got questions on your book. I just---. One of the big things for me about this project, is it made me go back through all your material.

GVE: Oh oh!

TG: A few years---

GVE: It becomes a memory test.

TG: You know what, I'll tell you what's interesting—this is the mark to me that you've done a job well, not poorly—the older I get the more value I get from your books. Not the less. I would have thought, like with some material, "Well, that's okay. Now I [grown?] pass that." And in a sense I don't need to [?]. But no, I get *more* value—I go back and I read your words and I see what you were thinking of, and I say, "Hey, that makes sense now." And I didn't understand that then.

GVE: That's marvelous.

TG: Do you still---

GVE: Boy, is that flattering. Oh boy. I don't mean flatter---I mean, you're not a flatter.

TG: It's true.

GVE: No, that's very complimentary. That's nice. That makes the whole thing worthwhile.

TG: That's great. It's true. I loved going through the "yellow book" the other night. It was such---so much fun. And I mean, like really, "Why didn't I think of that before?" And now I remembered where I got certain things from that I had forgotten.

GVE: That makes the past four years all worthwhile. Because I've been putting this stuff together forty years. I've been writing it for forty years, Ted.

TG: Okay, let me ask you---

GVE: I've been putting it into book form five years.

TG: The offering questions: here we go. Okay, we already took care of that. How did you come to write that first book, the [?] book? What was that---was there a purpose in that you wanted to set down a better system of educational material for guitar? Or was just, "I have it laying around anyway, I might as well publish it"?

GVE: Without mentioning any names I'll tell you---

TG: [*close to the mic on the tape machine*:] Just checking. Everything looks good. Yeah. Sorry, I just noticed---.

GVE: Yeah. Without mentioning the name, put it that way. In 193---the end of---the winter of 1937, '38 someone mentioned that a student of mine was writing a book on the material I had taught him.

TG: Ooooookay.

GVE: So. Hi Ed! So---.

TG: Better get it out quick.

GVE: Yes.

TG: Okay.

GVE: Jo and I heard this and we said, "Well, there's just one thing to do, and that is just write day and night." Because the scuttlebutt we got was that this guy was already two, three months into it. So, we had to go like the devil, you know.

TG: Can this be---can this go on the record, what you're saying?

GVE: Yes, it can, because I'm not going to mention the name.

TG: That's good. This is an important concept. The innovation---

GVE: It was an ex-student, one of my early students of the period of 1937, '38.

TG: Glad you're mentioning it, because this goes on.

GVE: And so, we did. We worked around the clock and we went to New York—Kay [*George's daughter*] was just a baby then—and we continued writing there. And the reason we went to New York: it's where Epiphone Publishing Center is.

TG: Oh. Originally?

GVE: Yeah. I had the original down here. So, Epi was in on this too, and Herb Sunshine. And so they loaned us some of their writers, and even bought some writers because they didn't have very many around there who spoke English very well. And we got the thing out in about seven weeks.

TG: Boy! That's pretty---

GVE: And Jo, my wife, oh, what a golden asset!—because she was a fine journalist and she could put sentences together, boy. I'm a grammatical bum, you know. But, oh, she could put together.

TG: No, you're not, George!

GVE: And we got Epiphone-hired copyists and everything, and I would hand pages of this and that, and he'd---. That's not my writing, you know, that's one of the copyists.

TG: But it's your word---I mean, your *thoughts* went into the---.

GVE: Yeah. And, oh, I remember one time one of the copyists, I handed him this one page and I could see that he's hesitating. He's writing it down, but he's analyzing it too. I said, "Is there something wrong?" Said, "Not really." I said, "Well, what is it?" He said, "Well, now, in the C major scale in first inversion triads," he said, "now you go up the scale: you go to Dm, the Em, the F, the G, the C major 6 or Am," and he said, "but the Am isn't there."

TG: It's the F instead. That's my next question. I've got the same question.

GVE: All right. I'll tell you what.

TG: This is great!

GVE: Now we---all right. Now, we're talking about 1937, '38.

TG: Okay.

GVE: Guitar players were rhythm players at that time.
TG: Right.
GVE: In the big bands. And 99% of them were playing badly voiced chords. "Barbershop chords" we used to call them—where they were all 6-string chords with the---like the big F chord down more---or the E chord. There's only 3 notes in it, actually, the rest are doubles, you know. Yeah. So, I'd been---Allan Reuss and I had been---. I showed Allan some of the voicings too. You know, we'd play a Dm7 with the F major triad---
TG: Top three---.
GVE: Yeah, yeah. And then the D on the 5th string, you know. Instead of a big F chord, you know, or a bad sounding minor. So, the guitar players had trouble at that time playing that F major chord with those fingers. "I'm going to throw that in the scale." Now, if you look in the back of the book---if you look in the back of the book, there's the C scale with the Am in it.
TG: Not in my copy.
GVE: Well, it should be.
TG: Really? After the etude, after the final page?
GVE: No, it's just before that.
TG: Okay, I'll go back and look.
GVE: I think the etude is the last thing in the book.
TG: Yeah. Okay. Then you mean, not quite the---
GVE: Yeah, yeah. But it's just there to show that they're consecutive thirds and---. Of course, the 6th interval is there.
TG: Right.
GVE: It's just that F. You've got a bunch of thirds in there and suddenly here comes a 4th, you know.
TG: It's interesting. Well, my other questions I came here with today, George, they're---you're answering them before I ask them. That's fine.
GVE: But that's the reason for that: to get the---. We didn't expect the book to do anything at all. We were trying to beat this fellow—who will stay nameless—to the punch. Because I had to figure that stuff out, you know. So, I'm about to lose it.
TG: That's right.
GVE: And Epi, he got the copyright [*he snaps fingers*] just like that, you know. Influence. Because Epiphone was a big company then. So, the whole thing was wrapped up in seven weeks.
TG: The big books, the three "biggies"—you say you've been working on them 30, 40 years. Is that correct?
GVE: I've been writing the material for 40 years, yes.
TG: Just collecting it?
GVE: In fact 41 years, because I came across one sheet, or one section of one chapter, that's dated 1940.
TG: Did you plan way back then that this would be---. Did it just start happening and before you knew it---.
GVE: Yes. Yeah, and I've been putting it together little by little. But then Carl Fisher wanted it, Schirmer's wanted it. And don't like either company. Not that I have anything against them, except that they publish *so* much stuff---
TG: It'd get lost, huh?
GVE: ---it would absolutely get lost in the shuffle. And since it's not that important to the general public, and all of their other stuff is—that there's be no way that for any exploitation [?] that. So, Jimmy Webster, who was head of the guitar section at Gretsch---
TG: Right.

GVE: He said, "Look,"—we were doing some tours plugging the 7-string guitar—he said, "there's only one man who can do your stuff justice, and that's Mel Bay." Well, I had met Mel years ago and I had toyed with the idea, but I didn't---. I hadn't seen him in, you know, 30 years. But it so happens that Jimmy and Mel Bay were old, old friends—real buddies, you know. So, Jimmy contacted Mel, and Mel jumped at the chance. He said, "Oh, I'd love to have it." Well, that was 5 1/2 years ago, so that's when I seriously started to put it together. Put it together in book form, and do all the extensions and all that.

TG: [?]

GVE: I can show you some pages, loose manuscript that's still lying in there, where there's just one bar with brackets on it, and that one bar will fill 12 pages.

TG: Because it's an idea. It's a concept.

GVE: Well, after doing the extensions, see.

TG: Right.

GVE: Yeah. And---.

TG: I know what you're saying---

GVE: And so, what I'm doing now---.

TG: ---because books are like that.

GVE: What I'm doing now is doing the extensions, and that's what's taking so much time. If I didn't have to do that I could have the whole thing out in no time. But it's no good without the extensions.

TG: Is it worth all the time to you? Is it satisfying?

GVE: It's---yeah, sure---

TG: Is it a burden to you?

GVE: It's satisfying but, if you'll pardon the vernacular, my real bag is playing. And my brother and I get hysterical. Mel Bay is starting to publish some of my brother's stuff too: his piano concepts, which are similar to these because they're concepts that fit anything, you know, fit any instrument.

TG: I'd like to see them.

GVE: We get---. A couple of months ago we got hysterical. And I told you about it, Ed. We said, "When this---." He's writing like crazy every day too, because Mel Bay bought his stuff and he's contracted. "And when we get all through with this, you know what we're going to do?" This was about 2:00 in the morning and we got a coffeepot going and the room's full of smoke. "You know what we've got to do when we're all through?" And I knew what he was going to say, and he knew what was going through my head. "We're going to sit down and teach ourselves. We've been showing everybody else how to do it, now we're going to try and---." You know.

TG: Play again.

GVE: Yeah, play again. Right.

TG: I've kind of gotten trapped into that myself the last few years.

GVE: I know you have. Sure.

TG: But I haven't done it, but that---it's on a lesser scale to be sure.

GVE: No, no it isn't either.

TG: What's going to be covered in the second volume? Is that the kind of question we should just throw away because, they should just buy the book?

GVE: No, I---that's a---. Wait a minute, umm.

TG: I was just thinking it might entice some more people to buy the book, you know, if they knew what was coming out.

GVE: Well, there's a---. The last chapter in the book is called The Chromatic Concept.

TG: In the second volume?
GVE: Yes. That's the one that's being printed now.
TG: Is that going to be out in a few months, would you say?
GVE: It should be out before that. They were going to try and have a few copies at the show, yeah, but they didn't quite make it. But anyway, the Chromatic Concept is---. Well, all the concepts, the chapters that are called "concepts"—there are other concepts all the way through but they're not spotlighted—it's a way of treating---. It's in three keys at the same time, for instance the C scale would be in Cb and C# at the same time.
TG: Using the satellite note principle?
GVE: You remember that. That's one of the chapters in the last, in the third volume.
TG: Again, using vernacular, "Man, everything you showed me made an impression to last."
GVE: So, when they get through—there are 7 chapters in the second book—and when they get to the Chromatic Concept, why, that concept has to be applied to everything in the first volume too.
TG: Oh boy! That's great.
GVE: Yeah. And there are examples here and there of some of the---of little short bits of what's in the first book showing what happens to it when it's put through the chromatic concept. But that's just an appetizer, see. Because I just show enough of it to explain what happens through that thought process. So, that's the 7th chapter. I have to---. I keep changing the location—I'll put it that way—of the chapters until it's finalized. And the second [*volume*] naturally is being printed, so it was finalized. And I changed it so many times I don't remember how I changed it. But I've got it written down here anyway. I'll name off the---. Volume---. No, that's volume three.
ED: That's upcoming.
GVE: Volume two has got to be here someplace.

[*End of Part 5*]

GVE: Sorry to have to hunt for this.
TG: No, that's quite all right. It gives me time to letter these tapes so when I get home they're not a mish-mash.
GVE: Where is it? I bet it's under one of your magnets. Ed, is it?
ED: What?
GVE: I bet it's under a magnet. There it is. The first chapter is 6 to 1; 1 to 6. Those are the reductions. Then there's an 8 to 1. I've had people say, "Well, why can't you just do it with 10 to 1?" Well, the mechanisms are different. And like I mentioned in the first volume, "Similar is not identical." You know.
TG: It takes a long time for that to sink in, the importance of that.
GVE: Yeah. Oh, the mechanisms are different. It's like I was saying earlier, Ted, that if you're playing something off the top of your head and you choose the wrong mechanisms, you want those lines to continue, and you suddenly find out that you ran out of fingers and the whole---all signals are off now. You just can't go anyplace.
TG: Yeah.
GVE: So, the 8 to 1 fingering is different than the 6 to 1. The 10 to 3 is different. Now, the fourth chapter is a chapter called, "Divided Voicings."
TG: "Divided Voicings"?
GVE: Yeah. Not only on the strings of the instrument, but in the intervals—divided.
TG: That sounds really fascinating.

GVE: It's all opened up, you know. And that goes through a "song and dance," then there's a 10 to 1 and---.
TG: Five string [?]
GVE: Yeah, yeah.
TG: I remember you gave me that.
GVE: Then the sixth chapter—10 to 1 is fifth chapter—sixth chapter are Tenths with Inner Line Motion.
TG: That's---ah---
GVE: That's the base. That's the base.
TG: Base, right.
GVE: Yes. That's the minimal amount of motion in the middle—just a "goose eggs" here---
TG: Goose eggs?
GVE: Yeah, right. And the middle note moves up one or moves down one, or whatever.
TG: That seems to be almost one of the hallmarks of your sound, to my ear: tenths with inner stuff moving.
GVE: Yeah. And then the seventh chapter is the Chromatic Concept. And the Chromatic: it's the use of the chromatic scale with two doubles in it, so it actually has---it has 14 steps. It's 15 steps to the octave.
TG: Lost me. [*To Ed*:] You understand that? [*They laugh*]
GVE: The 3rd is repeated, and the 7th is repeated.
TG: We'll have to [?]. It's better [?]. I want to get---and ask you a few other things so you guys can get your dinner.
ED: Oh, we have time.
GVE: No, I can give you a short demonstration of it.
TG: Well, I'd love to know it, if you have the time.
GVE: I haven't got the fingers---pencil fingers. But you'll see what I mean.
ED: Play a No.2 hard---.
TG: [?] so much work.
ED: [?]
GVE: [*George plays*] The basic.
TG: Right.
GVE: The original scale that you mentioned before, the major scale. All right. The Chromatic Concept applied to the [*he plays major scale*] would be [*he plays a major scale with the Chromatic Concept*]. Now, that's going up.
TG: Filling in all the spaces, yes?
GVE: Yes.
TG: Anything that's not covered---?
GVE: Yes. Going up you're half the time in the key of B, or C♭. We're talking about C♭ and C#.
TG: Can I watch you do the first few steps again so I---.
GVE: Now we---but just let me.
TG: Oh, okay. Okay.
GVE: Then we go---we'll backtrack. Remember what you wanted to ask.
TG: Okay.
GVE: Now, going up the scale, every position is approached from a half-tone low and then moved up. Now, going down the scale---
TG: D♭
GVE: ---every position is approached a half-tone high, and dropped down into place.
TG: I now understand.

GVE: Now, here's what---. I'll do it---. I'll have to do is slowly anyway because I haven't got any fingers. But, I'll play it going up and then coming down. You'll see. [*He plays*]

TG: So the doubling is: first it's E minor is in the key of C. E going up is in the key of B---

GVE: Right.

TG: ---so they're doubled.

GVE: Now [*He plays*] There's the second step. [*He plays*] Right?

TG: Right.

GVE: All right. [*He plays*] There's the third stuff---

TG: Would you---in lieu of the C---

GVE: [*He plays*] And here it is going down. [*He plays*]

TG: Abm, Am, A♭7, G7, G♭, F, Fm and yeah, yeah. All those nice pretty moves. Yeah. Wow, you really are in B, yeah, or C♭.

GVE: [*continues to play*] Now….

TG: That's great stuff. That's like two, three keys at once, right?

GVE: All right. So. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen. Well, that's very basic. It's a very basic concept.

TG: It's understandable for---that's---

GVE: But when you get into some of the stuff that we've put it through in the book---. I have---. Ed's seen them. There are two reference sheets: major and minor, and you better have the reference---. I'm not you---I'm not---. You don't need it.

TG: No, that's okay. It would be neat to have it.

GVE: Whoever tries to put some of these things through the---they better have the reference sheets handy or they're going to go to the woods! Because especially when you get into the minors. And it's---that was a bad example, but I---

TG: No, that's---no, that's fine.

GVE: Though, you see how the 3rd are repeated and---?

TG: Yeah, yeah. The Em and the E.

GVE: Yeah, so you got---. Your top line is a [*He plays the scale. (Since George's guitar is tuned down a whole step we converted the notes to concert pitch for the sake of this discussion.*)]:

C, C#, D, D#, E, E, F, F#, G, G#, A, A#, B, B, C. That's what makes 14, yeah.

TG: That makes sense. It sounded pretty cool.

GVE: But--.

TG: George, your playing has a tremendous identity to it, meaning, one can hear you play and just after a few notes people know that it's you. I don't know how to phrase this. Words sometimes don't do justice to matters related to music, but how would you describe your playing and your style, your style? Is it the "lap piano"? Are there other ways you think of it? Does that sum it up for you, the "lap piano," the piano style, pianistic style?

GVE: Yes. Yeah, I'm a frustrated bass player and piano player, so that's---. When I made that remark to Alan De Mause four years ago, he asked me the same question. And I said, "Well, to me it's a lap piano."

TG: This is nice: "George Van Eps did not actually *invent* unaccompanied solo jazz guitar—it just seems that living legends have a way of standing for all it went before." Very well said.

GVE: Have you ever heard him play, Ted?

TG: No. He's a fine player?

GVE: Oh, yeah. Excellent.

TG: I'll have to get this book [Solo Jazz Guitar, *by Alan De Mause*]. It's nice---Joe Pass. My God, he's got me in here too!

GVE: Sure has. That's what I was hoping, you'd crack it a little further. [*he laughs*] Yeah.

TG: That's so nice of him.
GVE: Yeah, I thought you'd get a kick out of that, Ted. I'd give you that except he sent it---
TG: Oh no, I should support it. Again, royalties. I should give him his due.
GVE: Yeah. Oh, bless you. Yeah.
TG: "Ted was directly influenced by George Van Eps." Thank you for getting something straight!
GVE: What's that say?
TG: It says, "Like so many jazz fingerstyle players, Ted was directly influenced by George Van Eps." That's nice. It's nice that he was aware of that, you know, I mean.
GVE: Yeah.
TG: Someone told me that like, "Man, did Lenny Breau learn those harmonics from you?" I said, "Man, you got it backwards!" You know, I mean. It's like people getting--- [*They laugh*] "Boy, he sounds like you, Ted." No. So.
GVE: That's a nice compliment, though, you know it, Ted?
TG: I'm aware---
GVE: "Did Lenny get the harmonics from you." That's---
TG: Of course, it's nice.
GVE: Sure. Because you know the way it's meant.
TG: Yeah, that's true. I don't really take offense. I don't come off as an angry guy about stuff like that.
GVE: No, you can't.
TG: I just feel better when people understand.
GVE: Well, you---. I know. Well, you're honest. You want to set the record straight.
TG: Yeah, I think so. I think I like to keep---.
GVE: And, yeah.
ED: Better than some.
GVE: Oh boy!
TG: One highly respected blues guitarist, Michael Bloomfield, has called your music "romantic." Says it has heart, has soul. Do you think of it in this way? Do you strive for anything akin to these qualities in your music?
GVE: No, I just want it to sound a certain way. That doesn't go through my mind.
TG: Okay.
GVE: Ah, with one exception: I have written a couple of things that were aimed at a certain mood.
TG: Love themes and lullabies and such.
GVE: Yeah, that's right.
TG: Okay.
GVE: That's "Scott's Lullaby." I wrote---. He wasn't even a day old when I wrote that. It's not the greatest piece of music ever written by far, but the whole thing was written in less than a half-hour.
TG: It's a charming piece. In fact, it was the piece that made me decide I should come an study with you.
GVE: Really?
TG: Oh yeah.
GVE: Well, it was highly inspired.
TG: It called me. I was sitting there at Donte's that one night and I heard that piece. I said, "I'm calling this guy up."
GVE: Well, it was a very emotional period, you know. My first grandson.

TG: Getting to composing, since you mentioned that: I have some questions on that. You have composed many lovely pieces, and as---. Did these happen as you were improvising or did you set out to compose often? Or both a number of both types of things?

GVE: Only one happened that way, and that was a tune years ago that my brother John and I wrote called---

TG: "Stop, Look, and Listen"?

GVE: "Stop, Look, and Listen." Yes. And that tune wasn't written; it happened. We were at Bob Haggart's house in Great Neck, Long Island, and Bob had one of the first home recording machines. It was put out by Victor, by RCA. And it recorded on an aluminum disk. I don't know if you've ever seen.

TG: No, I've just heard of things---.

GVE: The quality was awful, but it did record. And you had to play them back with a cactus needle.

TG: A cactus needle. Is that for real?

GVE: Yeah, right.

TG: Wow.

GVE: Yeah. And so, Bob wanted to test this thing out. John had his tenor and I had the guitar with me, so we unpacked the instruments. "What will we play?" Oh, you know what happens. You never can think of a tune to play in the spur of the moment, you know, because you know ten million tunes and why go through that. So John's saying, "Well, how about this tune?" and "How about that tune?" No. So Bob said, "Well, why---. Just play something." So I said, "Okay John. I'll just play an introduction in F and here we go." So, that's what happened.

TG: That's amazing.

GVE: I played---. It's a ditty. It's really not a tune.

TG: I like it. No, it's nice.

GVE: But it has a dissonance in it that at that time one wouldn't have thought of, because it wasn't popular to rub things together that badly. That C against the G7.

TG: I haven't analyzed it yet, but I---. It's a catchy little theme. I was listening to it. It's on that second Capital album again. [*George Van Eps' Seven String Guitar*]

GVE: Well, you've got a C on top, you know, and a B-natural under it, you know.

TG: Oh, gee. And that---.

GVE: Yeah, in the G7.

TG: Yeah. That works out---.

GVE: So, we played two choruses of it, and then of course the record that through. Because it was only a---it wasn't a 10" record, it was only one of those little ones. Haggart's still got it.

TG: George?

GVE: So, we wanted---. So we buttoned the thing off and them played and then played it back. And we decided, "Hey, that's kind of unusual with that chromatic bass line and that C standing out against the G7 chord with the B-natural in the bass." So---.

TG: So that one happened just off-the-cuff?

GVE: Yeah.

TG: But the other times you've sat down, because you've said---.

GVE: So we put it down on paper.

TG: Generally, you've say---. When you have composed, you said, "I'm going to compose a piece here," and you've worked at it through mainly musical means, as opposed to the times, you say, when you've tried to create the mood.

GVE: Well, most of the tunes come from just noodling, just improvising.

TG: And then you develop it from there, right?

GVE: Yeah.

TG: When you do try to create a mood—like say the "Lullaby"—is it something like, "These are my lullaby colors" and you draw on those? Do you have certain---. Is it just---is it stored away moods and colors?

GVE: No. I was influenced---. The reason it has an Irish lullaby---it's a little Irish Mick piece, you know. And when I saw his face through the glass in the hospital, well, he had the most Irish little Mick face I ever saw in my life. So I went home and I---that's what came out.

TG: You just---

GVE: Yeah, and I think in that 30 or 40 minutes it took to write, I think I only changed two notes in it, you know. It just came out. But I had a good picture to go by, you know. And it's got that "taddle-ta, taddle-ta, taddle-ta-ta," you know.

TG: Yeah, it sure does.

GVE: "Nana-ne, nana-na, nan, na-na," you know.

TG: It's got a beautiful sound to it. And it really did catch my ear, I've always remembered that. In fact, you showed me how to play it once. I still got the piece of paper written out.

GVE: Have you?

TG: Yep. Okay.

GVE: What a memory is that! I had forgotten that.

TG: George, is your music "jazz"? I mean, what does that word mean to you? Is your music---?

GVE: Barney [*Kessel*] says no. And Barney's the top authority. No. [*he laughs*]

TG: What does he say?

GVE: He said, "You don't play jazz." I said, "Barney---."

TG: He says---. Barney calls you a lot of beautiful adjectives, amongst which he inserts the word "traditional," whatever that means.

GVE: Yeah.

TG: Whatever that means. I don't know what traditional means anymore. Do you think of your music as jazz?

GVE: I never heard that "traditional" before, but I can understand Barney using it.

TG: He didn't mean that in a---.

GVE: I can't type it. I don't know.

TG: Okay then.

GVE: I really---. Ted, I don't know what I play.

TG: What does the word "jazz" mean to you? When people talk of the word jazz, does it mean---is there a way to---?

GVE: Well, jazz to me is playing something in a definite time signature with a different inflection than just the straight notes a coupled with—and this is all while improvising. Now, I don't mean by that jazz can't be put down on paper, because it has been. But in concept, jazz is improvisation in its highest form.

TG: Okay.

GVE: The only thing is, you're keeping time.

TG: That makes sense. Even when you're playing rubato there's an implicit time, yes?

GVE: Yeah, there can be a hint, an inflection, more or less.

TG: Your arrangement—excuse me—your arrangement of "Lover" seems to be bordering in that. Whenever I—when I was working with, you know, transcribing it—there's time throughout---.

GVE: It's got one foot in the classic field and one foot in the jazz field.

TG: Which to me is the best. That's the highest.

GVE: Yeah. It's both of them.

TG: What about the lifestyle of---that made jazz musicians chose in the, let's say, in traditionally, you know, the hard drugs, the heavy alcohol and all that? Is there---was there a connection in

your mind between the music and that situation? Or was it a phenomena of the cultural and circumstantial things? Was somehow the music a breeding ground for any of that?

GVE: Oh, that's a complicated question. But I think I know what you're getting at. Now, I have to go way back to when I first started playing, and some of the guys would have—they called them "reefers" back then, you know, nobody used the word marijuana. And one of my earliest recollections—I think this will give you, shed some light on it—one of my earliest recollections was one of the fellas was smoking, and I asked him why he did it. And he said, "It slows down time." He said, "I have more time to think." And I rolled that around for a while. I've never tried the stuff, see, because the only high I need is in the work, you know. I'm an egotist enough to be still excited about the potential, you know. I don't want to deaden that.

TG: I'm going to just insert—and I don't mean to be rude—I just want to insert this because I feel it will help instead of me asking you separately, it just will be part and parcel of what you're saying. The question was going to be: how did you avoid all this misery of getting involved with all this? In a sense, you've answered it. Now, maybe you'll---if there's something else that you could---that comes out of it---.

GVE: I didn't like what I saw; I didn't like what I heard. When they got on weed their playing suffered. The quality of what they played suffered. Maybe they could play more notes, maybe they had more time, but the quality, the thought-line changed. Their brain was a little dull. I didn't like that. And the most important thing was that so many of them used the weed, used marijuana—it became a stepping stone. And finally that didn't […?...], so they'd start to mainline. And some got on heroine and whatnot. And I turned into a very bad picture. And these were---a lot of these were very good players.

TG: And---excuse me, and many of them thought that---still in their mind contended that they sounded good or even better, right?

GVE: Yes.

TG: It deluded them that---.

GVE: Right. And there are still some young people—and still some of the stupid old ones too—that are doing it. But they don't realize what's happening. Because we did a---we made an experiment one time. We recorded a guy that was stoned out of his skull. And he was a good tenor saxophone player. We recorded him one night, and we played it back for him the following day. And you know what his first words were?

TG: "Who's that?"

GVE: "Who in the hell is that bum?" We said, "That was you last night when you were stoned out of your skull."

TG: Interesting.

GVE: And he didn't believe it.

TG: And the music being the breeding grounds factor. I mean, that was just---it became fashionable for musicians, they thought to do it. That's all that was about, or?

GVE: Yeah. And of course, Ted, you can't disassociate showbiz from the music business. And a lot of the theatre, people that trod the boards, you know, actors and actresses—being under tension all the time, they would pop pills and try to dull the pain a little bit. And it spilled over into the music world eventually. But this was back in the 1800's when it started, see.

TG: But you loved what was going on for you so much, at least enough, so that if there was a lot of pressure, say, in your life, it wasn't---. You said, "Hey, look, it's not worth it."

GVE: No, it wasn't worth it. And see, I was still a kid then. And I was---for one thing, I was cowardly: I was afraid of it.

TG: Well, that's good.

GVE: It was one time it was good to be a coward. Yeah. Because I'd see how they---I noticed a character change. There is. Whereas the guys that boozed a little bit, there wasn't a character change. Once in a while you'd get a nasty drunk, you know.

TG: Right.

GVE: Or like Sterling Bose, the trumpet player: he only needed three drinks and start crying. But he was never nasty.

[*End of Part 6*]

TG: It was good to hear your comments on that.

GVE: Yes. Well, Ted, like I said, I just didn't like what I saw. And I was, at that time, I was trying to make my brain more efficient, not duller.

TG: Makes a lot of sense.

GVE: Yeah.

TG: Okay. This may seem like an off-the-wall question, but it seems like it might be nice in the article: what thrills you in music, or about music?

GVE: Anything that's good. I don't care what instrument it is, as long as it's well-played. If it has meaning.

TG: When you listen to music are you usually analyzing it as it goes? Or do you kind of shut off that part of the mind and let the feelings take you where they want?

GVE: Ed will tell you. This ties in, Ted, with the question you asked earlier about do I visualize numbered notation or lettered notation. No, when I'm playing, I don't. When I'm listening, I analyze. I analyze what I'm listening to. And I wish I didn't do that because a lot of times it's upsetting. Because if I hear something bad I analyze that too. And that's upsetting, you know. That's sort of double punishment. You know, listening to it, now you got to analyze it too! [*They laugh*]

TG: Have you reached a point where you can identify almost anything you hear?

GVE: Oh, I wouldn't say that. No, no.

TG: But say from a guitarist: when you hear guitarists, basically, you visualize---you can see those shapes.

GVE: Oh yeah. Oh yes. I thought you meant like a symphony.

TG: I did, actually, then I brought it down after you said no.

GVE: Yeah. Well, I've had my ear fooled and that can happen to anybody, I like to think. Because now, what I'm getting at by that remark was that in the blockouts section at the end of the very first volume [*of* <u>*Harmonic Mechanisms for Guitar*</u>], if you play some of those blockouts—I've made mention of it in there—that there will be an audio illusion. Because you'll think the bass line didn't move chromatically, and it did because something upstairs going on created an illusion, a mirage, and it made the bass like sound like it stood still. Yet it moved two half tones.

TG: That's it.

GVE: So, in that sense, Ted, I've listened to some symphony scores and things like that where my ears have been fooled, and I have to play it again. And then really try to "test-tube" it, you know. And sometimes play it three, four times before you really find out what goes on. But that doesn't happen very often. But I've been fooled, absolutely. I think that happens to everybody at some time.

TG: That stands to reason. But […?...]. What would you advise other musicians to be attuned to when they listen? For [*example*] the readers of the magazine, so to speak, I mean. What---. So many people really don't listen intelligently, you know, and maybe---.

GVE: I don't think they should analyze it. I wish I didn't have to, but it's embedded.
TG: You don't feel that helps you to improve? Maybe it helps to analyze it.
GVE: Maybe it does, but it's also tiring. Because sometimes you just like to sit back and listen to the marvelous---be bathed in the sounds and the colors that are flowing around your body. The tonal---.
TG: You can't shut that off, though, huh?
GVE: No.
TG: Oh my!
GVE: I haven't been able to. But you know, Ted, in all honesty, I'm afraid to try and shut it off because I worked a long time to—not to acquire it, but to nurture it, you know, and to amplify it. And so I'm afraid if I try to---. I'm afraid of losing it, I guess. That's a good---. And so if I work at losing it I know I can, you know because, you know: mind over matter. You know, you can almost erase anything you want if you work hard enough at it mentally. But I think I'm a little cowardly on that. I'm afraid to lose it because it sort-of appeared out of the blue and then I nurtured it from there, and tried to develop it and keep it going, amplify it.
TG: Do you have any favorite composers? Or is it---just so all over so many and it's just---
GVE: Oh, gee. I---
TG: That's---. Okay, we'll leave that.
GVE: Yeah, Ted, I---. Naturally we have some pets we like, but I like so many I wouldn't want to offend anybody or leave anybody out, you know, anybody still living.
TG: What do you listen to these days? All forms or music, or just specific types of things. I mean---. Let me rephrase that. In what areas does your listening tastes---do your listening tastes lie, if you even have time to listen these days, you're such a busy fellow.?
GVE: Well, let me see, Ted. I can give you an example. The other night Kay and I played a whole symphony of---. We played a symphonic album, then we played a [*Count*] Basie album, and then we played a Bill Evans album. I love Bill.
TG: Bill Evans. Is he something!
GVE: Oh yeah. Marvelous harmonic sense.
TG: Can you follow him? I cannot always follow what he's doing. Is that difficult for you, or is that---?
GVE: Yeah. Now, I enjoy following him, because of the inventiveness and that he's so adroit. I played some of Bill Evans for Ed one night. You enjoyed it, didn't you?
TG: He's on almost a plan that's far above most musicians, intellectually, I feel.
GVE: Yes, and yet it so full of surprises, but it's so tasteful too. And it's logical after you break it down.
TG: Talk about inner voices and conversations!
GVE: Full of surprises, yeah. Now there's a man who thinks in all keys.
TG: Yeah, I've noticed that. He plays in---at least for a home key, as far as where he starts a song it's---.
GVE: Yeah.
TG: Future plans: you're going to be playing again, yes?
GVE: Yeah, definitely.
TG: Would you say within the next few years? Because it's not going to take you---.
GVE: As soon as I finish this third volume.
TG: Another year maybe? Is that---?
GVE: Well, that's safe. Yeah. I'm going to try to do it sooner than that. But there are record companies that want albums.
TG: Well, that's heartening.

GVE: Yeah. And some concert tours. So I'm just---I want to get back to it, because I've been holding those Blackman pencils so long that after I finish this I don't want to see a Blackman pencil for a long time. [*They laugh*]

TG: I don't blame you.

GVE: I have some letters here, Ted, where somebody said, "After you finish the book,"—this was a reply to the original letter that stated I'm not going to write after I finish the third volume, I'm not going to sit down and start writing out some solos immediately. So, this ties in with what you brought over here.

TG: Oh, I see. Well, I'll be glad to do that. It's worth my time.

GVE: Yeah, but I don't mean just for the fun of it, you know.

TG: No. Either way.

GVE: Mel---I know Mel [*Bay*] would be interested in that. Because they are some of the mechanisms under working conditions.

TG: Oh yeah, I had---I wanted to ask you. So, I went through the book recently. I'm almost just going to read this, because it says it better than I could probably---. It was a whole chain of thought last night as I was going through.

GVE: Uh-huh.

TG: I went through the book recently paying careful attention to your instructions instead of skimming as I had done earlier. I was astonished—I mean that—I was astonished by the well-arranged planning and totality of the fingering system. It seems that virtually every physical hazard in the left hand, that while my face[?] has been challenged head-on. And skipping a few other things which I---. It seemed---. I ended up feeling that the fingering principles themselves, just that, were in one sense the essence of the whole book. That it's being illustrated through harmonic principles, but the fingerings are what---. I don't know; I was just struck by that. Is that---?

GVE: Yeah. Those are the physical mechanisms.

TG: That---. Did it---. Does it seem like that to you?

GVE: Yes, yes. Because they open the door to---release the mind to become more inventive.

TG: That's fascinating.

GVE: Because of the dark areas—what used to be the dark areas—are no longer dark anymore. They let a little light in there. And it's like we were saying earlier, as the technique goes up and the ability to produce, so do the ideas.

TG: Makes total sense. Just taking the simple harmonized scales in the first part of the book, each exercise has new fingering challenges from the previous one. How did you keep track of all this? To thin, "Well, now I've got to put this mechanism here---."

GVE: [*They laugh*] I can read it. No---.

TG: It's such an enormous amount of information. Was it one of those---was it a feat of memory? Or was it check and recheck, enormously tedious---?

GVE: Now, since you asked that, Ted, I'm going to go back to something I said earlier about all the writings surfaces. Ed's been in here when there's been 50 sometimes 60 sheets of music. When this is cleared off, individual pages—this is how I kept track of them. It was very difficult.

TG: That's amazing.

GVE: Because when I'd write one page over here, I've got to go over and check did I---.

TG: "Did that fingering---?"

GVE: Yes. "Is that redundant, or---?" Then I'd find a redundancy, what I thought was a redundancy, "Oh yes, I did it." Then I'd get halfway back to the desk and I'd come back—something made me come back—then I found out why I did it. Because I read a couple of bars further, and the reason for it being down twice was that the first time it was done in a short form, and over here

it was done in a long form to show why it was done that way, and if you did it the other way you'd be caught with one foot off the ground. See. In other words, chose the wrong mechanism. See?

Ted: That's---

ED: ---I've come in here when that wall heater over there---

TG: Right.

ED: ---you couldn't see it. All the little pieces of paper with "check this" and "this is done" and---.

GVE: Yeah. Most of them are over there now, Ed, but I did throw a lot of them away. Because they pertained to the first and second volume. There's no sense keeping them up there. They were reminders.

TG: Genetic? Did you inherit it from your dad, this organizational facility, George?

GVE: Yes and no. I don't---. Ted, I don't know who's responsible for that, but all four of us boys were born with that. Let me see. I have to backtrack. Six generation in the Van Eps family, there were six generations of musicians and watchmakers. All right. Now, by watchmakers I don't mean jewelers or repair, but people that can *make* a watch, you know. All right, now that's highly involved mechanics, right?

TG: Yeah, I would think so.

GVE: All right, now there's the mechanical side. Now, the other side: but they were all musicians—professional musicians. Not that I look down my nose at amateurs. But what I meant: they were not dabblers, you know.

TG: Right. I know what you're saying.

GVE: So, I don't know where it came from. I really don't, except that Rob had it. Fred had it, Rob had it, my brother John, who was killed in a car accident, he had it. And I don't know where it came from. It had to start someplace.

TG: But you've had it over the years---.

GVE: But it's funny: those genes were all passed down through those---you know, for a couple hundred years.

TG: It's, I guess, more than funny, huh? I mean, it's just---

GVE: Yeah. Well, yeah. In fact, it's a little scary. Like, Rob's book on piano, *The Mechanics of the Piano Keyboard*. That's what his book is called. And I tell you, when that comes out that's going to open piano players' eyes because it's so damn full of logic, you know. And the mechanics are beautiful.

TG: That's great. Do you any of this? [*Referring to the typewritten pages*]

GVE: No, hunt and peck.

TG: Hunt and peck.

GVE: No, I'm still trying to learn to play guitar.

TG: Yeah, I bet. [*They laugh*]

GVE: No. And when I'm all through writing this stuff I'm going to start on page 1.

TG: You know, I decided I have to start playing through your book as part of my training too. I get smug and think I know that stuff, but I don't know all those fingerings, and that's so important.

GVE: Yeah. Well, one lifetime's not long enough, but we have to sweet-tooth it.

TG: "Sweet-tooth"?

GVE: And that's why in one section I said, "Just pick a section that fascinates you, or if you're into it a little bit. And if it doesn't fascinate you, dump it and go to something else."

TG: That's good. It's about all you---

GVE: Because it's all related, you know.

TG: There are really years and years in that first volume, with the work, I would think, to do it in all the keys. That's could be 5, 10 years worth of work for a serious guy.

GVE: Well.
TG: Maybe not. It's up there. Right? No? I mean, don't you think so?
GVE: Well, if you look at the math involved—of course it would be awfully tiresome. But the math involved is the linear arrangement of 6 is 720. Now, that's the open 6 strings. And you can pluck them 620 [*720*?] times in various combinations so they've never been related that way before—720 times without repeating. Okay, now, the geometric progression takes place when that's extended to the 12 chromatic tones, just one chromatic octave. Why, now it's up into the light-miles. So, when you put the two together, if you spent one second on each one, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 12 months a year—you'd sit there in one place, spending that one second on each combination, for 11,056 years.
TG: Yeah, I read that last night.
GVE: Yeah, well, so, when anybody says, "Can I go through this book in a year?" Well, sure, you know. Well, you can go through it faster than that if dribble it. But, you know. [*He laughs*]
TG: I meant just doing the exercises you have, you know, in all 12 keys, it would seem that's a few years.
GVE: Yeah. But all the reference, like, the book is loaded with "I give this particular thing, and rather than be redundant and write it out in a certain variation, I just list, just show one bar of a variation. Now put it through that." Because some of those variations, they don't look very complicated when you start---. Every---. No matter how small the difference is between this mechanism and that mechanism is very important because one of these days you're going to paint yourself into a musical corner—I don't mean you or you, but the people---but some, yeah. It happens to everybody where if you don't that mechanism, or if you didn't play that variation you're not going to get out of the---you're going to fall flat on your face. So, since nothing is perfect and nobody can go through---. You could spend, oh, you could spend a million years putting all three volumes through everything, all the potential that's there. That isn't the point. The point of the three books and the concepts are: learn the concept. You can't play all the variations, you can't play all the mutations and all the permutations. Nobody lives that long. Nobody. So, the whole purpose of the concepts is: learn the concept. They're not that difficult to understand. And once the concept is understood then you can pick up the ball and run with it in any direction you want. If you've got a half-hour, why do it. If you've got 5 minutes, do it for 5 minutes. You know, it's not locked into a---.
TG: That will be very encouraging with people that don't have enough time. Because a lot of people have asked me questions like that. And I---
GVE: Yeah.
TG: But it's nice to hear it from you---for them to hear it from you.
GVE: Yeah, sure. I don't believe you start on page 1 and milk page 1 to every potential. You can't do that.
TG: George, many knowledgeable and respected players consider you to be the greatest guitarist in the world in your field. Did you ever hope to attain this stature when you were a young man, or did it just evolve as you---?
GVE: No, and I don't think I've attained it.
TG: Well…
GVE: I don't think I've attained it.
TG: You're bucking the opinion of a lot of good people!
GVE: I know, and everybody's entitled to their own opinion, including me. [*They laugh*]
TG: But you weren't driven as a child---
GVE: No, that was not an objective, no.
TG: It was just the love of music---.

GVE: That's right. I just wanted to play some things that satisfied me.
TG: That's it.
GVE: Because even when I was a kid, Ted, I was kind of a dumb kid in a lot of ways, but I was smart enough to realize this: that I was number one in my own audience. And then later on, through association—I didn't study with Ralph Wylie, he was a friend of the family.
TG: What's his name? Excuse me.
GVE: Professor Ralph Wylie.
TG: Uh-huh.
GVE: That's spelled---
TG: WILE?
GVE: No, WHI---no. Wait a minute, I got a letter right---where is it? I always---. I'm the world's worst speller, Ted.
TG: Old Magnatone amp – those are wonderful sounding.
GVE: Yeah, it is: WYLIE
TG: WYLIE. That's---
GVE: Professor Ralph Wylie. He was professor of music at Harvard for 17 years, and a marvelous man with some marvelous observations. Now, he taught a lot of people. Fred, my oldest brother, was a student of his. And Rob studied with him for a while. I never did, but I got a lot of the rub-off. Now, getting back to the number one in your own audience: Prof. Wylie, one day we were sitting and having coffee and we were just batting ideas around like this, telling lies—and he said, "That's right" he said, "please yourself. At least you know you're pleasing somebody."
TG: That's well put.
GVE: "Someone" – his grammar was perfect. "Strive to please yourself; at least you know you're pleasing someone." And he followed it up with, "And in that process be honest."
TG: That's good, George. That was very good.
GVE: It was very good, and---. He was a marvelous man. This is a letter from his son. Prof. is gone, but---.
TG: To what do you attribute your success? [*They laugh*] That's what I think of you. That's what I think of him, but I'm just curious if---
GVE: I don't think I've been---. Well---.
TG: Success is a funny term. I know you might have misgivings, but trust the rest of us who think you're a success for a moment, and allow for the foolishness of our ways, if you think we're foolish.
GVE: Well, I don't measure success by money.
TG: Neither do we.
GVE: But I think I've been lucky in a lot of ways. I really don't know. Gee-whiz.
TG: How about. Okay, well, can we put in "hard work"? Would you say that? Is that okay? I mean, as one of the factors?
GVE: Well, I can---. Wait a minute, I can personally answer that this way. I jot things down at odd hours of the day and night, and I think I showed you these, Ed.

[*End of Part 7*]

GVE: This is related—I'm not deviating---
TG: No, I didn't think you were.
GVE: Now---
TG: Wait, excuse me.

ED: He is one of the most honest and pleasing persons to ever be around.
TG: That's wonderful.
GVE: You're sick, Ed. [*They laugh*] And that's on the record! No, thank you, Ed. I'm a stubborn Dutchman. We were all stubborn kids. The whole dang family is stubborn. And all the back generations were stubborn too. We would not really select a target, but whatever we undertook was never half-hearted. So, one night I—this is funny; I didn't know you were going to ask this question—but I wrote this down, well, this is February 11th I wrote this down: "An objective, a target in life, must be very thoughtfully and very carefully chosen, and then pursued with every ounce of human effort." And I would say that that's the Van Eps credo. And right or wrong we liked it. And it's just lucky. Now here's the luck part: it's just lucky that someone else did too. And for that I'm grateful. But I don't know how that relates to success, but it does in a sense, but---.
TG: It sure does.
GVE: I think in a small sort of way I achieved part of the objective I set out to [*do*]. After I teach myself the rest of it, why, I'll know more.
TG: How would you like to be thought of or remembered a hundred years from now?
GVE: [*silence*]
TG: Gee, I think we'll invite Ted over, he'll just be---he's just coming for an hour! It's just going to go quickly. [*They laugh*] I'm sorry.
ED: Oh, don't worry about it. We---
GVE: No, no Ted. We're not on a schedule. Gee whiz, let me see, Ted. I'm not trying to---.
TG: No, no. You don't even have to answer it.
GVE: No, no, but I'm not trying to dodge it, but just let me think for a second.
TG: Sure.
GVE: "How would you like to be thought about a hundred years from now?" Well, very carefully---. [*They laugh*] I knew. I can hear the wheels moving over there, Ed. Well, I don't---. Let me see.
TG: It's a tough one.
GVE: Well, this may sound trite, but "as someone that---as a person that had the courage of his convictions." Because there's the stubbornness coming in, see, in the objective. It might have turned out miserably, but I doubt if I would have dropped it. You know, I would have hunted around until something worked. But I don't think I would have changed it much—changed the objective. And the objective wasn't to be the world's greatest anything. It's an ego trip; it's to prove something to yourself. I was trying to prove something to myself.
TG: When you say, "prove something" do you know what it was that you were trying to prove?
GVE: That I could do it—whatever it was.
TG: Just growing, learning, and absorbing all this music and being an antenna or a radio?
GVE: Well, I build a live steam locomotive almost on a dare. And here's the stubbornness coming back again.
TG: Wait. You told me that's---you're not being facetious?
ED: No.
GVE: No, no. We've got pictures of it.
ED: I've seen it.
GVE: Ed's photographed it.
GVE: I was---now here's the watch-making training. See, we all were watchmakers. And I was in a hobby shop on Western Ave. and there were two fellas in there that were nit-pickers about detail about locomotives. They were model railroaders, that's what they were. And there was a new brand, and a very small size, called Table-Top, because they were so small you could put an electric train on the top of this table and have all kinds of switches and everything. And this

one guy said, "Aw, naw; there's no detail." "Well, somebody could build detail in it." He said, "Well, you can't. You can't see that well, can you?" And he said, "Would you know how to build detail in that?" He said, "No, but somebody will come along…" And they started a real---almost an argument over it. Well, there I stood with my big ears listening to this. And then one of the fellas said out of desperation, he said, "Someday somebody will build a live steam locomotive that size." I'm sorry I heard that, because 8 1/2 years later came the live steam locomotive.

TG: You don't mean that you worked on it.
GVE: Yes.
TG: For that long?
ED: Do you have one of those little postcards that---? You did the actual---.
GVE: I've got all the pictures, Ed, that you took. Yeah. Including the big ones.
ED: I printed up some that show the actual size, and it's a real steam locomotive. It's not a model, it's a real one.
GVE: It's not a model. It's a miniature. It's a real locomotive through the wrong end of a binoculars. That's a dime. See. It's a blowup.
TG: Oh, my God!
GVE: That shows---
TG: How did you learn about all that? Was it just research and---? I mean.
GVE: Yeah.
TG: A lot, huh?
GVE: Yeah. That's what took me years. It didn't take 8 1/2 years to build.
TG: Did you ever meet the fellas again that---?
GVE: Never saw them again.
TG: Oh, how ironic.
GVE: No, I didn't have any idea who they were. But that's the stubborn strain that runs through this family.
TG: I think "stubborn" does yourself an injustice. There must be a better word. I think "industrious" is closer to---.
GVE: Hey, Ted---.
TG: These are amazing, man. No wonder you guys hit it off. He was telling me about your specialties.
ED: Oh?
TG: And with his knowledge and the facts and such, you guys might build a new machine that'll help save the world from all kinds of troubles. It'll be eclectically and mechanically [?].
ED: She'll likely to be a goof too! [*They laugh*]
GVE: Now, I haven't had a chance to paste the pedigree on here, but---.
ED: I was thinking I had a postcard one in here.
GVE: Well, I have the postcard, Ed.
ED: Oh.
GVE: I have the postcards right here. But you can't get the---
ED: No, I meant just so he could get an idea of how big it actually is.
GVE: Oh, the actual size?
ED: Yeah.
GVE: There's the pedigree. That explains what it is.
TG: Of course, I'll understand all this. [*He laughs*]
GVE: Well, any model railroader will. There; there.
TG: You used to have your own store with things like this, too?

GVE: Yes.
ED: That's the actual size.
TG: I haven't got a dime.
GVE: Oh yeah, that's the actual size all right. And that's right under the drivers, as Ed will attest to. So those drivers are smaller than a dime.
TG: So the feeling of satisfaction was worth the 8 1/2 years effort?
GVE: Yes it was. That's the ego-trip. Plus the "I'm not going to give up until that thing works." I had to make 22 boilers.
ED: If you think that's something, you ought to see what he does with a guitar!
TG: I've hear stories about that but---. [*They laugh*]
GVE: No. Anyway, I made 22 of these boilers, and it takes---oh, it take 3 months to make a boiler. I had to make 22 of them. The 22nd one worked. Now, because I had---. I can make a locomotive that long, you know, because watchmaking is miniaturization personified. So. But, I had to scale down. And here's the research that you mentioned: I had to scale down physics. For instance, I couldn't use the metal that the Swedish bearing iron that the steam chest is made out of in a big locomotive. I wanted---I would have liked to use the same material, but down at that size under a microscope, which is what microscopic size is, it's like Swiss cheese, it's full of holes. It's not dense enough. So I had to use exotic metals. And for instance, in that steam chest that's one piece, there are 22 channeled holes; it's honeycombed. So anyway, I had to make 22 of those before---. Now here's---.
TG: Was he around?
GVE: Oh yeah. There's boiling water in there to make steam. All right. The inside of that boiler isn't as big around as my finger. So how do you keep boiling water from boiling up and going over the top of the pot, you know? So the steam pipe is right there, and so the other boiler is the boiler, and the droplets of hot water would hop up in the steam pipe, would come down the delivery pipe and in the steam chest. And you know that water doesn't compress at all, so it would wind up in cylinder and the piston would come back, and of course it'd blow the head right out of the cylinder, see. So I---the 22nd boiler had a double-super steam system, and the steam that came out of it was so hot it would---if you put a piece of paper in there it would turn black immediately. It wouldn't set it on fire because there's no flame, you know. But it's real live steam. But if you put that page in the steam in the steam it would just turn to charcoal right now. Yeah. All right. So the drop of---. That did away with the drops of water, see, because they were long gone by the time it got down into the steam pipe.
TG: Did you make watches too? I mean, I know the whole family traditionally, but did you yourself, or repair, or? Is that where you learned---?
GVE: Well, I was in the training, yes.
TG: You were training for it?
GVE: Yes.
TG: Before music took over, huh?
GVE: No, it was during the time.
TG: Oh, you were doing it during that period?
GVE: Yeah, sure. My grandfather trained me. Yeah. He had a watch shop in New Jersey. Yeah, and I was playing at night and then I'd go over to the shop in the daytime, you know.
TG: That answers---that makes---.
GVE: And I took the training.
TG: All I can say is that explains to me only the genesis of while you would even be able to comprehend that, but still to do it is---.

ED: That air craft: he made that engine just from memory of one that he designed, I don't know, about---
GVE: Fifty years
ED: ---fifty years ago. And you know what? That engine, you know what it runs off of? Compressed air.
TG: George was saying that before. I didn't understand the---
GVE: Ted, this is a corny thing, but I know Ed won't mind. There's the pedigree. It should be trimmed and glued down here someplace, because it tells what it is, and who done it.
TG: Hey, that's wonderful.
GVE: Oh, that's a hammy thing to do, but I---
TG: No it isn't, not at all.
ED: This is some of the stuff that I think is the real George Van Eps, the guy---
GVE: There are two things---
ED: ---the guy I know.
GVE: I've never played anything I really liked, but there are two things that I've done that I'm proud of, and in this order: I'm proud of my family, my daughter, my wife, my grandson. That's number two [*the miniature steam locomotive*]. Yeah. Because I know that sounds hammy, but---
TG: No, not at all.
GVE: They say that couldn't be done.
TG: It's far from hammy, it's a big achievement is what it is.
GVE: Well Ted, it hasn't been exploited.
TG: I wish I understood more.
GVE: The model magazines would [?]. It hasn't been exploited because we have no insurance on it.
TG: You can't patent it?
GVE: Oh no, you can't patent it. But it's---look at the size of it. It's highly swipe-able.
TG: They won't insure it, huh?
GVE: They'll insure it, but---
TG: ---[?] the world, huh?
GVE: Yes. We've had thirty-some-odd insurance companies, underwriters, say---they say, "Well, how much did it cost to build?" They won't pay you for your time, even though I was a professional, they won't pay you for your time.
TG: Why won't they?
GVE: Because they just don't do that.
TG: That's not right.
GVE: It would have to be sold to place a value on it. You know, the medium priceless – it means it's worth nothing---
TG: Or it's worth---
GVE: ---or everything. Right. So, it's like that answer to the two sons that you told me about. So, the materials cost $342.73, so that's what they'll insure it for. That's what the material cost.
TG: They don't realize the 8 1/2 years.
GVE: No, they don't. They don't realize that, even though we were building micro miniaturized mechanics professionally. But they count that as a hobby.
TG: Has this ever been done, to your knowledge, by anyone else?
GVE: No. Well, I'm leery of claims.
TG: Well, I say "to your knowledge," that's why.
GVE: No. We'll, I'm a member of the Live Steam Society. See, they gave me an honorary membership because of that. And the Live Steamers, the National Live Steamers Association—

they say it's the world's smallest. I don't. I'll tell you why: there might be somebody behind a locked door in Sweden or Switzerland with one half that size, see. But I told that to the people at the Live Steam Society and they said, "All right, there may be somebody, sure." Said, "There may be a nut like you somewhere around there that's got one smaller, but that's the smallest we know of. So until they come out with one, that's the world's smallest."

TG: You could have made it smaller if you wanted to. You chose this size because---for probably reasons that I don't understand, but---.

GVE: Because it was the size of the—1/10" to the foot—of the one that the fella said, "Oh, you can't get any detail on that." And the other guy, the bottom line was, "Oh, someday somebody will build a live steam locomotive that size." So, I built it to that dimension for the simple reason that that's where it all started, and it seemed like a neat idea at the time. So then a company in Indiana, HP Products, hired me to make an electric locomotive, see. And this wasn't the upshot, the direct upshot of that conversation between those two guys. See, I left part of the story out. HP Products---. In fact I was in the store to pick up one of those kits for those little locomotives, those little electric locomotives that had no detail. Well, through Frank Traxel who owned that railroad store, he had told the people at HP Products that I could add detail to it, see. That's the reason I was in the store. I'm not a model railroader. So they hired me to do it, and I reworked their kit. And I added detail and added detail, and in the meantime---. Oh, I put 6, 7 months in it. Because I was doing a lot of shows and recording and the company went tapioca, it folded. So I'm left with all that time, and they didn't pay a dime yet. So I decided to finish it, after much deliberation—2, 3 weeks. But I thought, "Hell. I remember that conversation. I'm going to scrap the electric thing. I'm going to go back to square one and I'm going to make that thing a live steamer." And that's how that came about.

TG: There'll be something about this in the article, you can rest assured. I've got---. As you were talking I was listening but I was all there. I've got some thoughts. That's nice. I'm sure I can---.

GVE: You can feel free, Ted, because that little pedigree, that should go with it because it explains what it is.

TG: Well, let me see. Maybe just one or two more questions. Okay. What would you like to talk about that we haven't talked about? What do they always leave out that you wanted, you'd hoped in prior interviews if they might be able to discuss? Of course, they still may try to cut it, but I'll fight for you.

GVE: Well, one of the things I would like to mention—and I think you know what I'm going to say—that the IV-V chord rockers are still in the majority, but there are a lot of young kids, and it's a joy to listen to and to see them, that want to know more. They want to know what makes a guitar tick. And I've talked to a lot of them lately, you know, the past year or so, at the show in Chicago and also here. And I think the tide is turning. I think we're going to wind up with a crop of new, I mean kids, you know—new good kid guitar players, that want to know more.

TG: Do you have any advice for them on what they should do to make it happen for themselves better? Is that kinda---. That's a trite question, I know, but coming from you it might carry more weight.

GVE: No, no. But the only thing I would say to that is to: taste can't be taught, but it can be influenced. And so when they---. Listen to all types of good music. When they find the particular idiom that they like, why, listen to everybody, every good professional that plays that way, and try to have the various rub-off. And that's very important.

TG: It's helped me a lot. The last few weeks preparing for this, [?], transcribing.

GVE: Have you been preparing that long?

TG: Well---.

GVE: Geez, that takes a lot of your time.

TG: That's not an accurate statement, if I were to call preparing "having fun" for the last few weeks and thinking about this. I mean, it's fun. It's not work.

GVE: How about your work, though; your playing, and your teaching?

TG: How about it? It's not as important as this. They should have done this 10 years ago, I mean. You know, it's ridiculous that they would wait this long. Why don't you publish that, guys! [*They laugh*]

ED: People just don't realize---. [*Tape recorder to switched off momentarily*]

TG: ---some of this guy back on. Would you mind, again? Something […?...]

GVE: Yeah. The---. All young instrumentalists, regardless of the instrument, but particularly the guitar because that's what we're talking about—it's not a final word of advice but I think a very important one in my mind—is first of all they must be honest with yourself and select the idiom that fascinates you most and pursue that. And of course, your fascinations will change. Your idioms will change. But approach your instrument with love and respect. I say that because the respect bounces back. There's a feedback. You treat it well, it'll treat you well. You beat it to death; it'll beat you to death. [*Tape recorder is turned off momentarily*]

TG: It's about honest mistakes.

GVE: Yeah. An honest mistake. This has to do with sincerity of what you play.

TG: [*Ted to the tape recorder*:] Oh, I'll put this on too, what the heck.

GVE: No matter what the job at hand is, it should be done with as much integrity and sincerity as possible. And a mistake does not spoil a performance. But there are different types of mistakes. There are two distinct types of mistakes. One is a dishonest mistake, and the other is an honest mistake. And the difference between the two is this: that a person can be a marvelous technician and have a brilliant mind working in back of all this technical ability and be distracted and make a mistake. But then you do it over again and here it comes—letter perfect. Now, the dishonest mistake is when somebody tries to play a piece of music that is over their head. They're in water that's too deep and they're not technically proficient enough to execute the passages. And so they fall down and make mistakes. Now, those are dishonest mistakes because they're either playing it---the material is either too complicated or they're playing it too fast. So, if it's very complicated play it very slow and you won't fall down and fall on your face.

TG: And yet even an honest person could make a dishonest mistake at first, not realizing that he was in over his head.

GVE: Yeah. And if he tried to play too fast.

TG: Right. Yes.

GVE: Oh sure. So, but---.

TG: Story of my life. I fancy myself being an honest person making many dishonest mistakes.

GVE: But the basic meaning of the dishonest mistake is that no matter how many times or how slow the person played this passage or this piece, he still can't play it.

—END—