

Jimmy Wyble by Jim Carlton

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The Amazing Captain C Chord

Jimmy Wyble laughingly calls himself “Captain C Chord,” but I think he has the right to call himself Captain Marvel. He’s perhaps the most genuinely humble person I’ve ever talked to although he’s covered more ground musically than any guitarist I can think of. Early in his career he was an integral part of Bob Wills’ famous western swing band, the Texas Playboys. Later, he moved on to enhance the groups of both Benny Goodman and Red Norvo, among others, and like many of his peers spent years as one of Hollywood’s top studio players busily working recording dates, television shows, commercials and film scores.

Not only has his jazz playing influenced countless others but his series of original, inventive and atmospheric guitar etudes have fascinated any number of classical artists. Jimmy’s a complete player with a legacy that’s yet to be totally discovered by the guitar world at large. That’s why it’s my pleasure to share a glimpse of, and I hope some insight to, this player who’s one of the world’s finest jazz guitarists. Many guitar-greats consider Jimmy Wyble a genius talent.

Jimmy’s a soft-spoken man without pretense or ostentation. His mild-mannered demeanor left me with a sense of his being a focused, centered and creative artist who nevertheless seems truly amazed at his own accomplishments. Few players have had such a comprehensive and interesting background and I sincerely believe he looks back fondly at a blessed and satisfying music career.

You can find one of Jimmy’s compositions, “Two Moods For Lily,” in a recent Mel Bay publication, *Jazz Guitar 2000*. It’s a piece I’d recommend to any serious player. And while you’re at it, try his marvelous book of etudes, *The Art of Two-Line Improvisation*, another Mel Bay publication, which offers a lifetime of study and a wealth of guitar revelation. It’s indicative of Wyble’s artistic imagination because it’s full of compositions that were created just as he played. In it you’ll find pieces that are every bit as astounding as what Tuck Andress, Martin Taylor and

Van Eps offer, but in Jimmy's case one must consider the astonishing factor of immediacy. He composed two-line jazz inventions at the speed of thought.

We spoke for several hours about his lengthy career, in particular his association with many great artists in both the country and jazz genres. His observations were always interesting but often with a self-effacing assessment. However, anyone in the know will testify that few, if any, performed both styles as well as Jimmy has. And if one considers, as one must, his valid influence on serious classical players, there is no doubt that Jimmy Wyble is one of the most brilliant and revered artists in the world of guitar.

JC: Jimmy, I don't quite know where to start because you've done so much.

JW: I don't know if I can remember what I had for breakfast (laughs). I do know that I got my first guitar at age 12 and took lessons from a young man who was about 25 or 26 and worked with my father in an oil refinery. His name was Raymond Jones, a wonderful man, who was a machinist at the refinery and who loved music and the guitar. He and my dad were friends and one day Raymond said, "Maybe I can help Jimmy." At that time he didn't play electric guitar; he had one of those old steel Dobros, which he played on his lap. So I went over to his house and he brought out a Nick Manoloff book and started to teach me to read and so forth. Later, when I learned three or four more chords, we'd play for house parties. Raymond would play Dobro like a steel guitar and we'd play simple little tunes. And in those days, they'd roll up the rug and the husbands and wives would dance. They didn't care as long as there was some noise going on.

JC: This had to be in the Depression era, right?

JW: Oh yes. I was born in '22, took my first lessons at 12 and it took me a couple of years to learn those four chords (laughs), so I was about 14 or 15. But I give so much credit to Mr. Jones because, not only was he a wonderful guy, but he was so enthused with music and the guitar. He was

taking correspondence lessons from a guy named Eddie Alkire who was rather prominent among steel guitar players. Nobody, at least that I know of, was playing electric steel then.

JC: Tell me about your early influences.

JW: Well my influence then was from a lot of the little bands around Port Arthur and Houston and various little places in Texas where these string bands would work. And I wasn't even familiar with Bob Wills then. But these bands usually had a bus and they'd come through a town and play on the street and pass the hat. Maybe they'd have booked some little country dance hall and that way they'd advertise their little gig. So, I'd go in the daytime and listen to them play on the street. I remember there was a guy named Bob Dunn, a steel guitarist, who impressed me. I didn't know what he was doing, but looking back on it, and having heard some of his recordings, he was trying to play jazz.

But I'd go listen to these people and get inspired and continue trying to study. My friend and teacher, Raymond Jones, eventually tuned me on to Eddie Lang, Dick McDonough and Carl Kress. And he would buy these books and try to teach me little smatterings. I never really learned a whole piece, but as I said, he was a very important teacher in my life.

JC: And he got you to read.

JW: Yeah, that's the first thing he made me do because he could read on the steel guitar. We'd play a bunch of Hawaiian tunes and simple little tunes of the day, but I really credit him for making me aware of the importance of reading.

JC: And introducing you to jazz.

JW: Yes. And at just about the age of 15 or 16, I started playing with a local string band, which consisted of a violin, a rhythm guitar, bass and piano. And in the band there was a Cajun guy. Incidentally, I'm Cajun too. Both of my parents are French and fresh off the farm around Port Berry, Louisiana.

JC: No wonder you were so musical.

JW: (Laughs) Finally, I got to play with this little string band on the local radio station. The announcer, and I can't remember his name, practically ran the whole station. But when we weren't there, I'd be home listening to the radio and he'd play Frankie Trombauer, Eddie Lang, Joe Venuti and Teddy Wilson and I gradually got tuned in to that. And that was the first time I'd heard Mildred Bailey and Red Norvo. That was when they were "Mr. And Mrs. Swing."

JC: Do you remember the name of your group?

JW: They were called the Sears Jubileers. They went out and got Sears as a sponsor. They didn't pay them any money but they got us the air time so we could play on the radio. Various merchants around town would have us advertise them, like a cleaners or a restaurant, and for payment we'd get food from the restaurant and free cleaning. I wasn't involved in much of that because I was a youngster living at home so I didn't get to cash in. But I got to play.

And as I mentioned, there were no drums in the band. The rhythm guitarist was Toby Kelly, the bass player was Barney Youngblood and the fiddle player was Bob Caruthers. Shortly after, I got my first electric guitar, which was a Charlie Christian model. I wanted that one because by then I was hearing those Benny Goodman Sextet records. I couldn't copy Reinhardt, but I could copy some of Charlie's things and play them in slow motion. So, that little span of my life, from about 15 to 17, was spent playing with those country bands.

Finally, when I graduated, I went to Houston and joined another band with a fiddle player named Buddy Ray. There was also a guitarist who sang, and whose name I can't think of. But we played on a radio station called KTRH. The pattern was very similar because we had a bus and we'd go scour the countryside for dance halls, put out posters, and play on the streets of the local town and try to attract some attention. But at that same time, when we were on the radio at KTRH in Houston, at the Rice Hotel, there was a staff band consisting of an alto player, who doubled

clarinet and flute, and a pianist, and these people were legitimate musicians. They didn't play jazz but they were good musicians and they played a daily program shortly after our country and western program.

Well, as time went by, one day they asked me to come in and play a little guitar part that was written out in a single line, which they wanted to add to a broadcast. So, I did it. It was simple but they were surprised that I could read (laughs), even a little bit. This happened two or three times and finally they asked me if I'd like to be a regular. So I continued to play with my friends in the country band and then go do the radio show with the staff band. And that opened up a new avenue for me to think more about other aspects of music rather than just being locked into the country thing.

This went on for a couple of years. By 1941, I was drafted into the army. I have terrible eyesight, just the worst, and all my friends were going into the service, including my country band friends, and I wanted to be with them. But when I got my exam the army people said they were sorry but they weren't going to take me. I weighed only about 90 pounds, and that, along with my bad eyesight, I guess made them think that there was no point in wasting their time with me. But I talked them into trying to find a band to put me in because I really wanted to go. A few weeks went by and the induction officer called and said there was a brass band, a marching band, in San Antonio at a supply depot that I could join.

So sure enough, I put on my zoot suit (laughs) and got on the train with my Charlie Christian guitar and tiny Gibson amp, and it was so funny because all the fellows on the train with me wanted to know what I was going to do with those in the army.

JC: Did you have to go through basic training?

JW: No. They put me in the marching band originally as a cymbal player. But it was also like a society dance band. They had four saxophones, a trumpet, a trombone, piano, bass and drums and a rhythm guitar player who just read chord charts, which were very stock things. So soon I got a chance to really be a voice in the band even though sometimes it was

just playing melody. It could have been a tune like “Night and Day,” and I’d try to improvise on it. But that got me more into reading and improvising and away from the country and western thing. Well a year later, the band got its orders to go overseas and the army asked me if I wanted a discharge, and by that time I was ready for one. You see, we did have to do chores, like dig, clean out chicken coops, do the marching band thing and so forth.

They gave me an honorable discharge and that’s when I went back to Houston and got involved with my country buddies. By this time, the saxophone player, who’d been on staff at the hotel, had a group of four saxes and four rhythm instruments - no other brass. His name was Les Crumbaker and he was a prominent jobbing musician around Houston. I didn’t play on the staff but I did play six nights a week with his dance band.

Now, while I was doing that, I was hanging out with my buddy Cameron Hill, a guitar player who didn’t read a note but had a super ear. He could play several of Charlie Christian’s solos like “Flying Home” and “Soft Winds,” and we’d get together and make a two-guitar thing happen.

JC: The beginning of the twin guitar sound.

JW: Right. So one day, Buddy Ray and Cameron Hill and I decided to go to Los Angeles. I really loved those guys and loved to hang out with them, so I gave my notice to Les and we all headed to L.A. That was in December of 1943. I remember we used to frequent a place in Hollywood called the Hangover Club where the great jazz piano player Bob Zerke was working. Well, one night I went in and Al Hendrickson was in his Navy uniform sitting in, and literally sitting at one of the tables in front of the bandstand because it was such a tiny place, only big enough for an upright piano. That was my first meeting with Al. And later I worked some with Tommy Duncan up and down the West Coast, and when we were in L.A., Al Hendrickson and Barney Kessel would come to listen to us and we’d get to hang out with them at intermission. I never got to study with Al, but I did study with Barney around 1948, and later in the early 50s, I got to work some studio calls with Al, Barney and Bob Bain,

who were all my heroes and who helped me along the way.

Anyway, a piano player by the name of Millard Kelso, who had played with Bob Wills in Oklahoma, knew that Wills was going up and down the West Coast at that time with his Texas Playboys. This was my first awareness of Bob except for hearing his hit records of “San Antonio Rose” and “Steel Guitar Rag,” which Cameron and I had played together. But we were really taken with Charlie Christian then and had worked out “Good Enough to Keep” and “Flying Home” and “Soft Winds” to where I was able to scratch out a harmony part for myself to Cameron’s playing lead on Charlie’s solos.

Well Millard went to Bob Wills and told him about us and Bob asked him to bring us out. I remember he always addressed us as “The Boys.” Anyway, we went out to this huge ballroom on Santa Monica Pier where Bob must have attracted 5000 people. He let us sit in and we played our Charlie Christian things, and Bob said, “You’re hired!”

JC: You had to be thrilled.

JW: (Laughs) Yeah, we were thrilled. This was in December of 1943, and by 1944, we’d been making trips up and down the California, Oregon and Washington coasts, playing all the dance halls and just having a wonderful time. After we did that a while, Bob told us that we were going to make some records for Columbia. I remember Art Satterly was the A&R man for Columbia at that time. We went to CBS studios in Hollywood and recorded Bob’s things of course, and some little twin guitar harmony things like “Ida Red” and “Take Me Back to Tulsa” and so forth. He also had a trumpet player by the name of Alex Brashear who played wonderful Dixieland and was a good musician. So for this date, he wrote out some introductions that were kind of fugue-type things. Cameron would start with a four-bar thing and maybe I’d answer him in thirds on top of his four bars. Alex also taught us comping licks and background licks to play, and he’d play them with us sometimes. That’s when we recorded a tune that became a pretty big hit, “Roly-Poly.”

You know, my wife Lily grew up in Manhattan. And she and her sister

were died-in-the-wool jazz fans. She used to tell me these stories about going to see Tommy Dorsey and, in fact, she used to work in a little ice cream parlor where Barney Bigard and a lot of the Duke Ellington band would come in, and because of that, at a very early age she was very aware of jazz, much more so than I was. So it was funny that when we first met she said, "Oh, you're the guy who played 'Roly-Poly'" (laughs). But that happened to be the first song we recorded with Bob. Of course we also recorded "Faded Love" and all the rest of the repertoire.

One of the most memorable things, after we'd done a lot of West Coast touring, was when Bob said that we were going to do some theater dates. And in those days, during dances, we'd play every tune twice, back to back. That was just the style back then. Back when I played those house parties with Raymond Jones, we'd play a song as long as we could, stop for applause and then play the same tune again. And Bob did that too. But once we played the melody of the tune, Bob would never set the solos. In other words, you never knew when you were going to play. Bob would point his bow at us and that's how we knew. He'd stand right in front of you and stare right at you, really sweating (laughs), and his term was, "When I point the bow at you, I want you to get it."

JC: Was he a good guy?

JW: He was a wonderful guy! Oh he was so wonderful.

JC: Were you making a decent amount of money?

JW: Yeah, for that time. We only played three nights a week and he paid us \$85 a week and took care of our hotel bills and bought our cowboy uniforms. All we had to buy was food. But as far as the theater dates, Bob said, "Boys, we're going to make some theater appearances from L.A. to Chicago. We're going to end up at the Oriental Theater in Chicago and I want you boys to get two of the best and prettiest guitars you can find." And he gave us a check for \$1100.

JC: That's amazing.

JW: Yes. So we went to Fife and Nichols on Hollywood Boulevard and

told the salesman-owner that we wanted two Gibson L-5s that look alike. He said he was sorry that he didn't have any but that he had two Epiphone Emperors.

He said they weren't electric, but we said that that was okay because we'll get DeArmond pickups. By the way, Cameron and I both had Charlie Christian guitars but they were kind of beat up. Anyway, we gave the guy the check of \$1100 and it covered both the Epiphones.

JC: Did you trade the Charlie Christians?

JW: Oh no, we kept them.

JC: Good for you.

JW: We wouldn't part with them. But let me make a point about Bob being a good guy. We played all up and down the West Coast, and at the end of each gig, Bob would get on the bus with a briefcase full of money. You see, MCA was booking Bob and they'd book him next door to Stan Kenton, or anybody big because Bob would always draw four or five thousand people – always. But he'd get on the bus and say, "Boys, we had a good night." And he'd go down the aisle and put a hundred-dollar bill in each of our pockets.

Isn't that great? And you know, we loved one another. It was all about the music. It wasn't about us. It was family.

JC: It was a great band, too.

JW: Well, I've been told that a lot of people really thought that Bob swung. And I think that came from the fact that Bob loved Bessie Smith and he loved Louis Armstrong. He loved jazz, but he really didn't know that he loved jazz. It just made him feel good, so that's why he liked it.

JC: Western swing has such a marvelous feel to it. Many consider it to be a true form of jazz.

JW: He was such a great man. If a man had a wife and child, he'd see to it that they were never in need. He was a wonderful man.

JC: That's almost atypical of a leader, isn't it?

JW: Yes it is. Anyway, on this theater tour we had a left-handed fiddle player named Joe Holly who loved Stuff Smith. He'd try so hard to emulate Stuff, and when we got to Chicago, he got acquainted with Meade Lux Lewis. In fact, when we stepped off the bus, Meade Lux Lewis and some other musicians were standing on the sidewalk and looked at us and said, "What's this?" "What's this?" I'll never forget, when we opened at the Oriental Theater, Cameron and I would put our amplifiers on chairs so they'd get a better shot at the mike. The bass wasn't amplified but the steel was and we were. The guys in the pit would play the overture and we'd start playing as the curtain opened, and after the opening day of the show, several of them came backstage and said, "My God, what's making all of that racket?" I guess we were loud for the time (laughs).

JC: Were you playing several shows a day?

JW: We played five shows a day. And it was so funny because we were living in the same hotel as Tommy Dorsey's band, and Buddy Rich was with Tommy at that time. So we'd get on the elevator with our cowboy clothes and he'd laugh because he hated cowboy music. Later we became friends and he invited me to play with him, but he didn't like cowboy music.

JC: That's right. When he had to go to the hospital for an emergency operation, they asked him if he was allergic to anything and he said, "Yeah, country music."

JW: (Laughs) Oh, that's funny. But his guitar player got acquainted with us and would come up to the room where Cameron and I were rooming together and we'd all play.

JC: Who would have been with Dorsey then?

JW: You know I don't remember. This was in 1944.

JC: That will be a good trivia question. Who was playing steel for you at

this time?

JW: Noel Boggs. He was so nice and also played standard guitar and was a great talent. And he played beautifully without the aid of pedals.

JC: But it was a fat sound.

JW: Oh yes it was.

JC: How long were you with Bob Wills?

JW: I worked with Bob from December of 1943, all of 1944 and in 1945 I gave notice and went back to Houston because I was so interested in studying. I'd met all these people on the road who inspired me, so I enrolled in the Houston Conservatory of Music. But it was only for a semester because I got a job offer to go back to California and play with Spade Cooley. I really liked Southern California and the fact that I could study with such wonderful players. So when I first got back to L.A., I began studying with Laurindo Almeida.

JC: That had to inspire you as well.

JW: Oh, of course.

JC: And didn't you study with George Van Eps as well?

JW: Yes. It's strange, I loved Charlie Christian so much because I'd gotten to hear him, but it took me a number of years to ever hear Van Eps. And I don't know why that was. As I said, my friend who ran that radio station played Eddie Lang, Carl Kress and Christian but never anything by Van Eps. Many years later, I think in 1967 when Lily and I settled in L.A. for good, I studied with Van Eps and I also got to work in the studios, sitting across from Allan Reuss and thinking to myself, "Oh my God, how am I going to get through this?" Allan could play any fretted instrument. He could play anything. If they wanted him to play bouzouki, or whatever, he could play it and was such a superb musician. I would be sitting across from him, and so totally aware of just how great he was and quaking in my shoes to be there (laughs).

JC: What did you study with Laurindo?

JW: Just the classical and Brazilian literature. He was so wonderful.

JC: Did you already have a classical guitar?

JW: No, Laurindo let me have one, a Rodriguez. He offered to sell it to me but something happened where I put away the classical for a number of years.

JC: Were you a left or right knee player?

JW: (Laughs) When I studied with Laurindo I held the guitar properly because he wouldn't let me play on the right knee, but when I play my Borys at home it's the right knee.

JC: How did you get hooked up with Red Norvo?

JW: In the early 50s, my dear friend, Bill Dillard, Red's guitarist, was killed in a fire. Red knew that we were close and called and asked if I'd like to take a shot at it. I said that I'd try, so I joined Red and was with him from 1956 until 1965.

JC: This was after Tal had worked with him.

JW: That's right. And I don't know who was in between Tal and Bill but I must say that Bill was an impeccable guitarist. He had a wonderful harmonic sense and a superb attack as if he were playing piano.

JC: Would that he were better known.

JW: Oh yes, that's a shame. He did make at least one album I know of with Red and it's great. He was from Northern California and came to L.A. to work with various people; one was a lady pianist who was very good, Joyce Collins. Somehow Bill and I made contact and we'd just hang out and play things. He'd write things and we'd try them out and just enjoy each other. But he went to Australia with Red, and when he came back, it was on a Friday and he called and said that he was too tired to get together and wanted to try for Monday. It was on Sunday that he was

killed in the fire. I got the call from Red almost immediately because he knew Bill and I were such good friends.

JC: Norvo was always such a hip player and he used so many great guitarists. Besides you, I can think of Mundell, Tal, Jimmy Raney and, of course, Bill Dillard. Was there any significant difference in the quintet with Norvo when you worked with him?

JW: You know, the quintet was quite unlike what happened with Jimmy Raney and Tal in that my forte was keeping time. I think our quintet was more traditional swing, but I don't quite know how to describe it.

JC: Was Red Mitchell, Red Kelly or Charlie Mingus playing bass with you and Norvo?

JW: It was Eugene Wright.

JC: No kidding? He was with Brubeck, Paul Desmond and Joe Morello later on.

JW: That's right. When I joined Red it was the trio and Gene soon went to San Francisco to join Brubeck and was replaced by Bob Carter for a short time. Then Red decided to take the trio to Las Vegas to open the Tropicana Hotel and Bob wanted to go back to New York, so Red asked me if I knew of a bassist we'd both like, and I suggested Red Wooten. He joined, and we went to the Tropicana for a month, took a couple of weeks off and went back for an extended period of time.

Then Red got a call from Sinatra to go to the Sands, so he decided to add drums and a horn to make it a quintet. That's when we added Jerry Dodgion and John Markham on drums. The upshot of the quintet was that from 1957 to 65, we worked intermittently with Sinatra, and even went to Australia and recorded with him there.

JC: That's become a very big CD. I saw a big push on it no more than a year ago.

JW: It's on Blue Note. It first appeared on Bravura and now it's on Blue Note.

JC: How did you first get studio work?

JW: I did that actually before I joined Red. When I came back from the Bob Wills tour I'd learned about Laurindo Almeida who had joined the Stan Kenton orchestra, and I knew the bass player Gene Englund who also played tuba on a tour with Kenton. Anyway, Gene told me that Laurindo was teaching, and by that time I was interested in the classical guitar, so I studied with Laurindo for about a year and he was so helpful. He took me to my first studio gig. We recorded a complete motion picture score with Laurindo on classical guitar, me six-string electric and Bob Bain on both six-string electric and six-string bass guitar. The three of us recorded the entire score. I can't remember the name of the film precisely but it was something like The Littlest Outlaw, and I can't remember the conductor.

(Note: The film was indeed "The Littlest Outlaw," a Disney film shot in 1955. The score was written by William Lava.)

Anyway, I studied with Laurindo and he took a liking to me, I don't know why (laughs), but he put me on some studio dates, some motion picture dates, where I played the classical guitar, and as I mentioned, we did this complete score where I played electric guitar. And that sort of opened the door for me where I got to work with Al Hendrickson, Bobby Bain and Allan Reuss, and that was all before I joined Red. In the meantime, I'd gotten acquainted with Red through Bill Dillard. I'd made a record with a little quintet, which really wasn't jazz, but it was accordion, guitar, clarinet, drums and bass. That was the Jimmy Wyble Quintet.

JC: I think that was 1953.

JW: Did you run across it?

JC: Yes I did. Sounds like Van Damme's group.

JW: Sort of, but not as good (laughs). Anyway, that opened the door for me to do a little studio work.

JC: And you'd recorded some sides with Barney Kessel.

JW: I'd gotten acquainted with Barney when I was doing the Spade Cooley thing. About that time Barney and I did a thing with five guitars, a string section and a harp for Gordie Hormel, one of the Hormel heirs. He used five voices on it and it was a well-produced thing. So on guitars, it was Barney, me, Tony Rizzi, Bob Bain and Bobby Gibbons.

JC: Right. Gibbons also did the "Guitars Incorporated" records with Al Hendrickson, Howard Roberts and Bill Pitman.

JW: Oh, you know, I got to work with Bill. Bill Pitman was so nice to me. We worked several shows, including The Phyllis Diller Show that was conducted by Jack Elliot with Bill Ferguson doing the writing, and Bill was the other guitarist. The upshot of all of this is that everything has been a guitar lesson. I've been so fortunate.

JC: What a great quote. You did a lot of TV work, didn't you?

JW: Yes, a lot with a gentleman called George Wilde, a conductor and arranger, and of course this was all after I'd left Red, who I stayed with until 1965. And it was during that time, from '56 to '65, I worked with Sinatra and recorded with him, and we also worked with Benny Goodman.

JC: Which guitar were you playing then?

JW: At the time I joined Red I was playing my Charlie Christian.

JC: Again.

JW: And I had a little brown Gibson amp, the GA 150 or GA 50, something like that, but as things progressed with the quintet I had to get an amp that would cover more territory, so I went to Ampeg and got the Fountain of Sound from Everett Hull, the creator of Ampeg. As I mentioned, my wife grew up in Manhattan and took me everywhere. I'd have never found my way around. She was a very hip young lady.

JC: Art Ryerson, the great New York session player, went to Everett Hull and got him to create amps that would be appropriate for all the mainstream studio guitarists in New York. They called themselves The

Manhattan Guitar Club, which was a great idea because they'd all have amps waiting for them in the studios. By the way, it was Johnny Smith who helped develop the Fountain of Sound amp. He said he was inspired by Dizzy's horn.

JW: Yes, that's right. Great idea, too.

JC: I found a wonderful picture of you holding a blonde Fender Esquire, and it said it was first Fender six-string being introduced to the public. That was when you were with Spade Cooley's band. Do you remember that? The ad said it was selling for \$139.95 .

JW: Oh yes. Leo Fender came to the ballroom and gave me a guitar and amp and gave a steel guitar and amp to Neil Boggs. Leo was so great. Anyway, I had been doing a little studio work before I'd joined Red and it was because of him that I got to work with Frank and Benny Goodman.

JC: Did you get along with Sinatra?

JW: Oh of course, of course.

JC: I can't imagine this happening to you, but any time I interview someone who worked with Goodman, I always ask if he got "The Ray."

JW: Well, here's what happened with me and Benny. When I joined Benny, I knew about all of the guitarists who'd been with him, and I admired them so much, and I thought to myself that I couldn't fill those boots (laughs). So, when Red and I joined Benny I got the book that I had to deal with and I practiced that sucker like you wouldn't believe. It was not a rhythm kind of playing. The front line consisted of one trumpet, a trombone, Jerry Dodgion on alto and Flip Phillips on tenor. So the guitar was an integral part of the ensemble.

I could seldom play more than six bars of rhythm. It just didn't work. I had to be ready to jump in and play a line. Anyway, as I mentioned, to prepare myself, I'd go to a 12 o'clock rehearsal at ten in the morning, and there would be Benny. He'd be there practicing. He'd say, "Good morning, what are you doing here?" And I'd say, "I'm going to practice,"

and I'd take my book and go somewhere to practice. So, that was my whole approach to being with Benny and to being with Red. I'd try to do the bottom line, so to speak, and Benny seemed to appreciate that.

When we came back from Europe we went into Basin Street East where we worked for quite a long time. And when we closed, Benny's manager called me and said, "Benny appreciates your attitude and wants to give you a bonus." And he gave me a check for quite a bit of money. One of the things that happened after that, after touring Canada and L.A., on a plane flight, Benny's manager told me that Benny wanted to see me. So I went back and sat next to him and he said, "You know, Jimmy, I could really help you. If you stay in New York I'll put you on retainer." I don't think it was my playing as much as it was my attitude about the music. I was so honored, but I must tell you that I'd bonded with Red Norvo for many reasons and I told Benny that I just couldn't leave Red. And when I finally did leave Red, it wasn't to go with someone else. I left him to stay in L.A. and freelance.

I thought that that would be the end of my association with Benny, but I worked with him for two years thereafter. He called me again and again. I did one tour with him, just with the sextet and the Julliard String Quartet. They did half the program with Benny and the sextet was the other half. And during the two years I worked with him he had Russ Freeman on piano, then John Bunch, then Marian McPartland. So I got to be around all those wonderful people.

Of course I worked with Benny initially as part of the Red Norvo group, but thereafter, he'd call me simply because he wanted me. Red was also called by Benny. So when Benny would call, it would be for Red and me.

JC: Tell me about your books.

JW: The first one is the Art of Two-Line Improvisation, which I did on classical guitar. It was all improvised. First, I wrote out some scales in the key of C, with an altered third and a plus four and a plus five. And then I wrote the same scale on top of it, descending. So as the bottom ascended, I wrote the same scale descending. I did this quite

extensively. After fooling with this and practicing the scales, I began working out odd fingerings that I would use in improvising. The record with it is called Etudes. Since then, I've recorded some from that book and some from a book called Concepts for Classical Guitar and Jazz Guitar. It's another Mel Bay publication. And then I did one with a student called Jeff Hirschman called Jazz Duets, where I'd play two voices and he'd play two voices. So the entire book is four voices played by two guitars.

JC: Did this stem from your pioneering the wonderful twin-guitar sound with Wills?

JW: Oh yeah. That's definitely a big part of it. Recently, Bill Bay sent me a flier of a book called The Jimmy Wyble Solo Collection in which I play a standard tune, "Prelude To A Kiss" on my electric guitar, using two voices, and then I play a series of five compositions by a late friend of mine, which are written in the same style.

JC: I was reading some of what so many great players said about you in "The Art of Two-Line Improvisation." It's so complimentary.

JW: All of my life I've been blessed with the people I've sat next to. They've helped me learn and were so encouraging in so many ways. I owe a lot to so many people .

JC: I played your Etudes CD for a guitarist friend in Tulsa the other day who commented on what Joe Diorio said about learning from you and that he could hear it in Diorio's playing.

JW: My goodness, that's so nice. You know, I improvised that stuff. I'd sketch out a general idea. I had friends who had a recording studio and I went in and would follow the sketch but improvise on it. And finally, it came to the point where I had it notated. I was teaching at GIT at that time, when Howard Roberts first opened it. Ron Eschete was there and Ron Benson, Howard of course and Joe Diorio. The etudes were just lying there and Joe said he'd like to help me do something with them, but I didn't know what to do. The record company has long been out of business.

JC: But they are studies, aren't they?

JW: Yes they are studies really. I practiced those contrapuntal scales and got to the point where I could do something melodically and rhythmically with them but it was all a shot in the dark.

JC: Ted Greene said, "When people ask me to describe this music, one way I'm fond of is: George Van Eps meets Bartok and they visit T. Monk to discuss the music of J.S. Bach and a certain Mr. Gershwin."

JW: Oh, that's so nice. I really appreciate what Ted said, and what Joe said as well.

JC: Did Ted ever study with you?

JW: No, I should study with him (laughs).

JC: I'll tell him that. He'll love it. David Oakes did a great job with these recordings.

JW: Let me tell you about David. He's a very young man who was friends with Ron Benson and a lot of people at GIT many years ago. And when I went to Tommy Tedesco's wake, this young man came up to me and said he'd really like to record my material. I said that it was fine with me and sent him a tape. He checked the first edition, which I knew was a mess. Sometimes half of an etude was on another page and so on. But he redid the whole book and recorded it and did a marvelous job.

JC: I agree with you. He's tremendous.

JW: He's strictly a classical player. He sent me tapes of him doing some classical things with a full orchestra that were fabulous.

JC: So we'll no doubt be hearing from him.

JW: Oh yeah. David is teaching at USC in the classical guitar department. So there again, I was really blessed that he took an interest in me and the book. Actually with the etudes I've found more classical players study them than jazz players. Sid Jacobs has phenomenal right

hand technique, and Ron Berman too. I'd call them legitimate classical players as well as jazz players. But the etudes move in such a strange manner, so I think anyone would have a tussle with them unless you spend a lot of time practicing those altered scales.

JC: Well, I admire them. They're brilliant.

JW: Oh thank you.

JC: Here's a change of pace; can you tell me about working with the Sons of the Pioneers? Were you on the road with them?

JW: No, I was never on the road with them but I recorded with them and made some movies with them and Spade Cooley.

JC: Were Roy Rogers and Ken Curtis in the group then?

JW: The movie was starring Roy Rogers, and the Sons of the Pioneers were in it. Spade Cooley was in it and I was part of Spade's band. And from hanging out, they later invited me to do a record date with them.

JC: And Gene Autry?

JW: Yes, with him too, and Charles Starrett. I made eight movies with him.

JC: You were actually in the films?

JW: Yes, in the films and on the soundtracks. They dressed me up like a cowboy and there I was (laughs).

JC: I'll have to look for those, too (laughs). You must have known two other great country guitarists, Roy Lanham and Jimmy Bryant.

JW: Oh my, both of them are dear friends of mine. Jimmy Bryant and I were in L.A. at the same time and we'd often get together, but I can't remember that we ever played together except maybe for some little jam sessions. But we never got a chance to record together. He died of lung cancer.

JC: I saw an item where your name is linked with the Sons of the Pioneers, Barney Kessel, Glen Campbell and Roy Lanham.

JW: I think there was a time when we were all on the same show. I'm not positive but I do remember being with Glen and Barney Kessel.

JC: Could it have been a "Kraft Music Hall?"

JW: You know, I did a Kraft Music Hall, perhaps that was it.

JC: I read in a bio on you that you gave lessons to Duane Eddy.

JW: Not to my knowledge (laughs). It could be.

JC: Here's how the item reads: "Jimmy Wyble was giving guitar lessons to a young teenager named Duane Eddy and undoubtedly contributing to Duane's empathy with jazz...." and it goes on .

JW: Oh, that's wonderful. You know sometimes my wife will say Jimmy, do you remember doing this, or doing that? And I must confess that after all these years, I just can't recall everything (laughs).

JC: How about Steve Lukather?

JW: Yes, I did teach Steve. I had a wonderful experience with him. His mother brought him to me when I guess he was about fourteen. This fellow was so full of energy that the first thing I tried to do was teach him to read. And he'd start out sitting on the back of the chair, quite comfortably, and before we'd gotten two bars, he was on the edge of the chair and improvising (laughs). And he could really improvise and had great imagination. He went on to make a ton of money (laughs).

JC: Didn't you teach Howard Alden as well?

JW: Yes I did. His uncle called me, although I don't remember what year it was, but he told me that Howard had been playing banjo and wanted to switch to guitar. So he came to me and he was a very quiet young man who never asked any questions but he immediately absorbed everything I'd give him. I certainly realized that I didn't have to start at the beginning

with him so I brought in some Tal Farlow solos and some other solos by other guitarists that I'd acquired, and we'd talk about different ways to play them. We'd talk about playing an entire solo in a completely different position. Because of the nature of the instrument, the guitar is hard. But his talent was apparent from day one.

JC: Can we talk about some of the other great country players, like Merle Travis?

JW: I knew him very well, but there again, we never played together. We hung out together and I admired him so much.

JC: Was this in L.A.?

JW: Yes, that's where we'd hang.

JC: Hank Garland?

JW: Never knew him, but what a fantastic player, in the style of Tal Farlow.

JC: Garland influenced George Benson.

JW: That's right. Isn't that something?

JC: Joe Maphis.

JW: He was playing a double-neck standard guitar and had all kinds of technique - all kinds of technique.

JC: Was he playing a Moserite?

JW: Yes, he developed and designed that thing.

JC: Did you ever do any Nashville sessions?

JW: No, never did, but I played Nashville one time with Bob Wills and they wouldn't let the drummer play, and Bob insisted that he play, so the compromise was that he play behind the curtain.

JC: That sounds like the Opry.

JW: It was the Grand Ol' Opry. Isn't that funny?

JC: He was probably the first drummer to ever play the Opry.

JW: Yes he was.

JC: To me, both Lenny Breau and Jerry Reed made the nylon string guitar sound so funky, or down to earth. They got such a hip sound out of it. Do you like that sound?

JW: Of course. I worked The Jerry Reed Show, which was a summer replacement for Glen Campbell's show. Paul Yandell was there too, from Nashville. But Jerry Reed just plays so great.

JC: He's very clever and I think a great guitar composer.

JW: And Paul Yandell plays great too. The only guest I remember from that show was Chet Atkins. But it was in the 1970s.

JC: Which guitar did you use on that show?

JW: I played my Fender, an old Telecaster that Leo Fender gave me. I kept it many years and didn't sell it until I went on the road with Red Norvo. I sold a Stratocaster later on to Barry Zweig for \$125, who sold it later for \$2000 (laughs). And as I mentioned earlier, when I was with Red I found I needed something other than my Charlie Christian and that little GA-50 Gibson amp. The Charlie Christian was noisy so I went to a Guild X-500 with an Ampeg amp. Then Red added drums and alto so I had to get a Fountain of Sound because my Ampeg was the smallest one they made. And I found myself in situations where Red and others were writing way up high and I needed a cutaway and that Guild was superb. It really was. It was an archtop with two pickups.

JC: Did the Ampeg have reverb?

JW: Oh yes. Remember it had those four legs, and the speaker would point at the ceiling?

JC: Oh yeah, and I'll bet that's a relic worth a few bucks now, too. And I'm

surprised Barry would tell you about selling the Strat for so much (laughs).

JW: (Laughs) Oh I was happy for him. I really was.

JC: I've seen your name linked with Standell. I'm assuming you used one of their amplifiers.

JW: Yes, I used one of theirs one time and it was an absolutely marvelous amp, but at the time I couldn't afford it (laughs), and I had to let it go back. It was just one of those times, as you well know, for most musicians. It's like the panic.

JC: Were you influenced at all by George Barnes?

JW: Yeah, of course. I loved George Barnes. He was absolutely sensational. I didn't know him, or really any of the New York guitar players.

JC: You know Mundell Lowe though, who worked both coasts.

JW: I do know Mundell and we're close friends. He did quite a few movie scores when he first came to L.A., and on one of them, he used most of the Five Guitars group we had with Tony Rizzi. He just conducted that day but he did tell us that he was going to overdub some things with us.

JC: Well Mundell, because of his Mississippi roots, was close to another great player, Lloyd Ellis, and I wonder if you knew him.

JW: I did know Lloyd very well. This is so strange that you mention him because when I was about 15, Lloyd Ellis and a good buddy hitchhiked into Port Arthur. His buddy was a steel guitar player who played a little six-string lap steel. They carried their amps hitchhiking into Port Arthur and somehow I met them almost immediately because I was playing around town. Well, they were broke, and I told my dad. And my dad went out and got the two of them a room in a little two-dollar hotel. They were in town just a short time but we became immediate good buddies and later on, out here, Lloyd joined Red Norvo and they worked at Circus Circus in Vegas for a number of years with Monk Montgomery.

JC: I had no idea. That's a great story.

JW: Yeah. Then Lloyd finally went back to New Orleans where he became ill and, sadly, passed away.

JC: How about the newer players? What do you think of Martin Taylor?

JW: Oh yes indeed! Oh my God, he's great. Just phenomenal. You know the thing to me that's so impressive about today's guitarists is the technique they all seem to have. And I think to myself, how did they get that way? Because I could never play fast. When you hear these players today, they just burn it down – burn it down.

JC: Now c'mon, you had to play fast with Red and Benny.

JW: Yeah, I did that, but I was forced to. I never really thought that way.

JC: Well, there's fast, then there's fast with something to say.

JW: That's true indeed.

JC: Besides, I think your overall contribution is very important, and it's a real tribute from Bill Bay that he's publishing your works and producing these books.

JW: Do me a favor. Bill has been working on my last endeavor, and you have the CD, which as I said is going to be called The Jimmy Wyble Solo Collection. Ask him to hurry it up (laughs).

JC (Laughs) I'll do that. When I heard your version of "Prelude to a Kiss" I just couldn't get over it.

JW: Thank you. It's an example of how two voices or a two-line approach might interpret a tune. You could do that same thing endlessly, infinitely with two voices and I wrote two or three examples, but I settled on that one because the more I would fool with things the more it began to sound academic.

JC: It's so impressive to me that so much of that came from your roots and early days of pioneering the twin guitar sound.

JW: Well it's true. That was a wonderful experience. It was a time when I just played the guitar and didn't think about two-five-ones. And I had no thought of playing inside or outside or upside down. I'd just play and have fun. When I joined Red, I had all these people over my shoulder, like Mundell Lowe, Tal Farlow and Jimmy Raney. And if it weren't for Red, I wouldn't have gotten on the bandstand (laughs).

JC: From 1967 to 1983 you were in the studios. Can we talk about some of your more memorable recording sessions? You played on many famous films, for instance, "Ocean's Eleven," again with Sinatra.

JW: Oh yes. And I liked doing The Wild Bunch. I don't remember all the guitarists on that one but more than likely it was with Al Hendrickson and Bobby Gibbons. And I did an album called Forward Look with Red Norvo. And Red Norvo Plays the Blues with Helen Humes .

I also remember being at the Sands in Vegas. Frank always liked to have Red in the lounge when he was in the big room. It was during one of those times when Eydie Gorme was in Vegas. Well, they decided to do an album and use the Red Norvo Quintet integrated with their big orchestra. So we recorded with this huge orchestra in their convention center, which had been newly completed, and it had a wonderful sound. Don Costa wrote and conducted. There's another gentleman who scared the daylights out of me because not only did he write and compose, but he played great guitar. He would often times come and sit by me when we recorded and I'd get so uptight (laughs). And he'd say to me, "Jimmy, I'm so glad we don't have one of those New York bangers." (Laughs) I guess I was playing very quietly. So I guess there were some guitarists in New York that were playing too aggressively, or maybe he was just trying to be nice (laughs).

JC: Tell me about the Borys.

JW: I got the Borys in a very strange way. I got a call from someone, I can't recall the name, but they were a friend of Barry Galbraith's. He said that he'd send me a Borys to see if I liked it. I got it, and it was the Barry Galbraith model. It was designed by Jimmy D'Aquisto and Roger Borys;

the two of them worked together on it. I've never played it except at home and on the recordings of the etudes that you heard. Since then, I've acquired another Borys with a carved top and a built in classic 1957 humbucking pickup. Roger copied my old 1928 L-5. He copied the neck and the bracing and it's the same kind of box but it's a cutaway. So, I've had both Borys since 1983 and I've never played professionally with either of them. But Southern California is loaded with Borys players, Sid Jacobs, for one.

JC: Emily Remler had one as well.

JW: Right. I think Herb Ellis introduced her to that guitar.

JC: I've seen Joe Pass with one.

JW: Yes, Roger even made him a classical guitar that he made an album with.

JC: Which do you pick up when you're in the living room?

JW: The first one, the B-120. It's a smaller box and not as deep. The copy of the L-5 is deep and has a longer scale. I don't really practice much and don't work on repertoire. I just kind of do ridiculous things.

JC: (Laughs) Get outa here. I heard those ridiculous things. They're dynamite.

JW: (Laughs) Well, I just amuse myself.

JC: Jimmy, you've been terrific to talk to and I appreciate your giving me so much time. I know our readers are going to be eager to find your books and recordings and find out more about you.

JW: Jim, I'm really honored. As I said, it's all been a guitar lesson.