

Tuck & Patti FAQ

From our website in 2001

How did you get started singing/playing? How did it develop from there?

Patti: I always sang. As a little girl, instead of talking, I'd sing a running, stream of consciousness commentary on life. (Tuck: She still does.) Patti: My mother would say, "Patricia, you're singing again!" It was second nature to me. Many people in my family sang, although none of them professionally. I started singing in church when I was six or seven, directing choirs by the age of 10 and adult choirs before I was 16. At the same time I studied classical violin for 11 years in school. But I was a terrible violinist, so my high school music teacher, Owen Fleming, encouraged me to sing and actually gave me voice lessons instead.

I knew when I was six that I would always be a singer. My twin sister, cousin and I were on family vacation with my grandmother that summer, and I was lying in a field listening to all the sounds of nature and watching the clouds roll by. All of a sudden it became completely silent and a voice said to me, "You'll sing and everything is going to be all right." I just said, "OK." Then all the sound started up again. I didn't tell anyone about this for years, because it seemed so normal to me. I just assumed everyone had the same kind of experience.

There was always music in our home. My mother had a big record collection that ranged from big band to all the great singers to blues bands and all the great gospel groups of the day. One singer that made a tremendous early impression on me was Mahalia Jackson. She came to our church to sing. But from the beginning we were exposed to all kinds of music, including a wide variety of concerts that our mother would take us to. We went to hear people as diverse as Josephine Baker, Patsy Kline and Tennessee Ernie Ford. One of my first major influences was Sammy Davis, Jr.; I learned about phrasing and scatting from hearing him sing. I was also hearing the vocal groups on the radio and standing in front of the mirror with a brush as my microphone and a broom as my microphone stand imagining I was one of them. Aretha, all the Motown groups, Dionne Warwick, Buddy Holly, the list goes on and on and on.

So from the beginning I have listened to all styles of music: Gospel, classical, jazz, soul, folk, blues, rock, country, music of other cultures; everything. My first love as a jazz singer was and always will be Ella Fitzgerald, but Sarah Vaughn, Carmen McCrae, Nina Simone and countless others have affected me deeply, as well as Joni Mitchell, Laura Nyro and singers of all different styles. John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme* changed my life. Stevie Wonder set me on my songwriting path. Miles Davis, Roland Kirk, Ima Sumac--the more influences I list, the more I can think of that I'm leaving out. I always say that once I hear it, it's mine the next day. Al Jarreau's *"Live In Europe"* album was a moment of truth for me; the moment I heard it I felt that he had raised the bar for all jazz singers, and knew I had to go back to the drawing board. He inspired me to start exploring mouth percussion. Of course Bobby McFerrin blew everyone's mind. We were fortunate to hear and work with him a lot back when we were all playing the same small clubs in the Bay Area.

Growing up in the Bay Area during the historic 60's was an awe-inspiring experience. I saw Big Mama Thornton, Otis Redding, Muddy Waters, Albert King, Carlos Santana, Janis Joplin, the Beatles, the Who, Cream, Blind Faith, Derek and the Dominoes, Sly Stone, Billy Preston, Aretha Franklin, Jimmy Reed, B. B. King, Dr. John, the Rolling Stones, Stevie Wonder, Wes Montgomery, Thelonius Monk, Roland Kirk, Miles Davis, Sarah Vaughn, Carmen McCrae and

so many others. The Fillmore, Carousel Ballroom and Winterland were like home to me. I was at Woodstock and Altamont. Bill Graham always watched out for me. Jimi Hendrix called me "Foxy Lady" on my birthday one year. I was at every show he ever performed in the Bay Area. I jammed with hundreds of musicians. It was a very exciting time.

Most of my professional career before meeting Tuck was with lots of Bay Area original bands, but, coming out of the San Francisco music scene, I would often play with bands that would play one continuous song for a whole set, just evolving from one thing to another. In the bands I played with, you had to be an all around musician, able to improvise in any style. We would make up songs on the spot and never look back. I was not very often in more tightly formatted bands that would play just one style, like jazz, soul, top 40 or rock. A couple of notable exceptions were when my band "33" became T-Bone Walker's backup band in the last years of his life, and when I was one of the founding members of "Kingfish," a Grateful Dead offshoot band featuring Bobby Weir, Matthew Kelley and Dave Torbert.

Hearing John Mayall's Turning Point was a turning point for me. It showed me that you didn't need a lot of instruments to make music, and I began experimenting with just guitar and percussion or guitar and sax. Even before that, there were times when I just played acoustic guitar and sang, which doesn't sound too unusual until you realize that I only knew one chord, that I moved up and down the neck. (Tuck: But she had a great feel! She taught me "Glory Glory" using that one chord.)

Patti: At the time Tuck and I met I was leading my own jazz band and singing with two other bands. Yet I felt that none of them were giving me any satisfaction, and I actually remember praying on the way to what turned out to be my meeting with Tuck for a change in direction in both my music and my life.

Tuck: My parents played records a lot, mostly swing and big band. Both my father and my older sister Sharon played piano. He had led a jazz band in college, but later became a lawyer and oil company executive, so he rarely played any more, but whenever he did, it would be Gershwin's Rhapsody In Blue. I'm sure I grew up with the concept that adult men nonchalantly sat down and played passionate and difficult music. My sister studied classical piano, and some of my earliest memories are of me rolling around at her feet as she played. Little did I know that I was getting tremendous ear training that would serve me for a lifetime.

My sister started showing me things on the piano when I was seven, then I took formal classical lessons until I was 14. I was thought to be talented but not prodigious. I did not enjoy the reading part as much as the playing part, so I memorized quickly and developed a good ear. A family highlight each year was our piano recital, where she and I would play a duet. If I were to have a regret about that period it would be that my teacher, Martha Blunk, understandably felt the need to keep me interested by giving me simple, catchy pieces with titles like "Man on the Moon" and sonatinas that I could master quickly rather than more challenging pieces from the standard repertoire. Fortunately my sister was playing Bach, Beethoven sonatas, Chopin and Debussy, and my ear was filling up with how this music worked. Later on my own I hacked my way through the Rhapsody In Blue, some Chopin polonaises, Bach inventions and Beethoven sonatas.

Meanwhile, my sister was listening to all the pop music of the day, and I was getting these sounds in my ear, but not playing them. It wasn't until the Beatles and Rolling Stones came out that I knew I had to play rock and roll. So we started a little neighborhood band, with me playing

piano, my next door neighbor playing electric guitar, and the kid down the street beating on a couple of practice pads and anything else he could find. Our songlist was Beatles, Rolling Stones, Animals, etc. It was during this period that I decided I must play guitar. I must admit that it was ego and competitiveness that drove me initially, in that I wanted to show up the guitarist in our band. So I took up guitar. This act allowed us to move from the living room, where the piano was, to the garage, and I was in my first garage band. This was pre-Jimi Hendrix, so my first playing was reminiscent of Chuck Berry with Beatles/melodic influences. The first electric guitar I owned was a Ventures Mosrite, with a Vox Pacemaker amp.

My first act on the guitar, after learning the basic open chords and barre chords, was to work my way through all 400 of the Orchestral Chords in the appendix of the Mel Bay chord book I had. These were complex jazz chords with impressive names like 13 #11 b9, and I had no idea how to use them and would not for years, but that did not matter to me at all; I practiced and memorized them because they were there. It was an early indication of a kind of systematic ruthlessness in practicing that I have always exhibited.

I had only a few months of guitar lessons with Tommy Crook, a brilliant Chet Atkins-inspired guitarist. He opened up the guitar quite a bit for me in a short time just by teaching me how to play songs. (Tommy would later become one of the most amazing solo guitarists in the world, but neither he nor I knew it at this time.) But most of my learning was on my own, from playing with other musicians, learning songs from records and a great deal of practice and experimentation. From an early point the guitar and I were inseparable. I would conduct my life with a guitar strapped on and my fingers active.

By the time high school started I was becoming one of the hot guitarists in school, and I fortunately got into bands where I was the weakest player. So I was always challenged. Wes Montgomery was in my ear from almost the beginning, because he had hit records. Soon I was learning to play in octaves and getting a little notion of jazz, discovering how to phrase and suggest the harmonies melodically. But one day when I was 16 a friend (Stuart Neimi) took me to his house and played records of Miles Davis, George Benson, Jimmy Smith, John Coltrane and numerous other jazz greats. This was an epiphany for me. Reinforced by my playing in my high school big band all three years and a parallel development in interest in jazz among the other players in the rock bands I played with, I immersed myself in jazz and figured out all I could.

The same week I heard Jimi Hendrix's first album for the first time. I remember being so dazzled by the sonic textures and so blown away by the power of his playing, that it actually had a reverse effect on me: I looked at his sound as unapproachable, and dived deeper into jazz. It was fully two years later when I started listening to him again and figuring out his songs and guitar style.

My other major influence at that time was blues. In addition to the classic blues greats of B. B. King, Albert King and Freddie King, and rockers they inspired, such as Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck and Michael Bloomfield, there was a characteristic, lazy Tulsa blues style, perfected in the playing of guitarists like Steve Hickerson, Jim Byfield and Tommy Tripplehorn. It had elements of all the electric blues styles, with particular emphasis on the nuances of intricate bends and slides, perhaps derived somewhat from pedal steel sounds. There was no emphasis on playing fast, but considerable technique was necessary to accomplish some of the subtle moves these

players used. Perhaps more than anything else this led me into exploring the infinite nuances of the single note.

During my high school years I was not particularly socially active since I spent all my time playing the guitar, but the friends I had were divided between a handful of straight, smart kids (I was one of these) on the one hand, and the musicians and the hippies that hung out with us on the other. It was the late 60's, and everybody on the musician side of the fence in Tulsa was looking towards San Francisco and the scene there. Perhaps because I witnessed them all experimenting with drugs and acting so stupid I developed an early aversion to drugs so strong that I never tried them at all during all the years I was surrounded by them. It became a standing joke how straight I was. So although I was a part of a whole cultural and political movement and a local social scene, my whole interest in it was the music. I had a reel to reel tape deck, and I recorded my albums onto a handful of three hour tapes I would listen to over and over. One night I would fall asleep listening to the complete Jefferson Airplane collection, and the next to Thelonius Monk.

I enrolled in Stanford in 1970. My musical life there was rock bands, and I was still teaching myself jazz and Jimi Hendrix in every available moment. After the first quarter I dropped out and went to Los Angeles to rejoin some of the members of the band I had played with in high school. I was lucky enough to get session work the first day I was there, and within only a couple of months circumstances conspired to show me that I could become a studio musician for albums and tv if I wanted to. Thanks to Dean Parks I was given the opportunity to take over the guitar position for the Sonny and Cher tv show, which was very popular at the time. It was at this time that I made one of my first real career decisions, which was to abandon the L. A. scene before I even became a part of it. I was idealistic (and well-funded, courtesy of my parents) enough to believe that I would not go as high artistically if I were in totally commercial situations, even surrounded by some of the top musicians in the world. I have never regretted that decision and have always been grateful that I was in a position to make it.

So I ended up alternating for the next four years between Stanford, where I ended up halfheartedly majoring in music but playing in rock and jazz bands as well as the Stanford big band and mainly sitting in my room practicing, and Tulsa, where I would play with the Gap Band whenever I was in town, which was a tremendously formative experience. For years I got to feel like the worst guy in the band. I learned more about feel and groove in this situation than in any other one in my life. During this period I was studying Wes Montgomery, George Benson, Jimi Hendrix and John McLaughlin's Mahavishnu Orchestra. I was listening to every jazz album I could find, especially early Miles Davis. By the time I studied classical musical theory, I had already learned it all from a jazz standpoint by listening to these albums and trying to explain to myself why various chord substitutions worked and how solos related to chords.

At Stanford I had the only experience that was a precedent to what Patti and I now do. Mike Stillman, who had been faculty resident in my freshman dorm for the first quarter, played sax in some of the rock bands I was in. We started playing as a duo, both exploring jazz, although he had a big head start. We did this off and on whenever I was in California. We ended up playing mainly in the Stanford Coffee House, where we were fearless, biting off difficult tunes that neither of us could count on getting through.

While in Stanford I took two years of weekly classical guitar lessons, first from Stanley Buetens, then from Charles Ferguson. I already had a lot of classical experience from my childhood and piano, a lot of left hand technique from playing electric and enough right hand technique to play

the pieces I was learning. Therefore most of their focus was on expression, and learning to hear and experience one guitar as several different instruments at once. I learned how to vary the volume and tone of each part independently of the others, not knowing that this would become an essential ingredient of the fingerstyle guitar I would take up when Patti and I got together.

From the time I left Stanford in 1974 until Patti and I met in 1978, I was in and out of countless primarily soul bands in the Bay Area, with a few top 40 and rock bands thrown in. I was notably shy and unambitious at this time. In contrast to Patti, who was leading bands, playing with the hottest musicians in the Bay Area, jamming with everybody and recording all the time, I put the emphasis on playing with friends or anyone else who would ask me in bands in local bars for very little money, rather than trying to seek out the best musicians or most challenging or promising situations. Mainly I sat alone, practicing and listening to music, 8 to sometimes 14 or more hours a day. It was during this period that I learned entire Wes Montgomery and George Benson albums note for note, as well as studying Kenny Burrell, Grant Green, Pat Martino, Larry Carlton, Eric Gale, Cornell Dupree, David T. Walker, Wah Wah Watson, Amos Garrett, Art Tatum, Fats Waller, Herbie Hancock, Errol Garner, McCoy Tyner, Jimmy Smith, Jack McDuff, Miles Davis, Freddie Hubbard, John Coltrane, Cannonball Adderley, Charlie Parker, Eric Dolphy and many others.

One notable exception to the general trend of my not playing with the best musicians was the years spent in a few top 40/soul bands with Terry Saunders, noted Bay Area funk guitarist, whose awesome technique, comprehensive musical knowledge, fastidious attention to detail, unique style and general modesty and willingness to share made him a most welcome band-mate and friend. From watching him I learned several important principles, such as: The difficult will eventually become easy; the impossible will eventually become difficult. The guitar can do more than you think it can, but only if you work very hard. Much of your preparation is so you can have multiple levels of musical overdrive available that you can shift into when the situation calls for it. Left hand staccato is important. Dense voicings will work if you use the right tone and execution. Details matter. We reinforced each others' explorations of playing multiple parts at once (guitar, keyboard, horns).

For chords I worked out a system for generating every possible voicing of each possible chord in all its possible layouts across the strings. Any voicing I liked I inverted up and down all possible string sets, and harmonized various scales with it. I looked at each chord superimposed over every possible bass note. I listed every three, four, five and six-note chord that contained a given bass and melody note (very powerful later when I was starting to play chord-melody, although it was just a theoretical exercise to me at the time). I did similar work with scales (there are the same number of scales as chords, you just play the notes one at a time in order of pitch), finding systems for categorizing and ordering them, studying their harmony and relationship to chords and practicing and integrating all the different systems for laying them out on the guitar, from most horizontal to most vertical. Likewise arpeggios: I devised algorithms for deriving all possible fingerings and predicting the most satisfying ones, as well as superimposing them over all possible bass notes. I applied similar thinking to rhythms, picking technique, picking patterns, melodic patterns, left hand finger patterns, etc., with the goal of developing a comprehensive knowledge of and familiarity with the resources available to me. Although I generated more than I could play in a lifetime, I tried to get as much of it as possible under my fingers.

During all this time I convinced myself that it was my goal to become a great straight-ahead jazz and soul player, using a pick on an electric guitar, even though I would have nagging doubts: "I

love the way George Benson and Eric Gale already did this so much; there's nothing I would change if I were them, so why am I doing it?" I did not even suspect that it was all merely preparation for a very different path that I was about to discover.

Years later Stanley Jordan showed me how he had done all the same work, except he had the good sense to program a computer to do all the permutations and combinations more quickly. But doing it manually probably helped me realize the goal of keeping my ear involved, realizing that all this was just a step towards expanding what my ear heard and preparing my hands to grab whatever my ear directed.

How did you meet?

Tuck: We met in 1978 in a band in San Francisco. I was already in the band, and one day Patti came to audition. She walked in, said hi, passed out her charts (Horace Silver's "Out Of The Night Came You") and we started playing the song. Within a few seconds of hearing her sing, I knew that I had found my musical soulmate.

Patti: It was that immediate for me, too. I immediately knew two things, that the band wasn't happening, but that I was going to steal the guy playing guitar in the corner. Our mutual friend, Mike Stillman (who later wrote the lyrics to "Joy Spring," which became titled "When We're Alone"), had been trying to get us together for a while before that, but it just hadn't worked out.

Patti: We have often talked about it later, that moment of realization about someone. We realized that musicians have a kind of radar on all the time. They are unconsciously scanning for someone that they can communicate and collaborate with. By the time we met, we had each played in hundreds of different bands and aggregations, so by now the radar was finely-tuned. Yet this was the first time for each of us that we got such a strong blip on the radar.

Tuck: We usually call it the ill-fated club band, but that is not sufficiently evocative of the situation. It was formed by the drummer, who had come from the U.K. to the United States to organize a band based on what he explained was a common approach for commercial (top 40) bands there. The goal was to be a totally commercial group that could make a lot of money playing in Las Vegas by sounding just like all the hits. Rather than have everybody take the records and figure out their parts, he brought big cases of charts of all the popular songs with every single note and vocal phrase transcribed in detail. The band was expected to sightread the charts, sound just like the record, look and act the part and go make the money. This may have been a valid premise, but in San Francisco, at least for this collection of musicians, it did not fly.

Patti: All the musicians were good. There was a soft-spoken keyboard player who dressed in kimonos and robes, an Oakland funk bass player, Tuck, too shy to look up and the only one able to decipher the charts, the drummer/bandleader, mystified and depressed by all the others, and now me, singing as if I meant it, and terrifying him. He would pass out long, detailed charts of medleys of Carly Simon and Bee Gees tunes, then stop the band continuously, saying things like, "At measure 46, beat 2, you sang a demi-quaver, not a semi-demi-quaver. Now let's try it again."

Tuck: As powerful as his will was, it could not shape the band into the commercial unit he dreamed of. We played exactly one gig, at the Presidio in San Francisco for a handful of people, and never named the band.

Patti: We stayed with the band for two or three months, and being the only members who didn't live in San Francisco, we drove to rehearsals together. During that time we quickly became best friends. We plotted our course: We would find other musicians and start our own band, based on more musical goals. We began setting up some jam sessions and auditions. But meanwhile we hadn't worked for several months and needed to make some money. So we compared notes and discovered that we knew hundreds of songs in common. We figured that we could get work immediately as a duo, then that would buy us time to put together the band. So we worked out a handful of songs, went out and auditioned and were immediately working as a duo, scrambling to get a whole night's music together. We were bold, even at the beginning. We would dress up and go to a place that had live music and tell them we wanted to play there. When they found out that we were a duo, they would offer us Monday happy hours, but we would say, no, we mean Friday or Saturday night when you hire bands, and we want the same money you pay the band. We would offer the deal they couldn't refuse: We'd come in and play a couple of hours one night for free, just so they could see how their audience responded. Pretty soon we were working all the time.

Tuck: I remember sitting on Patti's couch playing every song from Beatles and Jimi Hendrix and Joe Pass/Ella Fitzgerald albums, and realizing that I had never had so much fun or been so challenged. Patti was having the same experience. We went out to play at venues, typically after dinner in the lounge next to the restaurant, and found ourselves forgetting to take breaks. We might do a two hour set, take a fifteen minute break, then play another couple of hours. Club owners had to tell us to stop at the end of the night. I remember people passing by the lounge on their way out of the restaurant after dinner probably saying, "Who are those two maniacs who are so totally lost in what they are doing in an almost empty room? Let's check this out." They would tell their friends and within a few nights the room would be full of people listening intently when we played. The notion of the band just fell away, and we never looked back.

Patti: Early on as we were playing all these hundreds of different songs, we started talking about what we wanted to say through the music, and found that we agreed completely. We made this a fundamental organizing principle from the beginning: Every song had to speak to and be played from our hearts. We realized that for both of us such a discussion or band consensus was a first. We are convinced that this principle is one of our secret weapons.

What are the Tuck & Patti "secret weapons?"

(1) Dedication of every aspect of our music and business to God: By so doing, we believe we align our minds and efforts with divine intent without needing to understand the details of divine intent or the workings of cause and effect. We free ourselves from the results of our actions and can focus more on our role, which is to do our best with what we're given.

(2) Unanimous agreement that the music should have a positive message that speaks from our hearts, and that all business decisions should keep this in mind. This is not a guaranteed formula for maximizing financial returns, but it is definitely the formula for maximizing overall returns. It tends to minimize ego problems. It causes the positive power of the music to increase over time. It tends to attract like-minded listeners, giving us the best possible audience, and challenging us to go deeper. It reinforces our desire to be sane and be the same people both on and off stage, which makes for a much more coherent life in the long run. It simplifies business and personal decisions.

(3) In-ear monitors: By using these consistently since 1983 we have been able to live on a level of musical detail and subtlety that would have been impossible otherwise. By mixing monitors and front of house ourselves, we have been freed to focus soundchecks entirely on tuning the system in the room, resulting in dramatically clearer and more consistent sound to the audience. When they can hear better, they can fall more deeply into the music, which makes it easier for us to do the same thing. By using the same monitoring system live and in the studio, we eliminate a lot of the difficulty making the transition between the two. See Tuck's Corner for technical details.

(4) Study and control of dynamic range: This has enabled us to make our music sound "out front" rather than sound small or fall into the background, both live and in recordings. It is particularly important for a small group trying to overcome the psychological obstacle of being perceived as a small group. See Tuck's Corner for technical details.

(5) Insistence on recording live, documentary style: This has kept the real-time musical pressure very intense, making us grow more as a result.

How much of what you do is improvised?

Patti: On the structural level it varies. We have a joint commitment to go with spirit, wherever it leads us, even on the gross level, and even if it doesn't work. That works out to mean different things on different songs. One chorus of "I've Got Just About Everything" will probably always have 64 bars, but I might change melody and even lyrics, or add a chorus of solo, while Tuck would freely improvise bass lines and chords, substituting and reharmonizing around me, and varying whatever countermelodies he incorporated, just as any jazz group would. This is also true of most of the ballads we do, although at times I'll intentionally leave out a section if it feels right; Tuck typically catches this and goes right with me. On other songs the structure of some sections might change every night, even segueing into different songs.

For example, the out section of "Tears Of Joy" was completely improvised in the studio when we were recording; each take was completely different, with different chords, melody and words. After the CD came out, we actually went back and learned what we did on the particular take we decided to use. Many of our songs are like that. When we play live, the same kind of thing will happen. On a given song we might stay with a particular form for a while until one or the other of us goes off in another direction one night, then that alternative form becomes a new theme for variation in the future.

Sometimes we'll make up an entirely new song on the spot during shows (this is how "High Heel Blues" and "Love Is The Key" got started), but one result of having albums is that people have more favorite songs than there is time in a show to do them, so this happens less than in the past.

On the detail level, it is almost all improvised; nothing is locked in. My phrasing is always changing, as are the details of Tuck's playing, even on songs we've played literally thousands of times or songs with carefully constructed arrangements. We agreed long ago always to do this so the music always stays fresh, and it works. This approach comes from our both growing up listening to and playing jazz, gospel, blues, etc., where improvisation and going with the feeling of the moment was the whole point, more important than delivering a polished version. It is also the natural result of there being only two of us, so our performances can be more conversational than if there were a big band which would have to be more organized. To be a duo and not

engage in group improvisation would be crazy; it would be missing out on a tremendous part of the potential

A few years ago for a commercial we recorded a song together, live in the studio, as we always do, then I had to go back and sing it again in several other languages, singing to the original guitar track Tuck had recorded when we recorded as a duo. It was the weirdest experience, as if I were carrying on a conversation with someone who was not listening to me. It completely surprised me, because I had not realized how constantly we respond to each other instinctively and instantly all the time, back and forth. It is automatic, reflexive behavior, just like in dancing, and to suddenly rigidly lock in Tuck's response to me was completely unnatural and disconcerting. Of course, this is how most recording is done today, but for us the conversation has always been the thing.

Tuck: I'm not sure whether this is philosophical, psychological, realistic or just wishful thinking, but my experience is that even when I play the same thing twice, it still feels like I'm improvising. I don't successfully memorize, either music or hand motions. I believe it comes largely from my practice approach and musical philosophy: Musically I have spent most of my energy working on options and variations rather than polishing just one version, and on playing what I hear rather than what I practiced yesterday. Therefore songs themselves become ever more complex branching networks of possible ways of getting from point A to point B four or eight bars later. It is as if the theme just becomes another of the variations.

Technically my emphasis has been on exploring as many alternate fingerings as I could find and using alternative right hand approaches to open up textures and feels. As a result, I don't develop specific finger memory to help me play a song the same way each time, or to help me get back if I get lost. This means I might play a song with identical voicings several times in a row, as if it were a memorized arrangement with only subtle phrasing variations, because I hear it that way each time, then one night something Patti does or something inside me causes me to hear and branch off to a completely different harmonization. Naturally she responds automatically in kind, and we are off to some unexplored territory, on a track parallel to the normal version. Since I just play what I hear and I'm currently hearing something different, I don't even have access to the version I played the previous night or several nights in a row. And I don't have a memorized chart scrolling in my head to compare to. But the basic form still remains intact underneath.

Another way of saying this is that Tuck might space out at any moment, so watch out! Seriously, though, in an age of fake books, jazz by analysis and results-oriented rather than process-oriented teaching, I believe what I am describing is nothing more than the way jazz musicians used to learn a tune by ear, never necessarily even knowing the "correct" changes, and then automatically be able to play it the first time equally well in any key, simply by following as the ear leads. There is a natural inevitability to the way chords lead from points of stability to points of tension to points of resolution, so it is irrelevant to memorize any of them; just follow your ear as it leads you. With this way of learning, you only need to memorize any peculiarities, typically no more than a few per song. This way of hearing is what makes it possible for a player to sit in, playing unfamiliar songs and still catching most of it as it goes by.

The great benefit of this approach is that it leads to a less rigid, more musical experience. The risk is that, with no scrolling mental chart as insurance, there is a greater danger of getting so lost that you never find your way back to the song. We have agreed to define this as a good thing when it happens. Our medley of "Castles Made Of Sand" and "Little Wing" was born of an

experience like this. We used to play only "Castles Made Of Sand." We had never played "Little Wing." One night while playing the guitar solo I heard something, went with it and pretty soon had completely forgotten what song I had been playing. As I kept playing, Patti eventually realized that it sounded like I was playing "Little Wing." Rather than wait for me to work my way out of the mess, she started singing "Little Wing." I didn't really know the song, so I followed her. When it came time for another guitar solo, it somehow worked its way back to "Castles" again. We forgot to discuss it at the end of the night. Usually the next night things would gravitate back to normal, but I took a similar detour two or three nights running, and we had a medley, although the transition varied a lot for a long time.

What is the fabric of your experience like when you are performing?

Tuck: Performing with Patti is like no other experience I have had, because it is so intense. The closest thing I've experienced is race car video games, when you keep the accelerator floored and life comes at you faster than you can possibly deal with, except that crashing and burning is not an acceptable option and there is no slowing down and catching your breath when you do crash and burn. It is relentlessly this way for an hour and a half. It is like simultaneously being in the eye of the hurricane and in the hurricane itself, except that we are also generating the hurricane rather than passively experiencing it. It seems that there are multiple time scales being experienced all at once. Perhaps there is a similar experience when one is negotiating dangerous rapids. It is remarkable to me that it is possible to experience calmness, peace and joy in the midst of very intense, rapid activity, much of which has to do with disaster avoidance and damage control, but it seems to be the nature of the mind that these can coexist.

So on the detail level I am experiencing a myriad of unarticulated decisions, seized opportunities, missed opportunities, roadblocks, detours, emergencies, solutions, contingency plans, etc., with my universe additionally being in a constant state of earthquake due to the happily unpredictable nature of Patti. This happens on the millisecond level, with seemingly countless different events each second.

On top of this is an overlay of conscious mental activity, some of it superfluous (constantly asked question of how my balance is with Patti and how is the balance between the bass, each voice of the chord, the top note and the percussive subtext; that was great, remember it for the future; you missed that harmonic again, it's over, so quit judging yourself, you're falling out of the moment; I was about to get back in the moment when you reminded me; how do I know if I'm in the moment?; oh no, I just landed on my second finger when it should have been the first, so how am I going to execute the next note that I'm already swinging at which just has to be there because of what Patti's in the process of doing).

It is for this detail level that I practice so hard, because without a lot of automatic translating of things I hear and feel into finger moves, I wouldn't have a chance of keeping it together. Wes Montgomery used to say that playing in octaves and block chords instead of single lines gave him headaches because there was so much going by so fast. I am lucky that this does not happen to me, but I think I know what he meant. This compressed time scale part of the experience does not exist in normal life except for brief moments.

At the same time I experience a musical flow on the time scale of breathing (seconds), with the rise and fall of dynamics and emotions in the music. At this level there are the accompanying, unavoidable thoughts, almost all guaranteed to be superfluous, such as body awareness (am I

standing up straight; there is hair in my eye; I'm hungry) and mental musings (Patti is sure looking good; I wonder what the volume of this room is in cubic meters, how much air that gives each person, how much of that is actually used, how many cubic inches of air flow per minute would be necessary to give sufficient fresh air exchange to keep everybody going indefinitely and what duct size and fan speed would be required; what time do we fly out tomorrow and how much sleep will that give me; I wonder what a given audience member is experiencing). As in meditation, I just let these come and go, like the background noise floor of consciousness. Of course, in between these two time scales are a whole variety of intermediate scales.

I do not tend to consciously experience much emotional variety while performing, in contrast to Patti. It's as if I don't have time for this. It's more a consistent, overriding sense that, gee, I'm glad to be doing this right now. I think most of my emotions are taking place on the millisecond level, related to all the microevents that are taking place, and that each is replaced by the next so fast that there is no opportunity to reflect on the experience. I am aware that sometimes powerful emotion comes through the music, even when I play solo guitar, and I see this as evidence that divine activity can take place through the medium of humans who are busy doing their work.

Another level of experience would be the realm of transcendent experiences, of being transported somewhere else, of seeing things on other planes than the material one, etc. I hear about these (often from Patti) but very seldom experience them; that does not seem to be my role.

As to involvement with lyrics, they are very important to me when we are learning a song, but when we are playing I am responding to sounds I hear Patti make, with the verbal side of my brain turned off. Occasionally I will get to enjoy the meaning of a phrase, but usually this coincides with my forgetting where I am the next moment.

One other factor that intensifies all this is our use of in-ear monitors, which are psychologically very powerful. The result of these is that everything but Patti and me disappears while we are playing, which is as it should be. Our music temporarily becomes the entire universe to us, and in our role as creators, maintainers and destroyers of that fragile universe the seeming importance of everything is intensified. So, for example, when I dance through what I experience as the joyful minefield of any ballad at a non-negotiable rate of hundreds or thousands of events per minute, every single note has a potential range from global catastrophe (being missed, played out of tune, played too loud or with too harsh a tone), to trivial event (played slightly out of balance or time with Patti), all the way to exultant and transcendent, universally shared experience for all life forms (played just right, perfect blend with Patti). You don't get the latter without risking the former. I experience all this as mattering during the moment of doing it as much as I experience anything mattering in life, having almost life and death importance. Additionally the in-ear monitors allow us to hear details that would be lost with regular monitoring, so the importance of all the subtleties is magnified even more.

At every moment there is a continuous giving up of what happened the previous moment. Of course, the minute we stop playing there is a transition back to ordinary consciousness in which it all becomes a vague memory of a very intense and enjoyable experience we had together, and it goes right back to being no more important than anything else, which is also as it should be.

The transition between the two states of normal life and performing is an interesting one which we've had a lot of opportunity to study. For me, normal life continues until the moment we play the first note, at which point it is like somebody just turned on the warp drive. It is absolutely

discontinuous. There is no gradually getting into it; it is simply a new reality suddenly replacing the old reality. I no longer get nervous or go into any altered state prior to performing, although I find it helpful not to converse too much with anybody. Warming up just prior to going on is a good thing but no longer particularly necessary, since I've had to go on cold so many times, and since Patti and I agreed early on that she would never refrain from calling a challenging song just because it was the first song of the night.

Compared to all other playing situations I have experienced, I would say that our nightly experience is similar but orders of magnitude more intensified. Heightening this is the duo nature of the performance, which means that there can be no letup of intensity or concentration for the entire duration.

Although I have virtually no experience to base this on, having been basically straight all my life, I have no doubt that there is no way to experience such a state through the use of drugs or alcohol, and that to perform intoxicated or high would simply not work.

Do you play for God, yourself, your partner or the audience (what is the relationship of these)?

Tuck: I love questions like this. I used to ponder such things a lot. Now I have come to a sense of clarity about this. When we are playing together, I play almost exclusively for Patti. It is as if nothing else exists. I have come to the conclusion that by doing so, I am properly playing for God and for the audience. I used to attempt to actively remember God, pray or have some type of divine thoughts while playing. It turned out that this was a distraction from doing what I was supposed to do, which was to lose myself in the music as an act of devotion to God. Since the music I play is a very detailed personal interaction with Patti, it is appropriate for her to be my whole focus.

The sense in which I play for myself is on a very detailed level that no one would ever know about; I think of it as the realm of whim. Almost constantly there are multiple options for ways to create the same sound (alternate fingerings or picking patterns), or there are equally good musical choices at a given moment (details of a voicing, degree of emphasis of various notes within a chord, angles of attack, details of underlying percussive subtext, etc.). Here, even though the specific choices would make no difference to a listener, or even to Patti, I see it as critical that I constantly exercise whim as much as possible rather than fall into doing things the same way all the time. It makes me more and more flexible. It gives rise to unplanned possibilities that do make a difference. I even suspect that sometimes it keeps my mind busy and out of the way so the music can flow through me more naturally. The boundary of details between what matters and what doesn't matter in music is elusive and very important. By constantly interacting with it, I believe I come closer to correctly balancing the ego with the music.

When I'm playing alone, I play primarily for myself rather than for the audience. I figure that my standards for myself are more unforgiving than those of any other listener, and that cumulatively, over a period of time, this will lead to the most sublime and honest music to share with others. At the same time I trust that subliminally I am in touch with the hearts of the audience. It is like trusting that the music is dedicated to God even when I'm too busy to be thinking about God. At times I also imagine myself playing for one of my musical heroes, like Wes Montgomery, with the goal of making him smile with a little of the satisfaction I've received from hearing him. And

I can never turn off the consciousness, developed in years of playing for dancers, of whether it is grooving or not.

I often have tried looking at the audience more, but when I do the music tends to fall apart. It's easy to get lost looking into the beautiful, sweet faces that we get to see and forget to play at all. I frankly don't know how Patti does it without bursting into tears all the time.

How do you manage to sing about love and not sound sappy or kitsch?

Patti: It goes back to the fundamental principle we agreed on when we first got together in 1978: We don't sing or play a single note that doesn't come from our hearts. Although I studied acting and became very good at acting out a musical role convincingly, we decided there would be none of this in what Tuck and I do. If it speaks to my heart, then I can make it speak to your heart.

Any anecdotes about the making of Hymns, Carols and Songs About Snow? (Our first installment; eventually we'll cover all our CDs.)

When I started thinking about recording a Christmas album, my first step was to go to the library and check out a random assortment of Christmas albums. What I found was appalling and depressing. Maybe it was just the bunch that I happened to pick, but most were obviously insincere. At best they were lackluster performances by people who would obviously rather be doing something else. For me Christmas music was part of the fabric of childhood. The songs I grew up hearing my sister play on the piano every year were even more standards to me than the jazz classics. This was music that was near and dear to my heart. So for a couple of months in summer 1991 I lived Christmas music. I love simplicity as much as complexity, so I took both approaches, sometimes using very straight harmony, sometimes jazz harmony and in one case atonal/polytonal harmony.

We had recently moved to our new house with no studio. It seemed ridiculous to go to a recording studio to record solo guitar when we had all the equipment, so I wandered all over the house with the guitar pickup plugged directly into a headphone amp listening to RF interference coming in the pickup. It turned out to be quietest in Patti's office upstairs. She agreed let me turn it into my studio for a couple of months. Ergonomic it was not. First, in order to reduce the RF interference still more, we had to make a Faraday cage. This was literally a cage of steel mesh screen wrapped around a simple wooden frame which I would stand in, the kind of thing you might keep chickens in. It occupied most of the room and was still barely big enough for me to stand in with the guitar. Definitely lacking in ambiance. The recording equipment was stacked in the closet with a mess of cords everywhere, fished in and out of my cage. I would start and stop the recorder with a VCR remote control. For me to switch between Record and Play mode we had to take a long PVC pipe, hook it onto the switch and run it across the room through a hole into my cage, where I would twist the pipe, being careful not to break the switch off. All the equipment made the room very hot. I stood in there sweating for hours at a time in June and July and lost myself in Christmas music. I was actually very happy with the results. I still completely enjoy listening to this album.

"Winter Wonderland" was inspired by George Shearing's trademark sound of harmonizing melodies in octaves, with three other notes in between. These very tight voicings are impossible on guitar, but I found that I could suggest the texture by fingering standard four-note jazz voicings on consecutive strings, but raising the bottom note an octave by playing an artificial

harmonic while playing the other three notes normally, an extension of an approach associated with Lenny Breau. If you've heard us play "My Romance" live, you've probably heard a similar approach in the guitar solo. Much of this version was improvised, but I put a great deal of attention into making the melody sustain vocally while the bass and chords were swinging underneath.

I had turned "Silent Night" into an exercise in parallel diatonic harmony, so it was becoming more and more rigidly arranged and unmusical, until I played it for Patti. She encouraged me to completely abandon my arrangement, go upstairs and turn on the recorder, randomly pick a different key and improvise my way loosely through the song, treating it as a fantasy, exploring its options as if I'd never played it before. That is the version that appears on the album.

I heard "Coventry Carol/What Child Is This" as wanting a very straight, classical approach, yet allowing for a few substitute jazz harmonies. This was a rare case of my intentionally not improvising, even to the point of repeating a section. Most of the challenge was in getting some difficult voicings to sound smooth.

"Jingle Bells" goes back to my very early Chet Atkins influence. I cannot tell you how hard it was for me to leave out the bass notes on the first verse and chorus yet keep the percussive subtext going underneath the melody. My ear heard it, but my fingers did not want to cooperate. For me, therefore, there is a big release of tension when the bass finally enters. As a guitar-playing listener I hear an interesting drama throughout in how I repeatedly wrestled with trying to do percussion on a string that already had a note ringing.

"Ave Maria" was inspired by Aaron Neville's beautiful version of the same song. Trying to play chord/melody after listening to him sing was humbling. I intentionally chose a key where the melody would stay in the alto range and therefore constantly collide with the arpeggios; it set up a musical tension that I felt would lead to creative solutions. During the earlier part of the song I used flamenco rapidly arpeggiated flourishes I learned from listening to Sabicas to evoke some of the characteristically mercurial feeling I got from Aaron Neville's melismas, since I could not possibly imitate the melismas themselves and keep the underlying arpeggios going. As the song evolves from a classical feel into a gospel piano-influenced feel, the melodic influences of Cornell Dupree, Eric Gale and Amos Garrett become evident on top, with a reference to George Benson creeping in during the fadeout.

"Little Drummer Boy" has lyrics which somehow go very deep for me, reminding me of all the inspiration I have received from reading about the lives of saints and lovers of God from all religious traditions. The challenge was to infuse some of that inspiration into my rendition of this simple song with three chords which depends entirely on the lyrics. In an attempt to evoke what I saw as the utterly humble drumming of the boy elevated to blazing magnificence through the simple act of his devoting his drumming to God, I had a strong intuition that I should borrow a technique Jimi Hendrix used on "Are You Experienced", rubbing rhythmically on the muted strings with the open hand near the bridge. In this case, though, I gradually overlaid this with playing the chord itself. This served as a point of departure for what turned into a percussive study on one chord.

In contrast to losing myself in a musical meditation on a song that epitomized Divine Love, "Santa Claus Is Comin' To Town" is a slow, improvised blues take on a normally snappy secular

song. My goal was make solo guitar swing like the Basie Band at a very slow tempo, using a lot of the understated, slippery blues style I learned when growing up in Tulsa.

"It Came Upon A Midnight Clear" is a largely improvised reflection on a beautiful melody. From a guitaristic point of view, its success could be measured by judging how transparently I escaped from all the unplanned fingering corners I painted myself into.

"God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" reflects capriciousness in arranging. I simply strung together a variety of ways to render this song, throwing in some modulations for contrast. For me the most interesting one, because I don't hear it too often, has an active melody in the bass with sustained chords on top.

"Deck the Halls" was technically the most difficult piece on the album, a real tongue-twister. Most of it felt like running through a minefield. The second verse combines a texture borrowed from George Benson for harmonizing melodies (octaves with an intermediate note a sixth or fifth above the lower note) with an attempt to keep the bass line going underneath. The third verse is another example of melody in the bass, followed by what turned out to be surprisingly challenging, three note chords with melody in the lower voice, but raised an octave by playing its octave harmonic. In this section there is an interesting textural contrast when all the chords drop to a lower octave. I did it to solve a range problem, but now I really like it.

I experienced "O Little Town of Bethlehem" as a duet between bass and melody, with the internal voices of the chords filling around them. To me this song is so inherently beautiful that all I had to do was play it and avoid messing up.

"Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" begins with another, simpler use of melody on the bottom in harmonics, this time fingering sixths, which become thirds by virtue of raising the lower note an octave. Songs like this are sometimes characterized by critics as a "romp," suggesting a gleeful, careless run. I remember feeling as if I were sitting on a bull that decided to go for a "romp." I never quite fell off, but if you listen really carefully, you can almost hear me screaming. My favorite part has the melody in the bass under a synchopated chord part on top, which I lifted from Betty Wright's "Cleanup Woman."

"Angels We Have Heard On High" uses what I call "dysfunctional harmony," for lack of a correct term, where a diatonic melody is harmonized with a set of chords that have no relationship to each other or to a common key, yet which eventually resolve back to the original key. I intentionally avoid standard resolutions or chords that have a strong pull, tending to choose quartal structures and other stable or ambiguous structures, sometimes superimposed over an unexpected bass note. I avoid harmonizing any note with the chord that originally went with it or with any of the normal substitutions for that chord. I then intentionally break these rules only occasionally as an effect. Even though any pair of successive chords will have no relationship to each other, I try to choose all beautiful, consonant voicings and convincing voice leading, so the experience is not jarring. Within those constraints, I focus on what I experience as a meta-level involving the balance and flow of harmonic tensions and resolutions. My goal is to get the ear to suspend its normal desire to know where it is and how it all relates, with the payoff being an alternate, but beautiful, reality with the previously familiar melody being recast merely as a feeling of *deja vu*. While this harmonic approach works equally well for all types of melodies, I particularly like applying it to a song whose lyrics are so universal and exultant.

The two octave artificial harmonic on the end was either a stroke of luck or a divine gift, depending on one's point of view. I had not planned to play it and would be lucky to nail it like that once in a hundred tries if I had. The other 99 would have ruined the performance with an ugly last note (I was not equipped to edit). But I remember being moved to reach for it at the last instant of the only flawless version I did of the piece despite the risk, so I followed that intuition. For me personally, the whole meaning of the album is embodied in that one last note.

Do you have children?

No. We realized a long time ago that our priority was supposed to be our musical collaboration, and that if we had children that priority would have to shift. We have lots of nieces and nephews spread all over the place.

How do you teach?

Patti: I'm good at helping singers to maximize their technique by covering the fundamentals, and this is critical to expression. But I always say you get an F+ for good technique. The real challenge is in finding your own voice. I'm committed to the goal of unabashedly honest expression of a message of love and hope through the medium of music. I try to help other singers along their own paths of discovering and sharing what lies in their hearts. "I shall go away with my terrors until I have taught them to sing." The song, the melody, the lyrics, learning to communicate your intent, what you want to say to your audience, opening to improvisation, choosing your material, letting go, using stagefright: These are only a few of the issues facing every singer. We sing through them all.

Tuck: My goal has always been to support the student in discovering their own direction and helping them to move in that direction. To that end I try to help them learn to teach themselves. I try to restrain myself from the natural tendency to overload people with material, although I'm willing if that is what somebody really wants. I've had students who wanted to play like Steve Vai, Charlie Christian, Joe Pass, Ornette Coleman, the Basie band, Jerry Garcia, me, etc. I've had 7-string and Stick students, although I play neither. I have a good mind for problem solving, so we just look at the goal and figure out how to get there as quickly as possible. If reading is a goal, I can help even though I am more a decipherer than a sight reader. The only areas I stay away from are classical and flamenco guitar, because I am unqualified except to offer some technical tips.

I have found that transcribing and learning to play the actual playing of other players is one of the most important tools for learning a guitar style. In that case the student does the work, I listen and catch the mistakes, figure out how to help their ear develop faster and help develop a notion of how to analyze, extrapolate and generalize from it. The same approach works well for understanding music in general. One student simply transcribed Steely Dan songs, going gradually from barely following three chord blues to accurately hearing every note in every instrument, no matter how difficult the chord progressions. In the process he came to understand all about how harmony worked. It was then easy for him to hear any other kind of music accurately.

I try to trust my intuition when it falls on me to make decisions about where and how to lead somebody, but I try to help them use their own intuition to guide us both. I am very good at

reading fingers and bodies and figuring out how to help somebody technically, having done so much of it, and having gone down virtually every conceivable wrong path myself.

I've found it valuable to try to help students figure out how they can take advantage of their personality and technical attributes, using their strengths to compensate for and correct their weaknesses, and turning their weaknesses into strengths. Likewise I try to help them grapple with the issue of balance: How balanced should they be in their musical approach and in the way music relates to their lives, and how can they come closer to the balance that is right for them? Tuning into this kind of issue can be a powerful tool, and the answers can vary widely.

I had one student, a rather accomplished single line player with a good feel but not much theoretical knowledge, who invariably played all the "wrong notes" over any chord progression, including his many original songs. He had enormous enthusiasm and an infectious personality. His playing struck me as very strange and incoherent. Over a period of several lessons I did some soul searching, then finally gently explained that I felt an obligation to tell him what the traditional wisdom would be about his choice of notes, but that he should make his own artistic decisions. Using one of his songs I presented him with the set of notes (which happened to form a scale) that theoretically fit his particular progression. He happily tried them out, switching repeatedly between his and the theoretically correct ones. He finally concluded that he could see how the others fit, but he liked his better. We even repeated the exercise for some other passages, with always the same result. At that point it became clear to me that my duty was to support him in his direction. Over a period of time his conviction won me over; his music started to sound completely "right" to me. I have not seen him in many years; by now he is probably a very powerful and certainly unique player.

I have never been asked to give a refund, but I should have at least once: A student came for his first lesson wanting me to teach him to play Eddie Van Halen's "Eruption." I had never heard of Eddie Van Halen, but I figured it out note for note from the tape, using standard left hand technique, with the right hand picking every note. It was very difficult and unnatural to play that way. I could feel that something was not right, yet I knew I had all the notes right. I hope that he soon found out what I later found out, that Eddie played it using his trademark tapping style and that his "teacher" was an ignorant bozo. I assume he did, because I never heard from him again. The refund is waiting with interest.

How do you take care of your voice and hands?

Patti: Hot water and rest. Good diet. On the road I travel with a boiler and thermos, as well as a vaporizer (steam) for the hotel room. I lead a very boring life. If I were to party all night, I would become hoarse. You will very seldom find me going out after a show. There is no substitute for silence.

Tuck: Patti didn't mention awesome technique. I have seen her sing through bad colds, flu, pneumonia and laryngitis where I could barely tell. I know that she not only supports her voice correctly, using her diaphragm and never straining her voice, but that she has perfected the real-world technique of varying phrasing where necessary to adapt to the current state of her voice. I have many times been fascinated at her brand new approach to a song, only to learn later that it was because she was avoiding coughing or compensating for the fact that the break point in her voice had shifted half an octave. I've seen a bug fly down her throat and watched her somehow

sing right through it. Little things like this, perfect intonation, unbelievable mic control and 100% focus are what make somebody a pro.

How fast does the body regenerate and repair? I have had ample opportunity to study my own fingers. They are typically good for about 90-100 minutes every night playing with Patti, or about 8-12 hours of playing with anybody else or practicing, provided I keep it varied and don't get too far into doing one thing over and over. My fingers don't callous and only harden a little; each person is different this way. For me the early left hand symptom of playing a lot is sore fingertips. It is easy to ignore for a while because they quickly become somewhat numb once I start playing again.

The early right hand symptom is my already very short nails wearing down into more of a straight line than a curve, leaving the tip increasingly unsupported right where it hits the string the most, throwing off the tone and making me tend to dig in harder, thus accelerating the wear. The more advanced condition is nail separating from finger on the left hand, starting with the side of the pinky, and right hand nail wearing into the quick (beyond the point where the nail joins the finger), along with the skin wearing thin on both hands.

My left hand adaptations are refingering, backing off on vibrato and sliding where necessary and being very careful about angles of attack. I find that the more I play, the better my aim; but the better my aim, the more I tend to focus the finger wear on one spot. So I might intentionally hit at a less than optimal angle where I can get away with it in order to spread the wear.

In the right hand I'll substitute my little finger for whichever other finger is having the most problems, vary the angles of attack, and use alternate techniques where practical. I've never found a nail or skin treatment product that makes any difference, although Super Glue in a cut helps temporarily. The steel strings just wear them all off immediately.

Preventive maintenance: I take God's name before cutting, filing or sanding since there is a lot of guesswork involved. When I know that we'll be playing two shows a night for several nights, I'll lower action slightly.

I typically have no wrist or muscle problems at all no matter how much I play. I suspect that this is partially because my technique is so varied; all the different moves tend to balance each other out. I obviously avoid injuring hands. No power tools, no basketball, alertness when closing doors.

What are those mics on Tuck's pedalboard? What is that box on Patti's mic? What are those hearing aid looking things in your ears?

We use FutureSonics Ear Monitors, which are in-ear monitors; headphones molded to the shape of our ears using hearing aid technology. Thus we have no speakers on stage. We were among the first to do this, starting in 1983. The two microphones on Tuck's pedalboard enable us to hear the audience. They are panned left/right and give us a reasonable stereo picture of what the audience sounds like. We adjust their volume with a stereo volume pedal (the one Tuck almost never touches). This is commonplace among users of in-ear monitors. The box on Patti's mic (there is also one on Tuck's guitar strap) is an amplifier with volume control for her Ear Monitors. See Tuck's Corner for more details.

Do you ever play at weddings?

Our first performance together as a duo was at a wedding, and we have played for many over the years. We have always loved doing this; our music is so appropriate and it is hard to find a happier occasion for music. (Plus we get to secretly renew our vows.) We don't get to do it as much these days, but we still love to do it when we can. Contact us if you are interested in this.

Who writes the songs?

Tuck: Patti does. She has a gift for expressing what she feels very directly in lyrics, and for creating the right musical setting for those lyrics. She writes the way she speaks. I've seen songs come out of her complete in a few minutes, or gestate for years. At an earlier point I naively assumed that the logical collaboration was for her to write lyrics and melody and for me to come up with the chords, but I seriously underestimated her. It turns out that she is usually hearing very specific harmonies and textures, down to the details of the voicing, and that many of them are very different from the ones I might provide. And she has the chops to sing all the notes.

This was a happy realization for me, because I have always been a guitar player who liked to explore options and never a songwriter who could make decisions, so though I like to collaborate I was definitely unqualified when it came to writing songs. So I quickly evolved into the interactive canvas on which Patti paints. I try to be available as a resource but never inflict my concept on her when she's in the middle of her process. Because of all the systematic exploration of chords and voicings I did in the 70s, my mind can comfortably work that way whenever needed. At every moment I am available to offer options, whether for a chord, a voicing or a progression. Yet I often marvel that, at a critical point in a song, of all the, say, 46 possibilities for a given chord, she will automatically hear just the right one, which I can see logically but would have suggested an average of 23 others before getting to. I could go right through her songs and footnote these moments. There is one in "Strength" where what she heard was one of the handful I would not even have mentioned because it was just too weird and dissonant, yet it is the perfect chord. I guess a life without surprises is not a life.

On songs that are collaborative between us I try to save her the time of communicating all the details whenever I believe I know where she is going. So sometimes she paints in broad strokes where the harmony is concerned, and sometimes in extremely fine ones.

Patti: It's true that as time has gone on Tuck has become more of a willing resource and human sequencer, but sometimes my harmonic or groove concept for a song will spring from something I hear him play. "Everything's Gonna Be All Right" came out of an exercise he was doing around the house. He played these few notes over and over trying to get a particular technical detail together, without ever finishing the phrase, endlessly until it started to drive me crazy, and I said, "Finish it!" It became the verse and the song flowed out. Our version of "Woodstock" uses an African-sounding 12/8 groove he was playing around the house, which he said evolved from my suggestion that he listen to Salif Keita.

Tuck: I'm good for a few seconds of good ideas, either groove or progression. Don't look to me for organizing it into a song. If you look at the handful of songs I have actually written, they are as simple as it gets, both harmonically and melodically. The playing may be complex, but the structure is elementary.

I'm not much of a believer in committee creativity. I think that the more cooks, the more diluted the soup gets. Even with two people it is a very delicate interaction. I believe strongly in the value of one person pursuing, discovering and realizing their artistic intent without any sidetracking or dilution, both short term and long term. Sometimes when collaborating even if you have a good idea the best thing you can do is shut up. Let the primary person go through their process and see it through. Catalog your own clever ideas and offer them at a point when they don't cause sidetracking. I cannot tell you how many times I have seen producers spoil things because they start offering alternatives where none are needed. The amount of energy it takes to maintain or regain artistic focus in the face of continual distractions is prodigious, and it tends to make the artistic goal recede, sometimes past the point of being reachable. Many people would find this attitude to be a challenge to their egos, that somehow they need to assert themselves all the time. But we both try to live in accordance with something the great pianist and teacher Art Lande said long ago, "Serve the music."

So I sort of cast my vote with Patti as a songwriter. The songs she writes speak to my heart as much as those of my other favorite songwriters such as Stevie Wonder and Cole Porter. I don't think anybody, including me, needs to tell her how to do it differently. Instead her vision should be supported however it evolves.

Patti: My feeling is that I am not attached to being the songwriter. I don't care if I wrote it, if you wrote it or if someone else wrote it, as long as it is a good song and it speaks to my heart. I believe that the stigma about doing "cover tunes" is doing a lot of pointless harm to music. No one would accuse Ella Fitzgerald or Frank Sinatra of covering a tune. They were doing their version of a classic. It is an honor and a challenge to do a song that has been performed by many other people. It keeps you honest. Whenever I do this, I am aware of a whole procession of great artists before me, allowing me to join in being a part of a tradition. Today's great songwriters are being slighted and discouraged by the cover mentality because their songs miss out on the process of evolving through being performed by many artists. This kind of situation can lead to talented writers intentionally writing down to the lowest common denominator in hopes of getting the song recorded once as a hit, since it will likely not grow over the years.

Of course from a producer's standpoint the duo offers us the advantage that we automatically sound like we are doing an original version of a familiar song just because our instrumentation is different; it just comes out sounding like Tuck & Patti. On songs like "Time After Time" or "Castles Made Of Sand/Little Wing" we viewed ourselves as paying tribute by sticking as closely as possible to the original versions, but it does not sound like it.

Tuck, what's the thing on the back of the headstock of your guitar?

It is a container with a makeup sponge saturated with Sweet Oil, which is an unrefined olive oil used as an emollient which I buy at pharmacies. I use it to lubricate the strings since my hands tend to get dry. I was advised that it is less harmful to the guitar than the various products specifically made for this purpose.

Where can I get transcriptions/sheet music for your songs?

Other than a few transcriptions in magazines, there is nothing published yet. See Tuck's corner for a list of these. We plan to offer as many as possible at this site for free. See Tuck's corner.

What is Binky/Grey Kitty?

Grey Kitty is the name of our publishing company. Binky is the name of our recording studio. They were our cats, brother and sister, who died of old age around the time when we first went on the road. Binky was present during the recording of Tears of Joy. We recorded it in our rented duplex, which we soundproofed as much as possible and recorded in the middle of the night for quietness. We found that if we locked her outside she would meow so loudly that the microphone would pick it up, so we had to let her stay inside. But if she got too contented from being with us and started purring she would also make too much noise, so we could never pet her while recording. The compromise that worked itself out was that Tuck would stand, with one foot on his volume pedal and Binky lying asleep on his other foot, which he could never move without making her start purring. We had one beautiful take of My Romance where she suddenly woke up and meowed so loudly during Patti's last note that we had to use another take.

When will you play in my area?

See our tour schedule page. It is updated whenever new dates are confirmed. Until then we can't effectively predict, because tentative dates come and go as schedules are getting pieced together.

Do you take requests?

If you are going to be at one of our shows and have a particular song you'd like to hear, email us (allow at least a business day for it to bounce to us on the road). Or send us a note before the show. We'll do our best to honor your request.