

LESSON LAB

Chord Chemistry

Harmonic Exploration With Master Instructor Ted Greene

By Dale Turner

Any time Ted Greene's name comes up in print, it's almost always preceded by the words "the legendary"—and for good reason. Renowned worldwide as an innovative teacher and incomparable solo guitar stylist since the '70s with the release of his (now out-of-print) *Solo Guitar* LP and revolutionary method books (among them, the patience-testing *Chord Chemistry*), Greene's appeal transcends all genres—by no means limited to jazz guitar. In fact, any player interested in embarking on an exhaustive study of chord possibilities on the six-string need look no further. Perhaps this is the reason eclectic axemen ranging from John McLaughlin and Eric Johnson to Vernon Reid and Steve Lukather (who still practices out of Greene's *Modern Chord Progressions* book) repeatedly praise Greene's name.

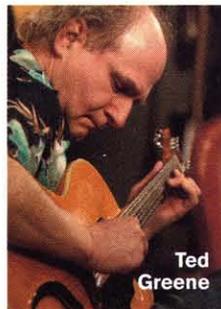
As he approaches 60, the reportedly (but actually not) reclusive Californian still holds a private student roster of more than 50 pickers. "They don't all come every week, of course, or the undertakers would surely know my family's name," jokes the guitarist.

Greene also has a new series of books in the works, illustrating a different approach from his arguably unwieldy 100-plus page past efforts. "I'm not gonna put out tomes anymore," Greene muses. "It's more important for me to reach people than to impose my will on them. These will be small books—maybe 35 pages." To cop some killer chord moves and a whole lot more, *Guitar One* tracked down the legendary chord chemist at his Encino, California apartment.

How do you recommend a student go about absorbing some of the materials in your earlier books, *Chord Chemistry*, *Modern Chord Progressions*, and *Single-Note Soloing (Volumes I & II)*?

The most successful way for many players is to find an area of interest in the table of contents, go to that chapter, play until they find something that thrills their ear, and learn that as best they can—just that. Then close the book and ask: "Why do I like it? What is it about it?" They might come up with a general answer: "I just like 9th chords, and this thing had a lot of 9th chords."

Or maybe a specific one, such as: "I love the sound of a minor 9 on a vi [chord]." The next step is to write their own example, using this thing they like, taking as long as necessary. If



LESSON LAB

they can't see their way through all this, maybe they'll be fortunate, as I was, and find a great teacher to help—get their favorite sounds flowing out of their hearts, into their hands. One lesson from the great Canadian guitarist Domenic Troiano years ago changed my life. All my teachers did: Sal Tardella, Jay Lacy, George Van Eps, Lenny Breau, Klaus Lenzian, and Donny Troiano.

But not everyone can afford lessons; others at least need to save up the dough. In the meantime, maybe they could try to find their favorite examples on other string sets, or possibly in different voicings, and of course, in other keys—all for the joy of discovering where their musical friends live.

So the suggestions you've just given are to prevent people from feeling overwhelmed when they open an information-packed book like *Chord Chemistry*? Yeah. I want them to feel great about practicing and all the rewards it can bring. Have fun with it. Music's supposed to be a blast. It's such a tremendous gift to have the time, energy, and means to play music. And yet, to play music really well, you're lookin' at a lot of hard work. But so what? Wes Montgomery practiced very, very hard and really studied the neck. Jimi Hendrix slept with the guitar still strapped on some nights. Stevie Ray snuck home at lunchtime just to play a few little notes on brother Jimmie's fine guitar.

What possessed you to put so much material in your books? They scared a lot of "quick fix" folks. I was optimistic. I had my hopes up that people would practice really hard. But from working with thousands of students through the last 40 years, I now know that guitar draws a hedonistic crowd—they want something that's gonna give them results fast. Nobody's hurt by that, except those whose dreams are dashed on the rocks of discipline. It's a tough thing to find out, "Whoa, this is gonna take some work!" Some people, they're learning fast, so they're having fun. But most people aren't learning all the cool stuff fast.

Do you recommend that some of them study theory? If they're studious, they'll find their way to it. But people who take up the guitar are seldom drawn to the instrument for studious reasons. I certainly wasn't. They don't want theory. But many of them will find theory anyway; she'll call in her own good time. Let's say they're learning a Steve Vai solo, and they ask a friend, "Why'd he play these notes?" "Well, because it's a G7 chord, and he wanted a ♭9." "What do you mean, G7?" Then it starts. They realize they want to know what's happening; they'll have to study at least *some* theory.

Fig. 1 HEAR IT ONLINE guitaronemag.com

G# C# F# (B) D# G# 4 fr.

Fig. 2 HEAR IT ONLINE guitaronemag.com

♩ = 126

B

Fig. 3 HEAR IT ONLINE guitaronemag.com

G# C# F# B D# G# 4 fr

Fig. 4 HEAR IT ONLINE guitaronemag.com

♩ = 132 (♩ = ♩♩)

B7

Scale degree: 5 1 2 3 5 ♭7 5 4 5 3 1

Fig. 5 HEAR IT ONLINE guitaronemag.com

♩ = 132 (♩ = ♩♩)

B7

Fig. 6 HEAR IT ONLINE guitaronemag.com

♩ = 132 (♩ = ♩♩)

B7

w/ fingers

Fig. 7 HEAR IT ONLINE guitaronemag.com

♩ = 120

A B/A E/G#

w/ fingers

Fig. 8 HEAR IT ONLINE guitaronemag.com

♩ = 60

A B/A E/G#D/C G/B F#7/E/D#

w/ fingers

LESSON LAB

Many pupils feel the need to get theory together when they attempt to improvise over non-diatonic progressions and continuously play wrong notes. How do you begin with a student like that? Their background and special loves tell me which road to take. If they're a pentatonic blues person, the next thing we do is Mixolydian, the glorious scale that envelops all of American "roots" and "non-roots" music. People all over the world have fallen in love with that "b7."

So you might begin by having them add two notes to a major pentatonic sound? Sure, the 4th and b7th. Here's B major pentatonic [Figs. 1-2]. Now I'll play B Mixolydian [Fig. 3]. We could approach it in a structured manner, thinking in terms of scale degrees [sings:] "5-1-2-3-5-b7-5-4-5-3-1" [Fig. 4]. Or I might just play [Figs. 5-6]. I always try to give them stuff that makes them excited, rather than discouraged. If they want more theory, then we start talking about the chords they can use their favorite scale(s) over.

How do you teach chords to rock players who don't want to study jazz? When people don't want [to learn] "jazz" but love chords, I've had much luck teaching them classical voicings and harmony, which I've been wild about and studying during many days and nights in the last 35 years [Figs. 7-8]. That's all Bach Chorale-type harmony. Hundreds of guys through the years have said, "Yeah! I can use that in my rock stuff!" [Fig. 9] Try playing those with fingers or with hybrid picking.

Another voicing my students like, we call "4-2-5." I tried a bunch of other traditional and contemporary names for it [*It's a sus2/4 chord—Ed.*], but this works better [Fig. 10]. Students can just think [in the key of E], "Well, there's a 4th [A], and a 2nd [F#], and a 5th [B] from the top down...." It's like an old figured bass-type way of looking at stuff. The whole Baroque period brought all those double suspensions in.

In addition to the Baroque approach you just demonstrated, you're also known to spontaneously interpret progressions with a "Gershwin" flavor. That's one of my favorite things; he's my favorite composer—the bluesiest cat [Fig. 11]. That used the same progression as Fig. 9, but [in measure 5] I changed keys from G to E to make it less high on the neck. I realized people without a cut-away may not have the fortitude to want to stay up there. I wouldn't blame 'em!

Do you play out much? Yeah, about once a month now. For me that's "much," but I wish it could be once a week. I especially love to play solo, for dancing or semi-listening—serious listening not required. People can come up and talk to me; I love that direct connection. Parties and weddings are my

favorites. Also, afternoon restaurant gigs—some of that crowd is starving for live *day-time* music. I'm their boy. I pass out hundreds of cards; I'm hoping to get more jobs. I enjoy backing female singers, too.

Writers keep calling you a jazz guitarist. What type of music are you playing? Swell fellows those writers, but there are a dozen styles that I really love. Orchestra's my favorite. Film music—way up there; B-3 organ, pipe organ, harpsichord, gospel

choir, big band, boogie-woogie piano, New Orleans rhythm & blues, Chicago blues, moanin' jazz ... I try to catch all that stuff out of the axe—just guitar and amp. This stuff's been kickin' my butt for so long, but I'm starting to get the upper hand. Which feels so great, to not be unhappy with my playing anymore. Life's been awfully kind to me, too, to let me have this job. There are a lot of people who'd love to teach music for a living. I fell into it three different times before I realized what a great thing it is. 

Fig. 9 HEAR IT ONLINE
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J = 50

G G7/F Cmaj7/E Cm(maj7)/Eb G/D A9/C# D7/C

w/ fingers
let ring throughout

Fig. 10 HEAR IT ONLINE
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J = 92

Esus2 E C#sus2 C#m A3sus11 A

w/ fingers
let ring throughout

Fig. 11 HEAR IT ONLINE
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J = 80 (*J* = *J*)

G G7b9/F C7/E Cm6/Eb G/B A7b9/C# G/B

w/ fingers
let ring throughout