

Spotlight

by
Jim Hilmar

Ted Greene Solo Guitar

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Through the years there have been a number of superb guitarists who have also been skilled arrangers. Players like George Van Eps, Johnny Smith, George Barnes, Chet Atkins and Lenny Breau come immediately to mind. Actually, the formidable playing skills of these guitar greats have tended to overshadow their wonderful arranging skills. You can add the subject of this month's "SPOTLIGHT" to this elite group of guitar player-arrangers.

Ted Greene is a "guitar maniac" of the highest order. He is an incredible fan/aficionado and student of virtually every conceivable style/genre of guitar music. In preparing this "SPOTLIGHT" I had the pleasure of speaking with Ted (several times in fact) and the depth and breadth of his guitar knowledge was beyond impressive. We talked about players from George Tomsco to George Benson. Ed Bickert to Roy Lanham. And lots of other players that are important to Ted — like Albert King, Wes Montgomery, Lenny Breau, Jay Lacy, Danny Gatton, Les Paul, Chet Atkins, Johnny Smith (who once played a gig at Ted's house), Thom Bresh, Curtis Mayfield, Tony Mottola, Steve Cropper, George Van Eps, Jerry Reed, Barney Kessel, Scotty Anderson, Howard Roberts, Merle Travis, Kenny Burrell, Pat Martino and on and on and on...

Ted was born in Hollywood, California in 1946. He lived the early part of his life in L.A. and then in Cleveland, Ohio. From 1955 to 1962 (Ted's early adolescence) he lived just outside of New York City. Like most of us Ted's musical influences came in stages. His parents were big music aficionados and his earliest influence. They exposed him to late '40s/early '50s pop, jazz, T.V. and film music. And classical music, too. In about 1955 Ted "went wild" over rhythm and blues, New York City rock 'n roll and blues. And circa 1957 Ted began playing guitar. An early favorite of his was Les Paul. And given his love of rhythm 'n blues, blues and rock 'n roll it's no surprise that he really liked Bo Diddley, Chuck Berry, Duane Eddy and the blues

duo of Jimmy Reed and Eddie Taylor. Before moving back to L.A. (circa 1965) Ted was greatly influenced by the late Linc Chamberlind (a legendary Tele player in Connecticut).

After Ted moved back to L.A. he worked at two Ernie Ball Guitar Stores (one in Tarzana and one in Canoga Park) as a guitar teacher. This was his first serious teaching job and it obviously agreed with him as teaching has been Ted's primary profession for the last 30 years. (These stores had a lot of great players as regular visitors including the late, great Roy Lanham.) And while Ted

was teaching others he continued to take lessons himself — from Jay Lacy. And it was Jay who was responsible for piquing Ted's interest in solo guitar playing. (For more info on Jay see my May 1994 "SPOTLIGHT" column.)

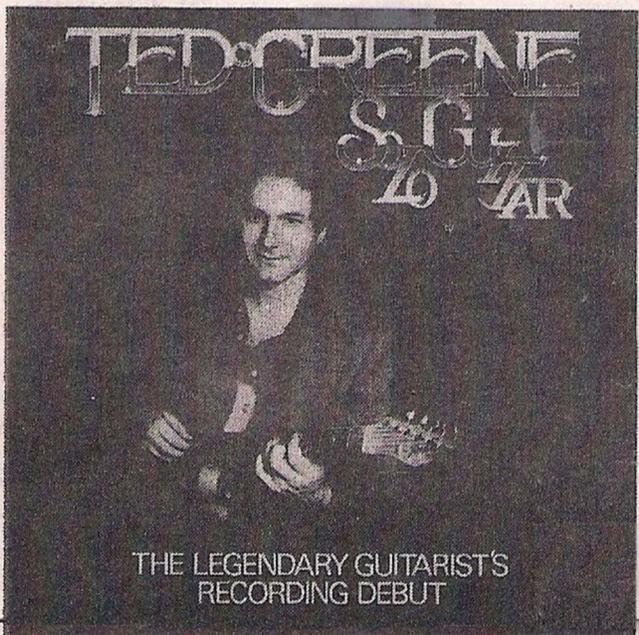
Also important at this time were Don Preston (of Don and The Deacons) and Bill Eucker — a fine James Burton style player. Circa 1969 Ted heard Canadian jazz-flavored player Domenic Troiano and this changed Ted's focus back to jazz again.

Although Ted was active in the L.A. studios as a session player, appearing on albums, film scores and advertising jingles, he felt it really "wasn't his thing". He still takes an occasional call if he feels well suited for it. For example, Ted arranged some Bix Beiderbecke tunes for Ry Cooder that Ry recorded on the album *Jazz*.

This month's "SPOTLIGHT" album was recorded in 1977. *Solo Guitar* was originally issued in 1977 in a limited

edition. (I've never seen a copy of this version.) In 1979 the album was reissued in greater numbers and with different cover artwork. The '79 version is the one pictured. Ted used two instruments on this project: a modified 1951 Nocaster/Telecaster and a '60s Telecaster. (Ted's a devoted Telecaster player. He loves their "beautiful tone, sensational sustain and fabulous versatility." Actually, he does play other instruments including Jazzmasters, an early Les Paul Gold Top, a 1940s Epiphone Deluxe and various nylon string guitars.) The '51 has a Gibson humbucking pickup in the neck position and a Strat pickup in the middle position. Ted went straight into the board and used a Fender Vibratone (for a Leslie effect) in a few spots. The bulk of the arrangements are played fingerstyle and were worked out in advance — much like Johnny Smith or Chet Atkins would do it. Stylistically Ted weaves an intricate blend of pop, jazz, blues, classical/orchestral, Broadway/show, T.V. and film music. (We're talking intricate arrangements, superior musical taste and wonderful technique here!) Since Ted was kind enough to provide me with detailed notes/commentary on each of the eight songs on *Solo Guitar*, I'll only make a very brief comment or two about each song and then I'm going to let Ted fill you in on the "nitty gritty" details of each tune. One item before we begin: Some of Ted's stylistic trademarks include intricate, full/deep sounding bass

note work (because of his tunings he often sounds like he's playing a 7-string guitar), cool/surprising modulations in tempo and key, catchy endings and lots of unusual chord voicings. (Ted's probably forgotten more voicings for a single chord than I know chords!!)



1) "They Can't Take That Away From Me" — Multiple tempo changes, key changes and beautiful 'harmonic' highlight this fine piece.

Ted: "George Gershwin is probably my favorite all-around composer. I heard George Van Eps play this song on his *Mellow Guitar* album [circa 1956 Columbia LP CL 929] and was totally knocked out by how the harmony and melody worked together. The guitar on my version was tuned down 1/2 step. I played it in D and modulated to F [tuned down it would be D flat to E]. I tried to sneak in some Gershwin-esque "blue tones" in the tag ending as a way of saying 'Hi' to the composer."

2) "Summertime/It Ain't Necessarily

used

the classic sides by Johnny Reed (late '60s)

and

Some of Ted's stylistic trademarks include intricate, full/deep sounding bass

too much enthusiasm here but...

NOT FOR THAT LONG

the story mentioned

love

(I still do)

about all

So" — More Gershwin. Two fine melodies. Due to Ted's tuning, the full bass notes sound like he's playing a 7-string guitar.

Ted: "The music from Gershwin's Porgy & Bess just seems to put my whole body into an electric state. For this cut the guitar was tuned down $1\frac{1}{2}$ steps (or slightly more). The bass fills which occur here and there were semi-improvised meaning that they were similar to things I had played before. The tempo on the cut seems a bit fast to me now but that's where I was at back then."

3) "Send In The Clowns" — The Vibratone makes a subtle appearance midway through this one. There's more beautiful "shimmering" harp-harmonics which Ted makes sound like a set of vibes.

Ted: "I heard an orchestral version of this back in the '70s and wanted to capture something similar to that. I messed around a long time with modulations 'til I found some that I liked. I tuned down $1/2$ step and used a bunch of different keys. I owe a lot to Chet Atkins and Lenny Breau for their great contribution of what we affectionately call the 'harp-harmonics' technique — although with my setup it seems to sound more like a Fender Rhodes piano or vibes. The ending is J.S. Bach flavored — inspired by his pipe organ music, easily some of the most glorious instrumental music ever written."

4) "Ol' Man River" — A little bit of "Dixie" for an intro. There's more neat bass note work and a passage with a droning pedal tone.

Ted: "I went for deep, rich colors of sound on this one and was tuned down $1\frac{1}{2}$ steps. The particular keys were chosen for many reasons, not the least of which were that a nice mixing of flat III and flat VII major chords with diatonic chords really 'does it' for me."

5) "Watch What Happens" — I love this melody! Ted's main melody arrangement modulates between a bossa nova feel and some walking bass/swing flavored segments. And there's a hip bluesy ending too!

Ted: "I tuned down $1/2$ step for this one. My Grandmother swore she remembered this song's melody from her childhood in Russia! I was attracted again by the way the harmony and melody work with each other. As for the rhythm, the change in the middle from a slightly Ray Charles/Latin thing to swing seems like a fun way to keep a solo guitar piece going. The fills and bass lines were improvised/semi-improvised."

My hero Ray on Atlantic

6) "A Certain Smile" — From the motion picture of the same name. The first version of this I ever heard was a vocal by Johnny Mathis. I liked it then and still do.

Ted: "Like the previous song I was tuned down $1/2$ step. And again, the orchestra influence shows up here. And the main melody is so spectacularly well written (by Sammy Fain, who also co-wrote "Secret Love") and the gorgeous chord changes. Sammy's a real hero of American popular song. The ending on this one is strongly influenced by the

Romantic Period of classical music — composers like Grieg, Tchaikovsky and Chopin."

7) "Danny Boy (Londonderry Air)" — A beautiful version of an internationally recognized classic melody. Superb pairing of "real" and "artificial" harp-harmonics — a la Chet Atkins.

Ted: "This arrangement owes a great deal to my teacher in 1965 — Jay Lacy — a truly wonderful player. He taught me how to play solo guitar or 'unaccompanied guitar'. The guitar was tuned down $1/2$ step and the bass string was lowered an additional whole step. The arrangement that Jay showed me was actually based on one that the fantastic solo guitarist Johnny Smith had written out and I based mine on both Johnny's and Jay's. Many years later I heard Bill Evans play this song and liked his approach quite a bit more than my own."

8) "Just Friends" — Ted switches to pickstyle and steps up the tempo for a nice segment midway through this one. And then he effortlessly returns to fingerstyle. Ted has a real way with endings and this one is very catchy.

Ted: "I was tuned down $1\frac{1}{2}$ steps. This was my attempt to simulate the 'jazz thing' that I heard so much in my childhood. The bass lines were improvised/semi-improvised. I recall picking up a flatpick and improvising the single note line thing in the middle and then putting the pick down as my left hand kept tapping some bass notes — until I could resume playing fingerstyle. It's a fun thing to do — to give variety/color to a solo guitar piece. The switch of rhythms to the jazz waltz thing just opened up the time (twelve beats on some chords instead of eight)."

A final note regarding *Solo Guitar*: This album is mandatory listening for serious fingerstyle fans and for players that are serious about developing their arranging skills. It's also a tremendous treat for the ears "chord-wise".

Currently Ted is compiling his 30 years of teaching experience/material into "digestible and friendly bites" for publication. And of course, he's still teaching — about 70-100 students and occasional clinics. He plays some casual dates and in 1996 hopes to play more regularly (solo and with a female vocalist).

You can also hear Ted's fine playing on veteran guitarist John Pisano's 1995 CD: *Among Friends* (on Pablo CD PACD-2310-956-2). Ted appears on two tracks: "Over The Rainbow" and "The Touch Of Your Lips". (John is a great player and this CD has a nice batch of duets with several other fine guitarists including Phil Upchurch and Lee Ritenour.)

In addition to being an exceptional player-arranger Ted is quite a teacher. He's written four fine books including: *Chord Chemistry*, *Modern Chord Progressions*, *Single Note Soloing Vol. 1* and *Single Note Soloing Vol. 2*.

All four of Ted's books are available from Warner Brothers Publications, 15800 NW 48th Avenue, Miami, Florida 33014.

An extra special "THANKS" to Ted

Greene for all of his wonderful assistance. Ted — I couldn't have written this month's "SPOTLIGHT" without your help.

* *Solo Guitar* is available on PMP Records LP A-5010. *no longer available on CD this year though*