

THE NEXT

JOHN MCLAUGHLIN

ALEX MACHACEK

At 34, **Alex Machacek** has already drawn praise from the legendary John McLaughlin, who says “Machacek’s music begins where other music ends.” We talked to the young guitarist about his latest album **[Sic]** and his deep connection to India.

BY SAMANTHA LOWE

Jazz great John McLaughlin, not one given to casually doling out praise, has this to say about a 34-year-old Austrian guitarist with a self-confessed love for the music of Joe Pass and everything Indian: “Alex Machacek’s music starts where other music ends.” Given that that pronouncement came from The Mahavishnu himself, and that Machacek’s love for India isn’t just that of a desolate soul working off some karmic debt – he’s married to the singer Sumitra Nanjundan, we hooked up with his online distributor AbstractLogix and eventually tracked Machacek down to his home in Los Angeles to talk about his new album **[Sic]**. Excerpts from the interview.

Samantha Lowe: You picked up the guitar when you were eight... were there other instruments that interested you then? What drove you to the guitar?

Alex Machacek: I remember that I was highly interested in music but I was not sure which instrument I wanted to learn. But since my father had a guitar and from time to time he strummed a few chords on it, my choice was the guitar.

S.L.: You obviously had influences other than jazz when you first started playing, what sort of stuff did you listen to back then? Do those guys still hold an influence on your music now?

A.M.: I used to listen to Iron Maiden, Deep Purple, Dire Straits, Kiss, Queen and many others. Around the age of 13, I was exposed to jazz and was quite fascinated by this kind

of music. From then on I listened to Joe Pass, Mike Stern, John Scofield, John Abercrombie, to name a few. Later on I discovered Allan Holdsworth and Frank Zappa.

But to answer your question, I surely am influenced by all the music that I like(d).

S.L.: Your latest album **[Sic]** is slick and has even drawn high praise from musicians like John McLaughlin and Shawn Lane. How did **[Sic]** take shape?

A.M.: Well, first of all, as a composer I am always working on new material and the natural development is to bring all these ideas together (in the form of an album).

[Sic] was actually planned as a follow up album of my first album entitled *Featuring Ourselves* – I guess around 2000 or so. My initial plan was to make a record, “just me and the computer.” I remember that I got my Mac during that time and I could finally record audio at home. Until then I had used an Atari computer where I could only sequence MIDI. The new opportunity to be able to work completely from home without any time limits, which you usually have if you are booking a studio, was very appealing to me. Later on I had another idea which materialized on **[Sic]** – I took plain drum tracks from Terry Bozzio (leftovers from the *Delete And Roll* sessions and one track from Terry’s *Drumsolos* album) and composed around these. And even later on I recorded some tunes with my Austrian Trio (Raphael Preuschl on bass and Herbert Pirker on drums). In 2005, I finally found time to continue working on all these bits and pieces and made a whole

album out of that.

S.L.: That’s quite a few bands. How did they all come together?

A.M.: On **[Sic]** there are three different bands: the one with Terry Bozzio, then my Austrian Trio with Raphael Preuschl and Herbert Pirker and one track with Mario Lackner. I played with all of these musicians for years and had done some recordings with each group. Working with different drummers on different tracks was very stimulating. Each of them has their own sound, style and understanding of my music. In my experience this was a positive input. Having such a great upright bass player (Raphael Preuschl) is an additional luxury for which I was very grateful.

S.L.: You recorded an earlier album *Indian Girl* with your wife Sumitra. What made you decide to do a track together?

A.M.: Sumitra and I have been working together for the last eight years. We are a duo and we also played quite a lot with different bands. I also produced her last album, *Indian Girl*. I remember when Sumitra came up with the song (*Indian Girl*) I played around with it and made this arrangement. Although we made a different arrangement for Sumitra’s album, I still liked what I did and thought it would be worth continuing to work on it.

S.L.: Do you plan to do any more work together?

A.M.: Yes, our next plan is to record an album together.



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S.L.: You said earlier that this album took a long time to take shape. How long are we talking?

A.M.: As I mentioned before, I started to work on this album around 2000. But shortly after I began, other projects came up and since I had no time pressure I postponed it. I recorded the album with Terry Bozzio and Gerald Preinfalk (Delete And Roll), and a bit later I did the album with my wife Sumitra entitled Indian Girl. So I barely had time to continue working on my own stuff. I always enjoy the creative part of the process. Experiencing how the music goes and grows through so many phases is very exciting.

S.L.: How do you think [Sic] has progressed on from Featuring Ourselves?

A.M.: I would like to think that I have grown in all those years and am further ahead on the path to finding my own voice. But this is an ongoing process...

S.L.: You have done a lot of work with Terry Bozzio and three tracks on the album feature him. Is this going to be a continuing working relationship?

A.M.: Most definitely! We have been playing together since 1999 and so far there is no sign that this collaboration will end.

S.L.: You've done a lot of touring with your collaboration band BPM (Bozzio, Preinfalk and Machacek). Are we going to see anything else from them as a group?

A.M.: BPM became the Out Trio. Terry Bozzio, Alex Machacek and Doug Lunn on bass.

There are plans for an east coast tour in September and there is also talk about Japan, Korea and Europe in 2007. Last January we recorded new material for an album which we hope to release by the end of this year. The Out Trio has been performing regularly in the LA area and is ready to tour.

S.L.: You played in India for the first time in December last year for the Jazz Fest. Did you prepare for it? Will you be coming back to perform?

A.M.: First I have to say that I am married to an Indian who prepared me really well. But all in all I have to say that I was overwhelmed by the hospitality, generosity and warmth of the people I met in India, especially in Calcutta. I made new friends and met so many wonderful people. Everything seemed surprisingly familiar – I hope I'll have the opportunity to visit India again soon but there are no definite plans yet.

S.L.: Is there anyone in particular that you would want to work with in the future that you haven't already?

A.M.: Vinnie Colaiuta, Gary Husband, Selvaganesh to name a few. But beside them there are so many "unknown" players who play so well... Just as an example: on John McLaughlin's new CD – Industrial Zen, there is a 21-year-old bass player called Hadrien Feraud who I've never heard of before and he sounds fantastic!

S.L.: I see you have recently signed up on MySpace...

A.M.: Sign of the times... more visibility on the internet...

S.L.: Having an online presence obviously doesn't hurt.

A.M.: These days an artist is almost nonexistent without a website. With a website people all over the world can now easily find out what's new, where to buy my CDs (abstractlogix.com) and contact me. At the moment my website is not finished yet, it's a work in progress. But for instance, I don't know how many times people were asking me, "How did you get together with Terry Bozzio?" Now the answer is under FAQ on the site and I don't have to tell the story anymore – believe me, I did that very, very often.

S.L.: What's on your iPod at the moment?

A.M.: I do not own an iPod, but here are some albums I am currently listening to:

Joni Mitchell: Both Sides Now

Gary Husband: The things I See

Ben Monder: Flux

Brad Mehldau Trio: Art of Trio, Volume 5

Harry Pepl: Flow 🎧

For more information, visit alexmachacek.com
To download his music, visit abstractlogix.com