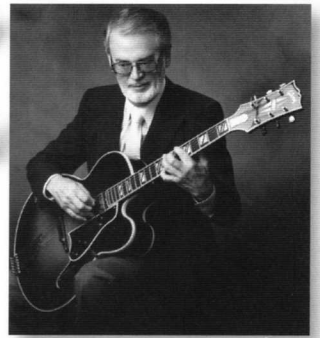


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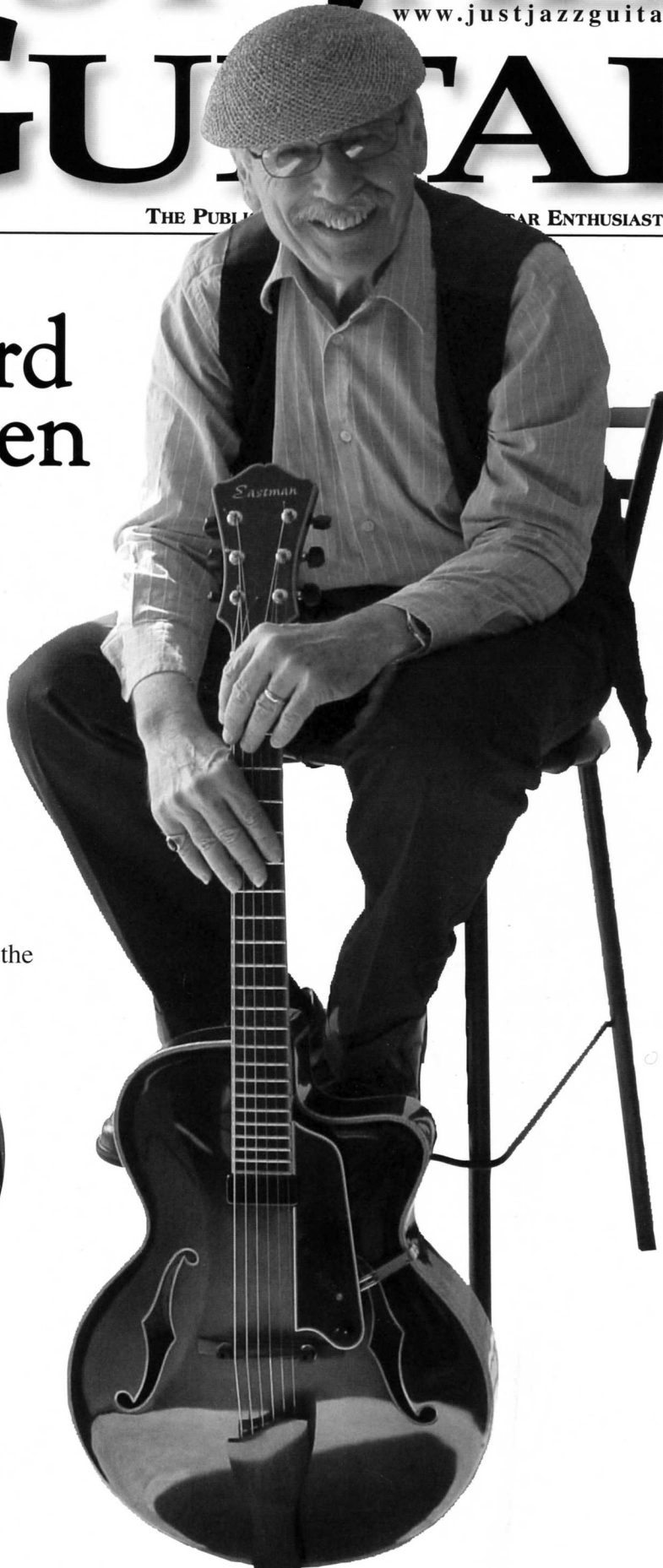


John Jorgenson takes the
Listening Test



Book Excerpt

Jimmy Wyble's
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All Work IS All Play For Howard Morgen

By John Huntley

It's the pure enthusiasm that you sense first. To watch Howard Morgen play guitar is to see a man enamored with the musical journey. He's going after "the sound" and, if you're lucky enough to be there, the music you'll hear is always melodic, precise, and beautiful. After a 50-plus-year career of teaching, publishing books, writing magazine columns, and having his fretboard prowess admired by jazz guitar royalty, Howard still exudes the joy of the proverbial kid in the candy store when he's exercising his craft. As his thousands of students can attest to, his enthusiasm is contagious.

Born and raised on Long Island, New York, Howard's first exposure to the guitar was at a drama camp he attended after grammar school. "There was this girl who had a guitar leaning against a wall. I picked up the guitar (not the girl) and that was it for me," he remembers with a grin. After that he bought his first guitar, started taking lessons and listening to the folk music that was starting to become popular. "Burl Ives and Josh White were my early influences. But that musical interest did not last very long after I met the 'jazz crowd' at school," he recalls.

Two friends were of particular influence. One was Mike Stoller, who, along with his partner Jerry Leiber, later wrote many of Elvis Presley's big hits and the Broadway musical *Smokey Joe's Café*. "Mike was into jazz and taught me how to say 'Man' with conviction," Howard laughs. "Another friend of mine then was Jordan Getz, a cousin of Stan Getz. He brought me to see Stan play at a club called The Three Deuces in New York City. At first all I heard was a cacophony, and then toward the end of the night, Stan played "I've Got You Under My Skin," and I was permanently hooked...things clicked. Stan Getz was such a great melodist, and the music made sense to me in a way it hadn't before. High school for me was weekend jam sessions, occasional gigs, and summers spent playing in the Catskills – not much time for academics."

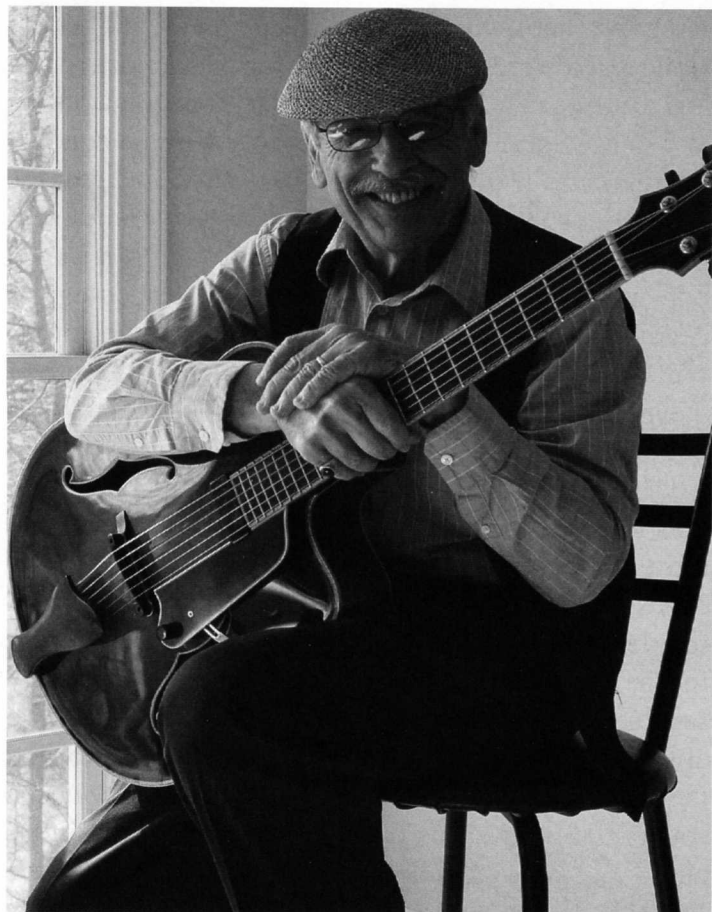
After an unhappy year at college as an eco major, Howard left home, joined a trio, went on the road and married his wife, Estelle, a lyric soprano and a graduate of the Juilliard School. "We just celebrated our

52nd anniversary. I couldn't have done what I did without Estelle's help and support. I've taken advantage of her musical ear, too...singers are always looking for the melodic line, and that's great to keep in mind for guitarists who can occasionally get lost in the reharmonization."

Back in school, this time as a music major at Queen's College, Howard still made time for gigs at local clubs and also began teaching. "I got a part-time job working at Sammy Spear's music shop. Spear was the conductor for *The Jackie Gleason Show*. Well, one day the guitar teacher didn't show up and Sammy said 'Howard, you're the teacher today.' Teaching, it turned out, was a natural fit. His teaching methodology is geared toward building an organic understanding of the fretboard. "The guitar has unique problems. Because of the instrument's irregular tuning it's really hard to visualize harmonic relationships," Howard says. Additionally, he sees the habit of viewing chord symbols as isolated "grips" as being a big hurdle for guitarists. His ability to break down these concepts into hands-on examples provides his students with the best of both the theoretical and practical worlds. "I'm going for the 'Eureka' moment with my students - when they see the fretboard in a way they hadn't before. I've always taught with the idea of getting students to find their own voice." Howard's teaching talents have been sought out by students from a wide spectrum of influences and backgrounds, including Paul Simon, Edie Brickel, Carly Simon, Christine Lavin and Tom Paxton.

Howard's resume of teaching positions at schools and clinics is impressive. In 1978, he started teaching at the Manhattan School of Music. He has also been a guest artist/teacher at the National Guitar Summer Workshop in Connecticut, and on the faculty of the Jazz Studies Program at the C.W. Post Campus of Long Island University. In 1984, Howard joined the faculty at the New School's Guitar Study Center in New York City, where the department director, Fred Winston, once wrote of Howard: "...as much as the course descriptions reveal about the depth and organization of Howard's pedagogy, they do not illuminate the passion, energy, commitment and humor he brings to the classroom." Howard enjoyed the different feeling classroom teaching brought him. "With private teaching, you build a unique relationship with each student," Howard

says. "You know a student's strengths and weaknesses. But with a class, it's more like playing to an audience. You have to keep this group of people with diverse levels of knowledge engaged and entertained. I've found, though, that the same concept can have different impacts on different levels of players--that it can create insights on many levels."



Given his love of teaching, it was a natural step to get his ideas and arrangements into print. In fact, his first book was published in 1964. But it was his *Concepts: Arranging for Fingerstyle Guitar* that brought Howard's unique insights to a wider audience even though it took almost two decades to get it into print. "The first publisher I submitted it to back in 1966 said it was too far ahead of guitar players who don't want to read. So back in the drawer it went." The book was eventually published by Big Three in 1981. In 1983, Jim Ferguson of *Guitar Player* magazine came upon Howard's books, *Preparations* and *Concepts* and gave them an excellent writeup. Having his books raved about on an international stage gave Howard a whole new audience. "That really started things moving again," Howard said. His authorship eventually grew to 16 books, most of which are still in print.

Each of Howard's books displays his keen sensitivity

to the music he is arranging. "The Ellington book is arranged to be more orchestral," Howard says about his *The Ellington Collection for Solo Guitar*. Or pick any tune on the CD "Howard Morgen Plays Gershwin" from *The Gershwin Collection For Solo Guitar* and you'll hear the intimate, piano-like nature of those arrangements. "I learn a lot by arranging," Howard says. "I look at arranging like sculpting. I have to find what to leave out and what to leave in."

The early 1980s proved to be a turning-point in Howard's career, bringing his music and teachings to a world-wide audience. He was approached to write an article for the inaugural issue of *Guitar World*. He enjoyed the experience and began writing a fingerstyle jazz column regularly for that magazine until 1985. After Lenny Breau's untimely death, Chet Atkins took over Lenny's fingerstyle column in *Guitar Player*. And when Chet retired a few years later, editor Jim Ferguson asked Howard to take over the column. From 1988 to 1992, Howard's articles and arrangements appeared in that magazine, including a Sound Page recording "Christmas Images" and a three-issue Master Series article with Ferguson called "All About Chord Progressions."

And from there, Howard started his *Insights* column for *Fingerstyle Guitar* magazine in 1995. As in his one-to-one teaching, Howard's columns grappled with the unique issues presented to guitarists. "I've worked through these challenges myself and wanted to relate what I had learned," he says. Since the mid-1990s, Howard has been a contributor to *Just Jazz Guitar* magazine. "Just Jazz Guitar readers are sophisticated in their understanding and it's a delight to arrange for people with this level of knowledge," Howard says.

One of the many treats for Howard's students is, of course, to hear him play. His playing is at once thoughtfully melodic and rhythmically driving. None other than guitar master George Van Eps wrote: "Listening to Howard Morgen play ... is a most delightful musical experience. His reharmonizations of standards are very refreshing, full of surprises, but never rude to the ear. Howard is an accomplished, inspired musician and a truly great guitarist."

Bill Wurtzel, a top-notch guitarist in his own right and Howard's long-time playing partner, agrees. "Howard and I have played all kinds of gigs and workshops

together over the years, and the musical interplay between us was always great. I picked up so much from his playing," recounts Bill. "I'm mostly an improviser and to have Howard's seven-string behind me with those walking bass lines was very inspirational." Bill, whose current gigs include weekly appearances at Manhattan's Tokyo Pop club with other guitar luminaries, recalls Howard's rhythm work as being impeccable: "Howard always has a deep groove going; he really knows how to accompany a soloist. And then he'd do his solo chord-melody arrangements...just beautiful stuff. Nobody plays like Howard. And of course we always had lots of laughs together," Bill concludes.

Howard, too, remembers a unique exchange between their playing styles: "Bill's an extremely artistic guy and I always enjoy playing with him because he frees me up. So much of my career has been about arranging and writing, where you have to really focus on being precise. Playing with Bill allowed me to loosen up and improvise more. Bill really puts together musical ideas in fresh ways and that would spur me on," remembers Howard.

Howard is also known for his mastery of the seven-string guitar. "My first seven-string was the Gretsch Van Eps model back in 1969," he recalls. "I had already been developing a contrapuntal playing style, but having the low A of the seven-string allowed me a greater range." He has great respect for the creativity and musicianship of current seven-string players: "Guys like Howard Alden, Fred Fried, Steve Herberman and Bill Solley never overplay the seven-string, and it's always about the music. There are so many great players these days."

Howard's seven-string collection has also included a custom archtop by Connecticut luthier Carl Barney, and a custom solid-body D'Aquisto with tone chambers. Lately, he's focused much attention on Jimmy Foster's seven-string models. "I have two Foster Tele-style solid-bodies – one has a Tom Doyle split pickup, which allows me to use an effect on the top five strings while keeping the bass strings dry," Howard says. "The other one has a Tom Doyle neck pickup and a Mike Christian piezo pickup, which give the guitar a unique acoustic quality." Both of those guitars were used exclusively on Howard's Gershwin CD. He also has a Foster 17inch blonde archtop and 17inch tobacco-colored flat top with an arched back, both of which

Howard sings the praises of. "I love all my Foster children," he laughs.

Importantly, Howard has not allowed the instrument to pigeon-hole him artistically. "The seven-string can get a little heavy, a little muddy at times, and I find the biggest joy of arranging and playing is overcoming an instrument's limitations...creating more from less." With that in mind, these days Howard is just as apt to pick up his 6-string Eastman Uptown model. "It sounds just like an old Gibson. The Eastman is just a marvelous guitar." It's worth noting, also, that all of Howard's books are written and arranged for six-string guitar.

Despite having recently been diagnosed with acute leukemia, Howard keeps working. "It all happened so fast. I went right into the hospital when they diagnosed it. I had one more chapter to finish for my new book and so my son, Gary, came down and we pounded out the last chapter on his laptop from my hospital room." Thankfully, Howard made it through treatment well and is in good spirits. "I'm in remission now and feel good," he says. The new book, *Through Chord-Melody and Beyond*, has been a labor of love for Howard. "It took me over four years to write this book. I think of it as a comprehensive overview of solo styles for jazz guitar, a sourcebook and a guidebook, with references in each chapter for further study." Because of his health, Howard was unsure at the time whether he would be able to record the accompanying CD, and so Howard Alden gladly accepted the job. "I can't think of anyone I'd rather have recording my work," Howard Morgen says. The book and CD are due out toward the end of 2007 through Alfred Music.

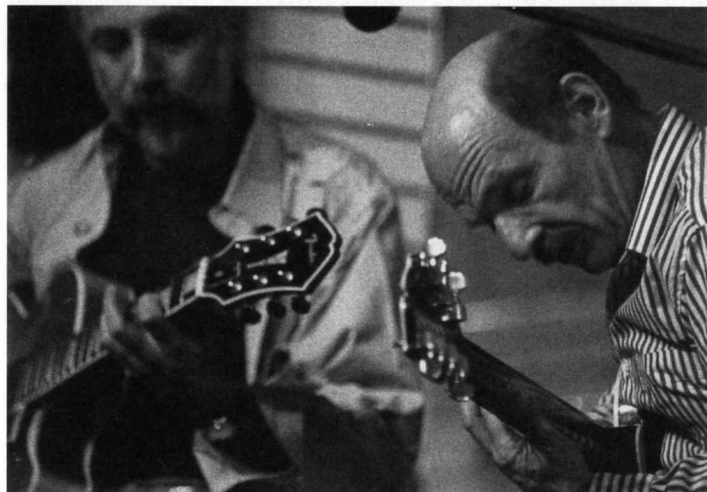
A Conversation With Howard

JH: Your career as a guitarist and teacher has spanned over 50 years. When you were starting out did you always see the guitar as a career for you?

Howard: I've always been in love with the guitar since I first picked it up – but I was constantly told by my parents that I could never make a decent enough living with it to support a family. My father, a dentist, was horrified at the thought that his son might become a guitarist. In fact, when I was in trouble in a math class in high school, my mother went to the school and pleaded with the instructor to pass me in the course. She said, "Do you want him to spend the rest of his life in a bar with a piece of wood?"

JH: When you were coming up there wasn't the plethora of instructional materials for guitarists that there is now. Were there any players or instructors that gave you specific insights?

Howard: Like many guitarists in those days, I had very little if any formal training in music. My first teacher seemed more interested in selling me a guitar, an amp and eventually a tremolo than imparting information, insights or inspiration. Learning often consisted of a little here, a little there, and lots of un-learning along the way. Guitar was not considered a legitimate instrument and wasn't taught in the colleges. Ironically, back in the late 1970s I taught a fingerboard harmony course at the Manhattan School of Music, a college that would not have accepted me as a guitar student in the mid 1950s! It's really a great credit to their enormous talent that players like Charlie Christian, Django, Wes, Tal, Ed Bickert, Barney, Johnny Smith, Jim Hall, Joe Pass, and Jimmy Raney all came up during that era.



Bill Wurtzel and Howard Morgen

I thought I was doing just fine as an ear player and had no idea how little I knew about music. That changed for me at nineteen on a summer gig with a hotel band in New Hampshire. The band's bass player, Harlow Atwood, a close friend and band mate of George Van Eps, took it upon himself to get severely on my case and introduce me to what he called *triads* and *voice leading*, terms of which, believe it or not, I was unaware. For my twentieth birthday, Harlow gave me the George Van Eps Guitar Method and an album of George's solo recordings. In 1980 while playing in a booth for Guitar World Magazine, I had the great pleasure of meeting George and telling him of that pivotal point in my life. On returning to New York I went on to study with Hy White, Billy Bauer and Barry Galbraith who helped me to continue to grow musically.

JH: So did you always want to teach? Did your experiences with learning affect that decision?

Howard: From the day I gave my first lesson in the basement of Sammy Spear's music store, I knew what else besides playing the guitar I really loved to do. Teaching came easily and naturally to me, as did a knack for organizing the material I wanted to teach. My early background, full of black holes, also gave me a point of view, a conviction about what needed to be taught.

JH: How did you get started teaching fulltime?

Howard: After three years of teaching at the music store, Sammy announced he was closing temporarily and suggested that I teach the students at their homes and put aside his cut of my salary for him. Five months later, I had eye surgery that permanently blinded me in one eye. I dropped out of school in my senior year, abandoning the idea of teaching in the school system and Estelle drove me to the students' homes for another five months. What seemed to be bad luck turned out to be good fortune for my career. I now had to put all my eggs in one basket and concentrate exclusively on private teaching and gigs – a life style I had always wanted but never quite had the courage to commit to.

Sammy never reopened, told me to keep what I had saved for him, and with that found money Estelle and I opened a music studio. The Yellow Book made a big mistake our first year and compensated the following year with a half page ad. And then THE BEATLES CAME TO AMERICA! We never looked back – but I still wonder what would have happened if I played the accordion.

JH: You were one of the first fingerstyle jazz players. When did you first get interested in fingerstyle?

Howard: Back in 1958 I was playing with a trio in a club on Broadway when a South American diplomat/guitarist named Ray Tico walked in and asked if he could play during one of our breaks. He got up there all by himself and played "How High The Moon." I heard melody, I heard harmony and I heard a walking bass line to boot, all played simultaneously. As logical as it now seems today, not many guys were playing like that in this country and it was my first exposure to a self contained contrapuntal approach to solo jazz guitar. Within a year I was studying classical guitar with Albert Valdes-Blain and Leonid Bolotine.

A few years later, when I was seriously wondering about the validity of playing worked-out arrangements in a solo jazz context, well before the arrival on the scene of Lenny Breau, Tuck Andress and Martin Taylor, my doubts were overcome when I heard the wonderful British guitarist Big Jim Sullivan featured weekly on the Tom Jones T.V. show. I then knew I was at least headed in the right direction for me.

JH: Your playing is so harmonically fluid while always maintaining a solid groove. I'm wondering how you developed your own voice.

Howard: My earliest experiments with applying fingerstyle techniques to jazz material centered on trying to sound like two guitars. After completing a few arrangements, I called Billy Bauer and asked him if he would critique my efforts. He came to my house, listened politely and said, "Yeah man, you sound like two guitar players but you didn't say nuthin'." He went on to say how you play, whether it's with a pick or fingers, is part of it but it's probably the least important part. Technique alone without content becomes a gimmick. Jazz is about finding a personal voice, not about gimmicks.



Howard and George Van Eps

Soon after, I started relying more on my ear and intuition to find more personal ways of voicing my chord structures. I also started thinking horizontally in lines, rather than relying on chord grips and exploring in depth the harmonic possibilities of each song I chose to arrange.

JH: Whom would you suggest guitarists listen to as they develop their own voices?

Howard: Listen to soloists like Lenny Breau, George Van Eps, Howard Alden, Jimmy Wyble, Gene Bertoncini, Bucky Pizzarelli, Martin Taylor, Tuck Andress, Russell Malone, Earl Klugh, Joe Pass, Charlie Byrd and all those great Brazilian players. And do what they all did – listen to the great jazz pianists and big band arrangers who have the freedom to go to a lot more places harmonically and texturally. The trick is to figure out the notes that imply what you hear, and that takes a lot of time, experimentation and experience.

JH: You have just completed your new book, *Through Chord-Melody and Beyond*. Do you have any new projects in mind? What are you up to these days?

Howard: If my luck holds out and I stay in remission, I plan to put the teaching system I've developed over the years on line with **truefire.com**. Unlike most of my published material, which has been usually geared to upper intermediate and advanced players, this project is intended for all levels of players and all styles of guitar. It is also *very much* intended for teachers who I believe will find it a valuable addition to their own teaching systems.

This interactive course will include fingerboard visualization techniques designed to enable early-level players (even a bright and receptive beginner at the first lesson) to quickly grasp the logic of the guitar fingerboard, techniques for overcoming problems generated by the standard tuning system, how to overcome the chord grips syndrome, chord construction and embellishment, how to crack the chord symbol code, finding moving lines, voice leading, comping with walking bass lines and chord substitution.

I'm also hoping to have more time with my family. They're wonderful – Estelle and my kids, Donna, Gary and his wife Susan. And I have a bunch of talented grandchildren: Adam, Matthew, Jessica, Jackie and Daniel. All of them are creative and musical.

For more information about Howard's books, CDs and contact details, visit www.howardmorgen.com.

Photos by Jack Huntley

Photo of Bill Wurtzell and Howard Morgen by Abe Kantor