



Carl Verheyen interview with Kevin

In June this year I was in Los Angeles and caught up with the amazing guitarist Carl Verheyen (pronounced Ver-high-in) at Village Recorders in Santa Monica where he was working on and producing an album for Felipe Tarantino. Carl is the number one session guitarist in Los Angeles, a member of the band Supertramp, and runs his own band, the Carl Verheyen Band.

Apart from having a heavy schedule of studio bookings, stadium and club tours, Carl is still a student of guitar, believes in learning something new every day, plays a wide variety of styles, is a great arranger and producer, and a great guy. With the amount of talent that Carl possesses there is always something he can pass on to us guitar players here in New Zealand.

Kevin – *Carl, you've got some amazing chops (technique), how do you arrange your time to keep them in good shape?*

Carl – Well I try to play every day and I really do play every day, I don't feel good about taking a day off, I just want to push some strings around somewhere and somehow. A lot of times practising is with the next performance in mind, so if my trio is going to play somewhere, I will work on that. If I've got to keep work coming, it's a slightly different step if I'm going to do an acoustic guitar night, and do solo acoustic concerts, then that takes two weeks of practise out in front, but, a lot of it is, so that I won't suck the next time I play.

And the other stuff that is mostly fulfilling practising is when you can just work on your lines, work on new ideas. Sometimes I just play in the key of C for 20 minutes, then all of a sudden I will come up with



some new lines to write down in the lick book to get under my hands, and then I will transpose them to Bb, and G and F, to Ab and everything else, so that's a big part of my practising is to keep fresh stuff on board.

Kevin – *I heard about the concept of a lick book years ago, I don't know if it was from you or someone else, or did you just come up with that idea?*

Carl – No, it was a teacher of mine, Joe Diorio. He was living in Florida, and I found out about him and then he moved out to Los Angeles in the mid to late 70's, and I started to go see him play. And so I got some lessons with him, and one of the things he said early on is write everything down, so he got me started - if you're playing in the key of C or C

minor or Bb or whatever, and if you come up with an idea that sounds like you, then that's what you need to write down, and he got me thinking like I'm playing along and I go wow, that sounds like Pat Martino, yeah that's something I'm sure I've picked up from Jimi Hendrix, yeah that's something I know I got from Clapton or anybody, and all of a sudden you go wow, that doesn't sound like anybody, that sounds like me, and I would write that stuff down early on, and then I would start to seek it out, I needed good lines that starts down here in the key of F# minor and ends up here on the high C#.

I needed a good line like that to finish off this idea. So I'd start seeking it out and writing it down.

Kevin – *How do you divide your time between Carl Verheyen Band, Supertramp, studio work, your own albums, and now your online school? That's a massive workload.*

Carl – Well, Supertramp only really happens twice a decade. We had a giant three month tour of 36 arena's all ready to go in 2015 and the leader of the band got cancer, so the tour had to be cancelled. So I finished The Grand Design album and went on the road immediately following that. So, I don't know, things seem to lay into place, like I can really only do the studio work when I am home. You have no idea how many times I've been out on the road and my wife calls and says yeah you just got a call for this incredible week long session for a Pixar movie which pays huge money and I go well, this tour won't even pay as much as that week but, at least I'm playing my own music in front of adoring fans.

Kevin – *You've said in other interviews that you only practise things that you can perform, so do you have any schedules to help you organise that?*

Carl – It used to be that the morning was my favourite time to practise, but there just seems to be so much business stuff in the morning. But I always find time whether it's after lunch or whatever to get practising in.

Kevin – *One of the other things is about arranging. Your albums don't normally say who does your arrangements, so I presume you do all your own arrangements?*

Carl – Yeah, and I'm really into the textures and stuff like that, even on this record – The Grand Design. There's so much stuff crowding for the mid-range when you listen to music, only the sibilance of the voice and the cymbals are coming out up here, and the bass down here, and everything else from the

organ, the piano, the wurlitzer, and all the guitars, and even the vocals, so I try to not crowd the mid-range with too much stuff, instead use the upper mids for various parts like, that Tele thing, the part I played was kind of high. And I try to stack harmonics by not using the same amp for the whole song, because 6L6s stack them in a different way than say EL84's or like in a VOX or EL34's like in a Marshall, and 6V6's in a Princeton.

This is just my theory, I'm not sure if it's true or not, I should ask an acoustic engineer guy or something, but I just feel that if you playing all the rhythm parts with a Fender, it's good to play the solo or the distortion parts with EL34's, or just different sounding speakers, different sounding amp so that parts are clear and have a way of working together and being different enough to where you can hear what's going on.

Kevin – *I never thought of that before.*

Carl – That's why I have 50 amps.

Kevin – *And your wife really believes that you got them on sale.*

Carl – She thinks we have 30.

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No, I've just been doing it for so long, that I bought a Princeton and it sounded amazing, so I thought wouldn't a stereo pair be great, and then somebody said let me make you a custom Princeton. And then I had a silver faced Princeton in high school that I put a 12 in, I had a new baffle board cut and put a 12 in, I was 17 years old, and thought, we'd better change this and did all that. So that thing sounds great, and my two blackface sound great and this fourth one that this guy made me sounds great, and so I just don't sell them.

Kevin – *No, in matter of fact you always get pissed off when you sell something because about a year down that track you think I should have never had sold that.*

Carl – Yep, always do. But I figure I'm going to use everything at least once a year, and when I do the next set of sessions for these guys, I'll bring some different amps and guitars, I know he's going to want that slide guitar and he was a big fan of the Gretch, the Gretch had a real Beatle-like sounding like so a few will come back, and also bring some different stuff.

Kevin – *I really like your arrangement of Dylan's classic Times are a Changin', and so how did you come up with that one, the arrangement that is, did it start off as a sort of little idea and just morph its way into the final mix?*

Carl – Well there's a way that I play 6th's that they can all ring, and I was fooling around, I've always loved the song, the first time I ever heard it was the Byrds version in probably '65 or something, and so I was fooling around with it in 6/8 time, and I love 6/8 for some reason, that just works for me, and sounds good. So, I think I just started working with it that way and came up with the solo intro and then we tracked it with my drummer John Mader playing with his hands, and then eventually he gets up to the sticks and yeah and it's fun to do. It's a nice song to open the concert with because people have heard it. It settles them because it's not so blasting right away, some people think you should come out with blazing, a really big huge number, but I've always followed the Supertramp model with you start kind of small and just build up and build up, and then maybe when you peak, then you can break it down to acoustic, we do that and then we sort of build it back up again in the concerts.

Kevin – *You don't use any sort of backing tracks when playing with the Carl Verheyen band, but it stills sounds so full and fat. How do you get that sound?*

Carl – I use stereo clean amps, so they're in stereo and they have their own reverb and their own chorus and their own delay, and it's stereo delay and stereo reverb. But it's an A-B pedal board so when I switch to the distortion side it goes to two different amps with their own reverb and delay.

I take a speaker out of the main distortion amp into a THD Hot Plate, it's a power attenuator, so I can turn it down if I need to. But that has a line out that can go into a really nice studio reverb Lexicon PCM 41, and come out of that at line level into a Marshall. The power amp comes into the effects return so I can have wet-dry. But then when I switch back to the clean amps, those delays are hanging in air and they're not cutting off like with midi, or like with channel switching, so you can play a line and then finish a note and the reverb and delay will hang in the air while you bring in a chord underneath it, pretty cool.

Kevin – *So overall do you think guitar players know enough about arranging?*

Carl – Some of them do, some are really good at studying records, and that's what you have to do, you have to listen. I've been listening lately to some John Mayer records, one was done here called Paradise Valley,



and I've been listening to this old Rodney Crowell record that I have, he's a Nashville songwriter. And I'm just amazed by the - ok then the organ comes in, ok then there's the tambourine, I'm talking about overall arrangement instead of just the guitar, but then I can really hear when somebody's doubled something, when they've played the guitar part on an acoustic and then doubled it. And I can always hear when somebody's put on a capo then doubled it, so I really listen to all those things. Jeff Lynne, great producer with the Travelling Wilburys, and all that, the Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers stuff that he produced, it's all pretty amazing to study it and check it out. Check out where the guitar fits in to those things.

Kevin – *Like you mentioned Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, there's some great arrangements on those songs and the different guitar parts and how they fit together.*

Carl – And the tones are really nice, really got it with tone those guys. It's funny all during Tom Petty's life I didn't really buy the records so much, I bought a greatest hits and maybe one or two other ones. But now I want to go back and check them all out.

Kevin – *As far as our students go, I actually use Tom Petty as a sort of like the beginning thing to learn all the different parts, like the back beat part, bubble parts, and all sorts of other things that are going on in those records because there's so many parts going on.*

You obviously work with some of the best arrangers in the business, what would be one or two things that you could say that many guitar players could learn that is reasonably easy.

Carl – I would say, and they're not going to want to hear this, but you learn to read music, because if you can read, then you can get on the kind of recording sessions that the guitar's got a written part that just fits in nicely or is doubling the cellos, that kind of thing. And so many guys go no I don't want to read it will affect my playing or something, that is such a load of crap.

Kevin – *Yeah we teach everyone to read, one of the things that I've found which is a little bit challenging, because you'd normally hear a lot of guitar players saying I don't read because it's too hard, and I'll say well that's a load of rubbish, but thing is, there are ways to make it easy for yourself. I haven't done a lot of recording in my career, but I've done a lot of touring with orchestras and things like that, but one thing that I did notice very early on is that quite often the guitar is doubling the horn or doubling the sax line or something like that, and when your reading horn music it's very different to normal guitar music. And quite often you might be playing a shout chorus or something like that. And back in the day I wasn't used to reading that sort of stuff.*

Carl – You listen to what they do and then phrase with them. I found two huge tips that I can give you, one is that if you look at the key signature and then the concept is to read in the position where the scale pattern lies under your hands with no position changes or stretches. So if you are going to read in the key of G, second position and seventh position are perfect, which I call that scale number one because it starts on the root, or scale number three because it starts on the third.

You never want to read it in the fifth position because then you're stretching or you're doubling back for the F sharp and the B. So that's the first thing, it will all lay under your hands if you play it in the right position.

The second thing is when it comes to rhythms, there's really only so many figures, and so, you begin to recognise the figures that they use a lot and just see it. Obviously there's quarter note, there's two eighth notes, there's a triplet - da da da, there's did da did - sixteenth eighth sixteenth, there's did did da - two sixteenths then an eighth, da did did - an eighth and two sixteenths. And then da da da da - four sixteenths. It gets difficult when they tie it over to the next beat, but that's what I mean, there's figures that get used a lot and you can sort of see them and go alright, now all I need to know is what the notes are and I can read that. That helped me a lot to figure that out.

Kevin – *Yeah, that's right. And reading rhythms is a bit like the English language in lots of ways, they say that we are only using about three or four hundred words a day, we repeat most of them, and I think reading rhythms is a bit like that too because we get a lot of rhythms that are very similar. And I don't know whether we'd be playing three or four hundred rhythms a day but it's similar.*

Another question that I had was there are lots of little counter melodies underlying the main one, do you record things like that in your lick book?

Carl – Yeah a lot of the time, because the lick book can really be anything, I might be transcribing a Pat Martino lick or a Jimi Hendrix lick, and I go wow, I'm going to write that down, and you come up with some variations. But also when I'm working on a song, if I get ideas for it I put them in the lick book, or put them in a note book that is basically what I'm going to take to the studio and use. I sometimes put together note books that are specific to the record that I'm working on, and I'll bring it. All the background vocals on The Grand Design, I wrote all those at home and then took them into the studio and told everybody what to sing. And the same with the guitar parts, the twelve string should do this and the acoustic should do that, and stuff like that.

Kevin – *There are a lot of backing vocals on that.*

Carl – Yeah it was really fun to arrange those guys.

Kevin – *And they sound bloody great too, they really do.*

Carl – They are really good, I know they are good singers.

Kevin – *Right, so just some questions about the lick book, do you record other ideas like chord progressions, voice leading, arranging composition ideas, and have you got a separate lick book for those or are they all in the same lick book?*

Carl – No, it's all in the current lick book, and transcriptions go in there, if I come up with a really cool chord, I wrote down this flamenco voicing that somebody showed me and I go man, I got to know that, just wrote it in there and hashed out a thing, and it's rather informal, but always for every little musical line I write in, I make sure to write the position above it, like seventh fret is where this finger is, and then underneath it I write what four fingers and thumb is playing and so I can always go back to that line and see exactly how I did it as opposed to tab, which is for chumps.

Kevin – *Yes, tab is for pussys.*

...when it comes to rhythms, there's really only so many figures, and so, you begin to recognise the figures...

Carl – Yeah so true.

Kevin – *I've told that to a few of my students and we laughed like hell, because there's no tab at our school anywhere.*

Carl – Oh good.

Kevin – *And I always remember the first time Bruce Forman came to our school, would have been maybe mid-nineties, he says I can't believe I'm in a room that every guitar player reads music.*

Carl – That's amazing, he must have been thrilled.

Kevin – *Anyway do you ever transcribe whole solos?*

Carl – Yeah, I had a period in my life where I was transcribing a lot of stuff, Coltrane, and Wes Montgomery, and Sonny Rollins and Bill Evans, and Miles, and then I went through this other period, actually when I was on the road with Supertramp, and there would be a raining day in Pittsburgh, and I didn't have a guitar with me, so I would try to transcribe stuff without an instrument. You can do it with YouTube, you don't even have to have your CD's and stuff. Just with YouTube I called up Green Onions by Booker T, and I wrote the whole thing out, all the organ stuff. And I go alright this is easy, I want to do something harder, so I did Freddy the Freeloader, Miles' solo, which is not too hard, but it has some tricky stuff because of the A flat chord he goes down to. Yeah I still transcribe whole songs every now and again, but now it's mostly just fragments of stuff, got to get that lick.

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Kevin – *I've been playing Green Onions for years, but I just wrote it out the other day, the organ part and everything.*

Carl – The chord part is hard to play on a guitar because of that A flat, A flat and then E flat. Super cool though.

Kevin – *Yeah. Well we've answered that question: do you transcribe other instruments. Who do you listen to aside from guitar players?*

Carl – I listen to a lot of other stuff. If I just think about this last week I was listening to Jimmy Smith, all those records. I was listening to Tony Rice, he's a guitar player, he's a blue grass guy. What else did we put on, we put on Rosa Passos, she is a brilliant Brazilian singer. We had some friends over and we just put a bunch of records in there, put in a Chet Atkins and Mark Knopfler record, that's still guitar. Cannonball, we were listening to the Cannonball and Bill Evans record called Know What I Mean. Let's see, and like I said I've been listening to this Rodney Crowell guy who's a songwriter dude/singer.

Went to see James Taylor last week, and he was unbelievable at the Hollywood Bowl, last Friday.

Kevin – *You've got a wide range of tastes.*

Carl – Yeah, yeah just to everything. We listened to The Firebird on Sunday morning, the Stravinsky piece, it was just on while we were making pancakes.

Kevin – *Why I asked you do you transcribe whole solos is, because one of the reasons why I transcribe whole solos, especially the ones like Joe Bonamassa's, is where I can see how he's developing and getting into dynamics, because a lot of his solos tend to build and sort go like this and like that and it's quite interesting to get into their brain about how things are developing.*

Carl – Yeah I agree with you, I listen to that contouring. Because guys that are meandering soloists just don't do it for me, to me it really has to build and it has to go somewhere.

Kevin – *It has to have a start and a good end, and that's the other thing that I take a lot of notice of, is how is he starting this thing, how is he building it in the middle, how is he finishing it and what's the final note compared to when the singing comes back in and all this sort of stuff.*

Carl – I had a really fun solo to do yesterday on a project, it was a kind of blazing Latin tune, and I for some reason was thinking Santana, and I wanted to get a tone like he had kind of in his early days.

So I pulled out an old SG, and played it through a red Dr Z head, or maybe it was a Marshall, and a 4 x 12 cabinet, and I just got the most glorious sound, and I said, I can play this sound all night long and you guys come back tomorrow and I will still be playing it. So inspiring.

Kevin – *Cool when that happens.*

Carl – Yeah I know, that doesn't always happen.

Kevin – *So, do you get a lot of your comping ideas from piano players?*

Carl – For jazz yeah, because then you can just use the tritone and the thirteen and stuff like that. Simple stuff that they do. But I also use a lot of I think they're called drop 2 voicings. But I think of it differently, I take a triad and put the middle note up an octave, and I've worked out all my major, minor, dominant stuff like that, and just a whole vocabulary of chords, and it comes in so handy, you can write with it, and use it in projects like this, it's really good.

Kevin – *Yeah, when I first came across that drop 2, drop 3 or whatever it is concept, I didn't realise I was doing it anyway.*

Carl – It just opens up your playing. I like it because it fits in with my idea of intervals, when you use intervals in your playing that are bigger than 2nds, 3rds and minor 2nds, all of a sudden it translates nicely to the chords too, to use chords that start with say a major 6th and then a minor 6th, like if you go A, F#, D, you've got a really nice D triad with an A in the bottom, that's a major 6th and a minor 6th, pretty cool, I like that big wide open sound like a piano.

Kevin – *I don't think there would be anyone who doesn't like it somehow, because it sounds so cool when I see you doing it on some of those TrueFire things you've done, and man that sounds cool.*

I've got just one last question: One thing I notice that Bruce Forman, Robben Ford, and matter of fact, Robben was out in New Zealand, just on Saturday, and I went and saw him play with the Roger Fox big band, phenomenal.

Carl – Yeah Robben's such a good guy, and a great player.

Kevin – *Yeah, Bruce Forman, Robben Ford and Larry Koonse, are all big on education for themselves and is that where the motivation comes for you to do a lot of educational things not only for yourself, but for other people as well, because you've done a lot.*

Carl – I think that our generation needs to pass it down, otherwise we're going to end up with a bunch of typers on computers, and they won't have the incredible joy of playing and making music with their hands, and with other people, those two things.

So I really believe education is a big part of what I do, master classes or the online stuff, and I take private students and I don't take any body steady because I don't really have a steady schedule that I can say you can come every Tuesday. But what I do is, if people want to come by for a guitar lesson, I will give them a lesson and enough stuff to work on for a month or two or whatever, and then see them again later.

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But I love doing the master class type of thing, that's really fun for me, just to share the knowledge, it's something I'm passionate about, I think we all are.

Kevin – *Exactly. We were at Norman's Guitar Shop this afternoon, and he was just showing me the All Guitar Network, and about how he's going to open it all up shortly.*

Carl – Yeah I know, he wants me to get in there and do something, so I probably will in the next few weeks.

He's a good guy, every time you go in though, he gives you guitars, sits you down on that couch, and starts to film you, and so you think ah jeez, I wouldn't have worn shorts if I'd known that, we call it a trouser violation in Supertramp, no shorts, trouser violation.

Kevin – *Do you have any questions Dylan Kay?*

Dylan – *Oh just one thing, for me it's interesting to ask someone who really knows about this stuff as a session player, how it's changed over the years that you've done it. I'm interested since you've done lots of studio work, and then perhaps finding that now you can do a lot from home, and how you learnt the skills to be able to transfer what you were doing in the studio to be able to do it at home into recording skills.*

Carl – Well I was really lazy when it came to watching what engineers do, I did figure out how to mic stuff and then do have a little home studio, so I can play on people's projects from France or Italy, or Florida. But I generally and much prefer hiring an engineer for those, I can do it but it's just so much more comfortable if I can just think about the music and not worry about are we going to punch in this or fix that, or whatever. But I gotta say the home studio thing, it's taken a lot of comradery out of playing music with other people, there's still studio work going on in L.A., and there's still film dates, and a little bit of television, but not much anymore because that gets done in people's houses.

There's a T.V. show called Cheers, did you ever hear about that? I did every episode for eight years, and it was a time when I really wasn't travelling and if I travelled it was in the summer time when they were on hiatus.

And then when that show ended then all of a sudden it was Seinfeld that was the big sitcom. And I did a handful of Seinfeld's but they were all in this guy's home studio, and the fun of playing with the cats, and saying how's the family and all that eventually went away from it. Yeah it's too bad that the digital recording thing is such that you can get a great home studio sound. There was a T.V. show for a while

called Lost, and they would do an orchestra day, but there'd only be three queues for the guitar or mandolin, or something so they'd come to me and bring a laptop to my house with the microphone and I'd play on the three queues and I would make the same session fee as all those guys that had to sit through three hours and traffic and everything else. So that was kinda good, but yeah, it's funny eh.

Kevin – *That just reminds me of something when you said about mandolin, do you use the same concept that Tommy Tedesco used to do about playing multiple instruments and using the same tuning?*

Carl – For years and years I'd had my mandolin tuned like a guitar, and then I was doing this movie called Ratatouille, where the other guy had a Gibson A, a hundred thousand dollar mandolin, and I had a hundred dollar mandolin. We both played our mandolin parts, we had to read, so we were both



tuned to guitar. So we went in there and we listened back and I walked over to the left speaker, and I said wow that sounds great, and walked over to my side and went oh my God, this sounds horrible, so I called up California Vintage Guitars and I said you have any of those Eastman Mandolins? Because those are Chinese, but they are really good, and they're about 1800 bucks, and he goes yeah, I've got one, and I go so how late are you open? 5, can you just stay open until 5.30, I think I can make it.

So I went by, bought it, took all the strings off and put standard guitar type strings on it, went back to the studio the next day and I sounded good, and it's been that way ever since, until about a month ago, I said I'm going to try mandolin tuning and just see if I can do it.

So I did it, so it's G D A E going from low to high, man is it weird playing all the fifths, it's so strange, all the chords, so now I can play G A C D E and a few minor chords, but it's going to take a long time to figure out, so I really need to buy another one and keep it in standard guitar tuning. I'd hate to get a call tomorrow morning saying can you play the mandolin on this track and it's a lot of sight reading, and it would be horrible.

Kevin – *And of course that will most probably happen. Murphy's Law.*

Carl – Yeah. Years and years ago I was doing a session and they said do you have a banjo? And I said yeah it's a 5 string banjo, and they go well we're going to need to you read a bunch of notes on it. And I go alright, so I went down to McCabe's and I bought a 6 string banjo, it's called the bantar, and I brought it to the session and it was just really not a very good sounding instrument, my tuner rejected it, my tuner said screw you I'm not gonna tune it, you play an E and it just goes what? So, I was playing it and it was working out, it did sound like on the track it was working and then I started to disrespect it by taking it over to the case and going clank and dropping it in.

End



Kevin with Carl, taken at The Baked Potato, June 2016.