

Total Guitar

What I've Learned...

AL DI MEOLA

Jazz-fusionist extraordinaire Al Di Meola has been pushing out the boundaries of guitar-playing for over three decades – but he'll never sacrifice the art of songwriting for the sake of technique. Behold Al's golden rules of the guitar...

Interview: Joel McIver

Music will take you to greater heights

Try to be surrounded with music or art that completely inspires you. If you go and see someone you admire playing at a club, hopefully you'll be blown away, and the inspiration from that performance will definitely spark new ideas. If I want to write something deep and melodic, I get inspired by the recordings of Andrea Bocelli, for example.

Songwriting is paramount, not technique...

A lot of jazz fusion is all about fireworks and technique, but some of us come from the world of the Beatles and we know how important melodies are. Pop music has such incredible melodies, but they're only great in my mind if there's great harmony underneath. Singable melodies are often simple ones, and simple is not bad if the arpeggios that dictate what the harmony is saying are interesting. You can play dumb G, C and D barre chords if you want, though: it's far harder to write simple stuff.

...but technique has its place too

I'm often accused of being all about technique, and not feel or songwriting ability – usually by people who haven't heard my last 15 albums. The songwriting was definitely there on my early albums like *Elegant Gypsy* and *Casino*, but it was an era in which we were hearing electric guitars played with that technique for the first time. Before that, the guitar was dominated by players like Clapton, Beck and Page, who were not technique players at all – they were stylistic players, wonderful in their own genre. There wasn't anybody out there, other than John McLaughlin, who was playing with that kind of jazz and classical technique.

Don't cheat, shredder!

The guys that are considered shredders today, from what I hear, are picking one note and hammering on a million. Depending on the musical passage, a hammer-on can be kinda cool, but to do it to give the effect that you're playing every note is cheating, because a lot of these guys don't have any alternate-picking technique in their right hand. It's also non-effective, because I come from a very rhythmic approach, where I want the notes to slam me in the middle of my chest – and you can't get that if you hammer on. Plus, the guys that shred can't get away with that stuff on an acoustic guitar, because it'll show everybody very glaringly that they don't have the technique. Their world is all about speed, and my world is not. Perhaps it was in the 70s, but this is now 30 years later!

Losing a guitar is like losing a friend

Last night I left my favourite Conde Hermanos guitar – which has been on all my records – in a taxi. It's gone. I'm doing everything I can to find it, but how will the driver know who it belongs to, and how will he get it back to me? It's worth a lot of money, so when he sees it, he's going to ask himself if he's going to be totally honest, or if he wants to make a couple of bucks. I could have lost any other guitar and got through it – but not this one. I loved it. I'm in total mourning today!

*Al's new DVD, [Speak A Volcano: Return To Electric Guitar](#), is out now. More info:
www.aldimeola.com.*