

The Hits Parade

The explosion of social media allows musicians to build a fanbase without the need for labels, marketing... even playing gigs. Roberto Restuccia is one of a new breed of young guitar players who are using the internet to make a name for themselves...

In the last decade or so, the measure of what constitutes a hit record has shifted from how many thousands of physical records you sell, onto how many downloads you get or even to the number of Spotify or YouTube streams you get. While the measure of your popularity has as much to do with how many Facebook likes you have as how many tickets you can sell, Williams guitarist Roberto Restuccia has embraced this sea change in the music industry, side-stepping conventional rock 'n' roll wisdom and the fetishisation of vintage gear in favour of a more tech-savvy approach.

After he left the Academy of Contemporary Music, rather than joining a gigging band and chasing a record deal, he decided to use the internet as his stage and set about reaching a global audience. A busy music teacher – both physically and online – Roberto has a huge following thanks to his extraordinary guitar playing talent and liquid-like tone. One of his recent videos for an online backing track hub, Coffee Break Grooves, garnered more than 300,000 views in two weeks, gear companies want him to have their wares online, and he has released an album, *Exposure*, to critical acclaim. With his second full-length, *When The Smoke Clears*, in the can, GBG caught up with Roberto at his Swindon studio to find out how he ripped up the guitar rulebook in his quest to make it as a musician.

Q How did you get started with guitar?
 "Well, we didn't have any musicians or musical influences in my family – which is unusual for Italians – so it all came from being at school. I was about 12 listening to Slash, and it was like 'Whoah

– this is what I like!' I found an old guitar in the attic, but it only had one string. That got me started – until I exhausted that one string, and begged my parents to buy me a proper guitar. When I got my first six-string, I didn't have any lessons at first – I just emulated what I saw by recording concerts onto VHS tapes. I was fascinated and inspired by the guitar – and determined to learn. I bought a Guns N' Roses songbook, but found it hard as I didn't understand the music notes – although I did pick up a few riffs here and there!"

Q Was that first guitar an electric, then?
 "No, it was a little Hohner acoustic. We were passing a music store, and I think my parents realised that one string wasn't enough anymore! [laughs] So my dad paid £50 for this guitar, and I was over the moon. I mean, I couldn't even tune it – but it had six strings and the neck wasn't warped, so I was pretty happy! Every lunchtime I would practise with all the other kids in school. We listened to Guns N' Roses – and I was really into Nuno Bettencourt at that time, too. Someone would be playing drums and a bit of bass, but most of them were guitar guys who were having lessons... and I wasn't! But I was hanging with them and picking up as much as I could."

Q You've obviously come a long way as a guitar player since then – how did you develop your technique initially?
 "I would watch the Guns N' Roses and Pearl Jam concerts that I'd recorded and listen to lots of CDs, too. I've had to throw away so many worn out players! On one of them, the rewind button actually fell into the machine because of over-use, trying to nail licks by playing the discs over and over again!"



40 JULY 2012 guitar-bass.net

guitar-bass.net JULY 2012 41



Roberto's chops have earned him a global online following

Q When did you decide you wanted to be a musician?
 "I was studying fine art, but when I was about 16, things took a turn. I saw an advert in a guitar magazine for ACM in Guildford, and decided there and then – this is what I wanted to do. I had an interview and was accepted. I had some amazing teachers, and I was able to spend every day with Guitline Govan and Pete Callard – I was very lucky, and they were influential in every way."

Academy helped me with that side of things. I decided not to do the degree, and left after a year to go straight into teaching. I was 19 – and I've been teaching ever since."

Q The learning curve must have been pretty steep with tutors like that...
 "You'd go home to study and practice – then the next day, you're playing it in front of the college. I remember the first time it happened it was a shock. So you want me to do this... have I got, like, a week? No – you've got an evening. [laughs] It was great experience with there were a few 'argh' moments, but it was a brilliant education. Their philosophy was 'if you want to be a musician, get your butt up there and play' – and it worked!"

Q Did you not fancy joining a band?
 "I did various things with people locally, but it's difficult. You'd spend a year rehearsing, and then it wouldn't take off or be going anywhere – the same old story. To be honest, I was quite happy teaching. I've only

Q Did you do the degree course at ACM?
 "No, I did a one-year course... but I had no formal education in music whatsoever. I didn't even know the names of major and minor chords! I knew how to play stuff, and had some fretboard dexterity, and I could play in time or whatever. But I didn't have a clue about harmony and theory – and I didn't think I needed it. Obviously, going to the

"I wanted to push out into a different area. I felt like the computer was the best way for me to express myself, and get something out there, that people could see immediately"

Q And you've done some demo work, too...
 "Yeah, I've done the Roland Blues Cube, and I've had various companies send me guitars and amplifiers to play – and this has all come from the internet interest."

Q Are you still teaching, too?
 "Yes I am. I'm also doing a lot via Coffee Break Grooves with tuition packages – they're packages with tablature and explanations regarding what I'm doing, and where it's

Q Are you still not tempted to join a band now you've made a name for yourself?
 "People are starting to know my name more now, which is great. I do get calls to do one-off gigs here and there. I'm working with some great musicians, but the time aspect doesn't leave much space for gigs."

Q So with such a hectic schedule, what led you to make your first album, *Exposure*?
 "It was more for my own satisfaction. I didn't set out to make a 'hit'. I just had these little

coming from scale-wise. It's very new – and very successful already."



Roberto is no gear snob, but he's got quality guitar tools to do his job

– there's some blues stuff, and although I don't consider myself a 'jazz player', there's certain jazziness to some tracks, too."

Q You mentioned Slash as an early influence – who else informed your playing style?
 "I love that George Benson style of playing – plus Robben Ford and Larry Carlton are awesome. I really look up to them both. I also love Prince for his musicianship... but Slash for the hair! [laughs] Acid-jazz guitarist Ronnie Jordan was another a big influence on me – because of that mix, where contemporary meets jazz. More recently, Chuck Loeb – his sense of melody is amazing and very catchy. One of the things I like to do with my music... it has to be catchy. I'm always looking for a swinging kind of groove. If you'd asked me when I was 18 or 19, it would be 'how many sweeping arpeggios can I squeeze into this piece'. Now, it's about my playing serving the song. That comes from Robben Ford – listening to his music taught me not to go crazy on the fretboard – but concentrate on tone, phrase and your ear."

Q Your rig seems pretty stripped down...
 "Yeah, it's pretty simple really, because most of the amps that I use are sent to me by demo – so I don't actually own them. I have to give them back! For the album, I don't use any amps at all, I use a [Avid] Eleven Rack. I use that for pretty much everything, because it's not convenient to mix up amplifiers for home projects – and it's not consistent."

Q You don't seem to be a gear snob...
 "I don't want to be like, 'Oh – I must use this because it's vintage' or the latest expensive thing. That said, I do own a Dr Z Maz 18, which I take out for live work. It's a great amplifier – just like Buddy Whittington uses. For the album and general use, I have my PRS Hollowbody II, which is great because I can blend the piezo acoustic type sound with the electric – especially as I use 011-gauge strings with a wound G. Then I've also got a Gibson Custom Shop Class 5 Les Paul and a Fender Custom Shop Strat. I've discovered that for a Strat to come alive, you need to use heavier strings and crank up the action to make it sing. You get a certain kind of 'chewiness' when you set them up just right."

Q So what's the next step for you?
 "I'd like to try and break into the bigger leagues, but I'm just going to produce music that I like – and try to stay true to myself. I'd like to start touring... somehow. I know that there is a market for instrumental music – especially in the USA. But to keep producing good music – and making a living, that's the ultimate." 🎸

For more information on Roberto's music, check out www.robertorestuccia.com