



Gio Lombardi

'Good Morning Bella' is the comparatively dignified product of a man who can splinter a guitar at will - but its poise and composure make for one of his best songs.

Here is an unwritten rule of personal growth: Practice with (or against) people who are better than you are whenever possible. It may seem counterintuitive - and stultifying to the competitive instinct - but it really is the faster route to proficiency. People like Gio Lombardi show how this virtuous cycle plays out in the domain of music. His years of practice as a guitarist brought him into the company of steadily more expert stage allies and session artists over the years, and at this point in his career he has the charisma and reputation to work with anyone at any level of the game. His newest single 'Good Morning Bella' demonstrates that virtuoso veneer everywhere you listen to it; foremost in Gio's staggering string expertise, but also in the casual, clockwork precision of the drums and adroit bass stylings. Independent reporter Lauren Thompson recently caught up with the talented guitarist to talk about his history in music and ambitions for the future.

LAUREN: Let's just get this out in the open - what's the craziest thing that's happened to you in your music career?

GIO: What happened while playing on a cruise ship during the Brazilian Carnival would definitely qualify as one of the craziest ordeals of my career. We were alternating bands on stage without stopping the music, so things were tricky. Imagine the scenario; a crowded space with a lot of gear - enough for two bands - samba rhythms playing loud, dancers in front of me, place packed with celebrating tourists... Brazilian party time! There was just a small space behind me to access the stage and we were swapping bands every thirty minutes for five long hours! So, what happens right during a band change? The ship gets hit by a big wave (it happens on cruises) and turns into a roller coaster! Man... it was a chain reaction meltdown; the first thing to go flying was the drum set, then the drummer, then the other band members, the dancers, and a bunch of tourists... all tumbled on the floor! Half the other band were on stage getting ready to take our positions, but their back line got unplugged - along with our keyboard and bass amps. I managed to stand still because I grabbed the P.A. system post next to me, and was left to play alone since my amp didn't get unplugged. For the next thirty minutes I was jammed together with the percussionist in the middle of the dance floor, firing off Samba rhythms like there was no tomorrow - 'cause the show must go on! Nobody got hurt, lots of laughing... and we all got the next day off as saviors of the party!

LAUREN: Your song 'Good Morning Bella' is receiving a positive listener response on radio. What was your initial reaction when you first heard your song playing on radio?

GIO: When I heard 'Good Morning Bella' playing on the radio I was in my studio tweeting some important updates about a guitar clinic in Europe. I like to listen to music in the background while I work and I don't remember how, but I ended up on WKND radio - London... all of a sudden I start hearing my guitar licks! I cried

'Hey, that's Good Morning Bella!' Yes indeed, I admit it was an emotional moment. I closed my eyes and in a split second traveled to London in my mind... I was there on stage playing my song! Anyway, I grabbed my phone and shot a quick video of the song playing. It's on my Facebook page. I believe in dreams. After all, this whole adventure is a dream coming true.

LAUREN: What was the inspiration behind your debut radio single?

GIO: Good Morning Bella' is a song that portrays the good things in life; that was my inspiration. When you see the beauty of nature, the smile of a baby or an amazing representation of arts - or just good food for that matter - you're captivated by beauty. No matter if it's on a massive scale like a sunset or a very intimate one like the look of two people in love... beauty will seduce you. I wanted to convey an organic sound, let my guitar do the talking, so I tried to give it a retro arrangement with a modern twist. You know, the word 'bella' is an Italian adjective for beauty, so if you can think of something or someone beautiful... 'Good Morning Bella' is your song.

LAUREN: It is often said that great art arises from difficult experience. Is there something in your life experience thus far that you would describe as the 'catalyst' or 'fuel' for your desire to create music?

GIO: Well, I'd have to consider things from the very beginning. Back then it all seemed like an impossible dream. Leaving my native Italy to face new challenges certainly made my desire to write stronger and I'd say that it's grown progressively from there. A working musician has to play all kinds of gigs; that's the nature of the business, how you grow and gain experience. Having the opportunity to share the stage with great players will definitely fuel your drive to get better, but sharing it with inadequate performers (that happens too) will complicate the struggle, especially if they think they know better than you!

LAUREN: How would you characterize yourself as an artist/musician? (Ex. Down-to-earth, serious, fun-loving, complicated...)

GIO: I like to think of myself as a down-to-earth artist. I appreciate all the support and love that has been given to me. I know that without it I wouldn't be here. As a music teacher I constantly encourage my students and always applaud their progress. I love to have a good laugh and definitely try to develop honest yet respectful relationships with my colleagues and my audience. Having said that, when it comes down to work I'm a perfectionist. I work very hard to reach my goals - I know no other way! I confess, I've been described as meticulous, but I really care about what I do and I won't stop till it sounds right!



LAUREN: What has your experience been like working with the other people on your team?

GIO: Quite positive. I like to establish strong channels of communication with colleagues, especially the ones on my immediate team. Making sure that they understand my vision and will work toward the same goal is crucial to getting there. Sometimes it happens that you have a misunderstanding or something wasn't conveyed properly - we're human after all - but I make sure to do everything I can to clarify the requirements. My goal is to get out of my team the best they can do. I encourage them to do so and definitely acknowledge their work. Having said that, when things don't work out no matter how hard you try, you just have to let it go, because it takes two to tango!

LAUREN: Did you come from a musical background? Are there other musicians in your family?

GIO: In a way my father qualifies as the musician in the house. He used to have an old guitar at home. I was just a kid, but I remember him playing a few chords while playing his harmonica. He still does to this day. He was an opera fan and my mother continued the legacy. She used to play old records from the biggest names of the Italian opera tradition, so I guess you can say I was surrounded by music growing up. I remember my sister was the first one to grab Dad's guitar. She took some lessons then abandoned the instrument and started singing. I was second in line and it was love at first sight - I haven't stopped playing ever since. Changed the strings though!

LAUREN: What do you find most rewarding about being an artist? What do you find most challenging?

GIO: I'd say that having the chance to express your creative side is priceless. When I play music I'm making a statement - my statement - and there is nothing that feels better than that. The flip side of the coin is that it is a highly unstable industry, so you have no security. It's crucial for a musician that has ambitions to express his or her artistic/creative side to find a way to balance the uncertainties; that's the challenge. Teaching is my safety net. I've taught for as long as I've been performing, on line nowadays as well. I've started producing lately and I can see how it will become an important part of what I do in the near future.

LAUREN: Who are your role models in music?

GIO: My first 'Guitar Hero' has been Jimmy Page (Led Zeppelin), my beginning were definitely into rock & roll. Then growing up, thanks to an Italian artist that unfortunately left us recently Mr. Pino Daniele, I've discovered jazz music and its contaminations. Also, my experience in Brazil left a recognizable mark in my style, I

love Brazilian Jazz ! But if I have to mention few more names of my 'Guitar Heros' I'd like to list Mr. Geroge Benson, Larry Carlton, John Scofield as very strong influences in my style. As far as the business aspect of music things have changed dramatically, from what I can see, the only working model nowadays is a mix between live performances, writing, producing and Social Medias in any form. A good balance of that is what I'm working on right now.

LAUREN: Describe your best or most memorable performance.

GIO: Although I've been lucky to perform in many countries, stages and situations, there is one gig that had a very unusual setting! It was few years ago in Paris - an amazing city to start with - and I was lined up with a French artist. We were playing our repertoires and it was pretty much a cool jazz night. The club was in the heart of the city, near the Louvre Museum, but the amazing thing is that it was actually the basement of a sixteenth century castle. Think huge doors, heavy metal gates, arched brick ceilings, low torch light and incredible armor antiques! Sound like a 'Lord of the Rings' set? Close enough; the only difference is that it was all real! The stage was set in this huge room with a breathtaking light array highlighting the armor, and torches around the perimeter to create a magical atmosphere. As we took the center of the stage to play solos the lights changed to put the audience in semi-darkness and the armor in changing colors... hard to describe in words but a mystical atmosphere!

LAUREN: What advice would you give to young, aspiring artists out there who are unsure and need guidance?

GIO: Study hard; not just one instrument but music in general. They say 'knowledge is power' and it's absolutely true in music. Never lose your dream, your vision... if you have something to say, sooner or later you will, and the time will be right. I was told once - by one of my guitar heroes, who I had the pleasure to meet in person - 'Gio, if you can touch people's souls with your music, you've made it! It's the only thing that matters!' I still go by his teaching.

LAUREN: What's next for you as an artist? Is there a new single in the works? If so, what can you tell us about it?

GIO: Yes there is, and it will be part of my next album. The new single I'm producing explores my rock side, so the distortion pedal is on! There will be some classic rock elements and some sounds that might bring you back to the British Invasion... but with jazz harmony. I explored similar mixtures in 'Scripta Mament', my first record, so I'll try to take it from where I left off. That's all I can say for now!

LAUREN: Thanks for talking with us, Gio. You are an astonishingly gifted musician and we're convinced great things are just around the corner for you!

<http://www.giolombardi.com>

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