

Interview

Ryan Meagher

By Gary Heimbauer

JJ: You've been fortunate enough to study with 3 very different and very influential guitarists of our day--Kurt Rosenwinkel, Peter Bernstein, and Ben Monder. In addition, you've studied with one of the living legends, Kenny Burrell!! Can you give a brief overview of some of the key traits of each of these teachers approached, and the unique impact they each have had on your concept, perspective, and development as a musician and human being??

Ryan Meagher: One may not hear it when you compare our individual playing but Peter Bernstein was the most influential on me of all the aforementioned teachers - especially when it comes to the human being part. He's one of the nicest people I've ever met, and that's no exaggeration. Musically we worked on a lot of important things like time, clarity, ears, etc. But one memorable experience of studying with Peter was particularly moving... literally. During a lesson in Peter's hotel room in Culver City, California, an earthquake started. I grew up in California, so it wasn't a big deal to me. Peter, however, was freaking out! He is a native New Yorker, so it was a new and terrifying experience for him. He's probably going to kill me for mentioning that. With Kurt, I approached him with specific questions about his injecting chords into his single note lines. I knew he played piano before he played guitar and I was hoping he could shed some light for me on his thought process of "comping" for his own solos. That was a really great lesson. The thing he stressed the most was *knowing the neck better*. He said when he thinks of a chord symbol the whole fret board lights up with the possibilities like one of those FretLight guitars. The drill he gave me to work on was to pick a single chord - i.e.: E flat minor 9 - set the metronome really slow, 75 beats per minute, and play a different voicing every beat for around five minutes. It has helped, and that reminds me I need to work on that again. Ben Monder and I worked on time a lot. We played familiar tunes slowly. We talked about philosophical time things like Wynton Kelly and Jimmy Cobb's hook-up and how it's a perfect blend of "on top" of the beat - Jimmy Cobb - and "behind" the beat - Wynton Kelly. We also worked on inversions and substitutions. Hind-sight being 20-20 I wish we talked more about composition. We also talked about Dostoyevsky some. When I was at San Diego State, Kenny Burrell came down from UCLA to do a big concert and teach a couple of the guitar players. I was just a freshman so I am not sure how I made the cut, but I was ecstatic. I liked his playing on this Jazz Guitar Legends VHS series I had. I played that Trane tune, "Like Sonny," for him because I was binging on the Kenny Garrett record, "Pursuance" at the time. I played pretty well. I was played lots of parallel quartal harmony things that I was beginning to explore, and showing off some technique. Well, the only thing he wanted to talk about was my right - picking - hand.



"I'm very-very self-conscious. I play my best when I don't give a flying F@ about what anyone thinks! I play my absolute worst when I am trying to impress someone by playing something "cool" or trying to do something that everyone else does just to show that I can do it too, which strangely enough is most times I play."*

He mentioned something about my "modern" harmony but really didn't let up on my right hand. I messed with what he was trying to tell me to do for a couple weeks after, but after listening to the sound he got from his picking I realized that's not that sound I wanted for myself anyway. His concert was great, though.

JJ: You were very active in San Diego and California before moving here to NY. Can you talk about the differences in lifestyle and style, between the two scenes.

RM: San Diego and New York are so different in mind-set and scenery that they should almost be in different countries. Basically people in San Diego like things like sunny weather and good burritos and people in New York like things that make the world go 'round. San Diego is very fun and beautiful - and I still miss the quality of Mexican food about four times a week - but its extremely laid-back lifestyle was not for me. Overall, for a driven, focused person like me, San Diego could have been a terrible life decision, but I was fortunate to have some very helpful mentors steer me in the right direction. I am thankful that San Diego State paid for my education and put me in a place where I met positively influential people, but I don't regret leaving that place for one second. In fact, I wish I had left sooner.

JJ: What events current or upcoming in your career are you excited about??

RM: Personally, I just got engaged to the love of my life. So I am very excited about that! Musically, Jordi Pujols (Fresh Sound New Talent) and I have been discussing a second project with my Atroefy group. A lot of new music has been written for the project. Nothing final has been decided but I'm excited about adding another product to my brand. It'll certainly be in the same vein of "modern jazz for the indie rocker," but there will be differences in the vibe and upgrades in my composition and certainly my improvisation. Gerry Teekens and Marc Free, from Criss Cross Jazz and Posi-tone Records, respectively, have also shown interest in recording my original boogaloo project called Oddibe Funky.

JJ: I noticed in your bio that you played many of the legendary New York clubs like Arlene's Grocery, the Bitter End, etc. Was this with rock or blues groups? What other types of music are you involved in besides jazz and how does each "style" differ for you in terms of what it provides for you psychologically, emotionally, artistically, etc? What is it about musical improvisation that you find so valuable? What does it offer to you, your band-mates, and the listeners?

RM: Interestingly enough, I played at those legendary Manhattan rock clubs Arlene's Grocery, The Bitter End, and Kenny's Castaways all with my Atroefy

Continued on Page 74

www.ryanmeagher.com