

MILAN POLAK

'STRAIGHT' TALKING TO NICKY BALDRIAN

From out of nowhere comes a rather nifty fresh album from Lion Music recording artist Milan Polak. Milan for many years has fabricated a niche for himself within guitar circles. Now with a new album about to be unleashed called "Straight" Milan takes hold of not just the guitar but also vocals, allowing his music to respire outside the scope of instrumental music.

In turn Milan has made a beautiful hard rock album, songs like 'I Don't Care' and 'Difference', both showcase a classic rock edge with a little soul n' funk added - think Glenn Hughes and Robin Trower, whereas the awesome 'The Glowing Of A Cigarette' has a smouldering blues rock feel equivalent to Thunder and Y&T - I love this song to bits.

Coupled with a solid production and slots featuring celebrated bassist Randy Coven and drummer John Macaluso, 'Straight' has become adored by yours truly, so I caught up with Milan to find out what inspired him to make a vocal led album.

Your new album 'Straight' is excellent. Can you tell me what inspired you to make this one a vocal based album?

Thank you very much. Well, after a few instrumental albums and being known as more of a "guitar hero" I started to realise that instrumental guitar music only offers you limited possibilities both in expressing yourself and reaching a wider audience. So I decided to take a step into another direction. I have always preferred "real" songs and looking at my biography people can see that I have always worked with singers and/or bands. This may be surprising to some but my instrumentals have always been a bypass product of my musical being.

I've always been impressed with your playing, but vocally this record is going to open new doors for you. I was blown away with your voice which has a smouldering flavour akin to Danny Bowes of Thunder, Y&T's Dave Meniketti & David Coverdale. How long have you actually been singing, and who inspires you vocally?

Wow, that's a big call but thank you. Especially Coverdale is one of the best singers ever and I would never even dare to try to copy him. I like a lot of singers, there are so many great ones out there: Joe Lynn Turner, Kip Winger,

Stevie Wonder, Jorn Lande, Ray Gillen, Steve Overland, Jeff Scott Soto, Steve Perry ... man I could go on and on.

In my opinion I have nothing on all these guys, so I just try to do my own thing. This is something I have learned from all these years being a guitarist: It may be difficult to play a Vai lick but it is even more difficult to play your own lick. Having your own personality and being yourself is just so much more important. So I basically respect and admire these guys but I try to do my own thing. I have sung all my life ever since I was a little kid and I have always sung backing vocals in different bands. A lot of times after a show people would come up to me asking why I did not want to be the lead singer and I always had the same reply, "I'm a guitarist not a singer." Well, after years of trying to find a good singer in vain, I changed my attitude and decided to give it a shot.

Did you write/compose all the tracks?

I basically wrote all the songs except for two tracks where I incorporated a music idea that originally came from a co-operation with someone else. All my lyrics are true stories, sort of like my diary/journal.

Do you feel more freedom writing vocal songs than instrumental music?

Yes, definitely. Expressing yourself through an instrument is great and so is singing and writing lyrics. So, I feel like I have the best of both worlds. It's great!

The production sound is very good. Where did you record 'Straight' and how long did it take?

Thank you. I paid the whole production out of my own pocket: the musicians, the studios, the travels, the engineers, etc. It was a long, hard road full of joy and great experiences but also full of blood, sweat & tears at certain times. And it is amazing how many rats and psychopaths come creeping out of their holes once the CD was about to be released - people claiming that I stole the songs from them, people trying to get a piece of the pie, psychopath hair dressers, photographers that deleted all the pictures shot in a one day session as well as all the technical hassles that just occur in a production like that.

The CD was basically recorded in two studios. I recorded the basic tracks in NY and half of the basses, guitars and all the vocals in my own studio. I worked with some of the most awesome musicians: John Macaluso played the drums on all thirteen songs and Randy Coven bass on seven songs - those two guys are incredible and took my songs to a next level. It was a great honour for me to work with this world class rhythm section. In my studio I recorded six more songs with bassist Fabio Trentini. Fabio is not only a close friend but also one of the best musicians I have met in my life - even though he is a bassist he also sings, is a very successful producer and plays guitar in a way that could put a lot of guitarists to shame. We totally think alike. It is always a great pleasure to work with him.

For mixing and mastering I flew to another studio in Austria. The whole

process took about a year from the NY sessions to the mixing sessions due to many breaks in between. The recording itself was done pretty quickly. The whole CD has a 'first take' attitude and my bottom rule for this production was no more than three takes.

Is this a direction you will elaborate on in the future or will we see more instrumental records from you as well?

This is definitely what I will do in the future. Never say never but I am not planning on releasing any more guitar hero CD's in the near future. Last instrumental I have released was a song called 'Last Minute Call' - a collaboration with James LaBrie's guitarist Marco Sfogli for a LiquidNoteRecords compilation called "The Alchemists 2".

Will there be any shows to support 'Straight'?

I hope to be able to tour to support the CD. Touring is always a question of money - hotels, catering, travels, musicians. Let's see how supportive the label will be. Of course, a support slot for a big band would be awesome.

Tell me a little about your history and what who inspired you to pick up the guitar?

I grew up in a lot of different countries with a lot of different cultures such as Korea, Kenya, Saudi-Arabia, Italy, Germany, USA etc. all of which had a huge impact on me as well as my music. Originally, I wanted to become a drummer but ended up playing guitar since I never got a drum set. I started on acoustic guitar learning songs from a book called 'Beatles Complete'. Later on I moved on to AC/DC, Maiden, Priest, Van Halen etc and ended up transcribing Randy Rhoads, Paul Gilbert, Malmsteen and the likes. It was Randy Rhoads who made me fall in love with the instrument and awakened the passion for guitar. Having a natural ear I am completely self-taught but studied Fusion & Jazz later on.

You taught with Todd Duane in Vienna, do you still teach?

Very rarely ever. On one hand it's a question of time but also the attitude of the new generation of guitarists has changed. I mean everything's been said and done. They can download all those instructional videos from the internet; they get all the transcriptions of their favourite records. I still learned the old fashioned way by listening to tapes and records for hours trying to figure out what the guitarist did and how he did it, wrecking dozens of tape decks and records. But everything I found out became a part of me because that way you internalise things more. A lot of the guitar kids of today have access to hundreds of thousands of instructional material but therefore do not really appreciate that, it seems. Also, I tried teaching at another school in Hamburg, Germany, but a lot of these schools do more bad than good I have experienced.

Reflecting back on your career for a moment, what would you say are your proudest moments?

Hmmm, I don't know. I don't think in terms of pride. I am happy with what I have achieved - I have released several CD's, I have endorsements and I am lucky to be able to make a decent living on my music. For this I am grateful. I feel like 'Straight' is the best thing I have done in my life so far and I don't regret having taken this step at all. For a moment I thought that my die-hard guitar fans might be disappointed but it seems like they all stuck with me. The reviews and feedback from both fans and press have been really good so far and I am very happy about that.

Finally is there anything you would like to say to the fans out there?

Yes, thank you all for your tremendous support and feedback. I really appreciate it. You make this all worthwhile! I hope you like my new release. Keep it straight!

So there you go. 'Straight' proves that Milan has vocally and instrumentally the chops to take his career to the next level. This album smokes so make sure you check it out. www.milanpolak.com, www.myspace.com/milanpolak

