

SNOOZER QUINN: FINGERSTYLE JAZZ GUITAR PIONEER



Dan Sumner
Commentary and Transcriptions

Katy Hobgood Ray
Biography

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FOREWORD:

STEVE HOWELL

As a fingerstyle guitarist, I have always subscribed to a playing approach that embraces what Andres Segovia famously referred to as the guitar being seen as the orchestra through the wrong end of the telescope. Different parts moving with and against each other, trying to cover the melody and harmony simultaneously with a bass line weaving through the music characterizes this approach. I have always been shooting for a style that was as complete as what my abilities could bear, all the while trying to do justice to great songs.

My musical life began very early and quickly led me to a special love of music from the first half of the twentieth century. The wonderful melodies and rhythms of traditional jazz and country blues spoke to me in particular and led the way to a musical and historical interest in the music that has sustained me through most of my life.

Through his work with Louis Armstrong, I was introduced at an early age to a fellow Texan, the great Jack Teagarden. I developed a special love for Jack Teagarden's singing and trombone playing and heard and read mentions for years about Teagarden's stint in Peck's Bad Boys, this mysterious band from Galveston, Texas, in the 1920's. Peck Kelley was always mentioned as an astonishing piano player and bandleader who surrounded himself with great young musicians. Jack Teagarden was one of these great young musicians, along with his buddy Pee Wee Russell on the clarinet. I am not aware of any recordings of Peck's Bad Boys, but they were hugely influential with several graduates who went on to fame. Often when people would talk about this band, they would mention a genius guitarist named Snoozer.

The dark mists of time add a "noir" aspect to a lot of this music and its history that has always intrigued me. Awareness of a great musician leads to awareness of another and so it goes. Different figures appear out of the mist to different degrees over time, leaving us their gifts of brilliance and beauty. Sometimes we only catch glimpses of some of the figures in the past on the edge of the mist. We only catch glimpses of their power. These figures may not have achieved stardom or widespread recognition but some of them left gifts that are incomparable and immeasurable.

Ed "Snoozer" Quinn is one of these figures on the edge of the mist of time who left us a powerfully special gift. A Bogalusa, Louisiana, native, he was a gifted multi-instrumentalist who became a journeyman guitarist with a brilliant, unique playing style. Playing fingerstyle, he could orchestrate fantastic instrumental renditions of the songs of his day – songs that contributed greatly to the backbone of jazz and eventually the Great American Songbook. Some of the greatest composers who ever lived inhabited Snoozer's repertoire, providing him with a harmonic structure of the highest order through which he was broadly recognized as one of the most impressive, inventive guitarists of his time or any time.

The other widely notable guitarists in the late 1920's and early 1930's were largely plectrum guitarists and primarily played rhythm guitar in large orchestras. Guitarists, as a rule, were not featured soloists in these settings and therefore do not appear on the recordings of the day to much extent. Eddie Lang, Dick McDonough, Carl Kress, and others were brilliant on their instruments and played fantastic solos, but

Snoozer orchestrated his guitar arrangements into simultaneously moving musical parts that cover all of the bases to a degree that is truly notable and that no one else was doing at the time. From what we know from recordings, most of Snoozer's peers in the late 1920's and early 1930's, were from New York or Chicago and came much more from the Italian mandolin tradition. Whereas, guitarists from the South, like Snoozer and all of the New Orleans guitarists of the day, began on banjo and moved to the guitar later. It has been said that Snoozer Quinn represents the link between Lonnie Johnson and Eddie Lang. There is an earthy, soulful element to Snoozer's playing that is not present in many of his counterparts in bands all over the country. The influence of the country blues is present throughout his approach to the instrument, but it is combined with the best parts of the New Orleans jazz and early swing sensibilities. He accompanies himself while carrying the melody and including lots of percussive thumps, downstrokes, and other rhythmic fingerstyle devices.

Although he recorded as an accompanist behind singers like Bee Palmer and Jimmie Davis, the extant 1948 recordings, released by 504 Records as "The Magic of Snoozer Quinn with Johnny Wiggs & Johnny Wiggs Big Five (504 CD25)," provide the best of what was captured of Snoozer's solo playing. The Wiggs recordings are all we have that features Snoozer's playing to any extent. Listening to him playing "You Took Advantage Of Me" in a New Orleans hospital in this tuberculosis ward, tearing it up, fills me with awe at what Snoozer might have sounded like at his peak. What exists from his earlier career - where he is backing up vocalists or buried in the band - does not capture the magic of the Wiggs recordings. We are forever deeply indebted to Johnny Wiggs for making sure to take his acetate recorder to the hospital that day to record with Snoozer.

My dear friends and long-standing musical partners, Dan Sumner and Katy Hobgood Ray, bring serious muscle and authenticity to this book. Dan's precise transcriptions and in-depth commentary contain the art and the meat of Snoozer's approach and reveal his playing to a depth deserving of Snoozer's brilliance. Katy's biography of Snoozer is taken from many hours of deep research on Snoozer's life and music and animates and fills out his story with the family connection coming through.

Dan, the author of the commentary and transcriber of the arrangements in this book, is a Louisiana-based guitarist, arranger, educator, and music producer. He is an internationally acclaimed guitarist who performs and tours the world regularly with a variety of acts. He is a sponsored Benedetto Artist and owns and operates Fort Sumner Studio in Monroe, Louisiana, where he has recorded and/or produced dozens of critically acclaimed albums. He has taught music at Loyola University (New Orleans), Indiana University, Capital University, was Assistant Professor of Music Education and Guitar at University of Louisiana – Monroe and was the music director of the Kennedy Center Award-winning Lusher Charter School. He holds degrees in Jazz Studies and Guitar from Capital University, the New England Conservatory of Music with Doctoral studies at Indiana University Jacobs School of Music.

Katy is Snoozer Quinn's great, great niece and holds a master's degree in musicology from Tulane University with a concentration in New Orleans music. She authored the biography of Snoozer that follows and compiled his discography, as well as providing the photographs included here. She currently works in media relations at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee, and as an adjunct professor of public relations. She is a singer, musician, recording artist, and music historian especially passionate about the positive power of music in the lives of children. She hosts the weekly kids radio show and podcast

“Confetti Park” and plays music with the New Orleans-based children’s chorus Confetti Park Players and the Shreveport-based Friends of Lead Belly. She is a proud alumna of Carleton College and Tulane University. She released an album with her husband, Dave, in 2019 entitled “I Dream Of Water” to unanimous critical acclaim. Katy is indisputably the foremost authority on Snoozer’s life and career as a result of her exhaustive research.

Snoozer’s story is one that contains tragedy, unrequited promise, and the heartbreak that accompanies big breaks that do not pan out. He was a victim of life’s pitfalls and, despite human frailties and pure bad luck, his unique musical genius and his special gift on the guitar were recognized in his day as being singular and very powerful. Snoozer was in the company of Louis Armstrong, Bix Beiderbecke, Frankie Trumbauer, Jack Teagarden, Pee Wee Russell, Les Paul, Paul Whiteman, and other top bandleaders and musicians of the day, who, after being exposed to his talents, tipped their hats to him and held him up as one of the true greats on his instrument. They clearly recognized, as this book reinforces, that he was truly a gifted musician and a singular, very complete guitarist with a beautiful musical soul - as in Segovia’s telescope.

I would like to offer my very special personal thanks to Kathryn, Dan, Tom Stagg, Isaac Alexander, and Johnny Wiggs, without any of whom, this project would not have been completed.

We hope you enjoy the brilliance and deep soul of Snoozer Quinn.

Take it easy,

Steve Howell
Out Of The Past Music, LLC



www.stevehowell.ws

BIOGRAPHY:

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION BY KATY HOBGOOD RAY

I grew up in a large family that loved to gather around the parlor piano to sing and circle the campfire with guitars. I have always felt a connection to my family through music. As a child, I loved to hear my elders sing the songs they'd loved as kids, and to hear them tell stories about the past. I've always had a deep curiosity for both music and family history.

Songs and stories stuck with me, including those told on my dad's side about an uncle who had the marvelous nickname of "Snoozer." Eddie "Snoozer" Quinn was from Bogalusa, Louisiana, where I was born (like my dad and my grandparents). Snoozer was a musical genius who could play any instrument he touched, they said, and had toured with many famous musicians. He played violin like angels singing, said Aunt Nancy, and watching him play guitar would make your jaw drop. Supposedly, Snoozer could shake your hand while playing guitar and never miss a beat!

Years later, I realized that Snoozer's abilities were more than a family memory. Around 2001, while living in Shreveport, Louisiana, I was singing jazz standards in a band that included fingerstyle guitarist Steve Howell. Steve has an immense knowledge of country blues and early jazz figures. I thought to amuse him with the story of my distant relative named Snoozer Quinn.

Much to my surprise, Steve knew of Snoozer, and even schooled me on how important Snoozer's legacy was to early jazz guitar. A few weeks later, Steve gave me an incredible gift: a framed photograph of Snoozer Quinn and Louis Armstrong. I was floored. It was the first time I had ever seen a photo of Snoozer, and here he was, captured in laughter with the legendary Louis Armstrong. The photograph belonged to the collection of the Shreveport Federation of Musicians, chapter 116 of the AFM.

In 2004, I started graduate school at Tulane University. There, nestled in the "cradle of jazz" and surrounded by knowledgeable New Orleans jazz experts, I was in a prime position to learn about Snoozer's career. I began to explore Bogalusa and met my Quinn cousins. Most notably, I connected with Terry "Foots" Quinn who is Snoozer's most directly surviving relative (nephew, son of Alton Quinn) and who was keeper of the Snoozer archive of instruments, photographs, and memorabilia.

Snoozer is a figure that people are hungry to know more about. I have had the warm and enthusiastic support of a community of musicians and jazz musicologists, such as Chip Henderson, John Joyce, Bruce Raeburn and Lynn Abbott at the Hogan Jazz Archive, and others such as Tom Stagg, Jack Stewart, John Rankin, Carolyn Kolb, Charles Chamberlain, Ann Woodruff, John McCusker, and Greg Lambousy and Beth Sherwood at the Louisiana State Museum.

I've felt great serendipity and synchronicity in my search for Snoozer, which has ebbed and flowed as the years go by. As my own life has changed direction, I've been bouncing around to places that were significant to Snoozer. He had a life in all the cities I have lived in: Bogalusa, Shreveport, New Orleans—even Houston, Texas and Memphis, Tennessee! It's been a pleasure to connect with him through music, through place, and through people.

My search for Snoozer's music has enriched my life in countless ways. It's led me to rediscover my roots in Bogalusa and reconnect with distant relatives. (Foots and I have formed a strong friendship and have collaborated on several music projects featuring his original folk songs.) I've met and interviewed many fascinating people as I sought to learn more about Snoozer's influence, such as great guitarists Les Paul and Frank Federico. My search has taken me into lively jazz clubs, quiet nursing homes, grand university archives, mildewy basements of crumbling houses, and ramshackle cemeteries. I've sat for untold hours scrolling through microfilm and thumbing through stacks of 78s, ever hopeful for a miracle. I have not yet uncovered all I hope to unearth, but I have found tantalizing bread crumbs that keep me searching even as the light grows dim.

I am grateful to Steve Howell for lighting the match on this long-burning torch I carry, and for helping me share Snoozer's story today. I hope that this release of the hospital recordings, along with the musical explication by guitarist Dan Sumner, will bring about more interest in Snoozer, whose legend for too long has been shrouded in mist.

SNOOZER'S LEGEND

I met Quinn, the only boy who has it on Eddie Lang, I believe. - Frankie Trumbauer

Snoozer Quinn is the best [guitarist] of all time. - Danny Barker

I visited Snoozer at his house....That's where I learned to pull and hammer strings.- Les Paul

Eddie "Snoozer" Quinn, a pioneer of early jazz guitar, can be found in memoirs, diaries, and oral histories of some of the earliest jazz musicians. Born in 1907 in McComb, Mississippi, Quinn has been called a missing link between country blues guitarists like Big Bill Broonzy and early jazz guitar soloists like Eddie Lang.

In his peak career days, in the late 1920-1930s, Quinn performed with some of the biggest names in early jazz—such as Louis Armstrong, Bix Beiderbecke, Jack Teagarden, Paul Whiteman, and the Dorsey brothers. On April 30, 1948, Quinn was inducted into the National Jazz Foundation in New Orleans,¹ along with Louis Armstrong and Stella Oliver, widow of Joe "King" Oliver.² New Orleans banjoist and guitarist Danny Barker considered Quinn "the best of all time."³

Yet Snoozer Quinn is overlooked in the majority of jazz anthologies and merely footnoted in guitar history books. Working in the days before guitar amplification, Quinn was an acoustic sideman in the era of big band jazz. His technical skill on a quiet instrument was buried beneath the sound of horns and a full rhythm section. Though Quinn made a number of professional jazz recordings in his prime, many of these sessions were never released and are now lost—such as a solo session recorded for Victor in 1928 and a Columbia session with Bix Beiderbecke and Frankie Trumbauer in 1928. Of the professional recordings that are available, Quinn is playing as accompaniment in big orchestras or to vocalists such as Bee Palmer.

Anecdotes of Quinn paint a vivid picture of an unusual looking man. Slightly deformed from birth, Quinn had an egg-shaped head and was blind in one eye. He was reportedly quiet and shy. Tragically, Quinn struggled

with alcoholism and suffered from chronic illness from an early age, and began entering hospitals for extended periods of time before he turned 30 years old. Due to all these factors, Quinn's career was short. He died of tuberculosis at age 42, in 1949.

Even so, the sparse information known about Quinn has passed through generations of serious guitar players like a whispered mythology and a shared secret. The great guitarist and inventor Les Paul, in his youth, drove out of his way to Bogalusa, Louisiana to seek Quinn out for consultation—at Bing Crosby's urging. Leo Kottke told *Frets Magazine* in 1987: "Snoozer was playing what a lot of us today are trying to play, which is a finer approach to the guitar, but with all of the available harmony."⁴

Quinn's fabled abilities have only grown more mysterious with the passage of time. Multiple accounts attest that Quinn could play several parts on a guitar at once, and do it playing with one hand. The hillbilly singer (and Louisiana Governor) Jimmie Davis, whom Quinn accompanied on a 1931 recording session for Victor, said, "The last time I saw [Snoozer Quinn], he was walking down the streets of Baton Rouge, playing the "Tiger Rag" — had the guitar on his back, playing it back behind him, see."⁵

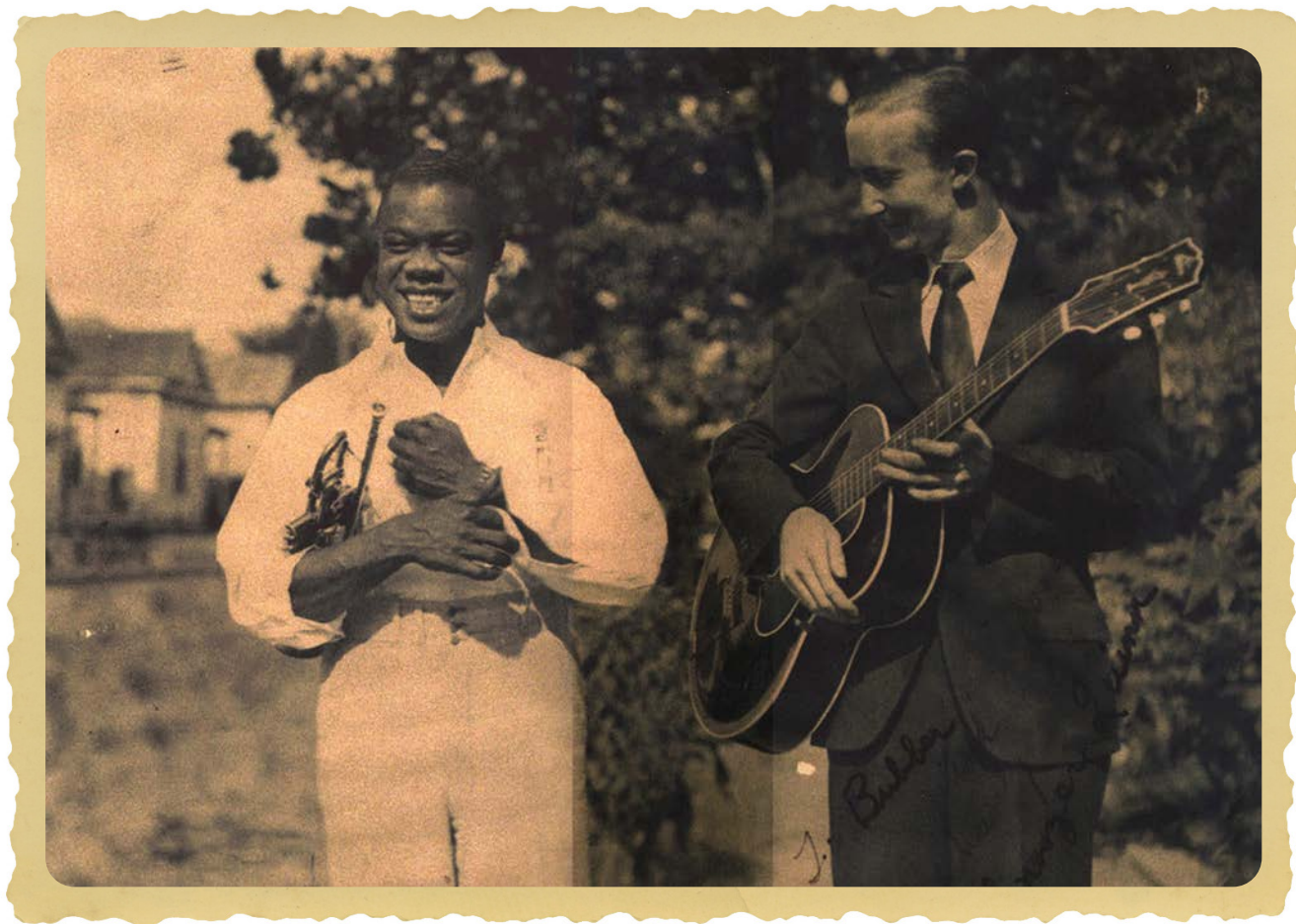
But where does the myth end and the truth begin? What was Quinn was capable of in his prime, and just what role did he have in the evolution of jazz guitar as a solo instrument? What was Quinn playing in the 1920s that so captivated and impressed his fellow jazz musicians, yet was deemed unmarketable by record company executives? What was it about Quinn's musicianship that made Paul Whiteman hire him on the spot? What was it about Quinn's technique that thrilled his fellow musicians?

Although there are no clear recordings of Quinn in his prime to work from, we are incredibly fortunate that in 1948, he was recorded by his longtime friend and bandmate Johnny Wiggs. A cornetist and New Orleans educator who recognized the importance of capturing Quinn's guitar work for posterity, Wiggs recorded Quinn on acetate cutting machine inside the tuberculosis ward at a hospital in New Orleans. Though Quinn was gravely ill at the time of recordings (he died within months of the session), the recordings offer insight into his musicality and unusual technique.

Wiggs has described the recording session in several accounts. Here is how he described it to jazz historian William Russell:

He was....in this little room, about 6 by 10 foot. I was trying to operate the recording machine, keep some of the thread from messing up the needle, keep people out of the room, and play, all at the same time. During one number the telephone started ringing, so I had to throw the phone off the hook....I didn't want to tire Snoozer as he was pretty weak then....He'd been working with an amplified guitar a lot and I had an awful time trying to get him to play without any amplification. Unfortunately there was only a couple of choruses of his picking style, for which he was best known.⁶

Wiggs released four of the recorded songs in 1952 on his own label. The entire session was released in 1969 as an LP record album by a small jazz label called Fat Cat Jazz Records out of Manassas, Va. It was re-released as a CD and digitally in 2014 by 504 Records. These recordings are the only known surviving aural legacy of Quinn's jazz technique.



Louis Armstrong and Snoozer Quinn in Shreveport, La. Inscription reads "Dedicated to Bubba Broyles." Broyles was a bass player who operated a music store located at 420 Milam in Shreveport, Louisiana. Photograph courtesy of the Shreveport AFM Local 116 and John Howe.

COMMENTARY:

DAN SUMNER

When Steve Howell approached me about this project (our second book together) I had no idea of the amount of time and effort that it would take to bring it to completion. Nor did I have any measure of the amount of love and respect that I would quickly develop for the musicianship and guitar virtuosity of Snoozer Quinn. I had earned multiple degrees in Jazz and guitar, and taught these disciplines for decades while, regrettably, never having taken notice of this true genius whose influence on his contemporaries and musicians who followed should never be overlooked. I will ever be thankful to Steve for introducing me to Snoozer and inviting me to be a part of this book project. I also would like to thank Katy Hobgood Ray for her splendid writings on Snoozer and for her encouragement throughout this process.

The transcriptions in this book are all taken from the recordings that Johnny Wiggs made in a nurses' station while Snoozer was in treatment for tuberculosis. It is unknown whether Snoozer had a guitar with him during his hospital stay, or if Wiggs brought him one for the purpose of this recording. Either way, I cannot imagine that the sounds we hear on the recordings reflect Snoozer at the height of his powers. This is a scary thought as his playing, in less than perfect circumstances, still demonstrates a remarkable virtuosity and a superior musicianship. As Snoozer passed soon after these recordings were made, Wiggs's efforts to make them happen should forever be appreciated. These are the only remaining examples we have of Snoozer's solo guitar playing, and I am honored to bring the best representation of them to you that I can offer.

A FEW NOTES ON THE TRANSCRIPTION PROCESS

Several factors combined to make the transcription process especially challenging. First, there is, in existence, only one short video recording of Snoozer playing the guitar. And, it is a silent film! I studied that short video countless times, searching for clues as to how he struck the strings with his right hand, how he fingered chords with his left hand, how often he changed positions, etc. The video was short, and silent, but it gave me a place to start, and it gave me a visual image I could use when I was imagining him playing a particular musical passage.

The second, and more daunting challenge was that Snoozer was well-known for tuning the guitar in a non-standard fashion. He didn't use open tunings like a slide guitarist, but rather tuned all the strings of the guitar down by the same interval. This is sometimes known as "Slack Tuning." He was known for tuning his low and high strings to the pitch C resulting in the tuning, from low to high (C,F,Bb,Eb,G,C). So, I tuned one of my guitars in this fashion and went on to transcribing. However, one of the goals of this project was to provide transcriptions that could easily (as easily as possible) be played on a guitar in standard tuning. This required that I transcribe the notes in his tuning but write them as if they were being played on a standard-tuned guitar. This meant that I was writing the notes transposed up a major third while playing them along with the recording.

Snoozer's approach to improvising through chord changes is based in playing the chord tones and extensions of the chords and chromatically approaching or surrounding them. This was a common improvisational strategy at the time, probably exemplified best by Louis Armstrong. This is not a chord/scale approach in any fashion. Rather, Snoozer usually outlined the chord tones (1-3-5-7) and then often played up into the extensions (9-11-13) to either color the chord, or provide dissonance, especially on dominant-functioning chords. His usage of scale passages largely utilized the major scale notes as passing notes between chord tones or extensions. Also, like Louis Armstrong, he typically used extensions at the end of an ascending passage, rising up to the extension and then descending to a chord tone to resolve the dissonance.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The first step I would recommend is for you to listen to all of these recordings several times through, before ever even looking at the transcriptions. This should give you a sense of Snoozer's style and general approach to solo guitar playing. Listen to his melodic ideas, how he attacks the strings, and how he rhythmically swings.

Then, listen again while looking at the notation (even if you're a tablature reader only). Watch for the contour of the melodies, see how he accompanies himself using bass lines and rhythmic articulations in the harmony. I suggest that you go through this process several times before attempting to play them on your guitar.

When you are ready to start playing, you have a couple of choices to make. You can keep your guitar in standard tuning, or you can tune down to the tuning that Snoozer used. Doing the latter will allow you to play along with the recording. However, unless you are playing a guitar that is set up for C Slack tuning (such as a baritone guitar) you will soon notice that the intonation, and most likely the fret action, will be severely compromised especially as you play in higher positions. The transcriptions are written to be played on a guitar in standard tuning, however, the resulting tones will be either one, or two whole steps higher than on the recordings.

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Singing The Blues #1 (One Chorus)	41
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I MET QUINN, THE ONLY BOY WHO HAS IT ON
EDDIE LANG, I BELIEVE. - *Frankie Trumbauer*

SNOOZER QUINN IS THE BEST [GUITARIST]
OF ALL TIME. - *Danny Barker*

I VISITED SNOOZER AT HIS HOUSE....THAT'S WHERE I
LEARNED TO PULL AND HAMMER STRINGS. - *Les Paul*



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