

## Interview with Tuck Address For FingerstyleGuitarists.com 2013

*(1) You've talked about getting the guitar position on the Sonny and Cher show shortly after arriving in So Cal yet almost immediately decided you wanted no part of the 'LA scene' and left. Most young musicians would consider themselves winners of the musician-lottery to get a gig like that as quickly as you did, yet you punted for the sake of artistic merit and affirm you've never regretted it. Mind talking about 'the rest of the story' in detail? How exactly it all went down and was there a particular 'event' that made you realize the commercialized music scene wasn't where you wanted to be?*

As with most things in life, there is of course quite a bit more texture than the story reveals. Here are some of my somewhat cloudy memories of that time, now 40+ years ago:

At the beginning of 1970, after my first quarter at Stanford, I took a leave of absence to move to North Hollywood, where the rest of my high school rock band had migrated from Tulsa immediately after high school. (This illustrates my ambivalence and bet-hedging at the time concerning pursuing music vs. some kind of "straight" life.) They were talented and ambitious, and they had already made encouraging musical and business connections, although nobody was making any money to speak of, and I found myself sleeping on a mattress in the corner of an already overcrowded, none-too-clean apartment.

By the time I arrived, they were rehearsing every day with Flemming Rasmussen for an album project. Flemming was a Danish artist and record producer getting ready to do his first solo album in the US. Literally on my first day in town, thanks to my old friends, I walked right into that gig, as well as some other studio work.

Googling Hotel Knickerbocker, where we rehearsed and were each given a hotel room for weeks (symbolically a big deal to all of us, even though we never used them), I see a somewhat-telling story, which I was too naive to discern at the time. Wikipedia says it was once a grand Hollywood hotel; it mentions names like Rudolph Valentino, Marilyn Monroe and Elvis Presley. But it gives equal attention to all the famous people who died or committed suicide there. Then it says, "By the late 1960s, the neighborhood had deteriorated, and the hotel became a residence primarily for drug addicts and prostitutes. In 1970, a renovation project converted the hotel into housing for senior citizens; it continues in this capacity today." This was exactly when we were there, full of the heady self-delusion that we were at the epicenter of the entertainment business. It also helps to shed a little light on the somewhat eccentric cast of characters that wandered in and out of the lounge where we were rehearsing.

Nonetheless, through Flemming I met and played with T-Bone Burnett and Dean Parks, as well as several of the musicians who were part of Joe Cocker's Mad Dogs and Englishmen, a band I loved. I was making lots of great contacts with no effort at all, despite crippling shyness! Dean in particular was very supportive. He was fast on his way to becoming a first-call studio guitarist, and he probably saw in me a kind of friendly adaptability, a critical attribute for this kind of work. He had decided to give up the guitar chair at the Sonny & Cher Comedy Hour, and offered to put me on the fast track to take his place. At that time I guess it must have been filming its first season, but there was a lot of buzz about it, and it was national TV! It's anybody's guess whether it would

have ultimately worked out, but in my mind it was archetypal; it symbolized a possible career in LA as a studio musician/high-level sideman.

At the same time I lucked into various low-level recording sessions, and I remember one where the producer was getting increasingly frustrated with all of us in the band; we were simply not giving him the magic he so wanted for this particular demo, and he was not the most sympathetic communicator about his feelings. The uncomfortable vibe was rapidly escalating; any pretense of shared musical aspiration had been fully eclipsed by the explosive tension we all felt. Finally, in an uncharacteristic, impulsive, professionally suicidal gesture of defiance, I grabbed something metallic and made the most awful, annoying sounds I could on the guitar. He immediately stopped the session and shouted through the intercom, "That's it! That's what I'm looking for! That's the hook we need! Why didn't you do that in the first place?"

So in what I perceived as a sudden, dramatic, existential role reversal, I was transformed from an aspiring musician trying to serve the music in my most heartfelt way into a cynical hack making novelty noises on a lousy demo for a bad song with an ignorant producer. Given that I was by nature introspective, it was certainly not the first time that I had observed that there could be diverse interpretations of the same events, depending on one's perspective, but somehow in my mind this occasion was immediately elevated to the archetypal level as well, a kind of warning about how unsatisfying it could potentially be to spend a lifetime as a studio guitarist, routinely subsuming what your heart said to play in the name of pleasing someone else for money, and perhaps gradually paying less attention to that quiet inner voice that I was just beginning to learn to recognize.

It was only a few months since I had discovered John Coltrane and Eric Dolphy and grasped what they symbolized to aspiring musicians, and the contrast between the two possible life paths of commercial music vs. art-for-art's-sake couldn't have been sharper to me.

No doubt it wasn't as reductionist as it sounds, but within four months of arriving in LA I left for good, having resolved that my connection to my inner voice was far too tenuous to survive there. Already I believed that this voice was vitally important, enough to base life decisions on, although it was only later that I would entertain the notion that it was the voice of God guiding from within.

Keep in mind that this was very shortly after Woodstock (I didn't go; Patti did), a time when, more than ever before, young people were aware of and involved with civil rights, the Vietnam War, ethics and politics. It seemed to all of us an era of transformation and possibility. It was a very idealistic time; many young people believed that discovering and following their dreams was a realistic life path, and in many cases this proved to be the case.

Incidentally, Flemming Rasmussen's album Rasmussen may be my only appearance on a commercially released recording during the early 70's. He later became known mainly for his work recording and producing heavy metal groups, including Metallica.

***(2) "It was an early indication of a kind of systematic ruthlessness in practicing that I have always exhibited. - TA" This is a quote from your website. An issue that always fascinates us is how high level players approach the issue of practice, subsequent to 'arriving' as a player. Do you still 'practice'?***

Playing the guitar has always been my hobby as much as my profession. Whenever there is extra time I tend to pick up a guitar and start playing, maybe practicing in a more-or-less-organized, goal-directed way or maybe just playing something. Unfortunately there is very little time for that these days with our touring schedule, plus I've found that there is a limit to how much time I can play in one day at peak physical intensity without overly damaging my hands, so when we're on the road I pretty much have to avoid touching the guitar except when on stage out of self-preservation. The same thing tends to apply when we're at home in studio mode.

I have therefore thought a lot about how to get the most out of the least time and particularly about how to warm up as fully as possible in little or no time; sometimes I'm lucky to get 10 seconds of warmup before going on stage. Most of this is physical; the immediate need is always more to get my fingers ready and flexible (and a little bit numb, if I've been playing every night and they have not had enough time to recover) than to work on anything specific. I have a variety of things I do, but they all fall into the category I think of as the "cold plunge"; the moment I touch the instrument I attack it with 100% physical intensity, and this lets me accomplish literally in seconds what I would not be able to do in hours of less-committed involvement with the instrument.

Specifically, for the left hand I might play rapidly changing chords, thirds, sixths, octaves, tenths, etc., using very-aggressive staccato, while for the right hand I would typically repeatedly fire one finger or multiple fingers through their entire possible range of motion, aiming roughly in the direction of various strings from a wide variety of angles and hand positions, with almost no concern for accuracy. My personal shorthand for this is "the sound of one hand clapping," but in this context I don't mean the Zen sense of silent mind, but the audible intensity of a finger snap. I avoid breaking strings while doing this just before the gig, but in fact in real practice I try to push to the point of occasionally breaking a string.

Offline, not in that moment before the gig, I have a lifetime backlog of things I'd like to work on more, and, while I'm really good at systematic and goal-oriented work, I'm equally likely just to lose myself in something (anything; it almost doesn't matter) and see what develops.

***(3) "Musically I have spent most of my energy working on options and variations rather than polishing just one version, and on playing what I hear rather than what I practiced yesterday. - TA"***

***I realize this is a pretty wide question but can you give some thoughts on the role 'creativity' plays in your playing, as opposed to recall and repeatability?***

If it weren't for Patti's influence all these years, I'd be a much more conservative, predictable, scripted player. Maybe by practicing and playing it all the same way each time, I'd have by now developed better technical control and would make fewer mistakes in actual performance, like a classical musician. As it is, though, that approach doesn't work at all in our collaboration. Since Patti is unpredictable, committed to being in the moment, taking chances and serving the music, wherever it leads, I must strive to be responsive and unpredictable myself. Otherwise it would be a one-sided conversation, like singing to pre-recorded tracks. Over time I became as hooked on this approach as Patti.

Due to the guitaristic technical challenges and the fact that it is impossible already to have anticipated and practiced everything the actual playing situation might ask for, I find

myself always on the technical edge, even when doing something I've done many times that should by now be routine. In my experience, there is not a single note that is fully reliable. It's all probabilistic on the micro-level. Each note carries a margin of error, a sort of bell-shaped curve of possibilities ranging from perfect (unlikely), to differently executed than intended but serviceable (likely), all the way to completely wrong or missed (unlikely again). While I don't make that many glaringly obvious mistakes, virtually every note comes out at least a little differently than I expected, and the sum total, plus all the adaptations I make as a result (with their own probabilistic errors...) is the sound of me, like it or not. Again through Patti's influence, I have learned to like it rather than not.

Also related, even though I was good at memorizing and taking tests in school, I find it almost impossible or at least tedious to memorize either music or repetitive finger patterns; I just don't seem to be wired that way. Instead I've spent a lifetime focused on training my ear and trying to link my ear and my fingers, so I automatically play what I'm hearing. In fact, if I don't hear it, I won't be able to play it. Even when reading music, I must listen to what the notes will sound like in my head, then make those sounds on the guitar. So I learn songs more by osmosis, depending on knowing them by ear, than by practice and repetition. That means that when we're playing live, if I hear something different from what I typically play, I will cease to remember the typical version and will have really no choice but to go with what I hear, whether I can pull it off or not. This is reinforced by our long-standing agreement not to play it safe, to abandon the familiar whenever either of us feels the impulse in the moment. It also means that on songs where there is not much variation, I never have the experience that I am playing by rote, because I am still freshly hearing and rediscovering it all every time, and there is inevitably variation, at least on the most detailed level, both because the notes live and breathe differently all the time in my ear, particularly as they relate to the variations in what Patti does, and because of the probabilistic experience of not being able to fully control anything on the most detailed level anyway.

Sometimes Patti spontaneously begins talking to the audience, often at length, while I therefore extend some phrase or section of a song or just make something up. I've observed that, even if I find myself repeating the most-familiar phrase many times, it is almost certain that each instance will be different from all the others. It suggests that there are variations percolating in my head for everything, and, given the right situation, they will come bubbling out.

One other factor is that I routinely use alternate fingerings for chords as well as lines, often out of whim, just to keep myself on my toes, with the result that even the identical passage can feel completely different, depending on the fingering.

Incidentally, realizing this about myself, when I have to learn (i.e. memorize) a song quickly, before osmosis begins to see me through, I go through and isolate only the moments of surprise and try to hard-code them into my memory, the way I used to cram for tests, trusting that all the other details will just work themselves out. This could be as little as the first chord of the chorus or a single melodic note, or it could be several moments spread throughout, as in the case of "Stella By Starlight," which has a lot of false cadences.

For example "Have You Met Miss Jones" effectively just kills time until the chorus does four oblique modulations, and even those reduce further: The first two are a sequence, so you only need to remember the first one, the next is a different modulation and the last is just the obvious path back to the original key; it goes without saying. Therefore my entire mental chart, if I didn't already know the song, would consist of:

AABA. Half-time turnarounds. B starts on IV. Giant Steps modulation #1 twice. Giant Steps modulation #2.

That's all the information I need to get through the song in any key. It's a matter of anticipating the moments where instinct alone is not enough, then boiling those moments down to the minimum information necessary to point me down the right path. By the time I forget even that much, hopefully the song will have filtered through my head enough times that osmosis will kick in and I'll never have to think about it again. I would definitely avoid looking at an actual chart, which would bog me down with probably 90% useless and maybe misleading information, completely obscuring the all-important tiny part I actually need to learn, as well as distracting me from using my ear.

This is also largely true of all the specific contrapuntal parts that I have had to work out in detail and practice over and over in order to have a hope of pulling them off. In that offline process inevitably I try a lot of fingerings and right hand solutions, and freely explore variations, so when the moment actually comes I tend to see options more than a single, rehearsed part.

The point of all this is that recall and repeatability, even though some things are predictable and/or repeated, is not a big feature of my experience. It is much more like walking the tightrope, where, even if you've done it a lot of times, each time is its own unique, 100%-involving experience. This is particularly true when Patti and I play together, but it has fully infected my solo playing as well.

But that's not to pretend that I am freely improvising, constantly playing fresh things I've never played before, either, even though that is certainly one aspect of the goal.

I submit that there is a third category, equally important, which we could call "real-time problem solving." It becomes vital in the complex, somewhat-improvised style that I play, more than it would be if I were only doing one thing at a time (single lines, comping, etc.) or of course playing anything fully scripted and rehearsed.

For example, at some point I heard a pianist comping on the and of four, as well as on four plus the and of four, changing chords between the two attacks, and realized that it was something I never did while walking a bass line; I always comped on or after the beat. Next a period began when I noticed it over and over in recorded music, wondered how I could have missed it for so long and realized that I wanted to incorporate it into my playing. Somewhere between then and now it crept into my playing to the point that it became my default comping rhythm, despite wicked fingering problems. But I spent very little actual practice time working on this, and only for one or two progressions, e.g. blues in G. I probably spent more time during normal life, semi-consciously solving the fingering problems on random songs in the background of my mind, than I did actually practicing it. Mainly, once my ear started to ask for it, my fingers started trying to grab it on the gig, and somehow gradually they began to succeed, with a lot of low-level fingering problems getting solved along the way without me consciously thinking about it.

How much creativity is involved in comping before the beat rather than after it? I'd argue that it is more of a one-time act of imitation rather than anything creative, although maybe the choice of where to apply it is marginally creative. About the most credit you can give me is that it was clever of me to notice and do something about it, when most solo players never do this. On the other hand, given the fact that this way of comping was already a cliché 60 years ago, and that lots of guitarists including me do it

instinctively when they are not simultaneously playing bass lines, I think that even calling me clever is a bit generous.

Does this prove that guitarists are basically dimwits? No, I don't think so. Rather it illustrates the fact that guitarists playing a one-person-band style all necessarily wear very tight blinders that filter out in advance the vast majority of possible musical options due to the almost-overwhelming technical difficulties inherent in playing this style convincingly. Otherwise they'd give up. If my blinders are a little looser than most, then it makes me appear to be clever, when all I did was develop a little better problem-solving skills and give myself permission to be a sloppy player. This gives me a better chance of pulling off things I have not played before in real time, and that allows my playing to be more conversational and less scripted.

How can one most efficiently work to improve at this? You get better at what you do, so, in addition to performing as much as possible in situations that reinforce improvisation, it makes sense to spend a lot of practice time improvising. Most of us tend to practice the same things over and over, which is good, but it should be balanced by the opposite approach, even if it forces you to play much more simply.

For example, I can't imagine how many thousands of hours I spent diligently and metronomically playing up and down scales in my "Scale Period" (pre-Patti), because I assumed it was the right thing to do. I remember regularly watching three late-night movies in a row while mechanically playing scales. On some days I would see the sun rise and set (or vice versa) and realize that I had done nothing in between but play scales. I got really good at practicing scales!

It was easy to justify, since there were at least six different scales that were essential for a jazz player, many more if you include 6-, 5- and 4-note scales/arpeggios, and it looked to me like there were at least 12 different independent systems of fingering approaches I needed to master (e.g., CAGED, 3 notes/string, 7 notes/2 strings, 4 notes/string with sliding, 4 notes/string with position changes between every pair, 2 notes/string, Segovia, one string only, one finger/fret with extra notes played by index finger, the same thing but pinky, cross-string/overlapping notes, intervallic pattern- or phrasing-based fingerings, etc.). Of course I had to do all modes of everything in all keys. Multiply this by several rhythmic levels, staccato vs. legato, slurring into the beat, out of the beat, randomly, etc., re-fingering everything using only three or two fingers instead of four, and apply even a handful of intervallic patterns, and it is easy to spend unlimited time on this. And that's only the left hand!

If I had it to do over again, I'd do a little bit of that, but mainly instead I'd set up a groove in my head and start improvising musical phrases, informed by having listened to real music a lot, that fit within those scales. Prioritizing never losing the groove, I would constantly vary fingerings, use only one or two or three fingers a lot of the time, freely mix horizontal and vertical playing, vary the rhythm (rests, triplets, syncopation), slurring and accents, incorporate intervals other than seconds and thirds, introduce chromaticism, etc. Sure, I wouldn't be able to fire off as many notes per second, but the density of real-time problem solving would increase infinitely, since it was zero before. Also I would sing every note.

Along the way there would be countless micro-branching decisions whether to interrupt or redirect the flow to work on something interesting or challenging for a bit or to keep playing and let it randomly work itself out over time. There is no simple guideline for these decisions except maybe to Pay Attention.

Some of that unstructured, scale-exploration practice time would be spent playing along with recorded music, using phrases others played as a springboard for my own explorations, being forced to keep the time.

The same thing applies even more to the problem of playing multiple parts at once. In an instant one can multiply out more possibilities to work on than can be covered in the remaining time one has to live. I think it's important not to defer time spent playing actual music too much in favor of chipping away at this workload. It's better to approach the problem from both ends at the same time; it multiplies the effectiveness.

So it's good to spend a lot of time playing the simplest phrase, maybe a blues lick, while playing the simplest bass line, even a single note repeated, getting into a great groove then letting it evolve where it may, solving most of the problems in real time. Likewise all combinations of bass, chords, lines and percussive attacks. Or apply a similarly simplistic approach to a tune. And, of course, throw yourself into as many actual performing situations as possible. You can support this by some more-rigorous, offline problem solving, but monitor the results over time and vary/refine your strategy based on what you observe.

Looking at the creativity issue from another standpoint, even though there is an element of improvisation in everything I do, with Patti and alone, in the broader historical context we all live in a completely post-modern period. In music, as in pretty much all walks of life, the lid suddenly got blown off sometime in the last hundred years, all remaining rules and restrictions went out the window, and musicians quickly and explosively explored all conceivable remaining territory remarkably thoroughly. The likelihood of creating something really new is very low; at best you might rediscover something that somebody already did.

It is one of the big creative challenges in our era. What do you do after Art Tatum or Charlie Parker or Jimi Hendrix or Michael Hedges or Bobby McFerrin? Generations of musicians who have followed these creative geniuses have grappled with this: You can try to play faster, cleaner, louder, more or less distorted, more evenly, with more or less complexity, but if they didn't say it all, they said most of it, about as well as it will ever be said, and they said it first, with a spirit of being on the creative edge that is practically impossible to muster by someone who comes along later, unavoidably thrust into the role of historian.

This leads me to a fourth category, cutting right across the other three, which I think of as "coherency," "honesty," "authenticity" or perhaps "sincerity." The fact that art and culture went through a Big Bang and we live, presumably forevermore, on the other side of it, does not mean that art is dead and there is no reason even to try any more. It still remains the case that each individual has a unique story which no one else can tell. For example, Patti and I have no pretense that anything we do is really new, even if history might judge that we broke some ground as a duo. As it is for everybody, there are footnotes for every note I play. But each person's particular way of putting it together is personal. In my experience music that is authentic, genuine, honest, etc., is more coherent and easier for the listener to buy into, suspending judgement. I think humans generally have an amazingly well-developed sense of whether another person is acting coherently, and it is important to us.

So, while I'd like to say that my goal when playing is to touch someone else's heart, in fact I have no direct control over whether that happens or understanding of the process by which it sometimes does. I believe a much more realistic goal is to try to play what your heart/intuition directs via your well-developed ear and technique in an attempt to achieve

maximum coherence between who you happen to be (in that moment) and what you play, because coherent expressions are more virulent; they have more ability to penetrate through the layers of defense of other people and have a more profound effect.

Put another way, I think it's important to play as if you completely believe in what you are doing, and do as good a job of it as you can. By far the easiest way to give this impression is to actually believe in what you are doing; it is more credible to the listener and more self-motivating. That means either psyching yourself into believing, like a great actor, or listening so carefully and habitually to your inner guidance that your spirit gets reflected in your musical decisions. Realistically, it probably takes a mixture of the two, with a big dose of being simultaneously discriminating and yet non-judgemental about your playing. In a post-modern world, this can be a big challenge, but I'm convinced that it is the antidote for the self-consciousness, irony, depression, etc., that can so easily accompany the knowledge that it has all already been done. To me as a listener it is more important than style, level of advancement, degree of flexibility or any other consideration.

***(4) Trying to think what could possibly be cooler than being a founding member of the GAP Band... Secretly being Spiderman, maybe. That's about it.***

***Mind talking about this point in your career, where you were at musically at the time and what influence, if any, that scene had on your ultimate musical vision?***

I agree; it was much cooler than running around the house in my Superman outfit ever was. First, though, I should clarify: "Founding member" makes it sound like I was one of the original members, and that my vision helped shape the nature and development of the band. That is not what happened. The band had been together for years before I joined it, and during the time when I was a member it gradually evolved into being centered on the three wonderfully talented Wilson brothers, changing its name to Gap Band in the process, GAP being an acronym for Greenwood, Archer and Pine, the three streets in Tulsa that circumscribed the little corner of town where all the clubs we played in were located. I don't think I had any impact at all on the musical direction of the band, nor would I have wanted to; I was just happy to be there.

I got the call shortly after returning to Tulsa from LA. I was 18 years old, by far the youngest member of the band. I'd played blues and rock in bands and had started exploring jazz. I never found out why they asked me to join the band, although one of the members had heard me perform with my high-school stage band a year earlier; maybe he saw some promise. I've always thought that it was not the smartest decision on their part, because I was unprepared stylistically and socially and turned out to be remarkably slow to grasp the essence of the feel of this music that I loved so much, but who was I to argue? Going to the gig with these guys, then staying up all night listening to Miles Davis, Wes Montgomery and Thelonius Monk, I thought I had gone to heaven.

Still bet-hedging by keeping one foot in academia, I also enrolled in Tulsa University, taking a 7:30 am class on comparative religions, because I'd never gone to church and wondered what this aspect of life was all about. We alternated between the Gallery Club from 6 pm to 2 am (the first four hours were "Jazz Night" and the next four were "Blues Night"), and JD's International Cafe across the street from midnight to 5 am, so I would just stay up after the gig then go to class. Knowing this, and noticing that I never drank alcohol, the guys in the band mistakenly concluded that I was studying to be a Christian minister, and they began to call me Reverend Tuck.



At the time they were a local club band, doing a mixture of jazz and the soul hits of the day (Johnny Taylor, Bobby Blue Bland, Bobby Womack, etc.). The other long-term members were Leon Rollerson (bass), Ronnie Wilson (trumpet), Tommy Lokey (trumpet), Chris Clayton (sax), Roscoe "Toast" Smith (drums) and Ray D. Rowe (vocals). Most of them had straight jobs, too, but nobody ever talked about that side of their life. Music seemed to be their entire reality, at least in the context in which I knew them. There was never a keyboard player until Charlie Wilson joined the band two or three years later; I never knew why.

Until then, therefore, most of the time I played the only chording instrument, and there were no song lists, charts, rehearsals or discussions about the music; it was pure sink-or-swim, an unbeatable learning situation. My eyes and ears were wide open. Now and then Odell Stokes would rejoin the band in between tours with famous soul bands, and he was the most-inspiring and kindest musician I'd ever met. Later, when he decided that they were old enough, Ronnie Wilson let his younger brothers Charlie and then Robert join the band, and it eventually turned into the Gap Band, centered around the three of them. It was toward the end of the four years that I spent alternately playing with them in Tulsa and dropping in/out of Stanford when they started doing original material and recording their first album on Shelter Records, produced by Leon Russell.

Ultimately I left the band for essentially the same reason that I left LA; I had the sense that there was still an inner voice that I had yet to cultivate sufficiently. By so doing, I also gave up the opportunity to spend yet more time sleeping on a mattress in an apartment in LA with a lot of guys before they hit the big time a few years later.

Along the way I learned a lot, both about music and about other, more practical things, e.g. whether to keep playing (fists, knives) or take a break (guns) when people started fighting. By the time they became famous, the Wilson brothers were wearing some really memorable outfits, but we had only one brief experiment with this during my tenure, when it was decided that we'd wear matching, stretchy purple Spandex jumpsuits. All the other guys looked really sharp due to well-conditioned bodies, noticeably less so in my case. If anyone reading this has a photo of this, I would love to receive a copy; by now it would be endearing and funny rather than simply utterly humiliating.

Musically I can't imagine a better education, especially in juxtaposition with my contemporaneous experience in the classical music department at Stanford. Even though I was a slow study, I learned all about the essence of music in a wonderful playing situation with the benefit of immediate audience feedback and the support of all the other guys in the band, who were like older brothers to me.

After I left I played with the Gap Band on only one other occasion, when I dropped by the Circle Star Theater in San Carlos, CA a few years later to say hi to everybody. I had brought my L-5, thinking I might play some jazz tunes after the show with Tommy Lokey like old times. Instead they grabbed me and pulled me on stage. Chaka Khan, who shared the bill, was sitting in at the same time. This was my first time on a big stage. They plugged me into a big Marshall stack turned all the way up; there was no time to turn any knobs. During the first song, which I had never heard, with the unstuffed L-5 hideously shrieking and moaning with continuous feedback, the band suddenly laid out with the expectation that I would groove on alone for a while, with all appropriate funkiness, thus showcasing me and illustrating why they had brought an unfamiliar, inappropriately dressed person on stage. The ensuing 30 seconds of horrifying, uncontrolled feedback completely obscuring anything I managed to play were more

illuminating than a year of graduate study in Preparing For the Unexpected would have been.

So many of the most-valuable lessons in my life have been learned this way, and I am grateful (in retrospect) for them all.

You asked about the influence the Gap Band scene had on my ultimate musical vision. Different perspectives suggest different answers. I got to know a very wide cross-section of people, the whole range of people who came to JD's International Cafe after every respectable club in town had closed, from pimps to prostitutes to drug pushers, and they all loved music even more than they loved criminal activity. I was spending hours every night with really cool, older musicians that I admired and who welcomed me. It was effectively an immersion in a micro-culture, both musically and socially, that served as a precursor to my later experience in hundreds of bands playing in the equivalent clubs in the Bay Area, like 20 Grand and the infamous Ghetto Club. Due to the Wilson brothers' father being a pentacostal minister, I got a big indirect dose of the church music that underlies the soul music that I was more familiar with.

But ultimately my experience could be reduced to two words: Odell Stokes. He was such a towering hero to me that everything else simply faded into the background whenever he played with us. I watched and studied him intently and tried my best to imitate his playing, but it took years and scores of soul bands after we parted for me to begin to understand and internalize his feel, his musical sense, his technical approach and the feeling of weight and authority that he miraculously imparted to every note. Now, even though my style is different, it is thoroughly informed by everything that, by example, he unknowingly taught me, undoubtedly his slowest student ever. Now I see him as simply perfectly embodying all the basics, the rudiments of guitar playing that are so often bypassed out of ignorance and that, though equally present, are more hidden by the complexity of players like Wes Montgomery, George Benson and Jimi Hendrix, and I return to them constantly, both for myself and my students. Without his shoulders to stand on, I would never have become the player I am.

Had I never met Odell, how different would my playing have turned out? If life had brought me constantly into the presence of other great R&B/gospel guitarists, like Marvin Tarplin (Smokey Robinson), Teenie Hodges (Al Green), Curtis Mayfield, Cornell Dupree, Jimi Hendrix, etc., maybe similarly. Still, I think Odell was the quintessential distillation of all the qualities that made these musicians great, and I was unbelievably fortunate to have played with him night after night.

***(5) There's a brilliant write-up on your site (link) about your gear and the moving parts of your tonal dynamics. You definitely seem to be quite the tech-wonk. I'd like to ask you about those vintage L5's. You've been a working musician since long before guitars were elevated to full-on 'collector fetish object', which was a phenomenon that really seemed to catch fire in the 1990's and onward. What's the back story on those L5's, where they came from, when you got them, etc? Did you keep the original parts?***

I don't know too much about either of my L-5's; in fact after a typical, teenage-guitar-lust phase (especially Gibson guitars because of Wes Montgomery and B.B. King) I found myself much more interested in playing guitars than in guitars themselves, so by the time I bought my first L-5 I had lost the motivation to research its provenance. What I do know is that I got the one I now record with (made in 1953) at Guitar Center in San Francisco sometime in the 70's, where I traded another L-5 that was newer and shinier

but for some reason sounded really bad, plus about \$50. Then sometime in the early 80's I got a second one (1949) when Tom Smith, who was doing all my repair work, asked a customer from Hawaii if he'd like to sell his, and he said yes. It became the one I've toured with since 1988 and has traveled as checked baggage in a flight case on 1,600+ flights. Neither cost me more than about \$1,000.

I have taken a player's, rather than a collector's, approach concerning modifications: I do whatever serves the cause of my making music on them, but temper that with some respect for the fact that they are old, scarce instruments. Practically speaking, that means they have both been modified and played to death and presumably have very little collector value left, but they are great guitars which I'll probably happily play for the rest of my life and others will enjoy playing long after that.

No doubt I have whatever original parts I removed around somewhere, probably in a box in the garage labeled "Parts." Even if you put them all back on, nobody would be fooled into thinking these were original, collectible instruments. Little details like huge frets, extreme wear, replaced fingerboards, repaired cracks, big jack plates, relocated strap pegs, moved and reshaped pickup holes, etc. would be pretty easy to spot.

***(6) Five albums. What are they?***

Just one: Art Tatum's **20th Century Piano Genius**. That's it; no others are needed. It has displaced all the other albums I used to listen to; at any given moment I'd prefer to listen to Art Tatum. All those moments add up to all the time, so I never listen to anything else. (If I had to choose a second, it would probably be Errol Garner's Concert by the Sea, because he plays with such joy and pleasure.)

I have not heard all of his recordings, but I have the strong sense from what I've read and observed myself that **20th Century Piano Genius** is the best glimpse we have into the world of Art Tatum at his most transcendent, which was in after-hours sessions, often on mediocre pianos with very few people listening.

What is it about Art Tatum that elicits such a singular focus? Forty years ago I would have talked about how complex yet flexible his playing was, his incredible virtuosity, especially given his blindness, his single-handed invention of much of the harmony that informed everything that came later, etc. When I listened to him then, I recognized that he was the pinnacle of jazz virtuosos and that there was everything to learn from him. I remember citing him as the source of chord substitution principles I was showing my students in the 70's. Digging back in more recently, though, none of my earlier impressions are changed, but, perhaps having gotten clearer on what is important to me in music and in life over the decades, I hear something I missed back then, maybe more closely related to pure musicality.

I have felt the presence of God many times in my life in subtle ways, and at least twice in utterly profound, permanently life-changing ways. On the latter occasions the presence I felt was stronger, more immediate and real, and more believable and compelling than anything I've ever experienced via my senses. It was undeniable, conversion-grade experience; I felt that I was surrounded by infinite love, knowledge and power.

Sometimes an artistic expression briefly gives me a really diluted reminder of the feelings of divinity I felt so strongly in those experiences, and these are the most profound artistic moments, the life-defining kind, the ones one could easily list and reminisce about for a lifetime. Amazingly and gratefully, Patti and I get to share moments like these a lot whenever we play; it's part of why we're hooked on doing what we do.

For me, Art Tatum's playing, especially on the first CD of this two-CD set, has a drastically higher concentration of those divinely inspirational moments to the point that they are sustained, continuous throughout, and the least-veiled pointer to or reflection of God that I have experienced in the human domain. Inevitably, whenever I listen, I feel washed in a sea of love, knowledge and power, accompanied by an overwhelming reassurance that all is right in the world, puzzling given that Art Tatum was reportedly a benign but relatively unremarkable person outside of his unbelievable playing (although there is a plenty of evidence that he was a genius). I see him as the most extreme example I've encountered of normal people serving, possibly without specifically trying, as vessels for the expression of divine attributes and intent, which is the stated goal for many musicians (including Patti and me).

On a musical level, of course, Art Tatum was singular in history; he had predecessors, but he surpassed them all by such a wide margin that it was as if he sprang out of nowhere, and he had no successors, even to the present day.

To me as a guitarist, what he did was so unattainable on every level, even more than for every pianist who followed him, that I can't resist the challenge, so I am at the early stages of what I think of as the Art Tatum Project. Maybe it will culminate eventually in a recording of music inspired by **20th Century Piano Genius**, but I'm more interested in the process, the steps along the way.

The first, an extreme test of my personal belief that adults can still and therefore should learn by osmosis as children naturally do, involves simply listening to the music so much (usually while driving) that I know it in detail by heart and that it becomes internal rather than external to me, as happened with Beatles songs when I was a teenager and nursery rhymes long before that, without any attempts to memorize, describe, transcribe or play any of it (on guitar or piano). I'm trusting that eventually the songs will play themselves back in my head, unbidden, in total detail, so clearly that I'll be able to slow them down in my mind and watch what he played reveal itself. To give myself the best chance, so far I haven't even allowed myself to determine what key he played each song in; I'm really trying to keep the left brain out of the picture as much as possible to let the right brain do its mysterious thing. I assume the other steps will unfold themselves as time goes on, although I have speculated a bit about what they will be. I realize that at some point they will involve hands on a guitar and some completely impossible problem solving, but I'll cross that bridge when I come to it. Probably prior to that, again baby-style, will be mimicing the rhythms that he played, playing air-piano. In the meantime I have seen this concentrated listening beginning to affect my playing in general; Patti has noticed it, too. I also observe that it is making me hear into other music more clearly and deeply.

One bonus on this CD is being able to hear the repartee between and sometimes during songs. It reinforces my impression that, while Tatum regularly quoted other songs, juxtaposed styles and did other things that seemed whimsical when done by other pianists, there was no sense of the sly wink of the entertainer that everyone loved so much about, say, Fats Waller, or really of any self-consciousness at all. Rather it seems that whenever his fingers touch the keys he instantly reinhabits a zone of absolute seriousness and focus, a completely solitary world, perhaps playing only for himself, the only listener capable of grasping what he is playing. I get no sense that he is playing for anyone else, even though they are all gathered around the piano in a state of rapture. It strikes me as a model of the coherency factor I mentioned earlier, and this, as much as his excellence, may be what makes it so compelling to me.

Incidentally, one of the CDs that Art Tatum displaced was Wes Montgomery's **Echoes of Indiana Avenue**, which had itself singlehandedly previously displaced all Wes' other recordings, including my favorite Riverside and live ones. I observe that something these two CDs have in common, in addition to obvious mastery, is a sense of abandon, which paradoxically is hard for masters to maintain; they get to be so good that the on-the-creative-and-technical-edge zone tends to shrink, and fewer things can push them to sound like they are really going for it as opposed to sometimes coasting a bit. Particularly in Art Tatum's unique case, no other musician was good enough to challenge him, so all the motivation to transcend had to come from within for his entire adult life. On **Echoes of Indiana Avenue** there are more ideas per minute (or bar, etc.), unprecedented moments where normally groove-perfect Wes pushes slightly out of time, and the micro-dynamics are wilder, more raw and exciting than on later, still-brilliant, recordings where, at least by contrast, it seems that he was doing more self-editing, exerting a little more control (plus maybe later recording engineers were using compression, making his short-term peaks blend in more listenably but less excitingly).

Interestingly, this Wes Montgomery CD was, I believe, his earliest known recording, whereas the Art Tatum was his last.

*(7) Your Hot Licks video (1991, was it?) was really one of the first widely available pieces of instructional material to articulate essential musical ingredients that go into 'the cocktail' of dynamic, modern fingerstyle guitar compositions/arrangements. So much of the educational material in the fingerstyle world is more 'tactical' in nature whereas your video came from the vantage of fingerstyle guitar as a medium of broader musical expression (instead of 'Acoustic Stunt-Guitar').*

*If for no reason other than to benefit of the canon of published guitar education, have you ever considered expanding on that video, perhaps doing a 'master class' type series of videos for more serious and advanced guitar composers?*

Yes, I have long been planning a comprehensive video "Tuck brain download," wherein I would fully dissect my playing, thinking, approach, history of things we tried along the way, etc., for each song we've recorded, abstracting out principles along the way, as well as independently trying to map out then dissect everything I've learned about playing the guitar in some semblance of an organized fashion. Needless to say, this is a huge project and probably not a financially rewarding one, but it's my goal, because an odd set of life experiences seems to have dealt me an unusual hand as a guitar player that can be useful to others, and I seem to be pretty good at breaking it all down and guiding others in their exploration of the same territory, perhaps as a result of being self-taught. Incidentally, to insure the latter, I'm thinking of having some other guitarists present to catch me if I'm unclear, incomplete, missing the point, etc.

I'm figuring on doing this sooner than later, since time marches on, and I'm pretty clearly a key man in the project. It's likely that I'll seek a grant or crowd-funding, since it will take quite a bit of time and not necessarily produce a lot of income on the back end. But I hope it will produce a useful and unusually comprehensive contribution to the educational material out there.

*(8) We have a policy on the site: all artists must be asked at least one pointless/absurd/bizarre question. Here goes... Of various flooring options- tile, hardwood, carpet, linoleum, etc- if you had to walk barefoot on one for the rest of your life, what would it be?*

Hardwood: Hard to damage, easy to clean, non-allergenic, looks nice, acceptable amount of friction even when not wearing socks. Could also lie on it or eat off it as needed.

***(9) Any shout-outs, plugs, etc?***

Patti and I have committed to finally teaching private lessons again, in person and via Skype. After decades of being too busy on the road to teach, except occasional workshops, we are loving doing this. Neither of us is concerned about level of advancement; we simply love helping other people work toward their dreams as much as we've loved working toward our own. For more information or to schedule a lesson, go to <https://www.tuckandpatti.com/teach-produce-mix>.