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Gary Hill: Dayton Music History Project

Gary Hill

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WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY
Dayton Music History Project
Interview with Gary Hill, July 3, 2018

Interview Information

Interview date: July 3, 2018

Interviewer: Chris Wydman (CW)
Special Collections & Archives

Interviewee: Gary Hill (GH)

Interview Transcript

Chris Wydman: Alright, to get started, my name is Chris Wydman, University Archivist at Special Collections & Archives here at Wright State, today is July 3, 2018, and we're very happy to have Gary Hill with us here today, who we are interviewing for the Dayton Music History Project. Thanks for joining us today, Gary.

Gary Hill: Thanks for having me.

CW: To get started maybe if you could just share a little bit of your personal background, where you were born, where you grew up, where you went to school, that kind of thing.

GH: Well, I was born in Dayton, I went to Beavercreek schools.

CW: Might I ask when you were born?

GH: 1951.

CW: 1951, okay.

GH: So I just turned 67.

CW: Beavercreek schools. It was probably a little more primitive than it is today.

GH: Yeah. I was on the Phil Donahue Show, because they suspended me because I had hair just a little longer than yours.

CW: Really? When was that?

GH: Um, it was in 1969. It was my senior year.

CW: You got suspended for your hair.

GH: Actually, it might have been in 1968, because- yeah, I believe it was at the end of the '68 school year, about in May. That's when I was on the show anyway. But the hair thing went on, and I ended up graduating through a correspondence school, because I didn't want to fight with them about my hair.

CW: So, how did Phil Donahue ferret you out for this?

GH: He might have saw it in the newspaper or something.

CW: It was in the newspapers? That's interesting.

GH: And he was still out of Dayton at that point, but then it moved to Chicago right after that.

CW: That was before he went national.

GH: Yeah.

CW: Nowadays, short hair is what they called long hair then, you know? That's funny.

GH: They guy from Iron Butterfly was on the show with me, and he had hair, you know, [*motioning from his hair down to his waist*]. But Phil said, "Your hair isn't even as long as mine is".

CW: And the guy from Iron Butterfly was on the show with you?

GH: Yeah. And my mom was on the show and I was back in school, because the show was at 10:30 or whatever it was in the morning, so she was on the show live, and I remember this woman calling in and said, "Mrs. Hill, how can you stand to sit across the breakfast table from all that hair every morning?" and she was thinking that the guy from Iron Butterfly was her son, I know it, because with him sitting there with shoulder length hair, it couldn't have been me that they were talking about.

CW: So, what was the connection with Iron Butterfly and Dayton?

GH: I don't think there was any connection. I think he just brought him in, just to talk about if he had had problems, you know, the same kind of problems, and etcetera, etcetera.

CW: That's funny. So, you went to Beavercreek High School-

GH: And they all- my American History teacher was so interested in that whole thing that he brought a TV in so that the class could see me on the show, and I got to watch,

too, because of that, because it was on during his class. However, the three principals came in and sat down right behind me and watched the show. [Laughs] And when they got to questions like, “Do you think that it was really fair that they suspended you because your hair wasn’t like a military style cut like they wanted?” and I said, “Well, that didn’t seem to be fair”, and then I’m crawling under the table. [Laughs]

CW: How long did they suspend you?

GH: It was only like a day, because I went ahead and got my haircut at that point.

CW: But then you ended up not coming back, or later on you just-

GH: Yeah, that was during my junior year, like I said, about the end of my junior year. Then my senior year I decided that I’d finish up through correspondence school. Because I didn’t want to, you know, it just... and then later on, it was a year or two later, they completely dropped the dress code.

CW: Really.

GH: Yeah. I think they decided they were maybe getting into some legal trouble.

CW: That maybe they needed to change their approach a little bit.

GH: So, maybe it helped accomplish something. Maybe. I don’t know.

CW: A local celebrity for a time, it sounds like. So, were your parents from Dayton?

GH: No.

CW: How did your family come to Dayton?

GH: They were from the hills of the Cumberland Gap, you know, like the corner of Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia. Middlesboro, Kentucky is where they were from, and my dad was a country singer, he had sung on the radio for some of those small radio stations down there. I kind of learned quite a bit from him, and also I had an older brother that played in combos, and played mostly instrumental type of things.

CW: So, bluegrass, is that how you started?

GH: He played a little bluegrass, and what they call hillbilly music, I guess. That was my dad, and my brother he played more combo music, like Bill Black, and Teddy and the Roughriders, and the Ventures. That kind of music, mostly.

CW: So, why did your dad move to Dayton?

GH: He moved to Dayton to work at GM.

CW: GM. That's a common theme.

GH: Yeah.

CW: And I always kind of come to this later in these interviews when we start talking about how Dayton sort of developed its musical sound, and I think you just touched upon it a little bit there. A lot of people moving up to work at GM, Frigidaire-

GH: Right, from different musical backgrounds, too.

CW: So, growing up there was a lot of music in the house?

GH: Yeah, it was a naturally musical family, there was a lot of... although my mom taught me my first C chord on the guitar, when I was 12, I do remember that. But even before, my dad was showing me a few chords, and he was a great singer, and he was just okay on the acoustic guitar.

CW: Right, a good singer, though.

GH: Yeah. He had a real strong voice.

CW: So, how early were you when you first started to... so music was just always around from your earliest-

GH: Yeah, that and you know one thing that really helped me later as a music studio producer was the fact that I remember that I used to when there was no radio I kind of had a radio in my head. You know, I'd be in my room and I'd start thinking about this Elvis song, or a Ricky Nelson song, and I would start thinking about all the details and how it went through, and I was pretty young, I was only like 10. So, I didn't really pick up the guitar until I was 12, my brother had a Fender Jazzmaster laying around, a '61 Fender Jazzmaster. So, this was 1963, I would say, when I started playing.

CW: Do you remember the first song that you learned?

GH: Yeah, Memphis. Memphis, the Chuck Berry composition that was a hit for Lonnie Mack from Cincinnati, it was an instrumental, and then the Ventures covered it, and that's how- I learned the Ventures version of it.

CW: So, you were a big Ventures fan, it sounds like.

GH: Oh, yeah. And also, obviously, Johnny Rivers had the major hit on that, on Memphis. So that song was like a hit three times, with Chuck, and the Ventures- not the Ventures, Lonnie Mack.

CW: So, you talked about listening to- you listened to a lot of radio? Where were you hearing music? Were there any programs that you listened to, or stations?

GH: Yeah, I listened to WING quite a bit, and as I got older and got more interested in- as I got into promoting local recordings and things, then I really paid attention to the charts, and even on the very first gig I ever did, which was at Ferguson Junior High School, which was Beavercreek's junior high, we asked for permission to play and they wouldn't give it. They thought, "Well, we don't want these 12-year-olds playing", so I went around them, and I called Lou Swanson from WING, and I said, "You're the MC at the dance, right?" and I said, "Do you have any problem with us playing some music at that dance?" and he said, "No, none whatsoever, we'd love to have you".

CW: This was a junior high dance?

GH: Yeah.

CW: And you were 12 years old? How do you put together a band when you're 12 years old? I think I was just learning to tie my shoes when I was 12.

GH: Well, a guy across the street played the accordion, and even though none of us were real excited about having an accordion player in the band, we thought, "Well, that's something" [*Laughs*] So, we got him, and I knew a guy at school who knew a guy who played drums, and that kind of thing.

CW: So, an accordion, and you're on guitar, and you had a drummer-

GH: Yeah, and actually we had two guitar players. So it was Lauren Patton on drums, and Steve Young and Richie Gates on guitars, and myself on guitar. So, we didn't have a bass player yet. We hadn't gotten that far, weren't that polished. [*Laughs*]

CW: [*Laughs*] I've heard that story before. Sometimes that was the last piece to come.

GH: That's where McCartney started.

CW: I don't think I've heard the accordion making it on the band before the bass player, though.

GH: He didn't last long. He was in the original band, though.

CW: So, you played at the dance?

GH: We did play at the dance. We got there and they said, "What are you doing here?" and we said, "We're on Mr. Swanson's show".

CW: And then didn't he say, "Didn't I say you couldn't?"

GH: He said, “Didn’t we tell you that you weren’t playing?” and I said, “All I know is he told us to come on down”, so they went to him and he came back and said, “Yeah, they say they’re playing”. So, they hated it, they didn’t like it, and we were just so excited about playing. I guess I was too pushy, obviously, but-

CW: And how many songs did you guys have?

GH: Well, we had quite a few songs-

CW: Did you have enough to do a set?

GH: We actually did two sets.

CW: Really?

GH: Yeah, we did two sets. The one thing we didn’t do is we didn’t sing. Even though we did some Beatles songs at that point and at that particular gig, we played them as instrumentals because we were too scared to sing. [*Laughs*]

CW: Right, that’s understandable.

GH: Yeah. I guess so. Then, you know, we started playing some, like, Xenia Skating Rink, and-

CW: That same band?

GH: Yeah, with the same band, although without the accordion player, and then one guy bought a bass guitar and learned how to play bass. He later became a studio bass player and did real well in California.

CW: Did you guys have a name?

GH: Originally, on the drum head it was- it said “The Tradewinds”, on the drummer’s bass drum head, but it was actually, and I can’t remember if we called it that yet, but it was The Vistas.

CW: The Vistas. Okay.

GH: And we did that for two or three years, and everybody kind of wanted to go in different directions. So, it seemed like a good way to meet girls.

CW: That’s always in the top three, of reasons that you join a band.

GH: It is, of all the musicians I’ve ever met, most of them if they’re honest will admit that, too.

CW: Yeah. So, did you go through a metamorphosis in the '60s, as the hair got longer and the music started to change a little bit with the Beatles and the-

GH: Yeah, and I studied the Beatles very diligently, I mean, I studied their production and I learned all their songs, and a lot of times I would learn the bass parts and teach the bass player the bass parts, because McCartney was getting more refined in his playing, too. It's funny how the music was progressing with us, you know? I mean, we were listening to better music, but it was also because the bands were getting better. If you listen to the Beatles first album, which they did in one day when they recorded that entire album, to where they spent months and months in the studio, like in Sergeant Pepper's and stuff, so everything in between I studied with headphones on and tried to get everything I could. And then later on when I got into Simon and Garfunkel, and even the Carpenters, because not so much... I mean, I liked the Carpenters and I thought they were talented, but I really liked the recordings, so I was trying to study how they were making those recordings. And I'd write stuff down, you know, and I'd listen through \$200 headphones and I'd say, "Wow, I like what they did there", and I'd write it down. It was a good way to study. You couldn't go to school then, especially not locally, anyway. They tried to get me to teach a couple of times, over at there was a thing called... it was in Chillicothe, it was at a recording studio, it was this Senum[?] recording workshop or something like that. The Recording Workshop, yeah, that was it. A buddy of mine said, "Why don't you come down here and teach with me", and I said, "I still want to play".

CW: When was that?

GH: It was probably... I was probably only about 30 then.

CW: Have you ever done any instruction or teaching?

GH: Oh, yeah. I've taught guitar and taught vocal.

CW: Where did you do that?

GH: Just out of the home, you know? I mean, once again, I've had offers to teach, in different stores and things, but that wasn't really my thing.

CW: That wasn't what you wanted to do.

GH: I'm a play by ear musician, and after... you know, I'm sure I've done 10,000 recording sessions, and out of those 10,000 I would say three times I had to read music.

CW: Really?

GH: Yeah, but see, it's a different market here. If I was in LA, it might be the other way around. If all three times I got to play what I wanted to play, and the rest of the time I'd be using the sheet music, and I'm aware of that. But most of the time in the local studio situation, a guy would come in where he'd beat out a song on acoustic guitar, and the studio band would listen to it once, maybe twice, and then we'd go right in.

CW: And then try to accompany it.

GH: Yeah, and work it out, and try to make it more interesting, make it more like something on the radio. And it's challenging sometimes, and the pressure was always there from the fact that the guy is paying a big amount of money for an hour, for the studio and for the musicians.

CW: So, you've got to get up to speed pretty fast.

GH: Yeah.

CW: Do you remember what the first record was that you bought?

GH: That I bought?

CW: Yeah.

GH: Yeah, I do. I think... I remember the first song I sang was- let's see if I can remember, [*singing lyrics to himself*], it's a guy named Guy Mitchell. That's the first one I remember off the radio. Maybe "*Sixteen Tons*" by Tennessee Ernie Ford, but written by Merle Travis, who was one of my guitar idols later. But the first record I remember buying was Ricky Nelson, "*There Will Never Be Anyone Else But You*".

CW: So, what was the music or the artist or guitarist or whoever who really kind of made you want to play music? Maybe this was more influenced by the upbringing in your house.

GH: Yeah, it kind of was. It's hard to say, you know, I was already playing, but then the Beatles pretty much took over my life.

CW: So that made a really huge impact.

GH: Yeah, that was a big one.

CW: And you said you never took any lessons. Or minimal.

GH: Well, I didn't take lessons in the beginning, I was completely self-taught, but later on, because I wanted to expand my horizons, so to speak musically, I took from a couple of great jazz guitar players. Local guys. Jason Hollinger. Terry Brads [*sp*], both of those guys.

CW: Terry Brads?

GH: Terry Brads, he had a band called the Three-O [*sp*]. But musically, chord-wise, he was at least on the level with George Benson. I mean, he had, he was very, very accomplished. I mean he played [*imitates guitar riff*] and they were all chords. Chord-

melody, he just played it that fast. Jason Hollinger was in bands like Greenlight Sunday, and some very famous local bands. I took from him, and like I said, took some jazz chords. He played on a famous record, called Hey Conductor, it was with [] and they used to play at the Diamond Club, and they recorded a counterpart in Cincinnati, and he was like one of the first guitar players that played a real fast but good rock guitar solo, and it was on the end of that record. Especially for a local guy, it was really outstanding. That was considered- that song seemed like it was going to be a national top 10 hit, but they kind of dumped it, because they called it a drug song or whatever. "Hey Conductor".

CW: Really?

GH: Yeah. Whatever. There was a lot of that going on.

CW: Yeah. Casey Jones, and that kind of thing. Hey Conductor. Hmm. So, you were playing with-

GH: First it was with The Vistas.

CW: The Vistas. And you said these were some of your neighbors and friends who originally formed that band.

GH: Yeah, and schoolmates. Yeah. Well, the neighbor played the accordion, actually the other guys probably lived a mile away or so. And it's nice that I still see a couple of those guys, too.

CW: They're still friends of yours?

GH: Yeah, Lauren Patton was the drummer, and he still plays occasionally, and then Steve Young still plays some guitar. He's like a real estate agent, I think in Beaver Creek, or maybe Xenia.

CW: Was it hard to find people to play with? Or were a lot of people-

GH: Umm, well, I remember jamming with a lot of different people.

CW: A lot of people playing in garage bands and jamming around?

GH: Yeah, and that's all we were, really. I remember when we started getting paid, and started making \$10 a piece, and that was wonderful. But we played teen dances over at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, and then as we got older we played at the NCO Club, and then at the Officer's Club. So, yeah, it kind of opened up as you got older.

CW: So, those original guys, did you continue to... I know some of them went different directions, was there a core group of you that stayed together?

GH: Not really, no.

CW: You each found kind of different-

GH: Yeah, and then my first kind of successful local band was called Captain Crunch and the Crew [*laughs*].

CW: Yeah! When we did the story circle, somebody mentioned that then everyone started cheering.

GH: Yeah.

CW: Was it the name, or was it just a great band? Or both?

GH: Well, I wouldn't say it was a great band, but it was a good band. I remember we played a private party over on Mad River Rd. for some people who were fairly well off, and somebody that was there liked what we did. We did a whole medley of music from Sergeant Pepper, and they really liked that. They were so impressed that they asked, "Do you have any original music?", and I said, "Yeah, we do". So, they actually paid for our first recording session.

CW: Really?

GH: Yes, somebody just- it was a guy named Ralph Winkler, who owned the Cinema East and the Cinema South Theatres, and also ran the... I'm trying to remember the name of it, the newspaper for Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. I forget what the name of that was... Skywrighter is what is was called.

CW: Skywrighter, okay. I think it's still a thing.

GH: It's still going, yeah. He ran that at that point, and he was just really a super nice guy, and he backed our first record. I think it was originally 150 bucks, and you got 500 copies, and that's including the studio time.

CW: When did that band come together?

GH: That would be- well, there's two versions of the band, but the band that actually did something and did some things was probably '66.

CW: '66?

GH: Yeah, '66 and '67 and '68, right in there.

CW: So, you were still pretty young. You were, what, about 16?

GH: Yeah, we were about 16, and they were playing that record on WING, and getting it on a few jukeboxes, etc., etc.

CW: So, was this a very Beatles-influenced, British Invasion-influenced, or what other kind of stuff did you play?

GH: Hmm...

CW: How would you describe the music of Captain Crunch?

GH: Well, on that 45 was slightly different than what we did. But even on that record, there was a lot of Birds influence. Because I loved the Birds, too. By that point I still loved the Beatles, and went to see them in '66 and etc., etc., but I became a real big Birds fan. And then the Yardbirds, was the next major influence. Of course, that brought in Clapton and Jeff Beck and those guys.

CW: Right, and Cream and all that stuff.

GH: That really helped out my guitar playing, and then Hendrix was next, and then I was always listening to him.

CW: It sounds like that was a time period where all guitarists had to go back to work, and really study and learn.

GH: Yeah. We can't just play that surf guitar now, we have to actually play. You can't play [mimics surf guitar sound].

CW: Yeah. You turn on the radio and it's like, "get a load of this!"

GH: Yeah. Jimmy Hendrix was completely different. It was like when- and this is kind of off the track- but one of my favorite stories is Allan Holdsworth, he's by far the greatest guitar player that I've ever heard. I mean, I've worked with some of the greatest in the world over the years, and thank God for that, but he was just so great that even me being a studio guitarist for all those years, that every time I'd see Allan I would work on his road crew, and we became friends. But to make a long story short, when he was in this area and if I could work it out, I would either get out of the gigs that I had or book around it or whatever. Because I wanted to be- you know, it was a chance to be with some of the greatest musicians in the world and learn from them up close. Part of the deal was that I would help with the gear and stuff, and help him every way I could, and then I would get a front row seat, and I would sit maybe just a little bit further than you and I are apart. So, even though I was a fairly accomplished guitar player, even the first time I saw him in like 1984, he was so good that I would just shake my head. I couldn't figure out where he starts or ends. I could not figure out what he was doing, he's just that far beyond me and beyond most people. I felt a lot better later when Eddie Van Halen said the same thing about him. [*Laughs.*] He said, "Every time I watch him, I keep thinking, okay, I'm going to make the jump now, I'm going to be able to tell what he's doing. But no". And it took me like 8 times, it wasn't quite 10 or a dozen, but the light would start

coming on. It's not that I could sit down now and play that, but at least I understand musically what he's doing, and basically where he's coming from.

CW: So, you got to the point where you weren't just copying or mimicking, you were actually-

GH: Well, I never copy of mimic him, because really I don't think anybody could. He was so good. I got into this story about Allan because he really is one of my main influences as a guitar player. But I never sat down and tried to work out any of his lyrics, or any of his licks, I should say. But I told him- and somebody asked me in front of him one time, they said, "What do you get out of watching him?" and I said, "I'll tell you what I get, I take away the fire". You know, because he never stops. He's just high energy, all the time. He does not come down off of that. He's just so intense, and I started applying that, and applying it to my playing. I said, "I'm going to put that fire into my playing, and keep it there". I mean, I had it, some of it, a little bit of it. I had enough of it that I understood what it was about. But it really made a difference.

CW: That's interesting. It's one thing to know the music, and how to play a song. But that's what takes it to that-

GH: So, I never, ever played any of his individual licks, even though I worked with him a dozen times. I never even sat down and tried to. I would listen to his stuff and just absorb it. Both live, and- one thing about sitting that close to it in a concert situation, because it wasn't a laid back jazz thing. It was high energy, playing through big amps, and loud. It was very loud. And so me sitting there, I felt everything that all of the guys in the band played. So, it was like being in the middle of the band, just not playing. And that was really good, that helped me a lot. But back to why I started that story was that George Benson was at this concert club that served food, and he was there with his wife. He was eating, and he didn't know who Allan Holdsworth was, but Allan was setting up to play that night and doing a sound check.

CW: And where was this?

GH: It was in New York. So, Allan picks up his guitar and turns his amp on, and starts wailing! And George Benson- now I met George Benson one time, I never worked with him, but I met him when I went to see him, and he's a very nice, laid back man. Super nice guy. Like when I shook his hand, I said, "I'm never going to wash this hand again, George", and he said, "Oh, do you play?" [*Laughs*] and I said, "Well, I thought I did. Until I heard you".

CW: He played at Gilly's, a couple of times?

GH: A lot. Yeah, he did, and that's where I talked to him that one time, when Gilly's was over at that hotel on 4th Street.

CW: Before they moved.

GH: Yeah, before they were where they're at [now]. They were on Lawn Street, too, but this was even before that. Or it might have been after, it might have been Lawn Street, then the hotel on 4th Street, and then on 5th Street where he ended up. Anyway, but poor George, he just wasn't ready for that, and like I said, everybody I've talked to that knows him, said they've never heard an outburst like this from him, but he stood up and said, "What the F is that?" He just couldn't believe it. He was just blown away.

CW: So, was that in a good way?

GH: Oh, yeah, it was a good way. He was just stunned. He'd never heard anything like that. A brilliant musician. In fact, Allan was by far the greatest musician I ever worked with, and not just guitar player, but musician. And, no, I don't play like him, and I don't know anyone else that does, either. I also worked with John McLaughlin, who was considered the world's greatest guitar player for many years by a lot of people. I told Allan one time, I said, "Yeah, I did the sound for the Mahavishnu Orchestra twice, with John McLaughlin", and Allan said, "He's the master", and I said, "No, you're the master". I said, "I thought he was, but I can do a lot of the things that he does, but I don't even know what you're about. [Laughs]

CW: What was that orchestra you mentioned?

GH: Mahavishnu Orchestra. Mahavishnu.

CW: Mahavishnu. Okay. I try to catch these things early, so that when I'm trying to transcribe-

GH: Yeah, right. Mahavishnu. Jan Hammer was the keyboard player. He did all the music for the Miami Vice soundtrack, the TV show. He did all the music.

CW: He did a lot of TV arrangements.

GH: He was Czechoslovakian, and he was a fabulous keyboard player. He used to play at Gilley's all the time, too.

CW: Really?

GH: Yeah. And Billy Cobham was the drummer, and he was phenomenal. Just world class people, you couldn't find any better people. So, that was Mahavishnu. But anyway, the last thing I'll say about Holdsworth is he was voted the greatest guitar player in the world like five times by the readers of Guitar Player magazine, and those were all guitar players. It's like one time he looked at me and he says, "Gary, I love you, but please don't sit right in front of me. It makes me nervous when a great guitar player sits right in front of me". He actually said that to me. And I said, "Well, we might as well tell everybody to go home, because there's 300 guitar players out there waiting to hear you".

CW: That's funny. Because it sounds like he was someone that guitar players just revered, but the casual music fan might not know about him at all.

GH: You know, he asked me one time, he said, "Eddie wants me to go"- he was talking about Eddie Van Halen, who was a big, big fan. In fact, he got Allan a contract with Warner Brothers, he took Ted Templeman out to hear him and he said, "Oh yeah, he's super accomplished", and he got him to sign with Warner Brothers. But that lasted one album, because Ted Templeman was a producer, and I think he produced the Doobie Brothers, originally, and a lot of stuff like that, and then he produced Van Halen all those years. But he would tell Allan, "Okay, just do twelve bars of guitar, and then back to the vocal, and then..." Well, a virtuoso, you can't really tell them how to play. That doesn't work, because they don't like that [*laughs*]. That's like, Allan asked me, "How would you produce me?" He said, "I know you're a producer, how would you do it?" I said, "I'd take my Neumann U-87 [microphone], I'd put it about 5 feet away from your amp, and then I'd put an SM81 Shure (or whatever I was using at the time) up close on your cabinet, and I'd say "Play". I wouldn't say, "Play 12 bars". And I understand Ted Templeman wanted to sell records, he wanted to sell recordings, and I get that. I get it. But you can't do that with somebody that accomplished. You just have to let them go, and just try to make it work, as far as a commercial thing. So, they hated each other, they got through one album and they were done with each other, that's what I'm getting at. But Eddie always talked about how Allan was a master. So did Joe Satriani, and so did so many other great guitar players. So did Eric Johnson, another great guitar player. You know, all these guys thought that he was the guy. When 40,000 people voted for him as the greatest guitar player-

CW: And just by mentioning some of those names you get a real kind of idea.

GH: Neal Schon.

CW: Neil Schon, yeah.

GH: Neil Schon said, "When I get too cocky about my guitar playing, I go listen to Allan Holdsworth". He said, "That puts me in my place".

CW: It gives you a real good idea of the style of guitarist that he must be, when talking about some of these artists and the types of music that they play. You talk about the energy. But gosh, producing must be such a delicate balance there, you know? You talk about the musician and the artist on the one hand, and then the production side of it on the other hand, and when do you just-

GH: And, you know, when I was 25, I had guys saying, "You know, he's a good musician, but his head is messed up with selling all the time, with commercialism. That's all he cares about." Well, I was trying to make a living at it, so I didn't look at it that way. Jason Hollinger was one of those two jazz guitar players I said that taught me, and who was a very fine, virtuoso guitar player, and he said, "I've heard people say Gary Hill is messed up with commercialism." He said, "If I were you, I'd laugh all the way to the

bank.” Of course, I never made millions dollars or anything, but I had some good runs, though.

CW: You know, it certainly sounds like from a very young age, you were always very interested in what makes a good song.

GH: Yeah. And fortunately, because I was listening to Elvis, and Ricky, and the Ventures, and then the Beatles, and then the Birds, and then the Yardbirds, and blah blah blah, I had good influences. Simon and Garfunkel, too, Paul Simon was a major influence on me, and then after I studied all of their records big time, and then I went with one of my groups to Columbia in New York where they recorded most of that stuff, and I actually got to work with the same people, and so I got to put some of those... it kind of opened up some of the dark places, you know, that I didn't understand. I filled in the holes, I guess you could say. So, yeah, I learned a lot from being there. I was at CBS for like a week, recording. Nothing ever came out of that, but-

CW: Why did you go up there initially?

GH: I was signed as a songwriter with a couple of producers out of New York.

CW: Okay.

GH: And that happened through Jerry Kaye, a local WING disk jockey- he later became program director there- he recommended us to those guys. I think they said, “We’re looking for talent”, and that’s how that went, and I had a good relationship with those people for years. When I was 16, I recorded at Capitol with them. I was still 16 when I recorded there, and that was Captain Crunch and the Crew.

CW: So, things happened quickly, and this all goes back to your first gig out in Centerville that you were talking about, on Mad River?

GH: Oh, yeah. That was one of the early gigs, yeah.

CW: And you said that the house you played at-

GH: That came after that. Yeah, it definitely came after that, but that recording helped us to get our foot in the door with those people, too. Because they heard that, you know, they got to hear that recording and they thought, “Well, they’ve got some talent”. It was an audition at Capitol, that’s what they got us. The only thing was that we were so young and we didn’t know any better, we played a gig on Sunday night at Immaculate Conception Church, and we put the stuff in the drummer’s ’56 Chevy, and put all the equipment in a trailer that we pulled behind that ’56 Chevy. So, there was four guys in the band, and we took this other guy who was a real talented guy that was kind of- we wanted him to be in the band, he wasn’t officially in the band yet, but he was a better musician than any of us, actually. So, we had five people in that ’56 Chevy and we drove the 9 hours or the 11 hours it took to get to New York, and we got there at like 4 o’clock

in the afternoon, they put us in our hotel room, we put our clothes down on the bed, threw some water in our eyes, and went right into Capitol at 5 o'clock in the late afternoon there, and had to pull that together. And that's one reason we didn't get a deal, I've always felt that.

CW: You were tired.

GH: We were just wore out. But the head of A&R at Capitol was actually there to see us, and it was like a million dollar contract that was waiting there for us. So, you know, we were 16, so this was like a dream come true. And even when they called us and said what company it was, and the band was practicing at the time, I got off the phone and I just said, "Capitol!" and everyone in the room just erupted. It was like we won the lotto or something. But you've got to do it. It's just like an NFL player that shows promise in college, but he gets there and it's like, "Well, not quite there".

CW: You weren't quite there.

GH: No. The head of A&R says, "It's just not coming together." He says, "The bass player and the drummer are all over the place." He said, "Just play the song for me on your guitar, and sing it for me." And we did that, and he said, "I like your voice. I like the songs a lot. But if we don't get something real soon, we're all going home tonight, and we won't be back." And that's the way it went.

CW: And that's what happened?

GH: Yeah. That's what happened.

CW: But that led to you being hired by CBS?

GH: Yeah, indirectly. Because I was still with those producers, that got us in that door, and they still liked my writing and stuff like that. I was 23 when I went to CBS. So it was different, and a different band.

CW: Okay, so you went and you took your shot, and then you came back with your tail between your legs-

GH: Yeah, pretty much. But I learned a lot, because I realized at least I had a better idea about what it takes, and I knew then that the bass player and the drummer had to be tighter. Not that we were that tight, but that's what he said. You know, I'm just going by what they guy said. He said, "You guys are doing okay, but these guys are all over the place. They're all over the map."

CW: Well, you got to take your shot, and then you got to get the honest evaluation of where you were at.

GH: Right. So, then we...

CW: Did you go back to square on, or-

GH: Well, then we formed a new band with better people, and somewhere in there, let's see, in 1970 I worked with a band, so I was 18 then.

CW: Was that the end of Captain Crunch?

GH: Yeah, after Captain Crunch, and I worked with this band called East Orange Express, from Cincinnati, and I was the youngest one in the band.

CW: The East...

GH: East Orange Express.

CW: East Orange Express, okay.

GH: They called me and said, "A mutual friend has recommended you, and we need a lead guitar player", and I said, "Didn't I just see you guys at the Cincinnati Gardens opening up for Three Dog Night and the Birds?" and they said, "Yeah." So, I knew it was an opportunity.

CW: Yeah! [*Laughs*] "You have my attention."

GH: So, I went down and they hired me, but I was the youngest one in the band-

CW: Lead guitar player?

GH: Yeah. But I was pretty naïve, and they were all older and everybody was smoking dope and etc., and that wasn't my thing, so I didn't have enough of interest, but I was still learning in spite of that. And they were pros, and they were playing concerts, and they had a deal going with- I can't remember his name but he produced [*singing*], "Na na na na, na na na na, hey hey hey, good bye." Yeah, that guy. Steam was the name of the band, but I can't remember the producer's name. I think he also produced Harry Chapin. I mention that because Harry Chapin, we worked for him when we opened for him here at Wright State.

CW: Really?

GH: Yeah. There was two thousand people there.

CW: Yeah, I remember seeing that in one of the old campus newspapers, when he came. At what band were you with when you opened?

GH: That was Blue Max. Yeah, and in fact I kind of skipped around. Okay, so East Orange Express in Cincinnati, they were the top paid local band in Cincinnati, and they played 5 times a week, and to me that was just... so I said to them-

CW: And that was just around Cincinnati?

GH: Yeah, and around Northern Kentucky and etcetera, and they'd play Earlham College, and they'd play Erlanger High School or whatever that's called, and actually there was no Erlanger... that's another story.

CW: That's okay.

GH: Because I ended up recording a song that we did in the East Orange Express, but much later. I didn't record in until '77, but I made it to #5 locally, here in town. It was called "Cincinnati".

CW: And you wrote that when you were playing with them?

GH: I didn't write it. I just performed it and produced it. But they guy from Ivan and the Sabers- his name escapes me right this second. [*Pauses*] I almost had it. Anyway, he wrote the song, and he was the keyboard player in East Orange Express. And because they were older pros and could sing and blah blah blah, they ended up working out a thing where the Lemon Pipers were kind of on their way down a little bit, after Green Tambourine and etcetera, and they started doing gigs as the Lemon Pipers and as East Orange Express, but that was after I was out of the band. I can see that guy's face but I can't picture his name.

CW: So, East Orange Express wasn't quite your thing, but how long did you play with them?

GH: And I was driving back and forth, and it was taking me away from my girlfriend, you know, and actually I was going to Sinclair and they had a co-op thing, so I would go one quarter and then I took off the next quarter to play with those guys. And they were older than me, and I was younger, and I just didn't really realize what I had, so after I didn't show up for practice a few times, they fired me. I said, "Okay, I've learned my lesson. I'm going to take it more serious now", and that was the turning point.

CW: Was it?

GH: It was. Because I knew those guys were really good, and I'd blown a real opportunity there.

CW: So, in your co-op program, what were you studying at Sinclair?

GH: East Orange Express, one last thing about that is that the bass player and the drummer, Mike Reilly and Billy Hinds, went on to form Pure Prairie League.

CW: Really?

GH: Yes.

CW: You gave me this handout, and it's an impressive list of connections that you've had. For sure.

GH: Yeah, and there's even more that aren't even on there, stuff like Ron Riddle was a great local drummer, and he was in the very first Blue Max band that I put together in '69, and he went on to play 10 years with Blue Oyster Cult, and then he played with Stu Hamm, and he quit Blue Oyster Cult to play with Stu Hamm, which financially wasn't the smartest move. Because he was treated like a rock star. He'd go in and the roadie would have his drums set up and tuned and mic'd up and ready, and all he'd do is just play, and make good money doing it.

CW: They were pretty huge, yeah.

GH: And even later. You could call them a "has-been" band, but they were still a good band and they were still making big money. They were still selling out Bogart's in Cincinnati. I went to see them down there, and way after the fact, you know? Because he called me up, and said, "Hey, come down and see us", and I said, "Sure". And Ron Riddle, he was the best. He had gone to Berklee, I think.

CW: Is that the one that was the roommate of- who was the drummer, the woman that was at the story circle?

GH: Janet Ogg?

CW: Yeah.

GH: Oh, probably.

CW: I think, yeah.

GH: I think a lot of people were influenced by Ron. He wasn't a great band drummer in the beginning, but we brought him in for a session later on, and I told him- and I loved Ron when I said this- "I've got to tell you, you've got to get a stronger groove going. You're going to have to be more locked in on your timing." I said, "You're the best soloist I've ever heard, and I've heard a lot of bands in concert." I used to go and see Emerson, Lake and Palmer, and hear all these great drum soloists, and none of them could touch him. He'd go on for a half-hour, if you'd let him, and never play the same lick twice. He was just phenomenal, and he could do all the finger-sticking that Buddy Rich could do, and all those things. He was technically incredible. But he just hadn't played with enough good bands with a great rhythm section. So, years later he thanked me, and said, "If it wasn't for you and another producer I worked with, telling me that I

needed to get my timing together, I never would have played with Blue Oyster Cult or any of those bands.” So, sometimes it pays to tell the truth. Even though you take a chance on losing a friendship.

CW: Right, but they appreciate having the guts to actually tell them that; maybe other people were afraid to tell them, you know?

GH: Right. And he worked with some great, great people.

CW: He left Blue Oyster Cult-

GH: -and he joined Stu Hamm, who was the bass player from- he was Joey Satriani’s bass player, and they had a new band and he looked at it like, “Well, now maybe I can get a recording contract.” Because nobody’s going to sign Blue Oyster Cult, because they’ve already been there. But if it doesn’t take off, and then suddenly he’s not making those big paychecks that he’s making for all of those concerts with Blue Oyster Cult. But he was so talented, Ron was so talented that he went and started doing soundtracks for cable television, like the History Channel and Discovery Channel and things like that. He’s done over 180 of those now.

CW: That’s probably pretty good work.

GH: Oh, yeah. It is, and he was that talented. But, anyway.

CW: That’s interesting. So, you kind of talked about this a little bit, you weren’t just always into rock and blues, in your taste, and you talked about Simon and Garfunkel when you started to learn, and were interested in jazz and other kinds of-

GH: Yeah, and one time I got a review in the paper- actually, it was a review on another band, and they said, “What made you decide to use an acoustic guitar in a rock band?” and they guy said, “Because I saw Gary Hill in concert with his band, and he played the acoustic, and he showed me that we could do it.” And I just learned it from watching the Moody Blues or watching somebody, you know, we all learned from everybody else. But it was nice that he remembered that, and that we had that influence on him. So, yeah, I always- and the Moody Blues were always an influence on me, too. And definitely Paul Simon, and then when he came out James Taylor was a major influence. Yeah, working out those finger-picking styles made me a better all-around player, and different kinds of music. And the Beatles, too. The Beatles used a lot of acoustic, so I guess that was already there.

CW: So, you were with Captain Crunch-

GH: -then the next big one- after East Orange Express, anyway- was Blue Max.

CW: Blue Max. How long was-

GH: There was a Blue Max in 1969 with Ron Riddle and some great musicians in it, but that one never really did much. We just kind of sat in town and rehearsed and played a few times, and then we went on from there and went our separate ways. I'd say it was '71 when we finally got going with Blue Max, and we did that until probably '79, or late '70s. So, it was Blue Max that-

CW: So, that's when you kind of hit your stride a little bit?

GH: Yeah. We opened for Aerosmith at the Palace Theatre, we did the sound for the Eagles at the Victory, and the sound for the Eagles at the Reflections in Cincinnati, and we opened both shows for those, too. So, we did the sound-

CW: Wasn't that like the same day or something like that?

GH: No, it was two weeks apart.

CW: Two weeks apart. Somebody mentioned that, and said they thought it was the same day.

GH: No.

CW: Because that was one of the first times they were really coming out, right?

GH: Well, yeah, they only had their first album out, and even though David Geffen had put \$300,000 in promotional money behind them, and you knew they were going to be a super-group because of those vocals, because they just had that great vocal sound. But they had never headlined before. Before that tour that we worked two of the shows with them on, they had never headlined. They had opened up for Ten Years After, and they had opened for Black Oak Arkansas, bands that would never be as big as them. But Ten Years After, Alvin Lee was one of my guitar heroes, and I saw him at McGuffey's one time and I shook his hand in the men's room, and I said, "Alvin, you just shook the hands with the only guy in the world that has probably played *I'm Going Home* as many times as you have." That was his signature song, and he just started laughing. He just loved that. So, that was cool. But... I got off on a tangent-

CW: You were talking about the Eagles and-

GH: Yeah, so the Eagles, they had opened up for those bands, but they'd never headlined, so they had us for the first tour they headlined. So we worked with them, and the first one was like August 15, 1972, and the 2nd date was September 2. We worked with them in Cincinnati, and then they worked up the east coast, and then came back through Pittsburgh, and then we worked with them in Dayton, down at the Victory. And Glenn actually said some neat things, towards the end of the show.

CW: Glenn Frey?

GH: Yeah, Glenn Frey. He said, “You know, we used this PA about two weeks ago, and I wasn’t so sure about it, but we had a different guy running it then. And these guys running it tonight, it sounds wonderful.” And he said that to the audience.

CW: Really?

GH: Yeah, and that was very cool. Because we were kids, you know? What was that, ’72? I was 21. So, that meant a lot to us. That was my PA. We went out on a limb and borrowed money for this concert PA.

CW: How’d you get the opportunity to do that?

GH: That came about because a local promoter guy, who I’m still involved with after all of these years, Carmine Anastasio. He teaches here at Wright State.

CW: Is he- he taught, like, non-western worldviews?

GH: Yeah.

CW: I took classes with him. Yeah, I know him.

GH: We co-wrote a rock opera.

CW: You’ve got to be kidding me?

GH: We wrote an entire rock opera together. I wrote all of the music, and he wrote all of the lyrics, and it’s about the Buddha thing.

CW: Yeah? He taught a Zen Buddhism class. And he taught Karate.

GH: He’s still doing it, believe it or not.

CW: He was very funny. He’d say something like, “It’s very IMPORTANT that you learn this” [*Laughs*]

GH: Yeah, that sounds like Carmine. A lot of those concerts I wouldn’t have been involved with if it wasn’t for him.

CW: Really?

GH: The Eagles, he was the one that brought them in. Harry Chapin, here at Wright State, he had a hand in that. There was a bunch of them that we did. Aerosmith, that was him, he was involved in that. Now, a few of them, like we did REO Speedwagon over in Peru, Indiana at a hockey rink over there, and that was just through an agency. But a lot of that stuff, a lot of it was with Carmine. We haven’t done anything with that rock opera yet, but we’re just now trying to do something with it now, believe it or not, so we’ll see

what happens. We probably have a better chance now of doing something with it because of the internet, to be honest. But what had happened with Glenn Frey is that the first show... this is the way that went- I went to get food for a bunch of people, and I came back, and we had had the PA wired up, but we hadn't gotten the band on stage and blah, blah, blah, so after I got this big order of food and walking down the sidewalk down there in Cincinnati, and that's in the Over the Rhine section, and I heard *Take It Easy* through the wall, and I said, "Man, listen to how great that tape sounds on my system." I was so excited, and I walked in, and they were up on stage singing. And I thought, "Wow." So, I'm watching them do the sound check, and every once and a while we'd communicate, because it was my system, but they had a sound man with them, and the guy said, "Well, I used to work with Canned Heat, I travelled with them. And I said, "Oh, okay, cool." So, it got to a point in the sound check, and he says, "Glenn, you know, if you'd back off that microphone a little bit, I could get a lot better sound on of this PA." That's all it took. Glenn said, "If you ever tell me how to sing again, ever, we're done." And I don't know what happened, but two weeks later he wasn't with them. Yeah, because I went up to the head roadie and I said, "I just realized that I haven't seen that guy, your sound man, today", and he said, "Oh, Glenn fired him", and I said, "Who's running your sound?" and he said, "You are!" I said, "No, no, I'm not!" That scared the hell out of me, and my sound man, too. So, there was two of us, but we did it, and fortunately- that's what I'm saying about what was great about Glenn saying that, because we'd never run the sound for the Eagles before, and we barely could run it for any of us. Oh, you asked me how I got into that. I got into that because Carmine did a production of Jesus Christ Superstar. He put that together, and he used local people, and we went out and we did 55 concerts around the country, with Jesus Christ Superstar. When we were still in the rehearsal stage- we were practicing down there in the Oregon District, I don't even know if it was the Oregon District at that point. I guess it was, but it wasn't like the way it is now. But we were in one of those old warehouses down there, and I said, "What are you using for a PA on this tour?", and he said, "I'll ask the guy and find out". He brought it to me, and I said, "You're talking about playing in these stadiums and arenas and stuff down south", because I saw some of the itinerary, and I said, "This isn't going to do it." He said, Well, can you come up with a PA?" and I said, "I can try." So, I did. I got a local company to help me out on it, and that's how we got into the concert PA business. It got great reviews, everywhere they said, "We can actually hear their vocals." That was a rare thing, in '72, end of '71 and '72. So, then Carmine started using me to do the sound for the shows. In fact, originally we had five shows set up with the Eagles, and we were going to play with them in Cleveland, Columbus, and I think it was Toledo, at the three Agora clubs there, so we were going to open for them and do the sound again. So, we thought five shows with a band we really like, that was really great. However, then he found out that the Agora had its own PA systems in all three clubs, and when he calls me and says, "How do you feel about that?" and I said, "Well, I know what you're going to say, and I can't argue the point. We have no following in any of those towns, and all we're going to do is cost you money." So, they used the house system, and we didn't get to work with them on any of those three shows.

CW: And was that kind of a package deal? Were you opening for them at all?

GH: Yeah. We would have opened on all five, but we still opened on the two that we did where they didn't have a PA. And we did have a following that came to those. And it was \$5, to see the Eagles. *[Laughs]*

CW: That's incredible.

GH: I think I paid \$4.50 or \$5 to see the Beatles in '66.

CW: Well, you had a lot of experiences that were just right up there, you know? What are you more proud of? Your production work, or as a musician, the work you've done as a musician? Or can you separate one from the other? Is there one that you enjoy more than the other?

GH: No, not really. I like both an awful lot.

CW: You like both sides of it.

GH: I used to think I was a better producer than I was a guitar player, but I think the Holdsworth influence opened me up on the guitar quite a bit, but I'm not sure.

CW: So then through the '70s you were playing with your band-

GH: That was the Blue Max. We did Bachman-Turner Overdrive at the Palace, and Aerosmith at the Palace-

CW: Were these like one-off shows?

GH: Yeah.

CW: Not like a tour.

GH: And we did REO Speedwagon in Peru, Indiana at the hockey rink, Harry Chapin here at Wright State, and there was a lot more. Well, Jerry Lee Lewis, at UD Arena.

CW: Really?

GH: Yeah. That one was... I can't go by that one without telling you a story on that one. We played with him, he had about 1100 people. Well, that's not very much. That's an empty arena is what that is. *[Laughs]*

CW: That's exactly what that is. An empty arena. *[Laughs]*

GH: I remember another thing that was really classy about that concert was that somebody said that a couple was actually in the stage of doing something in the audience. *[Laughs]* Anyway, a higher class of people came to see that concert, I guess. But we were

setting up to do that show, and Jerry Lee's son played drums- Jr. We'd heard that he was kind of hard to deal with. That's all we had heard.

CW: Jerry Lee, or his son?

GH: His son. No, Jerry Lee, his reputation speaks for itself. So, they had rented a drum set from Hauer Music, and he sat down and said, "I don't like this set". The promoter says, "Well, what are you going to do?" and he said, "I like that set over there" and he was talking about our drummers set. So, I stepped in and said, "Maybe we can work something out", and so they did, and they put up \$75 or something to get him to let him use that kit. So, they do their sound check, and after the sound check he's sitting around berating on that drum kit. Well, we've got 10 minutes for us to do our sound check, or we don't get to do a sound check, and this is at the University of Dayton Arena. So, our drummer goes over to him and goes, "Do you mind if I play my drums?" and the guy went like that [*pushing motion*] and pushed him, and he fell back and tried to catch himself, and he landed on his hand and broke his finger, and we had to get a substitute drummer to play the show.

CW: You're kidding?

GH: Honest to God. And Jerry Lee came up to me later, and he said, "I'm really sorry about junior." Three weeks later, and talk about karma to the extreme, junior got killed in a car wreck.

CW: Oh, you're kidding. Wow.

GH: He was just one of those wild... you just had to see him, he had anger issues and the whole thing. But I do remember one more quick thing about Jerry Lee is that I went over to his grand piano, because I thought, "who would set a Pepsi can on a 9 foot grand piano?" and I picked it up, [*makes a sniffing sound*], and it was pure Jack Daniels. [*Laughs*] It was a good cover, good camouflage, I guess.

CW: That's funny.

GH: Then later on was the Dinosaurs, we did the Dinosaurs in the '80s.

CW: Is that the band that followed-

GH: After Blue Max, I think I just did some odds and ends things. Freelanced. Because I always liked- the most fun for me, as a studio guitar player, was going out with these bands. Like a band would call me and say, "We got your number from such and such, and we've got to have a guy tonight", or "We've got to have a guy Saturday night, so can you come out and just do the best you can?" "Sure." You know, I'd never even met the people before, and I loved the pressure, I loved just the fact that because I knew my ear was good enough that I could do that.

CW: Go in and try to figure it out.

GH: Yeah, and I'd just list to what the drummer and the bass player were doing, and I'd know where the song was going. Just like I would in the studio, you know? So, yeah, that's a fun thing.

CW: So you've worked with a lot of musicians in the studio.

GH: Oh, yeah. Not anyone that you'd probably know. Well, except for maybe the local guys. As a matter of fact, one of them just died, Bill Wheat. Better known as "Fuzz". He played on that Cincinnati record that I told you about, and that was as a part of the studio band. He had the best groove of any musician I've ever worked with. Now I'm just talking about the groove, the rhythm. I mean, he was just locked in. He could be playing in 21/8 time, and he'd come back on 1, and you'd think, "There's no way he's coming back on that", and he would do it, he'd be there every time. But he was just so funky, and he's a white guy [*laughs*]. Just a great drummer, he played strictly from feel, he wasn't a reader or anything. And then we did work with Dave Carpenter, when we recorded the rock opera with Carmine, and Dave Carpenter came in and played a lot of the bass tracks. He went on to be one of the most sought after bass players in LA, and in fact he worked in a band with Holdsworth.

CW: Really?

GH: Yeah. Small world. And he worked on a James Taylor Christmas album and all kinds of great stuff. He passed a couple of years ago, maybe three years ago, at a young age, he was in his forties. But he was an accomplished reader, and he could also- he could do both, he could just listen and then play super, or the reason he was the most sought after guy in LA is because he was such a great reader. It's like I was talking about, the markets are totally different. But he was great.

CW: Did you ever spend any time out in LA?

GH: No. I've never even been to California.

CW: Really? That's interesting, with all of your musical experiences and adventures.

GH: Yeah, I've played all over. I did a New England tour, and I've done southern tours, and I've played in Texas several times, and I've played all over Florida, I've played in Kansas, I've played in Minnesota, but that's about as far west as I've gotten. So I've played in about 30 different states, but I've never went out west.

CW: Was that on purpose, or just opportunity?

GH: No. Yeah, just whatever came about.

CW: So, you knocked around a little bit in the '80s, and then what was the next band you formed?

GH: The Dinosaurs.

CW: The Dinosaurs.

GH: I did the Dinosaurs from 1987 until about 2 years ago.

CW: Really?

GH: Yeah.

CW: So, it's pretty much been your whole career, and what you do for a living.

GH: Yeah. I've never... for about 2 weeks I was kicking around going to work for Eastern Airlines, and they were going to hire me-

CW: To do what? What were you going to do for them?

GH: I would have been a steward.

CW: Really?

GH: Yeah. Then my mom said, "You're not doing that". [*Laughing*] Yeah, she said, "You're too good, and you've worked too hard in the music business"=

CW: And about when was that? That was a question I was going to ask. I mean, approximately how old were you?

GH: Uh, I'll bet I was... I was probably... I was in my twenties when that happened. That was the only time that I was going to do something different, and then another time I actually sold the Trading Post- do you remember when they used to publish the Trading Post in Centerville? I only did that one day a week. Other than that, I've always just played music for a living. But I did that Trading Post thing really because it was... somewhere in there, to supplement my playing income, I bought and sold rare guitars, vintage guitars, and I would sell them through a guy I met in New York City, and he would sell them to Pete Townsend and Eric Clapton and John Lennon, and people like that.

CW: So, pretty successful with that?

GH: Well, it helped. It helped, I have to admit. You know, because of his training, I became an expert on Gibson guitars, and Fender guitars, and Martin guitars, and Gretsch guitars, so I knew all about old Martin acoustics and stuff. And my family had been with the Martin Guitar Company anyway, my dad had a Martin from the time I was a little kid.

So, sometimes I practically gave away- I didn't literally give away, but I practically gave away some really rare guitars in those days because of that, but I never even would have had them if I hadn't done that, so it all works out. And I sat down with a vintage guitar magazine catalog, and because of my experience with buying and selling guitars all those years- you know, I owned over two hundred different Gibson electrics, never at the same time, never more than 15 at a time, usually 5-15 at a time- but I figured out that if I'd had all of those guitars at the same time, in today's market they'd sell for over 2 million dollars.

CW: Right. Wow.

GH: And including the really- like, I played a '59 Sunburst Les Paul for many years, to the point where Gary Richrath, the lead guitar player for REO Speedwagon, when we worked with them at that hockey rink, he wouldn't leave me alone. He kept calling me, saying "Are you ready to sell that Les Paul to me yet?" He had one already, he just wanted another one. And guys like Keith Richards, he has a collection of those Sunburst Les Pauls, Steven Stills has a collection of old Martins, and he has old Les Pauls. I mean, that guitar would be anywhere from 250 thousand to 1 million dollars today, just that one guitar, just the '59, and the list goes on. I had a rare '57 Strat, it was white with gold plated parts, and they didn't have gold plated parts then, unless you went into the store and paid the money up front and ordered it from Fender that way, to get gold plated parts on the guitar. So, that's called a Mary Kay Strat and that's worth \$80,000 today, and that's one of the most valuable Stratocasters ever, and I got it from a guy that played country music with my dad. He liked my playing, and he said, "I want you to have that guitar". And I foolishly let all of that kind of stuff go. By the way, everybody does that. It's not like I'm the only one. You know, George Harrison, he had a fabulous guitar collection. Same thing. A lot of those guys put money in guitars. You'd be surprised.

CW: Sure. So, maybe you've kind of answered this already, but what would you say are one or two of your most notable or memorable shows or performances, whether it was a tour or a festival, or an opening act for-

GH: Well, I know that that REO Speedwagon show in Peru, Indiana at that hockey rink, that was the first time that I ever felt- just for a few minutes- what it was like to be a star. Because I remember the big crowd, the place was packed, and all these people were just standing and these girls were trying to reach up onstage just to touch our feet, just trying to [*stretches arms forward*]. That was pretty cool. [*Laughs*].

CW: Right. The rock star thing.

GH: Yeah, the rock star thing. Was that the biggest venue?

GH: No, certainly not. The biggest venue was right here [*Wright State University*], at what they called Wright Stock.

CW: Yeah! '71 or '72?

GH: Yeah, '71 or '72, John Yucker [sp?] did the sound, and we played at like 1:30 in the morning and it was real cold for some reason. I remember a guy came up and brought a heater up and I put it on the edge of the stage, and put my hands up in front of that heater to warm them up so I could play *I'm Going Home*.

CW: Well, that's an appropriate song to be playing at Wright Stock.

GH: At Wright Stock, yeah, and we were told then that there were 25,000 people. I don't know how accurate that is, but-

CW: I know there were an awful lot. That's when nothing was down the hill there and they called it Achilles Hill, is what they called that area. We had a former student- an alum- come by and he was a film student years ago, and he'd taken some video just walking around at Wright Stock, and he let us burn a copy of that, and it was neat. But you get a real picture of just how many people came out here. You know, everybody jokes about Wright Stock, but that was huge.

GH: That was probably a version of Blue Max, but it wasn't a great version. I probably shouldn't have said that, that may come back to bite me on the rear end [laughs]. Nah, they probably knew it. It was just kind of a throw-together thing, but we did it.

CW: Well, and I think that whole thing was a big promotional thing for the university. It was still a young university and they were trying to get people to come out and go, "Wow", and then maybe people decide to come out here, you know?

GH: I also remember the Dinosaurs playing on the roof of one of these buildings down here.

CW: Really?

GH: Yeah. I don't know if it was Millett Hall or Allyn, but it was one of those for sure.

CW: So that would have been in the '80s sometime? Or... but you played with the Dinosaurs a long time, right?

GH: Yeah. Well, from '87, but it wouldn't have been in the first year, because I remember Clarence being on drums. So, it had to be '88 through '90 or '91, right in that range.

CW: I might have been here at that time.

GH: Really?

CW: Yeah, as a student.

GH: Oh, wow.

CW: Yeah, they always had- not anymore, but until recently- a big fall festival and a big spring festival. What was it... October Days. But I wonder if it was one of those, where they'd bring the Budweiser trucks out and it was a big scene. Yeah, that's great. So, playing with REO in Indianapolis, that was one of the-

GH: Yeah, that was one of the- like I said, I don't know if it was my favorite concert or anything, but that was a very striking...

CW: It made an impression.

GH: Yeah, it made an impression. There was also, you know, over the years I also played with Beatles tribute bands, and I didn't even mention that, but there were a couple times when the people were screaming where you really felt like you were in the Beatles. I mean, especially since I was such a fan of the Beatles all those years, too.

CW: You were channeling the Beatles a little bit.

GH: Yeah, a little bit.

CW: That's neat. That's cool. What would you say would be kind of the low point, you know, of your career? Were there any low points? Or any times where you were like, "Maybe I should shift gears and do something else."

GH: Well, probably that time when I was thinking about going to work for Eastern Airlines, but, um...

CW: And I'm trying to think, because you-

GH: I'm just... you know, luckily- and it's funny, but my dad when I told him I was going to play guitar for a living, he said, "You can't make a living playing a guitar." He had that attitude, and he really gave me a hard time about it. But my mom always supported me about the music.

CW: That's great.

GH: It is great, and I love her to death for that, because she didn't have to be that way.

CW: Do you think you would have quit otherwise?

GH: It's possible. I don't know that I would have or not. Because there were certainly some times when I went out on my own. You know, I was out on the road for a long time. I used to do... I do the single act, you know, I've done the one man band-single act thing that I've done since the late '70s, and that's probably what I was doing mostly during the early '80s, and I would go into a town- like I'd go into Columbia, Missouri

and play at the Holiday Inn there, and I'd just be by myself. And I'm just saying, and I'd be there for about a month, and then I'd go to... Mississippi, you know, whatever I'd get from the different agents. And I'd play down there, and-

CW: Get an opportunity somewhere and go down there.

GH: Yeah, and I was hardly ever out of work, so between the fact that I was a hard worker and had some talent, that kept me working.

CW: So, these were things where an agent would set you up for like a mini... you'd go to Mississippi and there'd be like a little circuit or something?

GH: Yeah, and the same agent would either have something else, or while I was there I would talk to another agent and they would put me somewhere to go from there. Sometimes it was good routing, and sometimes it wasn't [*laughs*].

CW: Did you ever have any really bad experiences?

GH: Oh my God, yes. Certainly. You couldn't do a lot on the road without... you know, I'd have to think about it, but there were certainly times when we didn't allocate enough time between cities, and of course when you're young you can kind of reach back for that extra adrenaline and make it work, but as you get older you couldn't really do that as easily.

CW: Yeah. Being up on stage and it just isn't clicking.

GH: Yeah, just like being up there with no sleep or something. And, you know, every rock and roll person, whether you're on the road crew or maybe you're just working with the sound or the lights, or maybe you're up on stage, but they've all been through that, a million times. Where you've got to be good on your feet, even when you haven't had any sleep. And I'm not one of those people. A lot of times, though, when I was younger, I still made it work.

CW: Yeah. It gets harder and harder.

GH: Yeah, it does.

CW: So, you're still playing and performing?

GH: Quite a bit. I played last week. I played Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday last week.

CW: Why don't you talk about some of your current projects that you've got going on.

GH: Well, I do some simple things, like I play for- what is it, the RiverScape people downtown, and I do that a couple of times a month, you know, usually like on a Tuesday,

for lunch, for the lunch hour. And I go over there, and it used to be that they had it real laid back, but they've changed it to where now I just do a concert, just like I'd do anywhere else.

CW: Just you, or do you have some-

GH: Yeah, just me. Well, and sometimes my tribute bands. You know, now I produce- I have my Eagles tribute band, I have a Fleetwood Mac tribute band-

CW: Yeah, I saw that.

GH: So, I still do those, and we'll play at Courthouse Square with the tribute bands, and we'll do certain rooms around, you know, where we work something out. And we also do- like Fleetwood Dreams, which is the Fleetwood Mac show, and we were with a national agency, a national online agency, where people all over see us on there, so if we work out the money with the people when they call, you know, and we get a quote and blah blah blah. Like we recently- three or four weeks ago, we went to Danville, Indiana, or we might play in Burlington, Kentucky, on the other side of Florence, and I know we did a show at Boone County Park last year, and that was a great one. There was 1,200 people, and they were all out there singing, and that was one of my favorite moments in the last couple of years, because they were singing along with the words, and they knew the words to the songs, and we were the only band, and 1,200 people showed up. And it was because we did Fleetwood Mac, and we did it well enough that they loved it, and they were into it.

CW: These tribute bands, it's huge right now. It really is. I think it's because there's so much bad music out right now.

GH: That's part of it.

CW: A lot of these reunion tours and tribute bands seem to be really, really popular.

GH: Right, and also, who has the money to go see the Eagles? Or Fleetwood Mac? You know, that's part of it, too. They might pay 10 dollars or even 20 dollars, or 5 dollars, whichever the show is. Sometimes we do shows not for free, for us, but where the city hires us or the festival hires us, and we do a lot of that, too.

CW: How long have you been doing the Eagles tribute band?

GH: I'd say about 8 years.

CW: Okay. When Glenn Frey died, did you get a... my brother-in-law is in a band, he plays in the Elderly Brothers-

GH: Oh, okay. Yeah, that's a good band. We've worked with them over the years.

CW: Have you?

GH: Yeah, he probably wouldn't remember me, but I remember working with them.

CW: I think he does, I think he does. And I know that for a few months they were doing these Eagles tribute shows- right after Glenn died- that were really popular.

GH: Yeah. That was tough. Because Glenn was... he was real friendly. Henley was a little bit stand-offish, but backstage I'm talking about, Glenn was real friendly, and Randy Meisner was real friendly, and Bernie Leadon was real friendly, and that was the original band. I've got a great- I've got to tell you one more story. I keep doing this to you, but this is my favorite Joe Walsh story, and it's the absolute truth. The James Gang had played at the Ludlow Garage, and this guy says to me, "Let's go to this party", and I said, "Okay", and he says, "Joe Walsh is going to be there", and I said, "Oh, man, I've never met Joe, I've seen the James Gang several times" and blah blah blah, and I said, "I'd really like to meet him, we play a real similar style of guitar." And we do, too, because we had the same influences. He listened to the same guys I did, and it's not like- I didn't listen to Joe and say, "I want to play like that", we just happened to listen to the same guys, so a very similar guitar style. And maybe that's another thing that makes it fun with the Eagles bands, you know? But we're walking through the house and it's a great big house and it's full of people, and by then I gave up and I just said, "He's not here", and then we went in this room and he's over in this [*slumps in chair*], like that, I mean absolutely passed out, but it's him! [*Laughs*] I don't know if he's drunk or high or both, but he was there! So, I didn't get to meet him, because he was asleep! [*Laughs*]

CW: A lot of people getting pictures with him, right? "Hey look, it's Joe Walsh!"

GH: Yeah, you could do that, like, "Look, I took this picture with Joe Walsh!" No, we didn't do that. [*Laughs*]

CW: "So, you met Joe Walsh?" "Well, kind of".

GH: Isn't that funny, and he's the perfect guy for that story, too. You know what I mean? Passed out. If you ever read much about the Eagles, they were always trying to get him up to get to the studio and things like that.

CW: That's funny. So, do you still- when you have time- do you go out and enjoy music and go out and see music?

GH: When I'm not playing, but I'm always playing. I still play full time, you know, while I still can. Because some people look at it like, "Well, I don't want to hire that old man", but other people look at it like, "I want that guy because he does a lot of different things", and "because he's a good guitar player", or because he's a good singer", or whatever the reason they hire me. They're still calling, and as long as I can entertain a roomful of people, I'll keep doing it.

CW: Do you feel like you're still clicking on all cylinders?

GH: The recordings say that I'm playing my best guitar of my career, and the vocal is still holding up. I can still do *A Whole Lotta Love* by Led Zeppelin and nail it, to where I wouldn't be ashamed for Led Zeppelin to hear it. So, I mean, yeah, I'm also realistic. I know, just like every athlete... I guess one thing I always studied the management of the Reds and the Bengals, believe it or not, because of trying to learn to be a better manager, you know, of the big picture thing. And I know the time is coming where I won't be able to sing those songs, and my hands will slow down, and those things, and when it does... [*Knocks on table*] But so far it's worked. So far I'm lucky. I'm blessed, or however you want to look at it.

CW: Okay, I'm putting you on the spot here. What was your best or favorite band that you played in?

GH: My favorite band that I played in?

CW: Yeah. You think some of your best work you're doing right now, maybe?

GH: Uh, well...

CW: As a musician?

GH: I do think both of those tribute bands are excellent bands, and the talent level- I said recently at a Double Eagles rehearsal, we did one of the songs, I think it was *Seven Bridges Road* or something, one where all five of us are singing- and all five of us have been lead singers all our lives so it should be good, and it is- and I said, "You know, sometimes I forget about the talent that is in this room", and it is pretty amazing sometimes. And that's good, that's a good feeling, and the Fleetwood Dreams band is that way, too. And I play with a kind of punk rock band called the Outlets, and that's a lot of fun, I just have a real good time with that. You know, whether we're doing a cover of *Let's Go* by the Cars, or, hell, we even do a Blink-182 song.

CW: Really?

GH: Yeah, we do some different stuff that I wouldn't ever have pictured myself doing, to be real honest. Even in my single act, I do a Niall Horan song, *This Town*. Have you ever heard that?

CW: Uh huh, yeah.

GH: I just... I like that song, I can't help it if it's a newer song, you know? That doesn't matter to me. It only matters whether I like it or not. And, no, I don't like a lot of the newer music, and I've said that for 30 years, probably, the last 30 years.

CW: But you're not just playing the same music that you were playing.

GH: Right. Some of it's the same. But, you know, I do my own background tracks on my single act, and I play all the instruments and do all the vocals. So, when I do *Ricky, Don't Lose That Number*- because I played that piano part, and I played that bass part, and I programmed the drums to where it feels good- you know, it still sounds good. And then there's some things I've done strictly for money. [*Laughs*]

CW: Sure. Pay the bills.

GH: You know, where maybe the talent level wasn't too good, but it was a paying gig. At one point I was working in 9 different acts, and it gets frustrating trying to keep all of that together.

CW: Sure.

GH: Just to keep the schedules straight and to keep everybody happy from, "No, I can't do that gig because I'm already booked at this gig", and then step on toes. But it's mostly worked out pretty well.

CW: How many songs do you think you know?

GH: Like I said- well, I know that in my single act I've got over 300 background tracks. Now, that isn't going to Wal Mart and buying a background track. That's 300 songs that I've put together in the studio, one instrument at a time. So you can imagine how many thousands of hours of time that is in the studio. Because you have to do your drum track first for your road map, and then I might do a keyboard track, even if I'm not going to use it, just so I have something to tune to. Then I might do a bass track, and then I might go back or then I might put an acoustic track on, or horn parts off the keyboard or strings off the keyboard. I do- do you remember the song *Classical Gas*, by Mason Williams?

CW: Yeah, yeah.

GH: I do that in my single act, and I'm doing the [*mimics the music*], so I do the French horn using sampled French horns on the keyboard, so I had to play it on the keyboard, and as a keyboard player I'm okay, but I'm good enough because of my experience that I can do it once in the studio and get it right. Like, I do *Light My Fire*, by the Doors, [*mimics organ from song*], I did that well enough once and got it on the track.

CW: And now you never have to do it again. [*Laughs*]

GH: Yeah, I probably couldn't do it again, but I do play it, so I play the guitar live and sing it, and the organ track is going, but then when it comes to the organ solo I do that live. So, I do things like that. It's fun, and it keeps my chops up. In the single act, I'll do- like I said- Steely Dan songs, because they had good guitar players and it keeps my chops up, and I'll do a George Benson tune, and I'll do a Ventures tune, and a lot of different guitar things so I can keep my chops up, because that's important.

CW: That's great, that's great. Well, it seems like Dayton has always been a real haven for musicians, and it has a great musical legacy. Not very well documented, and that's really the purpose of our project here, to try to better document that history through talking to local artists, and we're very happy that you agreed to come in and talk to us today.

GH: I appreciate it.

CW: The story circle event was a lot of fun, but it went on forever, and everybody kept going, "Gary, come on, tell us some of your stories", and I'm glad you were able to come back and share some of those with us.

GH: Yeah. Believe it or not, I enjoyed telling you my story and this and that, but I just didn't want to do that to those people, because they'd sat there for so long listening to so much.

CW: Yeah, everybody had their own story.

GH: And I just thought the last thing they wanted to hear was another long story.

CW: And I don't think it really would have done you justice, either, tacking on the end of two hours of stories already. We wanted to give you the opportunity to take your time, and to have a conversation.

GH: Yeah. I like telling the stories, and they're all true stories. I mean, I like telling the stuff about the Eagles, like they're backstage and they're going, "We've already done two encores, what are we going to do now? Because they are yelling for a third encore, and we don't know any more songs!" And honest to God, Bernie Leadon said, "I know Johnny B. Goode", like they could just jam that and make it up on the spot. The Eagles [*laughs*]. It's just crazy. And they were also backstage saying things like, "Yeah, we've got to stop doing this country bullshit and we've got to be more of a rock band." "Like the Doobie Brothers", they actually said that.

CW: They said that?

GH: Now you've got to remember, the Doobie Brothers were bigger than them at that point. The Doobie Brothers were 10,000 dollars a night already. I know that for a fact because we were pricing all these bands, and buying and selling bands at that point.

CW: Well, and I think there was a real friction in their band about that, about being too country on this side, or too rock on this side.

GH: Bernie Leadon, even though he played the solos on *Take It Easy* and *Witchy Woman*, but he was still a country guitar player, and when they voted to add the... what's the other guitar player's name, that they finally added on the third album? It was before Joe Walsh, I forget the guitar player's name [*Don Felder*]. But they voted to put him in

the band, and just by coincidence, he knew that guy. He knew the guitar player, because he had taken lessons from him down in Gainesville, Florida. Small world type thing. He knew what a great guitar player he was, and he felt very threatened by that. He knew the guy was a great rock player, and he saw the direction it was going. See, and they weren't even happy with just that one great guitar player, they went ahead and added Joe Walsh after that. So, they had two great rock guitar players. Then they had the two great rock players and all those great vocals, and then it became a super-group, as far as I'm concerned, at that point. The agent that we were working with out of Cincinnati, he came to see us with the Eagles, and he came up after the show and says, "Man, the sound system sounded great, the band sounded great, and we're real proud of you guys." And I said, "What did you think about the Eagles?" and he goes, "Eh, just another country rock band."

CW: Just another country rock band?

GH: That's exactly what he said. I argued with him, I said, "Now wait a minute, what about those vocals?" He goes, "Yeah, they did have really good vocals." I said, "Well, what about those lyrics?" He goes, "Yeah, they did have pretty good songs." [Laughs] I said, "Okay, I'll give you this, the drummer isn't much of a drummer." And he wasn't, Don Henley wasn't much of a drummer at the very beginning. If you listen to the records, he's sloppy, you know, if you listen real close, and he was like that. And Bernie was a basic guitar player, a very basic guitar player, so that's what bothered him. He'd heard better guitar players and stuff, and drummers, for a long time. So that's why he wasn't impressed. But he forgot about the songs were the most important thing, and they put together great songs, and those vocals, you know? But see, what the Eagles did, to be honest about it, is that by the third album, and by the time they added a third guitar player, they weren't doing anything but concerts and recording. That makes you better. I mean, if the recording does a lie and you hear it, and you learn from it. So, Henley got to be a good drummer after a while. I mean, he wasn't a fabulous drummer, but he was good enough to sing and play, and pull it off and do it good. He was a good, solid drummer. He was never going to be a soloist or anything, he didn't have to be. But like I said, by the third album, then he was pulling it together. If you listen to the real early concerts, you know, they're singing flat, even as great a singers as they were. Maybe they couldn't hear the monitor that night, you know? There's a lot of stuff online that's got to make them cringe, because it makes me cringe for them when I listen to it. But there is some early stuff, too, like when we worked with them on that second show, where they could hear their monitors and they were singing, and they were singing right on the money. Because they had the talent. Anyway, I don't mean to talk your leg off today, Chris. I appreciate it, buddy.

CW: That's alright. Thanks so much again for coming in. And if you have any ideas of other people we should maybe talk to, you know, just about the musical past, rock and blues history around town here, please let us know. Because, you know, it's been a really cool project so far, and we started off with just a few people to talk to, and from that we're trying to utilize you to help connect us to others.

GH: I'll think about that, and if I can come up with someone I'll let you know for sure.

CW: Okay, that'd be great.

GH: There's so many things that are tied into it, too. I think about the time when I was producing an album in the studio for a band called the Pleasure Seekers, which was an all-black group from Springfield, and they were really talented. And I wasn't making anything, I was just doing it because I liked their songs, and I thought, "Well, maybe something will come out of it." But they played at the Palladium, and they said, "We want you to run sound for us", and it was a real interesting thing to be the only white person for miles, with maybe a thousand black people in there. And I'm not the least bit prejudiced, and I never have been, in fact my son is named after two black guys [*laughs*]. It just worked out that way, his name is Hunter Taylor Graham, and one of them was a great drummer that I worked with- well, it was the drummer in that band was named Hunter, and I named him after him from the Pleasure Seekers. But it was a real interesting political thing there, and especially when we had a real problem with the PA at first, and it was kind of like we were using part of their system and part of our system, and making my system and their system work together, and so I started to feel like the guy out on the island a little bit.

CW: Alright, well thank you again, Gary.

GH: Okay, buddy. It was great talking to you. That was enjoyable.