

## INTERVIEW WITH WAYNE HOLT - MAY, 1995

*Wayne Holt was born in April, 1950 on Staten Island, New York. A finger-style guitarist, Wayne was booked by Barry Dean on a number of cruise ships during the 1980's and it was through Barry that he met and befriended Dave. A past president of Houston's Theosophical Society, Wayne delivered the eulogy at Dave's memorial service on August 15th, 1994.*

Instrumental music has always been my interest. I went to Nashville and worked there for a while and then went out on the road. Later I returned to Houston, where I'd finished up high school, and started working in the clubs around here, playing in a lot of eclectic little ensembles. Then I met Barry Dean and worked with him for a pretty good while on the cruise ships.

I met Dave through Barry in the early '80's. We met in a social sense, and I always related to David a lot more in that way for a lot of different reasons. I told Linda when she asked me to do the eulogy that I couldn't give a eulogy about David as a musician because I never related to him as a musician. Now he was a wonderful, wonderful player. I think what the deal was that he had so many people around him because he was so good, and everybody was always talking about music in the musical community. He had a variety of interests, and there was no one to talk about those other things, and think that's why--when we would hang out--we would have a tendency to talk about non-musical topics. Because he got so much of that from work and all those situations, that I think he enjoyed talking about other things too.

He was very much interested--and this was something that he said to me, particularly as he got worse--that musicians who understood him as a musician primarily misunderstood what he was trying to do. He used music as a tool to express a spiritual dimension, just as somebody might write literature or maybe write religious literature or something. To him it was a spiritual experience. I think as he got older and particularly after he got ill and everything it seemed to me that the musical thing, in and of itself, was a little bit of a drag to him.

I got the impression that many people were so impressed by his chops and wonderful this and wonderful that and you're so good and so young and such mature playing ..... It seemed that he thought they were missing the point; the point being that it was an expression of a dimension of him that people were missing by getting caught up in the technique or the artistry of it. That's the impression that I got.

If I was playing some place and he'd walk in, even if I hadn't seen him in a while, he'd come up and we'd hug and it would be like we'd talked the day before. It could have been weeks and weeks or months. He was very busy, and we moved in different circles. He played a real purist jazz thing, and I'm doing something else, so we didn't really cross each other in the clubs all the time. But it was just like you'd spoken thirty minutes before. He would pick up the thread of that relationship totally naturally and be off to the races and fill you in on whatever was going on.

I first met Dave through social functions and I know that I didn't even hear him play for a while. I did go out and play on some cruise ships, and Dave did also, but we didn't end up on the same ones. And again it's weird that I didn't relate to him in that way at all. I play finger-style jazz now but I definitely was not a jazzer then. He was experimenting at the time--he still played

synthesizer then--and it wasn't until later that he decided that that was not the voice that he wanted to use. So at that point he was still experimenting and finding out what it was that he wanted to use as a tool. It seemed like he had a pretty good fix on wanting to do the jazz thing in a serious way, but he tried to do or allowed himself to try some other things that were more popular, I guess, for the work. I was always more of a musical generalist.

I was really impressed by the fact that he was a very handsome man; very, very attractive, tall, dark hair, always a real big "welcoming" presence about him. He was the kind of person who when he would walk into a room, people--even if they didn't know who he was--he had this very comfortable personality, so comfortable that people would kind of gravitate to him.

If you happened to be in a crowd with him... Lots of times people who get some recognition will be scanning the crowd to see who else is interesting while you're talking. David, when you were talking to him, you felt like there was no one else--even if it was only in passing for thirty of fifty or sixty seconds--he would hone in totally on what you were saying and pick up the ball and run with it. You would actually feel like, "This guy is sincerely interested in what I have to say." And then he would probably run on because everybody would be tugging on him. But he always impressed me as being extremely sincere and straightforward.

He had some self doubts, but everybody does. Dave had extremely high standards for himself, and sometimes I think he didn't feel that he lived up to them in different ways, and that maybe pained him some. But he was a genuinely warm and very sincere person and interested in other people in a sincere way, and that never ever changed.

As he got older he got a little more introspective. After he got ill and knew the severity of it, I think what happened was that he became a little more driven in a weird sort of way. I talked to Linda about this. I really didn't understand, when he was as weak as he was, why he was insisting on trying to keep up the pace he was doing. Linda intimated to me that to some extent that was him wanting to secure whatever his legacy was. So whenever he and I were talking and the subject would come up I would tell him, "You know you don't have to do that. That's secure. It's not necessary to keep up a pace as if you were totally well." And he said, "Yeah, I know, and I keep telling myself I'm going to stop but .... " He lived life that way, and I think maybe the hardest thing for him when he was ill was to actually feel bad and not be able to keep up that kind of pace, because he was just like a house afire. He just insisted on it. That's just the way he was. When he felt bad it was almost like he would do it anyway, and then he'd have to recover for however long it took to recover. But part of that I think was trying to secure--to himself--that since he didn't have any kids, that he would be remembered as a positive force, especially in the jazz community in Houston. Which is very difficult; there's just not that much support for it, and for anyone to get recognition as a jazz player--especially a young one--is very unusual.

Dave had a tremendous amount of gratitude to his physician, Dr. R., because Dr. R. was fighting for him to use various protocols that were experimental. The other thing was that he included Dave in his decision making process. He did not treat him. He consulted with him.

I once asked Dave if he thought the experimental protocols were going to prolong his life. His answer was very characteristic of him. David's thing was that he would chase whatever it was--he'd chase a dream or an ideal or getting better--but at the same time it genuinely seemed that if it blew up in his face, he was OK with that. It was not like he had all the emotional capital invested in getting well. He said that himself. What he said was that the healing process was not about him getting better. He thought the healing process was going to be him coming to grips with the fact that he was dying and the process of going through all the fears and trying to come to some peace about things. So the healing process to him was not in the sense of "Oh, something radical's going to happen and I'm going to get better and life's going to go back to normal." To him the healing process was this discovery that he was going through about the fact that he was dying, that he was in fact going to leave behind all this stuff that was really important to him, that he was in fact not going to be able to be active as he approached that, and then handling all the different emotions connected with that. He used this jazz jargon and said, "You know, I'll hang with that." When he said it, it was not affected at all. You could tell that he'd really thought about the fact that he was going to die, that all the treatments were not likely to help him in the long term, and that he was really comfortable with that.

Now I know that he had his bad days when there was denial--all the typical kind of stuff--but I think that's pretty normal for a young man who basically has all these vistas opening up before him and then finds out he's not going to live to see the stuff come to fruition. I never detected--when he was in his normal, not an agitated state--that he had changed from the guy he was years before, which was a pretty loose, laid-back guy. Dave was a perfectionist with himself and others, but always within the sphere of understanding that you're just not able to affect a lot of stuff, and so whatever turns out, turns out, and you'll deal with it. He definitely gave me the impression that the most important thing going on with him in his treatment process was that Dr. R. had actually included him in it.

It was so amazing because he switched all this energy that was thrown into his playing and composing and all this stuff; a lot of that energy got switched into his treatment, which is not unusual for people. A lot of people get fixated on their illness, but it wasn't really that. All the minutiae of his treatment he had off the top of his head. So you might say, "Well what is it that he's trying to do?," or "What protocol does the FDA allow Dr. R. to try?," just asking for a conversational answer. And he would give you this thing that sounded like the Physicians Desk Reference. He'd give you all the dosages and the contraindications and what to use in conjunction with it... It was incredible. And he had all this stuff in his head. Whatever he was interested in he would just totally saturate himself with it, and of course he was interested in what was going on with his treatment, for sure.

He and I probably had a total of less than five conversations about music in the whole time I knew him. It's interesting that eighty percent of the work I do now is solo guitar, and at the time of one of those conversations Dave was working at the Four Seasons Hotel in downtown Houston playing a solo gig. I had just left a group that I had been with for a pretty good number of years and I wanted to play solo guitar and get myself out there. So David had been playing down there, and I said, "You know, I've been thinking about doing this. It must be great to sit down and just play by yourself and not have all this other stuff going on." He thought about it, because he'd been doing it for awhile, and he said, "A lot of it is great because it calls up all the resources that you have. But with a group, those other players are a "battery" for you. You

bounce ideas off of them, and even if they don't have ideas, they give you energy. When you're playing by yourself the hours can seemingly stretch into days. You're sitting there playing, maybe playing very well, and people are ignoring you because it's happy hour or something." He said that he'd worked an incredible amount with a metronome when he started playing a lot of solo stuff because he wasn't happy with his timing playing solo. He said, "It's really great playing solo but the thing you really miss is the spark of working with other people, just that living energy. It can be very draining when you play solo," And what's funny is that I play solo now at the Four Seasons and I know what he's talking about! It's weird how it goes full circle.

I said, "It must be great to have ideas going all the time and keeping them all together ...." And he said, "Actually the hardest thing is to make the emotional statement. At a certain point all that stuff's going under your fingers, but the emotional/spiritual thing you're trying to say--especially in a situation like that where you're being ignored--is really tough to do. To keep yourself up and putting out a really high quality product all the time, by yourself, is really, really difficult." He said that you have to be willing to wear your heart on your sleeve. "Your playing has to be emotional, more so than you may be comfortable with at first." And he was exactly right. The hardest thing to do is not the technical thing. It's to actually play with a lot of drama and to feel comfortable sitting with a bunch of people sitting around you and pouring yourself into it. He was definitely right about that. I was thinking about keeping the fingers moving, and he was saying, "Don't worry about that. There's something else to be looking at."

Another anomaly with Dave: just like I never really related to him as a musician I never related to Dave as if he were gay. To me the gay thing with him was exactly like the music was in that if someone said, "Dave Catney is gay," that would mean to them one thing, whereas to him it would mean something totally different. Now that's not unusual in this society obviously, but there are a lot of people who are what I would call "ideologically gay," if you know what I mean. Dave was not ideologically gay. He was gay experientially. All these gay guys that I get along with great don't seem to have an ideological bent on the thing. It's not like there's anything to prove or disprove, to be or not be. He was experiential about it, and I didn't get the impression that he had any sort of baggage about the other issues surrounding it that have become so charged and debated today. He seemed to be--to me--disinterested in that. I don't know. But it was like the color of his hair; it was not of great interest. It wasn't a focus. He explored it, as with everything else, and had fun with it.

Why some people were surprised that he asked me to do the eulogy was because they figured it would be somebody he worked with. What Barry told me was that all these guys who were around him related to him in a very positive musical sense, but apparently nobody would talk to him much about spiritual things, and that was a big part of him. I guess he felt frustrated that there wasn't more of an outlet to speak about that.

I remember one conversation we had. He'd gone in the hospital for about four days; he'd been overdoing it and had gotten pretty run down. I saw him on like the third day and we went down the hall to one of the recreational or conference rooms. We sat down and were talking about how things were going. That's when he brought up about the healing thing. I said, "What do you think goes on? Are you worried about dying?" He said, "Sometimes, it being an unknown, I worry about it. But most of the time I think that it's going to be cool." It's not like he had a deep seated belief that there was this whole drama going on the other side, but he said that he just had the intuition that everything was working the way it's supposed

to work, and that's why he should not invest a lot of emotion into worrying about being healed or being physically healed. He just had this deep feeling that the process was about just learning about himself. He said that he thought the whole thing with dying was learning about himself. That was the greatest thing about it, that he'd learned more about himself through the illness and facing all the fears and all that than he did through almost all the other experiences. He said, "Everybody's dying." I said, "I know. Most people don't realize it until they're eighty or something." He said that that was one thing that was a benefit: "When you've got something like AIDS you know you're dying. And if you realize it and accept it you can really learn a lot about yourself." It was like everything else to him, a learning process. He was a sponge, and it was a learning situation for him.

He did not believe in a God like the one in the Old Testament or a sort of amorphous good feeling. It was somewhere between Yahweh and a Zen enlightenment. He felt that the music that he played--and when he played it really well--somehow got in touch with that. Dave really gave himself to his experience and even if it was his own death with all the fears and stuff, he just seemed perfectly willing to explore what that meant. Totally willing. Not many people are capable of doing that, not consistently. And I know there were some bad days certainly too, but the times that I saw him and the times that I talked to him he always looked at it in a light that was pretty positive. He always looked at it as something that was going to be an experience that was going to provide something that he would never be able to get in any other way, and that it should be interesting!

Barry said that even though Dave had people around him who loved him very much, they did not often feel comfortable talking with him about those things. He felt very natural talking about it but he didn't want to impose on other people that way. He wasn't going to say, "Hey, let's talk about my dying," because he knew that that would really put people on the spot. Barry said, "He knew that you are comfortable talking about it, so there was not a problem." It was totally to him like you were talking about anything else. It was not fear or morbid curiosity or any of those things. It was an inevitable experience: you're born, you're going to die, and he just happened to find out that he was definitely going to die, whereas most people don't have that. He was very natural and unaffected about it, it appeared to me anyway.

I did a production with Barry; he did a stage thing of *Jesus Christ Superstar*. David came out for it. And that's another great thing about him. As great a jazz player as he was ..... There are jazz snobs and classical snobs. Well, this was a rock musical, and basically I played finger-style guitar and rock guitar for it. There were no altered chords going on in this thing, but Dave was totally, genuinely helpful with his suggestions about the sound and this and that. There would be some guys of that level who would be looking down their nose at you because you're playing folk style music in this thing, but he was going into all this stuff about the panning on the guitar and "There's a little too much overdrive on that last thing..."; where he was really listening to this stuff, and he wasn't a guitar player even. Dave had a meticulous eye for details, and I think it reflected in his playing and what he was interested in and what he was listening to. He would focus in like a laser on things that most people would just fly by. He would pick up some obscure little thing and find a really interesting twist in it, which I always thought was pretty neat. You'd think he'd be interested in some big obvious thing, and he'd be over in the corner and turn over this little stone and see this weird thing and turn the conversation over to that, and you'd say, "Wow, I wonder how I missed that..." And that was the only thing he may have heard. It was a gift of some type, I guess.

On Dave's recordings on some of his ballads and more introspective playing--just those incredible mood pieces--that's the stuff I most enjoy listening to. To me it expressed him just really, really beautifully. The things that he seemed to be most interested in musically had to do with the feelings, and the prodigious technique just happened to be the prodigious technique. Dave was interested in intangibles.

When I first heard him play, his technique was really interesting in that it seemed very mature. It wasn't all pyrotechnics, and he seemed willing to leave space in his playing, which some guys don't really learn until they're in their forties or even later. Dave always gave me the impression of somebody who grew up and matured in his playing and in his person very fast really early on. Maybe on some level it had to happen that way because he didn't have much time; I don't know.

Early on I would see him more often because he was hanging out with Barry a lot, so we would go out to dinner and stuff like that. Later on by the time Dave and Scott were together, I wouldn't see him that much at all. It's strange to me in a sense because my contact with him compared to so many others in his life was very much less, and yet every time we were together we were old friends.

I was playing at this restaurant one time, and he happened to come in and he came right up to the front and hugged me. It was totally great with me. Here's this tall guy beaming so, and right in the middle of the whole set we're stopping and talking and catching up on old stuff. He was totally unselfconscious, like, "I didn't know you were playing here! Tell me what's going on." It was easier for me to do what he asked me than to explain to him that, "Well maybe we'll just wait 'til set break and then we'll catch up." I just felt better about actually doing what he asked. Dave just drew you into whatever his scene was. He was so enthusiastic that whatever his enthusiasm was for he would see all these connections between things and all these little twists and he would try to bring you along, and sometimes it was difficult to follow because his mind was so quick. But so many people are so insipid that even his enthusiasm alone was interesting to listen to, regardless of the topic.

He stayed extremely busy. He was booking the club and playing quite a bit and traveling some. But when we'd get together he'd unload all this stuff that maybe he couldn't talk to anybody else about. He never wanted to make people feel uncomfortable, even if he felt comfortable about whatever. If somebody was going to have to sit down and listen to him and commiserate with him and be totally uncomfortable, he'd rather not put somebody through that. So he just kept things bottled up. Some of it would come out in his music, some in his zaniness, and all the different ways he expressed himself. Dave was just a very creative person, and I just got the impression that it just so happened that he landed on music and that was his primary tool. But the thing that really fascinated him was creativity in itself.

Dave was not a piano-phile kind of a guy. There are some people who are in love with the piano almost as an icon. I just felt that it was more like this wonderful thing--it could have been a hammer or a saw--that allowed him to get all this incredible energy that he had out. And he was really good at it, and people responded. The response was very important to him too. Not in an egotistical sense, but I think he really wanted to communicate. It was really gratifying to him to see people respond to what he was doing. It was validation that this wonderful thing that he felt inside he could actually take

out, put on the table and say, "What do you think?" and there were some people out there who said, "Man, that's wonderful." He just really, really responded to that.

Dave had extremely high standards with people he worked with and extremely high standards for himself. If there was something that was not happening, he did not worry about your feelings where he would just let it slide. The music was very important to him, and he would correct it firmly--very firmly--but that would be that, and he could get back to having a good time again. There are some people who are very likeable and so they don't exert the discipline sometimes on the bandstand, and as a result the performance suffers. Dave was never like that. If something wasn't happening, he'd fix it one way or another.

Even right up until the time he died, David was a very tenacious type of person. He was perfectly fine in going; he just didn't want to go. He was just always a very magnetic personality. I don't see how anyone could be around him and not like the guy, and I haven't met anyone who didn't. He was pretty well universally loved.

Musically Dave made a decision fairly early on that a jazz "purist" approach was what he wanted to do. He could have done all the shows and pop stuff but he realized that that would not be satisfying so he put up with having to fight for recognition of that art down here and all the attendant things that go on with it; the money, the bills and all that.

We were talking one time about his medical bills and I had told Linda, "Look, why don't we get this thing together where everybody will pledge one gig a month to help him with his bills. Everybody will sign on and do one gig, and you book it for free and the person will play it for free." She thought that was pretty neat but she didn't think he'd go for it, and I guess he didn't. But

I'd asked him about it one time because I knew that the bills were stacking up, and they were going through all this song and dance with Medicare and expensive drugs..... I'd asked him about it and he was telling me that the IRS had contacted him either personally or at Cezanne or something. He was really funny; he said, "I told them, 'Have you seen my car?! What are you going to take? You guys don't scare me!'" He told me, "Look what I'm facing. Do you think the IRS scares me?!!" And it was really true. To most people the idea of the IRS is like this big deal. He was laughing about it, not so much because they weren't going to take everything away; it was the absurdity of worrying about such things when he was looking at basically the end of his life. It was really funny because he was saying that "It's really ridiculous to have worried about that at any point because we're all going to wind up where I am anyway!" It was a very interesting take on the thing. "Have they seen my *car*?!!!"

The memorial service was very interesting because Dave was a larger-than-life kind of guy, and what was interesting was that the room that the service was in was a rotunda type room with all glass walls behind me. I was on this stage, and the audience in front of me was facing out towards these glass walls. The weather held out pretty much until I got up and started talking, and then it was like all these theatrical effects going off. It looked just like a Hollywood set with all the rain pouring down and the lights flashing and stuff. And then right at the end of it, it cleared up with the last few drips..... Everybody was laughing about it later because it looked so forced. It looked just like somebody had staged the thing! It was really weird. It fueled a lot of speculation, and Dave certainly always had a flair for the dramatic. During the eulogy the

lights were flickering at really interesting moments during the storm. But what was especially weird was that it wasn't the electricity, because I was using the podium lights and there were also equipment pilot lights on behind me, and they didn't go off at all. The lights that went off were the chandeliers and things; they flickered about three times and everyone gave this nervous laugh. "Maybe that's Dave!" But my lamp--the one I was reading my notes off--didn't flicker. It was just the ornate fixtures on the walls and such, yet all this stuff was on the same circuit. And the storm was booming ..... It was strange, particularly since I said in the talk that "Dave didn't hang around here..." I was thinking, "Maybe I need to do a quick rewrite on the end of this thing..."

When Linda asked me to do the eulogy, I told her that her that I would but that I couldn't do it any other way than relating to him in a way that's non-musical. . She said that he didn't want the service to be the situation where everybody got together and told stories about, "Gee, wasn't it great when Dave did..." He'd planned the whole thing and he wanted that to happen later at the Museum Restaurant. I said that I wanted to bring out this aspect of Dave that was important to him, that music was just peripheral to that. I said, "I can't do it as a musical tribute. I just don't feel that way." Later I went over and sat down with she and Scott and my notes and gave them some ideas to see what they thought about it. They said that it was exactly what they had in mind but hadn't formulated clearly, and they were very supportive and everything.

I told my wife before I left for the service, "It is going to be extremely difficult to get through this." We were actually living this thing out that David had planned out. It was very, very emotional. And what was amazing is his envisioning and placing the gospel choir at the end, rollicking and rocking and real upbeat as the apex of it. It was perfect, and from a distance played the audience like a violin , because everyone was in this mood--it wasn't sad, it was incredibly sweet and melancholy--and then all of a sudden this gospel choir is rollicking down the aisles and clapping and it was like the perfect release for all of that. I shook my head. It was just amazing. They sounded wonderful and they provided that positive thing that was needed. They just brought it up, and it was a wonderful finishing touch. And he'd visualized all that out.

While he was planning the service I guess Linda had had to reign in his enthusiasm because at one point he suggested, "Look, it would be a great idea to take my ashes and parcel them out so that everybody will get this little hanky type thing with a bow around it--like a party favor--and everyone can take some of me home with them!" Linda's good sense prevailed and she put her foot down and said that wouldn't be appropriate. This was--again--Dave's sharing of himself, I guess, looking for that audience appeal. Getting himself out to the masses!

I hope that whatever point in my own life, if I'm able to foresee that situation, that I have that kind of aplomb and good grace and humor to do that because in our society particularly, death is so shunted away and so horrific--even though we're surrounded by it, there's so much violence and all--but still it's sanitized. And the idea that somebody would not be horrified by their own demise, most people find that absolutely baffling. They cannot understand a human being who actually says, "Well, you know, I'm OK with that," which is what he said. He said he was OK with that. Most people have no idea where a person like that is coming from, but Dave was not a run-of-the-mill person.

I felt that one of the issues he did struggle with at the end was the idea of a marker, that he passed this way. His body of work that he did obviously was very important, but he had a story about himself that was more than just the music. There were other facets there that maybe would require verbalization, maybe to spell it out for some of us who are "thicker." So I think Dave definitely would have approved of this whole thing.

Dave was the kind of person who, when you talked with him, he made you feel good. He just had so much energy about him that he just attracted people to him. Just that kind of magnetism. Dave had a lot of depth and love. He was a very loving person and he gave himself to whatever he felt like it was his responsibility to do; he would just lavish so much attention on it.

When I met Dave I could not believe that he was not from New York because his whole personality was like that; real intense with that rapid fire speech. I said, "You've got to be kidding me. You're not from New York?!!" I remember one time we were talking back and forth, and when the two of us got rolling we would be naturally talking over each other. And I said, "Pardon me David, but does the middle of my sentence interrupt the beginning of yours?" He liked that, and it stopped him for probably three nanoseconds before he started in again.