

**Oral History Interview of
Walt Driscoll**

**Interviewed by: Leslie Dutton
April 4, 2002
Lubbock, Texas**

**Part of the:
*Leslie Dutton Fine Arts Interview Series***

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Preferred Citation for this Document:

Driscoll, Walt Oral History Interview, April 4, 2002. Interview by Leslie Dutton, Online Transcription, Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library. URL of PDF, date accessed.

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Recording Notes:

Original Format: Mini-Disc

Digitization Details: digitized July 2016

Audio Metadata: 44.1kHz/ 16bit WAV file

Further Access Restrictions: N/A

Related Interviews:

Transcription Notes:

Interviewer: Leslie Dutton

Audio Editor: N/A

Transcription: Bill Corrigan

Editor(s): Kayci Rush

Transcript Overview:

This interview features Walt Driscoll as he discusses his career in music. In this interview, Driscoll describes how he got into music and provides some context into Lubbock's music scene. Driscoll also explains how he treats his music like a business and why he uses contracts when booking events. The interview closes with Driscoll and interviewer Leslie Dutton discussing rap and different types of music.

Length of Interview: 01:48:24

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Keywords

Music, Musician, West Texas music

Leslie Dutton (LD):

This interview is with Walt Driscoll to Leslie Dutton, on April, 4, 2002. Walt is a musician, and has played in Lubbock and around for many years, and so Walt, I'm really pleased to get to talk with you today. And can you tell me when and where you were born?

Walt Driscoll (WD):

I was born in 1949, April 25, in Santa Barbara, California, on a bright, sunny day. [Laughter]

LD:

And just a moment ago you told me that you had moved to Lubbock from Maryland, so did your family move to Maryland after that?

WD:

Yeah, my dad had a job with the Department of Defense, I think back then. He was an aeronautical engineer. So we had jobs and we travelled quite a bit. So we lived in Boston, out in Long Island, in New York. He even went over to Paris and we ended up in Washington D.C. twice, around Maryland.

DL:

Do you think any of that, those formative years, lead you to music?

WD:

I don't think so really.

LD:

No?

WD:

Not in particular just for then.

LD:

Okay. Did you—well, what I'll ask this, go in this direction. When did you start playing?

WD:

Well, when I was about twelve I started playing, eleven or twelve. My brother and I, we just really started loving the folk music and so forth around that Kingston Trio, "Peter Paul and Mary" and things like that. So I started playing the banjo when I was twelve.

LD:

Wow.

WD:

And we used to—my brother played guitar and we'd get up and do Kingston Trio numbers and stuff.

LD:

Now, did you take lessons for this or did you just kind of—were you self-taught?

WD:

I just kind of self-taught myself on banjo.

LD:

That's incredible. Did you just listen to the different styles and learn how to pick it out?

WD:

I don't know how well I did it back then, but yeah, because I played my banjo from about twelve to sixteen, then started getting into cars. So we were in Chevy Chase, Maryland then I remember, and so I remember—I think I sold my banjo because I needed to get a car, I wanted to, so I got that. Then I didn't play for a while, so I got in the Air Force.

LD:

Well when you were playing banjo, did you actually play gigs with your brother?

WD:

Well yeah. We didn't get paid gigs, we played things like at school or something, a few things like that.

LD:

And in the Air Force, did you sign up just to play, to be in the band? Or—

WD:

No, well, when I came down here in the Air Force, that was during Vietnam, and my—they were doing the lottery numbers then, so I hadn't been picked yet, but they were fixing to do lottery on mine at that time, so I said, Well, I think I'll join the Air Force just to be able to do something I want. And I didn't want to go in the Air Force so I'd get the G.I. Bill for college and so forth. But anyway when I came down here, my Air Force career consisted of a radius of one hundred and twenty-five miles, because I ended up at Amarillo Air Force Base for basic training. Went over to Shepherd Air Force base in Wichita Falls for my Tech school. Then I got assigned to Reese Air Force Base and stayed there for my entirety, because it was a high specialty—a high—I don't know what they call it. Priority, yeah, high priority, because it was training pilots, and they needed pilots real bad, so.

LD:

Okay, so tell me about your other training? I mean, because before we had talked and you said you had always done music. So you have other training, other pilot training?

WD:

Well no, I wasn't a pilot, I was a crew chief, worked on the jets. But when I get down to Reese, I was just—I had a roommate and he had a guitar. So I knew a few chords on guitar just from me and my brother, I played his just a little bit. So I knew about three or four chords, and I was just playing one day and this guy walked by my room, he said, "Oh you play guitar?" and I said, "Well no, not really. I only know four chords." And he said, "Well, would you like to get a band together?" And I said, "Yeah, if you don't mind me just learning the—song by song, you know what I have to do and so forth." He said, "No, no, that's fine." So we started up the band, and I've been playing in bands ever since. And there I just kind of taught myself for a while.

LD:

Did you ever take lessons?

WD:

Yeah, I took lessons when I started going to Tech. Because I got out of the Air Force in '72 and then I stayed here and went to Tech, because I was looking at—when you got discharged in Texas they allowed you to be an in-state resident. So I was able to go to Tech. And of course I had a lot of friends, and was—I was married at that time. I didn't want to move, so. And Tech was a real good school. It was a real good price, and so forth.

LD:

Yeah. What was your major?

WD:

My major was telecommunications. So I have a degree in telecommunications, but I did take lessons from Jim Bogle there.

LD:

So you studied classical guitar as well?

WD:

Uh, yeah. Um-hm.

LD:

What was it like to study with Jim Bogle?

WD:

Oh it was really good, it was really good. He had just started back then, so. Yeah, it was interesting. I always like—I was kind of more interested in jazz than I was classical right then, particularly, but.

LD:

Well, what were your lessons like? Any particular format?

WD:

Well, that was way back when. Not really. He was teaching me some classical and then we do a little jazz on the side. But—

LD:

Did you have, you know like a certain set of chords and progressions that you would learn? I mean, just kind of basic stuff?

WD:

Well, let me see. I'm trying to remember. I remember in the classical, well we worked out of a book of that, and we studied some particular etudes and stuff.

LD:

And did you find that helpful for your playing now?

WD:

Oh yeah, yeah. Yeah, very much. And yeah, I've always liked classical, I still play some now and so forth. And—well let's see. Also I did the stage band back then, I played in the stage band for like two years. Guitarist there.

LD:

What was that like and what sort of gigs did you do there?

WD:

Well, you know we rehearsed all the time and then we used to go, oh—well, we went to San Antonio And played for the music association, Texas Music Association or something like that. I remember that, that was probably the biggest deal we played. But we'd go and we'd put on concerts and Tech, when artists would come in we'd play with them. That was the main deal as I remember. [Dog barks, bell tolls]

LD:

Well, I'm just curious, since you've studied classical, you've played folk and everything, so what led you to do what you're doing now?

WD:

Well I guess one thing that I learned all the way through playing was—because I really love all music. I love a lot of the other instruments, because I taught myself well, guitar and I taught myself the piano and I did teach one lady, she wanted to play mandolin. She had this old banjo mandolin, it was called a—I forgot, some kind of—but anyway it was a little small banjo. But it was tuned and had the strings of a mandolin. Anyway, it was her granddad's and she brought it into the store and she had this little book and she said, "Well, would you teach me mandolin," and I said, "No, well I don't really know how to play it per se," and she said—well I think I taught her something, something, and she said, "I'd really like to take from you." And I said, "Well"—now I can take that book and learn the first page and then teach it to you what I learned. She said, "Well I'll be fine, I'll just go that way."

LD:

That's pretty good.

WD:

So anyway, I love all kinds of music. My theory has always been if it's a good song, it's a good song, it doesn't matter the style. And I like blues, I like jazz, I like bluegrass. But the other thing I've learned, if you're going to make a living doing a particular thing that you have to know your audience. So, when we formed bands, if we had a particular style. And in bands, pop bands, when you're making a living just playing around at different places and so forth, I've found, learned real quickly that the best thing is to be diverse. Play several different styles, don't just be a blues band or just a rock and roll band. Have a good variety, and just have good, mostly real fun music. I mean, if you're just playing for dances and stuff, you're not—now if you have your own music and you're putting an album out and you're pushing the album, then you should do just your own thing then to promote it. But if you're playing for dances and so forth, just play some fun music that people want to come and just listen to. Not that there's anything wrong with it, but they don't want to just sit there and listen to blues all night. Or you know, whatever all these songs you've written that they don't know, it's just—doesn't really conducive to a party setting. If most people are in a club, they're at the dance or they're at a function, they want to dance and have fun and so forth. So we try to play just a lot of fun music, you know. Songs that people really enjoy and so forth.

LD:

Well, you've been in Lubbock long enough and in that music scene, you've probably seen a lot of people come and go.

WD:

Yeah, quite a bit. Seen a lot of them stay too.

LD:

Yeah? Can you talk about that a bit?

WD:

Sure.

LD:

The person who comes to mind is Joe Ely, and then before, Buddy Holly, but that was really before you were here.

WD:

Yeah, Joe was more from Austin than he was from Lubbock. I remember when I kind of started even playing I think it was—he was always seemed like an Austin person more than a Lubbock person. I know he was from here and so forth, but he—I think he transported himself down to Austin like in the seventies, late seventies, something like that. Pretty much. So I never knew Joe, never played with him or—

LD:

What about—oh, she's fine. [Referring to dog]

WD:

I didn't know Joe that well.

LD:

What about some of the other musicians that are in town now? There's quite a few folks. And you may know more of the names than I do. And just kind of think about those for a while and tell me about—

WD:

Oh yeah. Well I know Danny Earnest, I've known him for—they call him Dangerous Dan. I've known him for years and years since the seventies.

LD:

Is this the one who stayed in town?

WD:

For the most part, I think a couple of years ago he moved down to Houston for a while. But he

played with—my mind's going now. Who was that gentleman who played—had the blues place? I have to think about that. Do you remember that man? It was back—

LD:

I don't. I mean, just not being here all that long. [Dog barks]

WD:

Penny— shh, shh. Well you know he had, well he has this band, Danny Earnest and the Soul Patch Band?

LD:

Uh-huh.

WD:

But he's played—well he's played in so many bands that—that's the hardest thing probably in the music business is keeping a band together.

LD:

Oh yeah? But it seems like the band that you have now, Masterpeace [sic], it's been together for a while, hasn't it?

WD:

Yeah, Bridgette and I, the lead singer, since—we played together in '79 and '80 in a band called Daddy's Money.

LD:

Oh yeah?

WD:

And then she went off, she married a guy in the Air Force and so forth. When they broke up she came back to Lubbock like in '85. And we put together Masterpeace and have been together since.

LD:

That seems like a long time for a band especially in this area.

WD:

Well, and then back then we decided that we were using a lot of what they call they sequencing, they put the drums down on the sequencer, horns and so forth. So basically, well we didn't have to mess with a drummer and a bass player sometimes. We've had keyboards and other singers

and sometimes keyboard players would play the bass lines and so forth. But we kept it down where we didn't have a bass player and a drummer.

LD:

And all the overhead that comes from that.

WD:

Yeah, it's mainly like personalities and so forth.

LD:

Oh, can you tell me something about that? I mean—

WD:

Well it's just when you get in a band everybody has their different personalities, and so heads are going to rub and personalities will rub, egos will rub. So, that's probably where the difficulties comes with keeping a band together. That and people's lives change, I mean like they—

LD:

Yeah.

WD:

And it's hard to make a living. Really when you have a five, six piece band. We found out too when we keep the number down, of course you can make a little bit more money so it's a little bit easier, justifying keep playing. But even bands like the Maines Brothers, I don't know if it was so much personality-wise, I think they got along real well, but it's just they had different things going in their lives and families. So sometimes, they're getting up the status probably where they really could have done something nationally, but I think when that decision came they decided their families were more important. They didn't really want to get that, that big. So they may still even get together now sometimes and do something. But yeah, it's just what you want to do, and music isn't probably the easiest lifestyle to be in.

LD:

Do you think it's hard on families when you're gone a lot?

WD:

Yeah, I think so. I'm married to my wife now and she's real—she knew I was a musician when we met, and she's real supportive. Of course we're not gone that long, probably the longest thing we've done probably—well and they're usually overnight, even when we go down to Austin last year, we just played a wedding, really, down there and were just gone that one night. So that's usually all. We go to Abilene, we'll go down and spend Friday night and then we'll play even

Friday and Saturday but we'll come back Saturday night. I'll be pulling in at three in the morning. She doesn't like me driving that late. It's not that bad. Anyway, so yeah, you're gone for those periods, and sometimes I'm gone on the weekends, which other things, functions are going on, so—and she may have to go to a party or something by herself or something. So yeah, it's that respect, you're gone a lot of times and wanted like on holidays and stuff like that.

LD:

Just kind of that life.

WD:

Right. When everybody else is doing something they want a band, so you're gone at those critical times. So. But she's real understanding.

LD:

That's good.

WD:

Yeah.

LD:

Can you think of any reason why we've had so many people in Lubbock, so many musicians? And not mediocre musicians, I mean they're really fantastic.

WD:

Well, yeah, but I don't think it's just set in Lubbock. I mean there are a lot of real great musicians all around. From a lot of places.

LD:

Maybe we just had a little more publicity about it or something?

WD:

Yeah.

LD:

Because the only other place that I've lived that I can imagine having that many musicians and bands and I guess musicians of all kinds is in Chicago.

WD:

Um-hm.

LD:

And of course it's because of the university there and then all the restaurants to play in.

WD:

Well, I don't know like for instance if Buddy Holly had spurred a lot of people that do music and so forth. It's always—and he was kind of almost a rock and roll pioneer to a certain extent. And that might have had something to do with it, a lot of people being in it. I can't think of anything besides that that would—it's not the weather. [Laughter] But I don't know, when people ask me well while why did you stay in Lubbock? And well if you haven't lived in D.C. you probably understand, but I go back to visit my family in D.C. at least once a year, and when I get back there I start getting claustrophobic. I love the open skies and the sunsets, and it's hard to describe to anybody. Plus I like the feeling I can get in my car, and in five minutes I can be out of town and in open plains. And if I want to go see the mountains I can hop, skip and jump. People ask me how far is it to Ruidoso or something. I go well it's an easy three hour drive or maybe two and a half hours, if you—

LD:

Uh-huh

WD:

And you can just go up there and people say two hundred miles, back east, well that's a big deal, but they don't understand that on that trip you're just out on open highway, you're not going through these small towns like back east you do and all this other stuff. And it's a nice drive, it's not like you're just driving in a bunch of traffic and so forth. It's an easy drive.

LD:

No congested.

WD:

So it's easy to get away. It's—I mean the people are real nice and it's really laid back. And I mean you get to D.C. and start going by the beltway and they're all going like eighty miles an hour. It's like a whole parking lot moving at eighty, just drives me nuts to do it. And then to get anywhere just takes you forever over there when the traffic's bad. Kind of like L.A. I was just out to San Diego a couple weeks ago, and it's the same way there, it's just wall-to-wall people. It's a beautiful city, I love to go out there. And that's the neat thing I think anywhere now. You can always go anywhere you want at a pretty decent price, as you look for it on the—fly anywhere. That's no problem. I mean they got real nice airports, easy to fly to Lubbock, most of the time. San Diego Airport, we had to wait in line just to go through security for about an hour, here it was five minutes. So, anyway, you can go anywhere. I just—I don't know if that has something to do with it, just the life here is a lot more easy-going, not as stressful and

everything. I've talked to musicians that have played in L.A., and they say it's miserable. First of all you can't ever be—you know you're not supposed to be late. But you have to leave three or four hours—

LD:

Before.

WD:

Before, because if there's something that happens along those freeways and stuff, you sit there. And you sit there for two hours. And so you have to really get there early. [Clock chimes] So, it's hectic.

LD:

Yeah.

WD:

But I know, maybe just Lubbock is conducive to musicians in that respect. I've—it's always been—I never had a hard time playing here. I mean, it's always kept me busy. So that might be good that there a lot of places where you can play.

LD:

Yeah, that's true. There's—I mean you could stay busy every night probably if you wanted to. During prime times.

WD:

But there have been—the other thing I was saying about—there are great musicians, you know there's a bunch of them from Dallas, a bunch of them from Austin.

LD:

They don't seem to be as plenteous as here.

WD:

Well—

LD:

I mean there are a lot of musicians in Dallas and Fort Worth area, but it's a larger area, the population's considerably bigger. And then here, it's not, and we still have an abundance of musicians.

WD:

Yeah. Well, yeah, well. I can't explain it really, but there are—of course I don't know. There are a lot of musicians that are great musicians that people don't know about. And guitar, I run into them all the time.

LD:

Really?

WD:

Oh, there's a guitarist out of Dallas, Andy Timmons, who's just a monster. And then there are a lot of people, oh like there's John Pizzarelli, who's a jazz guitarist, and a lot of people don't—if you came up to most people on the street they wouldn't know him. So there are a lot of great musicians out there. Floating around, that people don't really—that make a great living and so forth, that people don't know about.

LD:

Could you tell me a little bit about how the music industry has changed for you? What it was like in the early days before having a sequencer and having this large band? Well, I mean it's not large, but it's more than two people.

WD:

In that respect, technology-wise, yeah, it's gotten—I guess it's gotten a lot more, yeah, there's just a lot more technology even in like recording. I mean nowadays you can do an album on your computer if you have a good enough computer. And the software and stuff. And you couldn't even do that even ten years ago.

LD:

Yeah, that's true.

WD:

And you can put your own CD out and all else if you have the ear and do it. I think it still takes a lot of real professional people to put out a good recording, as far as mastering it. Mixing it and so forth.

LD:

Clearing noises and that kind of stuff.

WD:

But there are people that have done it. Put one out, and they even have little recording studios now, twenty-four tracks. And they'll burn a CD for you and everything after you're finished. So

in that respect it's changed. Playing-wise, yeah it's helped, like I mentioned earlier about just keeping the band to a minimum where you can make a living. And then you don't have so many personalities, so it's easier to keep the band together. And yeah, but I, in the same sense I do miss sometimes just the live playing. But whenever I do—excuse me. Whenever I make—we do a new song, and I've got it all programed back in my studio on the sequencer, I always go in the next room and I let it play, and then I listen, and I say does it sound like a band's playing in the next room. Now if something sounds too mechanical or something, the drums, I'll go in and change it, or if they need to be louder or something. Try to get the best live sound that I can. But I have seen a lot of acts that do come in and they have these drums that go tch-tch-tch-tch-tch-tch-tch and they sound like a machine. And I try to get away from that. That's the only drawback to technology, you can get a very mechanical sounding.

LD:

There's also a program now that will follow you, and it's—I can't remember what it's called, something accompanist. And Charles Nelson from ACU was kind of demonstrating that around, and so it replaces the accompanist. And it just, for some reason, picks up on whatever's there.

WD:

I haven't run into that one yet, but, that's good.

LD:

It's been a while back, so it's mostly because now and having universities, there's a shortage of accompanist, of pianists, and just people who just lack that skill in accompanying.

WD:

Well it's—technology has changed a bunch. So, but you know I think if you're going to do an album you're going to use maybe some of that to fix things up, but you know I think it's good to have a nice live feel. Musicians, and so forth.

LD:

Now I just heard you working up a gig on the phone before we started. And you mentioned sending them a contract and times and those kind of things. Now has that always been your custom, to send a contract?

WD:

Yeah.

LD:

Even—

WD:

And I've been really surprised because musicians have asked me around town, "Do you use a contract?" I said, "Yeah." We played one job way back when, I think it was like—it was probably about '76 or so forth, when I learned a real good lesson. We drove up all the way to Oklahoma—what's that town? Not Oklahoma City but it's right by it, it's pretty big. Well, it doesn't matter.

LD:

At a considerable distance, yeah.

WD:

Anyway we went all the way up there, and we played a couple of nights then we got this phone call saying, "I just wanted to warn you guys, you better get your equipment out of the club." And then they just hung up, and so forth. So the next thing we know we're looking over towards the club and there's smoke coming up. Anyways, the club was on fire. And—[Sound of tape stopping] and the tape ends. I'm going to get coffee. [Tape is flipped] So you can have these caffeine for dinner [?] [00:31:19].

LD:

So did they know what happened with that?

WD:

Yeah, somebody torched the club for some reason. Anyway we went in to see the owner and so forth. Well, and I wasn't the leader of the band, I was just playing guitar, so the leader went in there and he said there were two guys standing on each side and this guy right in between them. And he came in, said, "Well, we need to get paid." And the guy said, "I think the best thing you all could do if you want to salvage your equipment or whatever is go in the club and get your equipment and then get out of town." He had these two thugs on each side. So—

LD:

Jeez.

WD:

About all we could do is just pack our equipment up. A lot of it was smoke damage more than just fire damage, but a lot of it was kind of ruined also. So we packed up and left out of town. Ever since that I said, "Well I'm going to be up in the up and up, play with a contract."

LD:

That's really, really, really smart.

WD:

But you'd be surprised all the bands that don't. Play clubs and stuff. They'll just book it. Most people are fairly honest, but you got to protect yourself.

LD:

Yeah, that's true. And it seems like now there's a lot more awareness of contracts in the music business and those sorts of things then it was, you said, in what—'76. And that's when you really started doing that. So you're really a trendsetter in that respect, at least in this area. Unless it's with the really large bands.

WD:

Yeah I would think the larger bands I'm sure, like the Maines Brothers and stuff did contracts and so forth, pretty much. But a lot of just garage bands, and they just wanted to get in the club so much they go, "No, they're going to let us play!" They go down and play, but they're—and really it protects you as well as the club owner. Because there are things that can happen, legalities nowadays that if you have a contract you can say at least I was performing my job, and certain things happen. I mean the—well just what can happen to you legally, like in clubs, even if you're just a bartender now, now if somebody goes out and gets killed or something. And I wouldn't be surprised if a lawyer tried to get the band too, say, "Well, yeah, they were playing all this party music and everybody's getting drunk." I mean they could call you in the court and ask you to describe, so if you have some legal document saying well yeah that's my profession, my job, at least you might have some recourse to go, you know—

LD:

Is there anything else other than your time that's covered under your contract? I mean do you have equipment liability?

WD:

Oh yeah.

LD:

And those sort of things?

WD:

Yeah. Now I have—if I have to leave it.

LD:

Okay.

WD:

Because that was another thing back I guess, I'm kind of sticky about it, but yeah, I left it in that club and it wasn't covered. Didn't get paid, and now my equipment wasn't protected. So I have it in the contract, if I have to leave it in the premises to do my job, the club's liable for it.

LD:

Does that, what about—

WD:

And usually it does—

LD:

What about water damage? Or something like that.

WD:

Well it just says, yeah, damages, damages to the equipment. And theft. Theft is probably the worst. I mean, yeah, it happens more.

LD:

Have you had stuff stolen when you've had things set up?

WD:

I've had small things, nothing real big, like mic stands or something. So I had a guitar and amp and—we were talking about apartments—over at Tech. And it might have been somebody that knew me, I don't know. But I had a—probably a good eight, nine hundred dollar guitar. And there was an amp that was probably another six hundred dollars. The guitar was leaning up against the amp. And it was in front of the couch. And when I came and got there, they had moved the guitar and amp over to the side and stolen my couch. And here they had this other stuff that was worth fifteen hundred dollars.

LD:

Oh gosh, that's crazy.

WD:

Oh yeah. That's just one of those musician stories. I thanked them for leaving the guitar and everything, because I was renting the house and the furniture came with that, so I didn't have to worry about that. People are crazy.

LD:

Because the other is usually what's pawned.

WD:

Oh yeah.

LD:

Those kind of things.

WD:

I've heard just all kinds of horror stories. Other bands, about equipment being stolen. One band that went up to Chicago, and they had their whole—in the fenced-in area. And they had their equipment in the trailer, and their van and their trailer was all missing. Now I've heard stories about people with trailers that had all their equipment in it, and then something would happen to the trailer and get disconnected and go rolling down the highway. Because I worked in Al's Music Machine back in like '80, '78 to '80 right in there. At the mall. You probably wouldn't—I don't know if you were even born.

LD:

No. Yes I was, but I didn't live here in this area.

WD:

And, oh yeah, people would come in, musicians, travel around the country and all kinds of stories about what happened here and there. That's happened to me. I mean a few times. I remember once we were coming back from Plainview, and about Hale Center there had been a big thunderstorm had come through. We were flying down the highway, and they didn't have anything up as far as flares or anything that the road was flooded coming up. So we came up on it real quick, and the van, the wheel caught the van and it went shew—right down. It got almost up to the door and everything. Luckily, we didn't flip the van or anything, but it hit some pretty deep water. A couple of feet, pretty quick. So we got out of there fast. Backed up—we were lucky.

LD:

You know, the other thing that's really curious, because I really associate this more with artists since all the—during school, one of our best instrumentalists was an alcoholic, and in fact played his senior recital loaded. And then went into the president's own band. He was really a great player. And so it's just a matter of being in the clubs all the time that many times the musicians tend to have problems either with drugs or alcohol. Have you been around situations like that, and have had to deal with that kind of difficulty?

WD:

Oh yeah. I've played with both. I had one great, great singer, he could have been really, really good. I mean, but he got on the crack cocaine and so forth. Well he—I kind of watched him

just—he lost his job and his family, and after a while we couldn't work with him anymore. So yeah, it's sad. And he, for a long time after that period still—he moved even, but he stayed on it, and he wasn't in music after that. And I don't know if it was the music so much. I think—

LD:

Sometimes the atmosphere—

WD:

I think there was probably more access for it, and yeah, working in the clubs. Of course, yeah they're serving alcohol. Well right now, Bridgette and I don't play clubs that often. We'll play Abuelo's outside near the red door, like this summer. Well, she's allergic to music.

LD:

To music? To smoke.

WD:

To smoke.

LD:

Oh yeah.

WD:

So, yeah—some music she's allergic to too. [Laughter]

LD:

You're really lucky to have hooked up with a singer like her.

WD:

Yeah. That's another thing I've found out, well, people really, really enjoy vocals in bands. And we kind of put an emphasis on vocals and harmony and stuff. I mean you can play great guitar, but after—if you just played guitar for forty-five minutes after a while people—it'd get a little old. It's kind of like listening to the same record over and over again to a certain extent. So yeah, vocals are real, real important. And they—

LD:

Of course, and she's just—she's one of the most amazing singers that I've heard, especially to sing in the popular genre, that she can cover any style.

WD:

That's true. Yeah, and she's—she likes to do different styles.

LD:

And so evidently that goes along with you really well, because from what I've gathered that you'd like to perform a variety of things.

WD:

Sure, um-hm. Yeah, I like to, because it doesn't—you don't get bored doing it. Yeah, she's a real talent, sure has got talent. Yeah, that's what made me stick with this guy that got in—you know, the crack cocaine, he was so good. But I have learned he's cleaned himself up now. He had to go into like a church rehab program, like the church looks after him.

LD:

Uh-huh. Well that's not bad as long as he's clean.

WD:

Yeah, and you know I've worked with the people that drink too much.

LD:

What is it like to work with them? Typical?

WD:

Yeah, well I don't know if it's like music or something, because I've had even personal relatives that have had difficulty with drinking, so there are a lot of people not in music that have the same problem. Yeah, I think—I don't think being in clubs, playing in clubs, helps it though. If you do have a tendency to do that.

LD:

Yeah. I had an accompanist, and he was a very, very fine organist, and just amazing. And had an alcohol problem and once he started drinking—and you know it wasn't a matter of being in clubs at all, he was mostly churches or in the universities. It was bad news. So, it just seems that that's more accessible.

WD:

Right. Yeah, and I think you have to watch yourself. Because, you know, I like to drink a beer along with everybody else. But when I get to a club, I try to moderate myself. Because a lot of it—I've seen musicians come in and start hitting it right off—line up the tequila shots. I'm going, I can't really function too well. I get to a point where I know I shouldn't have any more. And that's another thing, how professional you are. If you've got a job too you should approach it, where some of them just want to get out and party and play, and that's what they think it's all about, just go out and have a good time. And you should have a good time, but you're also—if that's your—

LD:

If that's your profession—

WD:

If that's your profession—

LD:

Treat it—

WD:

You should do it.

LD:

Treat it—

WD:

Treat it as one. So.

LD:

Now what do you have to say about the different styles of music that's been in Lubbock?

WD:

Well, principally—well there's been everything. If you start including Tech, you know. Do you want me to comment on each style or just—

LD:

Sure, sure. Maybe some of the performers and—

WD:

Okay.

LD:

And the audiences.

WD:

Well you know I've played with so many great people, like Dan Earnest and—golly I'll have to get my memory cap back on. There's great country. A lot of good players of—I can't think of anybody right now.

LD:

That's okay.

WD:

Maybe I'm under stress here.

LD:

I'm sorry, I mean, to put you under duress.

WD:

Well who's the—Andy Wilkinson. I used to play in the band back with him.

LD:

Oh you did?

WD:

Um-hm. What's Sprott's first name? His last name's Sprott? Real good guitarist? John Sprott.

LD:

Oh yeah.

WD:

John Sprott. John Sprott and Andy Wilkinson. Now I haven't played with—I've known John forever, but John started out really playing country quite a bit. So, a lot of the folks that have started, started doing one thing and gone to other—and Andy used to play kind of more pop rock stuff, with country. But now he's gone into kind of the traditional western music. And—it's funny just how people grow and how Andy's just gone off and really made a living just doing his thing, so. I don't know, so many great country bands. Lot of good countries. Of course country, I don't know, it's probably the main deal in Lubbock.

LD:

And it's really changed a lot compared to the early days.

WD:

Uh-huh. Well yeah, but just country?

LD:

Um-hm.

WD:

Yeah. Because you know in the last country music awards though? They had all of this traditional country coming back? Where they just—might have a drummer, but they come back and it's just all acoustic instruments they're playing. And there are about three or four bands that got some awards for that. So that's coming back, I think it's gotten so pop and so—

LD:

You can't tell the difference.

WD:

Sounding like, yeah, sounding pop is that there's a trend in music, and country music now it's come back to roots. So, I think like Tech adds a bunch to like in bringing people in that Lubbock has so much variety in music. And now with the Spirit Arena they're bringing in bigger acts, but you'll get, well, Alan Jackson coming, but then Chicago just played and—

LD:

Yeah.

WD:

You have blues, and Tech will bring in more jazz things, so, and then with the orchestra and stuff.

LD:

It's real—

WD:

For a town stuck out in West Texas they have quite a bit of different stuff, so.

LD:

Um-hm. Almost every night. I mean you could go to something.

WD:

Um-hm.

LD:

Depending on how many different styles you want to listen to.

WD:

Right, and the—down there in the Depot District I think has helped the club situation. I think it's a little nicer to go, you don't have like club stuff in one quiet little area, you say, well I'm not

going to go down there, it's near the bad part of town, they've got a nice place down there. I think they—you can always go there Friday, Saturday night, and usually have some good bands playing. And they have it diverse down there pretty much now too.

LD:

Yeah, yeah. The only thing would be the smoke and volume.

WD:

Yeah. You have to—like I said, you have Bridgette can't stand the smoke, and I don't really like it. But if I want to go see somebody, yeah but the—well I get stuck by some speakers sometimes and I can't stand it, I have to get up. Because my hearing is my profession and I'm not going to sit there and let volume wreck that. I really need to get some earplugs when I go out to hear some of the bands. But some of them play pretty darn loud, and especially some of these younger bands, the alternative bands. They love to crank it up. [Laughter] Now, and that has changed a bunch too. In alternative, like oh even Creed, Three Doors Down and stuff. The clarity of what they're doing, and you can—there's a big controversy now, you may not know about it, about the volume of digital music, how much they want to push the envelope. Like they want the CD to sound loud. But a lot of it if you listen to is real distorted, it's not like old recordings where everything's clear. And they want that sound. And when I'm trying to pick tunes out for my students, sometimes it's hard because you might have the bass so loud that it's real hard to hear the guitar in the background. So, and style-wise that's changed a bunch.

LD:

Because I've been thinking about that, I mean because—other country stuff or other pops that I can tell you about, but not necessarily alternative.

WD:

Yeah, alternative bands are real [imitating distorted guitar sound]. And it's changed too, the guitar has changed quite a bit. They retune the things and lower things a half step quite a bit. You know, Корн you ever heard of Корн?

LD:

No.

WD:

Well they actually lower some of the bass strings down to a low A from an E, and it's real low. They get the real [guitar sounds] almost sounds like a—it's more of a sound than a note.

LD:

An effect.

WD:

Yeah. But they do it well. Because a lot of retuning, sometimes you a song and they'll retune guitars in ways, and you've got to figure out what they retuned it to. Sometimes that's real hard, just listening to it. So. But it's—people are just trying to expand on the instrument. I don't think there's anything wrong with it. It's kind of neat, you can get a lot of neat ideas retuning guitars. But I don't know if you want to—if we covered, getting back to the different styles of music around Lubbock.

LD:

Well—

WD:

They didn't even have a little—didn't they have like a—I saw it down at the Depot District. Didn't they have a—well almost like a reggae something with drums and stuff down there at one of the clubs? Klusoz I think or something had something. There are all kinds of—and there are plenty of mariachi bands. That's another thing too, the Mexican bands, they do amazing, what they do. As far as they can come into a place and they'll charge something just at the door, but they have such great crowds come out, and all these people go out to Tejano dance and so forth. Boy, they'll just pack places. You'll see those bands come in in big buses, and they have a couple of them from Lubbock that travel out. Yeah, they do a lot of good business. Of course, they like to party.

LD:

Oh yeah, that's true.

WD:

And they'll just come in, rent like just a hall or something, do that. So.

LD:

I suppose most of those people have a regular day job.

WD:

Yeah, and most musicians do.

LD:

Um-hm.

WD:

You know, that play, play around. I mean I teach, luckily I can do all music, but I probably

couldn't do it just playing. And of course we just play on the weekends, pretty much Friday and Saturday, we have some during the week scattered here and there. [Phone rings] Excuse me.

[Pause in recording]

LD:

Now, we've talked a lot about quite a few different things, and I'm just kind of wondering also about when you and Bridgette get together, do you have practice sessions still?

WD:

Yes.

LD:

So what are they like?

WD:

Well, usually I'll work up a song that we're wanting to do, which they don't know it. They'll listen to the tape. And usually when we come in, we'll—they'll work on the vocals. Because the instruments are all taken care of.

LD:

How long are your practice sessions usually?

WD:

Two hours.

LD:

How many songs can you cover during that?

WD:

Well, depends on the songs. Some are a lot more difficult than others, but I'd say, oh, usually two. It depends how—it's a hard question. It just depends on how familiar we are with the tune and so forth. A lot of times we'll learn new tunes that we want, but a lot of times we'll play wedding receptions, and if they want—we ask them if they have a first dance, they want something special that we'll work it up, if they give us enough time. A lot of times if we like that tune we're more apt to work it up well, because it well just keep it in our repertoire, keep using it. But that gets to be a good way of finding out what people like, too. And like, "The Way You Look Tonight," we're kind of—and everybody wanted Tony Bennett's version, the slow one, for the first dance. And the first time we kind of heard it and said, "Well, we might just use it just for

that wedding.” But we’ve got request and request for that after—since then, because we put it down on our list and people just pick it, they’ll say, “Oh yeah, that’ll be a great first song.”

LD:

Well how many songs are on your list?

WD:

Oh, a good hundred fifty or so. And some of them we pulled off of there.

LD:

Do you have those all on disc?

WD:

Uh-huh.

LD:

So that you just pull them up? That’s incredible. So you can take requests of any of those things that are on there.

WD:

Yeah. So, we just built them up I guess over the years and so forth. But like I said, well and I don’t know—I’d like every band to do what they like. And like I said, a lot of them just—they’ll get—I think a little bit. Well, and if that’s what they want to do, fine too, I’m not criticizing them for it. But some of them just get, well we’re just going to do what we want to do. And we’re kind of doing what we want to do, except we like a whole bunch of stuff. But we’ll go in and play a lot of songs that like I said that are party tunes, that other bands will go, “I can’t believe you play that.” I’m going well when we do it—

LD:

Because people like it.

WD:

People go nuts. I mean like take “YMCA” for instance. You go ask one of the alternative musicians, they ask you what you’re playing, and if I say, “YMCA,” they go, “YMCA? Well you must be kidding” it’s almost like a sissy song, I’m going “Yeah but when we play it like at a wedding reception or something, everybody’s up there and everybody’s going YMCA and going crazy.”

LD:

Dancing, yeah.

WD:

And that's why we're there, just to put on a good celebration. It's not exactly our deal, it's not our party, it's for the people that hired us. So that's the way I look at it. Of course, we get paid good for it too. And then people say, "You wear tuxedos?" And I go, "Yeah." In the back of my mind I'm going, well that tuxedo's paid for itself a lot of times over. They want to wear jeans and t-shirts. And fine down if at the club they want to, but if they show up at a wedding reception, one or two, and then nobody's going to call them anymore. So stuff like that.

LD:

Yeah, well I don't think they would get called for wedding receptions anyway.

WD:

Well I've had some people tell me that on occasion they called us and we were already booked and so forth, and some of them are even friends, but I'm already booked, so I'm not going to—that's another thing I don't do. I don't—and I've heard bands do this. Like they'll get a job and they'll have that, but then they'll get another job and the people offer them a lot more money, and they'll cancel somebody for more money. And I won't do that. And if I have a contract—

LD:

That's a contract.

WD:

Because yeah, and your name is name, and people can depend on that. That is a good thing to have, a reputation like that. Anyway. But you have to—we'll play like I said like "Celebration," "YMCA," just a lot of those party tunes. "Shout."

LD:

Do you find different tunes with different crowds? I mean age-group wise?

WD:

Well, yeah, well you now if we have older like dance group, we'll play different stuff.

LD:

Lots of Gershwin.

WD:

Yeah, just "Unforgettable," and—

LD:

Yeah.

WD:

But you'd be surprised as the night gets on. They'll loosen up, and some of them will come up and say, "Well can you play,"—you know, snappy stuff, and we'll play—you'll end up playing just a lot of different stuff, variety-wise.

LD:

Do you do tango things as well?

WD:

Tango?

LD:

Uh-huh.

WD:

Not per se I don't think we have a tango. We need to do that, because I heard it's coming back some, and we have got requests for it.

LD:

Yeah, it is.

WD:

And once I did, I worked up—well I got a disc that was a tango beat and everything, made up a song for a guy. Then he got on my case and he told me it wasn't a tango. Did you know that there are different schools of dancing? There's the Arthur Miller—Murray, and then there's like a Gene Kelley-type ball dancing? Or just different ball dancing. So I remember once we were hired for this dance club and this guy started coming up, "Well can you do this Arthur Murray style?" and I'm going, "What's that?" And I'm going—

LD:

Well you sing a little.

WD:

I'm going, "Well no, we've got our stuff that's on the discs and that's about—" I can't—that's the only maybe bad thing is I can't like change something, like the song's in a certain beat, it's going to have to stay in that beat. About the only thing on the live situation I can change is the tempo, somebody wants it a little faster I can change it quickly.

LD:

Yeah.

WD:

And if somebody really wanted something in one key, if it didn't have a whole bunch of different instruments in it, they had on different tracks I can do that pretty quick. I can change keys on it. But you'll get requests for just about anything. Actually we have enough songs where we can come close if we don't know a particular tune, if it's a style-wise thing we can come pretty close to it. Because we have a couple bossa novas and cha chas and stuff like that, but a tango [tape stops]—well that was fast. We may have to do one of those. [Addressing his dog] Will you settle down a little bit? We're trying to record here. I've had trouble doing that, barking in the middle when I'm trying to do something in the studio. So is Toby playing guitar, stayed with the band?

LD:

Yeah. [Unwrapping and swapping tape]

WD:

Oh that's good.

LD:

They're in—I can't remember where he is in Germany, one of the Air Force bases.

WD:

He plays great bass but I know he loves guitar.

LD:

Um-hm.

WD:

Well there's another band we can talk about, Jazz Alley. Great musicians. I played with Louis and with James Price.

LD:

Did you play with Tommy also?

WD:

Nope, I never did play with Tommy.

LD:

And do you ever sub with other bands? I mean do you have time that you could do that?

WD:

No, not really. I don't have time. I mean usually we're booked, so.

LD:

Do you have people who want to come up and perform with you?

WD:

Oh yeah, we let them quite a bit. Especially if they have a recommendation. A few times we've said, "Well we shouldn't have let them," but you know, we'll let them come up. In fact, the other night it got a little out of hand, it was turning into karaoke here. You know you start it sometimes, it depends on how many people you have that want to do it, but that other night there was quite a few, they started coming up, so. It was at the Lubbock Club, which is kind of strange too.

LD:

Yeah, they're usually a little more sedate.

WD:

Uh-huh. Well I've noticed since the September eleventh deal that quite a bit, like the country club, a lot of clubs their business has fallen off quite a bit. Talked with a lot of the managers and they've said, "Yeah, we've had to lay off people" and so forth.

LD:

Do you really think that that's because of September eleventh or do you think that's kind of now the economy?

WD:

Well yeah. Well, September eleventh, I don't think it's because of September eleventh, September eleventh and the stock market went down. A lot of people with a lot of money had a lot in the stock money. And especially older people had a lot of retirement stuff. And when that's cut in half, that can hurt you.

LD:

Yeah, that's true.

WD:

So I guess they just weren't going out as much.

LD:

Well, are there other aspects to music business, to band business, that maybe I'm not asking you some questions that you expected?

WD:

Well, no, not really. The band business probably—and I'm at fault to a certain extent for this—they've always said musicians have been bad business people. And probably for the most part that's right. Not that all are. But yeah, I feel as in the business, you know I feel that that's where musicians tend to lax off too much is to look at that business aspect of it and look at it as a business instead of—and of course that changes from when you just have your bands that are just starting out in college or something, and then you go up to people that are older, like Jazz Alley and ourselves, we look at it as more of a business. But in doing it professionally. I think as you get older that probably happens. But that's probably why musicians should have managers. Managers and promoters. Because it's—it can be hard. Maybe a lot of people don't—if you're really putting on a performance, it is—it does drain you. Especially the bigger the venues you play, big concerts. So in that respect, and instrumentalists, they really—and you probably know with Toby and so forth—Chet Atkins used to practice six hours a day all the time, and people say those guys just have a natural talent. Well yeah, there are great talents, but even the best ones are weak in some areas, and you still need to practice just to keep your chops up. At the stores I see all these young players, really fantastic coming up, and I guess the older you get you really do need to keep practicing just to keep your skills up. So yeah, it's hard to get all that done and have a personal life, keep your practicing going as you should. Probably keep care of the business too. But it needs to be done. And like I said, just keeping your attitude positive. Because there again, all kinds of things can happen in a band, and you got to just keep a cool head. You might want to say to somebody, get on them and just say, just be quiet, or because somebody's going to have a bad night, I have bad nights sometimes. And somebody's going to come in a bad mood and they might act a little nasty. The next night they'll be fine. You just got to roll with the flow a little bit instead of—like I said, when you get up—it's a different world than sitting out there and then being up on stage and being in the spotlight. And then when you're working with everybody you want everything to go just a certain way, and sometimes it doesn't, a lot of times it doesn't.

LD:

You want it to mesh.

WD:

Yeah. So, some nights are better than others.

LD:

Now, I—

WD:

So it's difficult and tense in that respect, when people get—let things get on their nerves too much.

LD:

Oh yeah. I do have one other question, and this is just watching you rub your neck like, hmm, maybe those glands are a little bit enlarged or something. How do you deal with illness? When you have things booked.

WD:

Getting sick? Well I can remember one New Year's Eve we were playing the gala over at UMC, the foundation. They were—New Year's Eve gala. And I was just sicker than a dog. I had the flu, actually had the flu, so I went down to the family practice doctors, because I think that was the only thing open on that particular day. And went down, and he gave me a shot, and actually I was walking out to the car. And he said the shot was pretty powerful, because I had told him I had to perform tonight. He said, "Well you're not going to be feeling that well." And yeah, I actually passed out in the parking lot from the shot I guess or something, it hit me when I was walking out to the car. My wife had to pick me up. And anyway, so we went out there and did it, and I was out so I could hardly talk, let alone sing, so I wasn't singing. I was doing Theraflu about every break. And that was probably the most unpleasant deal I ever did. I was just sweating and felt terrible. Anyway, I just had to do it though. It was big deal, big formal deal. And I said, well I played guitar as best I could, and I had to run the sequencer and all of that stuff, so, sit up there and make some—

LD:

What about when Bridgette's sick? I mean if you have vocals, then—

WD:

Well she'll try and hang in there too. There was one time last year she was—could hardly talk, and the other singer and I, we were up there at the Lubbock Club, but we just went ahead and did it. We can't—if there's nobody else that we can find to come in. So yeah, you just got to get up there and do it. So—

LD:

Have you ever cancelled because of illness?

WD:

No.

LD:

I didn't think so—you played with the flu.

WD:

No, I never have. Brigitte missed one gig because her car broke down in some rinky-dink town.

She was afraid to get out, and it was pretty early, way back in the eighties, so. That's the only two times that she's missed. Of course, with a vocalist, they really shouldn't if they have a real bad cold, they can ruin their voice. Get those voice nodules, vocal nodules or whatever they're called. But for the most part everybody's counting on you, so. Luckily, knock on wood we haven't had a death in the family or anything where somebody had to leave or something. I guess if something happened where you can't make it, you can't make it. Now I do have that in my contract by the way.

LD:

Oh you do?

WD:

Oh yeah, if there's something like for weather, something—but otherwise comes up where you can't do it. Especially if it's an outside deal. I make that perfectly clear, like somebody in West Texas wants to do an outside wedding in July or something.

LD:

You never know when we're going to get a great thunderstorm.

WD:

Yeah. A thunderstorm or it's going to be a hundred and ten out, and they want it outside. I've had to do that before. Play in extremely bad heat. Or if there's a thunderstorm or wind's blowing real hard. I always try to warn them, I say, "Yeah, they're nice when the weather's nice, but the chances of that are not with you in West Texas."

LD:

Oh yeah.

WD:

But and we have been rained out like at Abuela's a couple times. Once this other pool party we were—this one party they were having at Lubbock Country Club, and it was inside, but the wedding was going to be outside. At the—out in the field somewhere, it was a farmer, and his daughter was getting married. So, they had that, and that was real late and stuff, and I remember when I was setting up, when I was bringing in the lady that was at the Lubbock Club in charge out there, she came out and said—and I saw the storms building up. She said, "Well there's a real big storm that's fixing to come." About when she said that stuff this wind started to pick up and stuff started flying by horizontally, and I was trying to get whatever I had out in the inn and my van doors closed and everything. And that thing just roared through. This was probably about three years ago. And it just flew through. Well anyway, we learned that they were all outside, and they had to all set up with white chairs and all that, you know these decorations. Well

actually, there was like tornado warning, a real good possibility of a tornado. So they got word of that, but they all went, a lot of them went in the house and some of them went in the storm shelter he had out there. Well they came out of it and the chairs were all flattened and stuff blown over, and the bride started crying and stuff. Well her dad said, "Well, that's okay, we're going to set up all the chairs," and they set up all the chairs and re-did everything, so that's why they were late getting to the country club. But he set up everything and by golly, his daughter's wedding was not going to end. But they came in real late, and it was a mess. But that's what can happen in West Texas.

LD:

Um-hm. I know that you teach quite a bit. And you teach at Tarpley's. Do you have advice for young musicians going into this business?

WD:

Well, yeah, a lot of what I said as far as—well yeah, have your—well, you have to be very self-motivated. And I would say try to be the best musician you can be before like trying to be—see stars in your eyes. And probably business-wise, if you have your favorite music and stuff, and you're focused on that and so forth, go for it. But be aware if you want to make a living, you know your audience, and to know that you kind of realize well I'm not doing my thing at certain parties. There's a time and place for that. You can be working on your album and do all that, whatever. And like I said, business-wise, just trying to keep things—keep your business all lined up and keep organized, and look at it as a business. Because that's a big part of your reputation is you're a professional. And people can count on you. Be responsible. And don't go into places and start playing real, real loud. I mean, in clubs if you want to and that's what they want, fine, but like at parties where there's—like a wedding reception, you have kids that are little babies all the way up to great-grandfathers and mothers. So, and certain—a lot of places people are talking, and wedding receptions a lot of people are getting together, they haven't seen—so they're going to talk some. So play where it's punchy and people can still dance, but they can still visit, things like that. That's the other good thing about having everything on a sequencer though. Volume-wise you can always turn everything up and down and you can sing to that level. So you can turn it up when you have to, turn it down on other occasions. So, I've had a lot of people even come up and say they appreciated that. But sometimes it's hard just with live instruments, with a live drummer it's hard to play soft.

LD:

Oh yeah, yeah.

WD:

Ask Tommy, it's sometimes hard to play your trumpet soft. It's got a certain level it's got to be, you know, so. That's the advantage of having the volume on there and everything. But anyway,

and then to get back to what we were talking about—well that was a certain aspect. Playing for your crowd. Yeah, when you get to be a star, that's one thing—the crowd that comes out to see you, they want to hear what you've been doing, so they expect that. But when you play at a dance or something, people just want to have party music, they're not expecting a concert that you did on your last album, and if you have an album that nobody's heard it. So you've got to look at what you're doing. And you might throw a few of those tunes in to see how people like it. And the other thing for—this is probably—because I teach a lot of guitar. For young musicians coming up, well they all want to—I know this is just guitarists, because—or kids just want to get a guitar and be a rock star. But they all, a lot of them just like want to learn songs, which you have to do to a certain extent to get a feel for what other people are doing. And then they want to just want to learn guitar licks. But very few of them really study music that much. And if they really wanted to be really a really, really good musician, well it's better—the more you know about mu—well they think, guitarists think, well you just play guitar. It's guitar. It's guitar music, it's not music. [Clock chimes] But I try to stress on my students to try to—the more of music you know, the more music you know, the more music you can play on guitar. Because it's not really going to do you that good just to play like somebody else that you've been copying, if you want to play your own stuff. You've got to—I mean if you play like somebody else and play their album there are going to be people out there going, “Well he's just playing like so and so.” You're not going to get much attention. You want to turn that off?

LD:
It's fine.

WD:
That's a grandfather clock, by the way. But yeah, try to look at different styles and look at—don't get so much just in one style. Even if you may not play in these other styles, there's always something you can learn from them. But that's the great thing about music. Probably every day I learn something else, something new.

LD:
Oh yeah?

WD:
Oh yeah.

LD:
What has been your last new thing?

WD:

Yesterday I came across this chord that—a real neat sounding chord that I've never played before that I wasn't even have thought of putting in that certain playing it that way on the guitar.

LD:

Uh-huh. Was it an add-a-note?

WD:

Add-a-note?

LD:

Sus four, sus six.

WD:

Well it was a nine thirteenth chord. But played in a real unusual—I've played it in other ways before, but this way it's just differently voiced. And it just sounded neat. Yeah, there's always something to learn.

LD:

Those are really good if they're gapped at the bottom.

WD:

Uh-huh.

LD:

So that you have the open sound.

WD:

Yeah this has pretty—well this was exactly the opposite of that probably.

LD:

Really?

WD:

It had a gapped top actually. It was just unusual. And actually the third was in the bottom voice. Anyway, there's always something new to do. And just recently I came across this really neat improv, improvisation course actually from—this is from a keyboard player from Berkeley School of Music, Dave Frank. And it's called *The Joy of Improv*. And I started playing it one day and I said, "Man, this stuff is hard." Because I always admired keyboard players, they seem like

they can fly all over the place. Well they always study these Hanon exercises, when you get in piano. And they teach you to, really, it teaches you to play all these, well—

LD:
Patterns.

WD:
To play different—huh?

LD:
Just patterns.

WD:
Different patterns through the scales. And I had never done that, or even ran into that that much on guitar.

LD:
Yeah.

WD:
But he wrote it for all instruments, so I started playing, I said, “Man, this stuff’s hard. Why is that.” Well the whole course is designed to build your inner ear up. And so I started looking into that more and more. Basically, you have these people that play, and I’ve read some of the stuff that, yeah they don’t think about it, they just think what’s in their head and it comes out through their fingers, and that’s really what your inner ear is. This thing was designed to build your inner ear up. Said this is real hard, and I was wondering why it was so hard for me and I just started—kept with it, kept with it, and finally I started—even at my age I started getting a lot better on stuff. It’s just amazing. So I’ve been trying to get some of my students interested in it too. But just to build you inner ear up. Because they always admire these great guitar players, I said well a lot of them you know they—and people just—I’ve seen a lot of people with different degrees of inner ear like some people have a more natural inner ear already. But it’s just something that you can work on if you need to. And even if you do have a good inner ear you can even make it better. And I really didn’t know there was a course for that, sometimes—and a lot of people rack it up a lot of times, well they just have a natural talent. Which you know, people do.

LD:
Sure.

WD:
Most great, great musicians have something very, very special. Got a little something special.

And most of them, most great musicians you can tell it's them right off the bat. You noticed that? They have their own particular little style, whatever.

LD:

There are a number of improv books though, but I have never heard of this. You said he's from Berkeley?

WD:

Uh-huh. Yeah, I highly recommend it—now see another thing, it's all written out in notes.

LD:

Really?

WD:

So—

LD:

So all the licks are written out. Is that right?

WD:

Right, um-hm.

LD:

Hmm.

WD:

So a lot of the guitar players are—a lot of them don't read music, so. Not that that's a—if they're really interested in it, either they can get somebody to write them out for them or, you know.

And all of my students don't read, so I would just tap it out for them. But like, this guy stresses the whole thing, it's the process of going through this. And he has you singing along with what you're playing, because he said that'll strengthen your brain and your fingers, what they're doing. Forcing yourselves to sing it. And he said, "I want you to have fun with it, and I want you to sing with it, and I want you to swing with it," is what he says. Because he wants you to not criticize your playing, and don't get upset if you don't play it perfect. Because he said the process is what is the most important. Just keep doing it, have fun with it, you'll get better and better, all those mistakes will go away, don't let your inner critic just overwhelm you and say, "You're not doing it well." Don't get down on yourself. And it was about a year after doing it, and doing these Hanon exercises, and you know like I said spending three weeks to a month on each one. So that's what I did, and so after about a year it started clicking a little bit. Each one started to get a little bit easier, and they were getting harder, but it was easier for me to do them.

And it really helped me a bunch. And it helps your—I don't know, I can't—I think it does change the way you think. You have to work on it every day, or five or six days a week. If you just do it—I think it changes the way you think and the way you focus, the way your mind. You know, use those different little sides of your brain and everything. It's just something that does take time.

LD:

Yeah.

WD:

And it's been exciting for me. Because I was getting, well I'd play the same old things that I knew would fit on certain songs. And I'm just playing different stuff, not so afraid to venture out. And it's real hard when somebody comes in and says, "I want to learn how to play lead." And they say, "Teach me." And I'm going, "What," and they say, "Well you know, what—should I start", well I say "You really need to know the fretboard, you need to start scales." And they say, well they want all these formulas that'll work, and I say, "Basically, you can play any note you want." And most good players will play all the notes in between, and everything. Not just the notes of the scale. So I say you just have to get to that point where—I said, "Really you can play anything, as long as—it depends on how you resolve it." Or as one musician said, "The note that you play depends on the note that preceded it and the note that comes after it." So, and I said, "That's just one of those natural things that you'll build up the more you work on it. But there's really no formula. Not to a great improviser, he can just about"—after a while you can get where your confidence is you can try out just about anything and you know that you can get out of there, and just feel free to experiment. They said Mozart was a great improviser.

LD:

He was.

WD:

And Beethoven, they said sometimes they'd play parts of their songs and just go off on something else.

LD:

Beethoven, Liszt, yeah, most of them. In fact, it's always been a big part of music education.

WD:

But in this book—I don't know if you wanted this for the interview.

LD:

Sure.

WD:

Anyway, he has what they call these “jazz Hanon” exercises. And he has you do all kinds of different ways of playing this, and he says you can apply to any style, it’s not exactly—you don’t have to do jazz. And they’re challenging. And then on guitar of course you have like twelve positions, so what ends up you can play it in one position through all the different keys, or you can play it up and down the keyboard or fretboard in one key. So a lot of times I’ll have a stack of cards with every key and I’ll just pick out a key every day, and then I’ll have a stack of positions over the fretboard. Just go through the—I mean I’ll just go like this and pick one, whatever it is I’ll pick it in a certain key. So after a while you do that and the keys doesn’t matter, you can be playing in any key, so.

LD:

Now have you done this with your students as well?

WD:

I’m trying to.

LD:

Have they caught on?

WD:

You now, guitarists, I don’t know why they fight scales so much, they just don’t—like I said, they want to learn these guitar licks, but they don’t know. Then they say, “Well what am I playing?” they don’t even know what they’re, playing, key, so. It’s hard. I’m trying to emphasize on them, well the more you know about the music, the more music you can play.

LD:

Yeah, but when you get excited about that I’m sure that carries over.

WD:

Yeah, some of them. And I do have one that’s really started on it, that’s quite a good guitarist. Yeah, but I’ve just been—it took a while, and a lot of times I was going, well, I still think this is going to work, because it’s something—there was some reason I couldn’t—I was getting it but I was real slow. But now the speed’s picked up and boy it’s just—I’m playing things at a speed I’ve never played before. Just real recently.

LD:

That’s good, that’s good.

WD:

I'm just starting on book number two now, so.

LD:

I hope this kind of follows that, but I kind of wonder, what are your future goals?

WD:

Well, that's a good question. Well I still want to write a lot more original stuff. And I probably need to focus more on that. I do have some originals. [Tape stops] Do we have another side?

LD:

Um-hm. [Tape is flipped]

WD:

And yeah, I'd like to put something out. An album or something. Next year.

LD:

Would you do this alone, or with Bridgette?

WD:

Well I was thinking, yeah, more guitar stuff. If we could find—I'm not really a songwriter per se. I mean I could probably help out in the music and lyrics. Expertise, certainly in that. But anyway, I can probably tell if somebody has something good. But if we had the right material I'd love to do something with Bridgette. But she hasn't mentioned to me about anything, so I don't know if that's what she wants to do. Of course Bridgette's had two daughters to bring up by herself, so that keeps her full. And one of them's in college already, went down to Texas this last fall. Then she's got another one that's eight or nine, or something like that.

LD:

Do you plan to continue with Masterpeace for a number of years?

WD:

Oh yeah. Yeah. And I like teaching. And like I said, I mean doing anything, I'd always like to do something more professionally, but the way the market is right now I don't think I have to worry about being a rock star, because it's very youth oriented. Probably if you're over twenty the record company would be real skeptical about even looking at you. But maybe in some other genre. Of course, I'm not—rock guitar right now is not my greatest love. I don't know if you've noticed, they do very few leads in most alternative bands. And when there are leads, they're very, very simplistic, almost thematic. They'll do one line then they'll repeat it about three times and that's it, so.

LD:

Same chord, over and over.

WD:

Yeah. I'm not a real heavy metal fan. There are some great heavy metal guitarists that have a great talent, but I just don't like listening to it for very long. And a lot of the music, there have been other artists that talk about this, but a lot of the anger in music, the noise, I would call it sometimes, it's like—I like music that I can hear, and I like notes and I like—

LD:

Tunes?

WD:

Tunes, I like melodies. I like singers that aren't screaming, I like them to sing. And I may be old fashioned, but I know it's stylistic. It's like Creed—well, Vedder from Pearl Jam, and then the Creed guy kind of sounds like him, and then there's a group called Calling, and that guy kind of sounds like both of them. So it kind of gets to be a style. And I don't know if they'll have singers that last anymore, like Billy Joel or Neil Diamond, because they're so in and out. And the way they're singing I don't know if they can keep their voice very long. But, and this will—the music nowadays I'm sure, you know how music goes in cycles. So I don't know if it'll last either. And they play some great stuff though, there's a lot of stuff I like. I'm not that old fashioned. I love a lot of the stuff. Matchbox Twenty. Rob, he's real talented. He's a good songwriter too. And there are some—but you know, I don't know, I'm just not much into all this vulgarity and swearing. It's like hip hop, I don't know if you noticed that they've got to begin off with the big F word. Every song. And there's no sense in it. And a lot of it's just—I don't know. Not that it's trash, but they're, a lot of the lyrics are just trashing people and different things. It's not very positive, just tell me what's wrong with everything.

LD:

Okay, what are you going to do to fix it?

WD:

Well, I try to put out good music. That's what I try to do.

LD:

Yeah.

WD:

It's about all I can do. So, I just can't understand a lot of like hip hop and rap, just even all the violence between the companies, it's like weird. It's—

LD:

I'm not sure that we're going to put rap, okay, as a—from a historical perspective. You put things in all the different genres, when you look back on them. So the historians really do that. And so, I've given this quite a bit of thought of really what are we going to do with rap? It's not music by any musician's standards.

WD:

No.

LD:

I mean, spoken poetry, and some people are very talented at that, and I do think it's very important because it expresses the views of a particular culture, but I'm not sure where we'd put it.

WD:

Right.

LD:

It's not that you'd especially call it poetry.

WD:

No.

LD:

But we don't call it music.

WD:

Yeah, I just don't. I don't know what you do—

LD:

But it's important. It may not be important to everyone on whatever level, but it does have its place.

WD:

Uh-huh. I don't know. See, with all these like shootings and stuff, I know it has to do with money. And I don't know if it like caught on because the kids just loved it and they started selling a lot of albums, so they said, "Well, if they're going to buy it we'll keep putting it out." Because it seems like the early rap was better than what it is now. I mean now it's just really gotten—

LD:

Trashy.

WD:

Yeah, really bad. I don't know. I just think it's more money-oriented. They think that, well, the worse we get the more money we seem to make. That might be true.

LD:

That may be, but I think it'll probably cycle out eventually.

WD:

Yeah?

LD:

I don't know.

WD:

Because there's some good things that have come out of it, some certain beats and way of doing things. They'll even start mispronouncing words and stuff. It seems like it starts spilling over. Do you ever notice how they say, "me"? It's like "me." You're going to love "me." They ain't never say "me" in any hip hop stuff or anything.

LD:

I always wondered we students have such problems singing "me." And that may be the problem right there.

WD:

Yeah, could be. Because pronunciations are different. More slang, they use a lot of slang. But the—one thing I think that's kind of sad is a lot of people grow up thinking that that's good music. Kids. And—

LD:

Exposure.

WD:

Yeah, I don't know if they get enough exposure to what's—or that's hip, so if they listen to a classical piece, they go, "Oh man, that's just—" well they say like listening to Mozart will build your intelligence. Well I don't know if listening to rap is going to build your intelligence up.

LD:

I don't really think so. I don't think that it's complicated enough to involve the mind. Unless it's to create rhymes. Who knows, I mean that would be a good study.

WD:

Well if it does have a message, the sad thing is half of it you can't understand, because they keep mumbling on, some of it. And some of them are just screaming in the microphone, I can't understand half the stuff they're saying, so. Well it's the truth, and then, well it's like, well Britney Spears, she puts on a great show and stuff, but now it's such a theatrical deal.

LD:

Yeah.

WD:

It's like the talent for singing people don't want to hear just somebody sit down and play guitar. You've got to have all this dancing and stuff.

LD:

Light shows, smoke, yeah. It becomes a whole creation.

WD:

Now, P Daddy I did see on the tonight show a little while ago. And yeah, I didn't realize, because I obviously didn't ever go see one of his shows. But he was doing this rap thing and then all of his sudden he went like [sound] and you know these dancers were all in the back of them and they went and it was a total different thing, they started doing this big dance thing. The dance thing was real—it was great.

LD:

Entertaining.

WD:

Oh yeah.

LD:

And they're very talented. Contortionists.

WD:

But yeah, it's—I don't know, the show's good, so. And they have it all down together, they're very, extremely talented. But—

LD:

Do you face that with the students when you're teaching them now? I mean you said that they really just want to play guitar licks, but—

WD:

Yeah they want to play the—

LD:

Do they have exposure to different sorts of music?

WD:

Yeah, see, when I get a new student, I'm up against two things. Just getting around on the guitar and having them make some music is a little difficult, right off the bat. And I know they come in with a certain music level with what they listen to and everything. But my first deal is I want them to really like the guitar, I don't want it to be like torture. So I'm not going to say, we're going to sit down and here, and you're going to start learning do re mi fa so la ti do [phone rings]. I want my students to get to just be able to play something. So, it's my theory if they like a particular song or something they'll probably practice it longer and harder if it's something that I come up with. So I usually have them pick three or four songs that they really would like to play, then we'll kind of listen to them and see if one would be easy enough where they could be able to do it. Because a lot of them usually use the same chords, so it won't be like—you know they'll keep using those, those things. So I try to get them where it's fun, and see if they can play something. Because I think accomplishment, if they feel they can accomplish something then it'll keep them going. But I think if you start on something that they're going to hate right off at the beginning without them realizing. Because usually after a time they start asking questions, "Well why do you do this," and then you can start introducing a little music theory. And they might ask, "How do you play lead?" and I'll say, "Here's a scale, this guy just played these notes of the scale." They go, "Oh, okay." Then I talk them into doing other things, but you know a thirteen or twelve year old or fourteen that likes to go [guitar sound], to start them off on something like that, I found they're going to—

LD:

Take a while to like it.

WD:

One or two lessons and they're done. Yeah, but you can ease them into it.

LD:

That sounds great.

WD:

But yeah, there's some great little guitarists running around town. Really good. And some of them are scary even, they can play so well.

LD:

Lots of talent, lots of facility.

WD:

Oh yeah. So, I'm glad I ran into this improv thing. It is pretty—like I explained to one guy that's working on it, it is a college course pretty much. It's not easy.

LD:

I have to get that.

WD:

Yes—but I could show it to you. Or we could continue this, and I'll show it to you. But yeah, it's pretty neat.

LD:

Well Walt, you have so many things going for you, and it's just really interesting to meet a musician who is a businessperson as well. And you have all that wrapped into one. And teacher. And to just get excited about that, I mean it's really wonderful to see. And so, thank you for your time.

WD:

Okay, well I hope this will help you with your—

LD:

Yeah.

End of Recording