

An Interview with Tom Riepl



Author: Dragutin Matosevic for Barikada World of Music Web Portal
Tuzla, Bosna i Hercegovina



Date: June 2005

Dear Tom, please, introduce yourself shortly.

Hi everybody, my name is Tom Riepl, I live in Munich, Germany, I am 43 years old and I'm a guitar player. This includes touring as a sideman for various artists, being a studio musician, composer, recording artist and producer. I also have a regular column in "Gitarre & Bass", Germany's premier guitar magazine.

Reading your biography noticed that in the beginning of your music career you were fascinated with the blues and big names of that music genre. Who were the greatest heroes of the blues music scene for yourself and why?

Blues is the most important element in modern American guitar music, because Blues is all about feeling and without feeling you won't have that magic tone on guitar. For me, one of the greatest heroes was, and is of course, Robert Johnson. That's where it all came from. He played unbelievable stuff on his Gibson L-1 acoustic guitar, with an energy like no one did before. I mean, this was 1936 down in Mississippi and most people could not believe that a man could play like this. Actually, they thought Johnson had sold his soul to the devil... I also liked Johnny Winter back then, well, he's not as much traditional Blues but more Blues Rock. I liked his technique, his fast and fluid style...

Many young people want to be good guitarists. Given that you applied many various techniques during the process of guitar playing learning, what could you suggest to the

young guitarists in that regard? Does some technique learned from some famous guitarist might be limitation factor in the rest of career of some guitarist in sense that he might miss to build/develop his own style of guitar playing?

If you have just started to learn guitar and want to become a good player the most important thing is to keep your ears open! Listen to every style you can and try to figure out what's going on. You don't have to listen to pop music necessarily, because that's no art form but just business and there's no guitar in today's pop anyway. Better check out the ones like Eddie van Halen, Steve Morse, Larry Carlton and Steve Lukather. If you want to know from whom those guys learned to play go back in time and listen to Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck, Jimmy Page, Jimi Hendrix. And if you want to know where THEY got their influences from, go back in time a little bit further and you'll stumble on Robert Johnson, Muddy Waters, Son House and all the other great Blues men. The other important thing is to develop an own style as a guitar player. Trying to play like other guitarists is good in order to learn the instrument, but it is definitely a limitation for future uniqueness. Better play only 5 of your very own slow notes instead of 50 fast licks of Van Halen. There's only ONE Van Halen and there's only ONE you, so you have to decide whether you want to be the guy who tries to play like Van Halen, or the guy who will be recognized for his own style...

Thanks to your good music playing you are promoting equipment of many worldwide known producers of such equipment. What such work is bringing to you (beside the financial compensation) and is it sometimes too much time consuming? Are such performances sometime obstacles in realization of your regular music activities? What is good point of that work?

Well, first of all, the financial aspect with those product endorsements is not as good as you might think. I started doing those clinics & workshops in the beginning of the '90s, driving from town to town and doing a guitar show every day. I learned a lot! How to entertain the audience and keep the show exciting for 2 hours... Those shows also gave me the chance to sell a lot of CDs and become known to a wider audience. It's time consuming, yet it's no obstacle for my own musical activities. I performed 5 times at the Frankfurt Music Fair, made many international contacts there and got lots of recognition from the trade press. Eventually, the Japanese guitar company Ibanez offered me a deal and they built my own signature guitar model. They have not done this before for a German guitar player, only for Americans. That's the real good point of that work...

You released 5 instrumental solo albums. The Only One - 1988, Dance The Blues - 1991, Let The Guitar Do The Talking - 1993, Planet G. - 1997 and Hollymood - 2002. Please, describe each of them in sense what was goal of each of them? What music stories you tried to say fans of your music?

The goal of the first album, which was a 4-track vinyl EP, was simply to have an own album and get played on the radio. Well, it worked and I even was invited to a TV show to play one title, which was really great for me back then. "Dance The Blues" was a band project, we recorded this CD and went on tour, playing small clubs and selling the CD after the shows, which was also a good experience. These first two albums were more Fusion-oriented and the next one "Let The Guitar Do The Talking" was actually my first real Rock guitar album with lots of solos and all that stuff... "Planet G." was the first album with a concept behind it. It took the listener on a trip to a distant planet on which guitars, amps and music are what it's all about. The fans liked it and I liked the idea of having a good concept behind all my future CDs. A good concept is the key to an interesting and musical sounding album... Then I did "Hollymood" and that concept was just perfect. That CD became my most popular and successful.



Tried to find out more details about your recent release, concept-album "Hollymood", but data on Internet were very modest. May I ask you for more detailed story about that project?

"Hollymood" is like road movie without pictures, a guitaristic ear movie. I'm fascinated by old Hollywood movies, American TV series and the film industry in L.A. So I stay a few weeks in California every year visiting the Universal Studios in Hollywood a few times and that's where the inspiration came from. I got into a real Hollywood mood - The HollyMood. So I started writing the music and out came 12 scenes of an imaginary movie. It's great fun and I think you can hear the California sun on the album. By the way, German Musik Express magazine rated "Hollymood" best instrumental Rock album of the year...

Three years passed since you recorded and released the album "Hollymood". I truly believe that you already have finished some new project. What will it be and could you describe the sound/style of it?

No, I have not finished it yet, but you're right, there's a new album coming out by the end of the year and I'm busy working on it. First I planned to do a sequel of "Hollymood" like "Hollymood Part II" or something, but then I decided to do something different. The new album will be less Rock but more R&B, Fusion... Real nice & slow guitar melodies, the ideal night time music and that's also the concept behind the new CD. Guitar music for the night... But I think I'll also do "Hollymood Part II" in the near future and this will be fast, loud and rocking again...

We in B&H, it applies also to this much wider area, are not so much familiar with nowadays German music scene. Which music style is prevailing and who are the most popular representatives of such music scene? This question does not refer to pop music, but the music which is considered as good and qualitative.

The German music scene nowadays is as it ever was. There's good music and there's bad music. Good music can be heard in small clubs and at festivals and the bad music is on TV and radio. Jazz, Fusion and Blues is kind of niche music and you won't hear that on the radio very often. Pop and Hip Hop are prevailing! German record labels don't care very well about their local artists; they rather distribute all the US artists. The record companies only provide music for teenagers and don't care for the middle aged, 25-50, fans. That's the big problem, because there ARE lots of fans of good music and there are also excellent musicians in Germany...

For the end of this interview, what would be your message to the listeners of the radio show The Jeans Generation who will have an opportunity to listen some songs from your album "Hollymood"?

To all the listeners of The Jeans Generation, thanks for listening to my "Hollymood" album, I hope you like it. If you have any questions on my music, guitars, or whatever please don't hesitate to contact me. How? Just check out my website www.tomriepl.com.

That would be all. Thank you Tom.

Thank you, Dragutin. You're welcome!