

# Lauer Architecture Progressive Design

1553 Meadowside Drive, St. Louis, MO 63146 314.994.3926

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DATE: Tuesday, September 20, 2005

Al Di Meola Interview

By Derek Lauer

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*Al Di Meola is one of the world's foremost guitar players – considered to be the best by many. His works spans thirty years – most notable is his work with Chick Corea and Stanley Clarke in Return to Forever. He was first famous for being a pioneer in electric jazz fusion, then later for his acoustic Latin, world music and symphonic work. This was a rare opportunity to speak to one of the important composers of our time. He has been a huge influence on musicians the world over.*

## Questions For Al Di Meola

**DRL: How would you describe your new project with Russian Pop Singer, Leonid Agutin – how is the direction different from you previous work?**

ADM: It's Interesting – It's mainly his music and I am pretty much producer and playing on it. So it's not reflective of what we're doing live... It's in a pop nature – kind of an Al Di Meola meets Sting.

**DRL: Is that right - wow! Is the producing role a new challenge for you? To produce something other than your own music?**

ADM: No, no it was not a challenge, it was just a project that came along that I thought was interesting enough to do. Nothing more than that and I just think that he has a great, I would say very unique voice. Something I haven't heard before, but definitely in the pop mode. It doesn't have much to do with anything other than that.

**DRL: He's based on a Russian Label – is that correct?**

ADM: Right now it's released on a European label and will be released here in the States as well.

**DRL: Is it different working with a European label than in the States?**

ADM: Yeah – they work harder.

**DRL: Right, Right**

ADM: Although that doesn't refer to my record company. I was referring to the major pop labels here. That in Europe they're – In Europe the major pop labels, they have tremendous promotion teams that really get behind stuff – that I've witnessed. In the States I've really not done

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anything – yet - I've not witnessed anything at a pop level. But my record company that I've been with for the last bunch of years, Telarc, is very, very good at what they do. They really know the market, that particular niche, very well.

**DRL: Has Telarc stepped up its marketing in support of your tour?**

ADM: Yeah they have, they really have. Surprisingly, they're interested... the contract has run out, oh about a year ago I would say, and they're very interested to continue. There isn't a new contract right at the moment. There's just talk of one. And they're supporting this tour as if I'm on the label. It's very nice.

**DRL: There's been a lot of talk about radio payola – how has that affected you directly?**

ADM: There hasn't been enough of it (laughs) for me. Could sure use some more to get my records played!

**DRL: What's the line up for upcoming tour? Will Gumbi Ortiz be with you?**

ADM: Gumbi is definitely there, yeah

**DRL: And Ernie Adams?**

ADM: Ernie Adams, Mario Parmisano and our bassist is from Havana, Cuba. Victor Morano

**DRL: How much rehearsal did it take to pull together the upcoming tour?**

ADM: Well we're in rehearsals now. So as soon as I get off with you we go back to rehearsal.

**DRL: What material will you feature & what tunes are you excited about playing?**

ADM: Probably most excited about reintroducing the electric guitar that I've kind of abandoned over the last fifteen years, somewhat. I've been focusing on acoustical. This time I'm bringing back into the music the electric guitar.

**DRL: Is that going to be the Paul Reed Smith or the Les Paul?**

ADM: Probably Paul Reed Smith this time. And it'll be, you know, a blast from the past a little bit. But as well I'll be doing music from recent albums, and also introducing for the first time new music that will appear on a future recording.

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**DRL: What's the setup with the guitars – do you have MIDI pickups that you're using along with the traditional?**

ADM: I use the MIDI pickups primarily on my acoustic. For a variety of sounds, I've always done that. But I'm also going to have the solid body this time instead of recreating the sound.

**DRL: What about the archtop from the Orange and Blue era – are you going to be using that at all?**

ADM: I would love to. – it's just tons of stuff to carry. (laughs) I had to think about it. We're in rehearsal now and we're trying to cram a months worth of rehearsal into three or four days so it's very hard.

**DRL: With Gumbi you guys always have this great interaction – do you actually practice those sorts of duet/solos where you have the interaction, or is that all just musicianship right off the top of you head?**

ADM: It's 100% improvised.

**DRL: That is beautiful. Do you ever get in contact with in the past like Rachael Z or Anthony Jackson?**

ADM: Anthony, he played with us about a year and a half ago on a little tour. He's not tour friendly these days. He's kind of like; you know... the road is very rigorous for him. So it was difficult to keep him on these grueling tours that we do. You have to have a lot of stamina. So it was nice to play with him again when we did it. Rachael Z, I haven't seen in a while. She's been out with Peter Gabriel on and off. I would like to reconnect with her. I sometimes run into Stanley Clarke, people like that.

**DRL: Has there ever been talk of a Return To Forever Reunion?**

ADM: I almost got a reunion back together a couple of years ago. I almost reconnected it. I had it on third base, and then Chick changed his mind about doing it. It's a shame because I really think the fans deserve to see it.

**DRL: Absolutely. I think you would see that there would be a huge turnout.**

ADM: The reunion would be huge. It's just Chick is being very, very stubborn. And he doesn't really care at all about the fans. He only cares about what he wants to do, and well, sometimes you gotta think about what the fans want. You know, cause it's not just the fans, it also a new

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generation of fans. The fans we have, have kids now. And they would get to see this group that existed. And it would be an event.

**DRL: Are you involved with music education? Do you ever get back to Berklee?**

ADM: I haven't been back there in a while. But I love doing clinics. I had done some clinics there about ten or fifteen years ago. I do clinics with guitar companies and music store around the country and I love doing them. I wish I could go back to school – I love those days of being surrounded by everybody wanting to learn. To put real focus on your instrument where it is the only thing in life that those students truly have focus on. And that's a wonderful period in anyone's life – when you focus on one thing.

**DRL: Do you know of any up and coming guitar players that you like?**

ADM: I was just recently the chief judge at the Moniteau Jazz festival this past summer. There were five finalists that we judged on and I found to be incredible, almost all of them were incredible. They were all fairly young players and they were all in a kind of jazz-bebop mode. They were phenomenal - just really, really well beyond their years. It was just a very interesting thing to see. So there was one, there were a few of the five or six that I saw that I thought were just amazing. One is Gilda, and he's from Israel. He wound up being first place. In fact we all, all of the judges involved, voted for number one for him. There was another great guitar player from Brazil, and another one from Norway that I remember were just phenomenal as well. But Gilad from Israel won the whole thing.

**DRL: What do you listen to on your own time? What type of music do you immerse yourself in outside of your work?**

ADM: Out side of my work? I listen to Tango music. I love Astor Piazzolla - he's a constant source of inspiration. I listen to Classical music. I listen to XM radio, satellite radio and I love the Cinemagic channel which is the soundtrack channel. I think it's highly inspiring

**DRL: How do you spend your time away from music? Do you have hobbies or things that you're involved in?**

ADM: No! Cause I'm only involved with music. So, I'm just not at leisure to get away from it right now. I've got so many different projects going on at once, crossing one another, so it's difficult. I've got the project with Leonid Agutin, the Russian pop singer, that I keep returning to, to do either videos or shows in Russia or Eastern Europe. I have another project with an Italian singer, he's actually from Sardinia. His name is Andrea Corodi. This guy is phenomenal. It's more world music like. I'm very much involved with that. And then I have a classical project

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which I'm doing. Big production, with a hundred and twenty piece orchestra – of Bach. Like a contemporary version of a Bach theme. That's taking place in Hungary. I've been doing a number of those types of projects as well, with classical orchestra in Europe. Which is very difficult to do here, unfortunately, because of the lack of funding for the arts in America is a great disparity between here and in Europe.

**DRL: Are there charitable foundations that you're involved in or that you like to support?**

ADM: Yea, I'm beginning to get involved with; I'd like to become fully involved with hearing. Just hearing. To really make musicians, and people in general, more conscious of our hearing abilities. I think the organization is cool, Hear. But ethically we are in a period of time right now where young people are to high volumes through I-pods and headphones, you know, constantly. So the rate of hearing loss and deficiency is getting extreme at a very young age. Which is alarming, because where people are starting to go deaf at 65, 70, 80 years old; it's going to happen at 40, 45 & 50.

**DRL: I have a drummer friend who has tinnitus and it really can be a debilitating condition.**

ADM: Tinnitus is just ringing of the ears. You can actually have ringing of the ears and no loss. So, what I'm talking about is the potential for tinnitus and then also loss. It pretty much inevitable at what volumes these kids are listening to. It's going to happen. It's just that when you're young, you just think you're invincible. You just do, you know. There are greater concerns today then there were like fifty years ago.

**DRL: Out of all of your travels and such, is there a particular place where the people of the place really struck you?**

ADM: Well I always loved Europe. You know, Europe is a very comforting place for music. It's just a better environment for touring. I love the cultures – I love traveling all around the world. I think my favorite is Europe.

**DRL: What work are you most proud of overall? I know that's kind of a tough question with such a large volume of work.**

ADM: I'm most proud of *The Grande Passion*, *Orange and Blue*, *Heart of the Immigrants*, *Kiss My Axe*. I have a lot of records that I'm really, really proud of. A lot of attention and detail went into these records.

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**DRL: I see that on your web page you said there is also a potential group project coming up that's along that line.**

ADM: Yea. Well some of this music that we'll be performing live will wind its way up on the next group project record. So actually, we're rehearsing right now, to be able to perform it live, to get it to a stage where we're going to record it. So, we'll have two or three, maybe four things, hopefully, in store.

**DRL: I'm really looking forward to the show. I thank you for your time in answering these questions. That's beautiful – I really appreciate it.**

ADM: No Problem! Take Care.

**END OF INTERVIEW**