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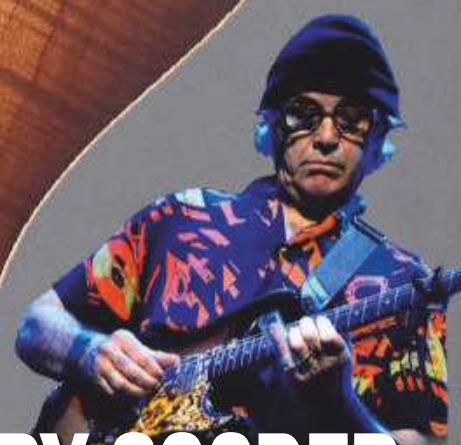
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A minute's all it takes to find out what makes a great guitarist tick. Before he jumped into his limo for the airport we grabbed a chat with film maker Ennio Morricone's extraordinary guitarist, **Rocco Zifarelli**

GT: What is your guitar, amp and effect pedals set up for Ennio's tour?

My main guitar is an Agostin Custom guitar, model Z24, built by Canadian Luthier (but located in Italy) Agostino Carella. It's based on my Valley Art Custom Pro: 24 frets, Gibson scale and smaller Strat type body, and you can switch from Gibson to Strat type tones. It's a great, versatile guitar. I also use a nylon-string acoustic electric, generally Godin Multiac. I've been using digital systems for a long time now, and today my main amp is the Kemper Profiler; to me the best you can have in digital amps and effects, and the profiling is awesome. I can say that the profile of my original '63 Vox AC15 is better than the original! For rehearsal or emergency I use Zoom G5N or G3N, not comparable with Kemper, but great tone for a great value.

GT: How do you achieve the famous guitar sounds for Ennio's Western movie scores?

The famous western movies were produced from '64 to '71. The guitarists were the best session players at that time in Rome. Two of them that Ennio considered his first choices were Bruno Battisti D'Amario, and Alessandro Alessandroni. Both used Fender guitars and amp (Strat and Jaguar) but basically they were great classical guitar players that played electric too, especially in open or first position, with heavy strings, influenced by the '50s, early '60s guitar tone of that time (Hank Marvin, Buddy Holly, Scotty Moore). So to emulate those tones I have to play a lot of open strings: heavy picking, single-coil bridge or middle pickup, De Luxe, Bassman or similar Kemper profiles and a lot of spring reverb simulation; a treble fuzz distortion for The Man With The Harmonica tone, originally played by D'Amario, probably with a Vox Tone Bender distortion; they were very common because they were made in Italy at that time. I should ask him!

GT: How many pieces are played in the concerts?

About 30 pieces, but they are grouped in five to seven suites, for two hours of concert. The program changes tour by tour and it happens that I don't play on some tunes or suites, so it depends; some tours I have the guitar in my hands for all the concert; others the guitars are on the stands for a long time.

GT: What is the trickiest piece to play with Ennio Morricone?

The trickiest parts concern experience and attitude to play in a big symphony orchestra, when you have to play a well-known melody above all the strings and you feel very exposed in front of an audience of 10, 20 or 30.000 people that know that melody perfectly and want to listen to it exactly as the original. I love this challenge but I feel more comfortable playing jazz.

“THROUGH THE BEATLES I DISCOVERED CLAPTON, BECK, PAGE, ALLMAN, FINALLY ARRIVING AT COLTRANE AND BRECKER”

GT: Do you have a type of pick that you can't live without?

I use different picks but mostly the heavy gauge Ernie Ball (1mm or heavier) for all the electric and soloing; thin for acoustic strumming and medium for electric oud, mandolins or any other ethnic stringed instruments.

GT: You have to give up all your pedals but three - which are they?

I'm not a pedal guy and I feel nonconformist considering that today most guitarists on the planet use stompboxes for their tone. The reasons are professional. I've always been considered a multi-stylistic musician, able to pass from one style to another, then from one guitar to another, from one sound to another; play with headphones or with a stack on stage. The best is to have different amps, guitars and setups for the projects that I've been hired for, but many years ago I started to experiment with digital amping and effects that let me

switch immediately from a preset to another and eventually changing the guitar at the same time. This often happens with Ennio and on all the tours I've done with singers, or all the TV shows with the RAI Italian television orchestra, or when I play my own music. So to answer your question, if I cannot bring my Kemper I would take my G3N.

GT: Do you play another instrument well enough to do so in a band?

Yes. I play electric oud, the Godin Glissentar (a sort of 11 nylon strings fretless guitar with a sound very close to the Arabian oud), but in the past I modified a 12-string tenor mandurria (or bandurria) to create the same sound. I named this instrument 'mandoud' and played it live and on my first record, Lyndon, in 1997. I also play mandolin, bouzouki and other stringed instruments, all tuned like the

guitar to feel comfortable for reading and for improvisation. I remember Morricone called me years ago asking if I play balalaika. Yes I do! The movie was I Demoni di San Pietroburgo, directed by Giuliano Montalto. I've also worked with a music company located in Switzerland and we recorded a lot of samples and world music compilations, each project to produce music and sounds with a specific ethnic and geographic flavour. I used a lot of my ethnic stringed instrument collection but I also created or modified some acoustic guitars to reproduce some particular instruments' tones.

GT: Is there anyone's playing that you're slightly jealous of?

I'm slightly jealous of all the musicians and artists that lived and performed in the mid'60s to late '80s, because they lived during the best time for music and arts. They had the possibility to freely create, experiment, practise and believe in

a way totally forgotten today. The audience was so inspiring and involved because the music and all the process involved to create, perform, organise and listen, was a heavy part of the culture of that time, way better than now!

GT: Your house or studio is burning down: which guitar do you salvage?

Terrifying question. Well, I own some beautiful vintage guitars, so I would save the '56 Strat, the '53 Goldtop, the '68 ES-335, the '50 Martin 015 and one of my Agostins, because they're different in style and I could continue to work to rebuild the house. But mainly because they're great guitars!

GT: What strings do you use?

The strings are Ernie Ball for electric and acoustic, and Galli (made in Italy) for oud, flatwound jazz and some nylon. For the Agostin, Strat and Les Paul 010-046, sometimes 009-046 for Teles, because Ernie Balls have more tension compared to other companies. For jazz guitars I use a set of 011-052 with 012 on top; roundwound for humbucker equipped jazz guitars and flatwound for floating mini-humbucker guitars (GB20, L7 etc.). For steel-string acoustic I use phosphor-bronze 012-054.

GT: Who was your first influence to play the guitar?

Various Italian pop singers inspired me to ask for an acoustic guitar for a present. Then I switched to electric with George Harrison and The Beatles. Everything started with The Beatles; through them I discovered Eric Clapton, then Jeff Beck, Jimmy Page, Duane Allman and so on, finally arriving at John Coltrane and Michael Brecker.

GT: What was the first guitar you really lusted after?

Gibson Les Paul Standard. My first serious guitar was a Les Paul Deluxe, with mini humbuckers, that I would appreciate better today. Then I switched to a Strat.

GT: Can you remember the single best gig you ever did?



Rocco Zifarelli
playing his custom
built Agostino Carella
guitar made in Italy

One of my best gigs happened on July 13th this year at the Umbria Jazz Festival in Perugia, Italy, where I was part of the rhythm section (with Harvey Mason on drums and Nathan East on bass) playing for Quincy Jones's 85th birthday, along with some great world artists produced by Quincy during his career: Take 6, Patti Austin, Ivan Lins, Noa and others. But I've been playing with Ennio for 21 years now; we've toured the world many times in the best venues, but I cannot forget the first concert at the Royal Albert Hall in 2003. Incredible place! Awesome theatre. But also I was impressed by the pictures in the big long corridor, with all the great artists that performed on that prestigious stage: from Wagner to Led Zeppelin, Duke Ellington to Cream; Rachmaninoff to Jeff Beck...

GT: Your worst playing nightmare?
With Morricone in Rome some years ago. Something I ate before the concert. I needed the toilet every 10 minutes. Very bad!

GT: What's the most important musical lesson you ever learnt?

Create, experiment and develop every day. Try to free your creativity; look at the trends but follow your instinct and creativity with an open mind. I teach jazz and pop-rock guitar at the state conservatories of L'Aquila and Milano, and I try to transmit all this to my students.

GT: Do you still practice?

Yes of course. Technique, harmony, sightreading, improvisation, solos of the masters, and composing. Obviously I'm more serious when I'm at home!

GT: Do you have a pre-concert warm-up routine?

Generally large arpeggios and legatos for the fretting hand, and some exercises for the picking hand. I prefer very slow exercises, a sort of Tai Chi for guitar.

GT: If you could put together a fantasy band with you in it, who would the other players be?

Wow! Well, playing different styles I like to listen to the right musicians

in the proper musical environment, and I love so many musicians from different music styles. But I can imagine a dream band with Jaco on bass, Michael Brecker on sax, Vinnie Colaiuta on drums and Herbie Hancock on keyboards.

GT: Who's the greatest guitarist that's ever lived?

Everybody has something different to say. So how can we compare Jimi Hendrix to Wes Montgomery? Both are pioneers, even if people would remember Jimi more due to the impact he had. But Allan Holdsworth had a great influence on me and he still had many things left to say. After a year I'm missing him a lot, so I would say Allan.

GT: Is there a solo by someone else that you wish you had played?

So many: Pat Metheny, Extradition (Travels); Wes Montgomery, The Way You Look Tonight (Guitar On The Go); Allan Holdsworth, Devil Take The Hindmost (Metal Fatigue); and Carlos Rios, Brother To Brother (Gino Vannelli's Brother To Brother).

GT: What are you currently up to?

My second CD is out. There are 10 tracks, five are compositions of mine, two from Ennio: Le Clan des Siciliens and The Untouchables. This one I already play in concert with the orchestra in a jazzy and jazz-rock mood. It was recorded in my studio in Rome with great musicians from the electric jazz world, such as Paco Sery and Linley Marthem (Joe Zawinul Syndicate); Alex Sipiagin on trumpet; Dario Deidda and Pippo Matino, fantastic Italian bass players; Joe Bowie (singer and leader of US band Defunkt of which I'm the guitarist); Freddy Jay and Yassine Africancuts on turntables and samples. I also have to work for the conservatories, finish my instructional guitar book and prepare for the new tour with Ennio. It opens on November 5th in St Petersburg, and on 26th we play the O2 Arena in London.

For more information on Rocco's amazing career please visit him at www.roccozifarelli.com.