

BEN RANDALL

There is a storytelling aspect to Ben Randall's playing that puts him right up there with the guitar greats. Combined with a blistering technique, persuasive tone, and distinctive delivery it sets him apart from contemporaries.

Amongst Ben's influences, he is a great fan of Dream Theater and John Petrucci, but he has also been inspired by John Norum (Europe), Neal Schon and Andy Timmons.

Whilst incorporating heavy metal grooves his style encompasses jazz, funk and even a pop sensibility. The emphasis is always on strong melodies and engaging the listener with unexpected twists and turns.

Ben credits his early musical awakening to his father who – in the late 1990s – organised several tours for the legendary Dutch guitarist Jan Akkerman, more widely known as a member of the band Focus in the early 1970s.

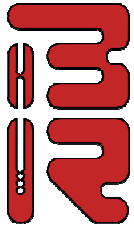
Ben: "I reckon something must have seeped into my sub-conscious, as I was taken to a couple of local gigs to watch a master at first hand. Jan also spent some time at our house tweaking various settings on his Roland sound module and so I was also exposed to technical possibilities."

Ben began playing the guitar in his early teens, using instructional DVDs before the now commonplace YouTube videos. He had formal instruction from a local guitar teacher and gained various music certificates. One of the highlights of this tuition was that he was invited to "jam" with pop soul veteran Jesse Green who had a hit with 'Nice And Slow' in 1975 and appeared on Top Of The Pops.

Ben: "Like many aspiring guitarists it took me some time to find a good teacher and a good instrument to play. I went to a more classically inclined teacher at first and then there was another guy who was into jazz but he never turned up for lessons. Eventually I hooked up with a teacher who was able to give me a basic grounding in theory."

"I picked up a lot of the more metal techniques from instruction videos, magazines, and what was then early YouTube demos."

"The guitar I played at the Guitar Idol final was a Schecter, then a lesser known American brand but both affordable and very playable. I then worked my way through various makes including Ibanez and Caparison. But it was only when I was introduced to Mayones that I really found the right instrument for my playing style and they made me a custom model."



He signed up for a short summer school at the Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts (LIPA) in 2007 when his working group was tasked with composing a song to be performed at a special evening for invited guests. He says “It was a fairly simple pop song but I was keen to get my solo on it. The collaborative experience was good but when I applied to get on a LIPA degree course I was rejected. Maybe they thought I was a bit too metal!”

With little local opportunity to form a band playing music that interested him (at a time when tribute bands were very popular) he came to the attention of Paul Logue, a Scottish musician who was enjoying some success with his band Eden’s Curse. He recommended Ben to Steve Williams, the main-man of the well-established power metal band Power Quest, who was looking for replacement guitarists.

Although not well documented, and not producing any recorded material, this period of Power Quest saw the band play a couple of UK tours, one supporting Michael Schenker and, on another, Tarja Turunen (ex-Nightwish).

It was a baptism of fire for Ben, playing live on stage and also enduring/enjoying the rigours of touring.

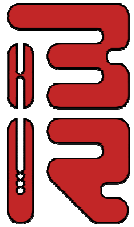
Ben: “Power Quest was a great introduction to band dynamics and live music and demanding a fair amount of rehearsal but longer term it wasn’t a viable proposition for me, either financially or musically. The world recession didn’t help either.”

Paul Logue had taken over as manager of Ben and was also hatching a new band concept drawing upon his contacts and a reservoir of unused songs. During 2012 Ben delivered the guitar parts for the project called Code of Silence. The album ‘Dark Skies Over Babylon’ was released in February 2013. In spite of low-key promotion and with the music world still emerging from the recession it received some glowing reviews, combining elements of melodic rock, heavy metal and prog.

Ben: “I had great hopes for the band but the timing was probably wrong. In addition, the band members were well dispersed in terms of location. Although the nucleus was Scottish based our singer Gus Monsanto was based in Brazil. It makes the logistics difficult. Also our keyboard player Scott decided not to continue and focus on his own project. This was quite soon after the album release and scuppered any immediate plans.”

“Code of Silence had really great potential, especially under Paul Logue’s guidance. He organised a one-off video shoot when it was generally felt that this was a band with real promise and with a chemistry that was developed during an extended weekend of Scottish hospitality.”

“In truth after that project I lost some interest in the music business realising that it was unlikely to provide a stable income and that – going forward – it would always have to be combined with a “proper job”.”



The release of the compilation album came about when he realised that he'd gathered enough material to fill a CD. In selecting the tracks he also wanted to reflect his earlier collaborations.

He worked with the dance producer Steve Evans and progressive rock musician Ian Jones (Karnataka, Illuminae) on a fledgling project in 2009. 10 years later the album - by Chasing The Monsoon – was finally released! Although disappointed his piece wasn't included in the final selection Ben thought the song merited attention and fits well as the opener on his album.

"It's different and a bit off the wall. I can see why it didn't really fit on the Chasing The Monsoon album. We recorded in Steve's studio and he obviously knew what he wanted and how he would use the guitar elements. I remember him encouraging me to "play it like James Bond! Play it like James Bond!" referring to the drama of the film music rather than putting on a tux and shoulder holster!"

Around the same time, Ben connected with Welsh prog rockers 25 Yard Screamer. They helped him prior to his appearance at the Guitar Idol final and they subsequently produced four tracks together. Two of these are included on the compilation.

"I spent a day in rehearsal with Nick, Matt and Donal. This was effectively the first time I had played with a decent group of musicians and I was disappointed that things didn't progress further. They are friendly guys who have remained supportive, I was probably sounding a bit too metal at the time and they had their own sound, but I really enjoyed the session mainly consisting of jamming."

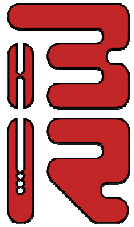
Ben's album includes four Code Of Silence songs. "We thought they worked also as instrumentals and it is a reflection of the band's quality that these were essentially early demo tracks before the album was finalised."

"My own piece "Tame The Tempest" was originally an instrumental which inspired Paul Logue to write lyrics for the band album. The version we've used is my original track supplemented by Scott McLean's keyboards."

"I have to say I really like the original version of 'Dark Skies Over Babylon'. The radio edit version cuts out my mid-song solo!! I worked on the edit with radio promoter Steve Dinwoodie but it was never released. Sadly by the time of completion (and re-editing by the Italian producer Alessandro Del Vecchio) I think the band concept was on its last legs. It wasn't helped by the attitude of the label boss who didn't really see any point in a shorter version with a view to airplay."

The remainder of the songs on the album are Ben's compositions. The title track 'Before The Rain' was his entry in the Guitar Idol international competition, run via the internet, in 2008.

"I didn't write the song specifically for the competition but it proved highly suitable. The final was exciting and with the advantage of a live band. It was part of the London Guitar Show at the ExCel venue in London."



Ben walked away with a cheque for £1000 awarded by the Rock School exam board as ‘the most promising young guitarist’.

“This was a well organised event and there was a real sense of community and goodwill. It attracted musicians from all over the world and all of a very high standard.”

Around this time also Ben entered the “Riff King” competition run by the band Saxon. The idea was to replace the guitar solo in ‘Live To Rock’, a track off their album ‘Into The Labyrinth’.

Ben went a stage further and devised a Simpsons-like cartoon putting himself in the action and with a cameo appearance from Saxon’s frontman Biff Byford. He didn’t win, but received a citation for the originality. Some commented that his guitar solo was better than the recorded version ...

Like many guitarists seeking a foothold on social media and YouTube, Ben provided online demonstrations for various guitar-related manufacturers. For a time he was sponsored by the Polish guitar maker Mayones and supplied a series of guitar demos. This involved composing original and explanatory short solos to illustrate different guitar models. ‘Reflections Of A Broken Dream’ was written around this time.

Ben’s videos have been seen on YouTube by more than a million viewers. He put his video editing and design skills to further use when producing two promo videos for Code of Silence.

Of the other original pieces included, all represent the shifting moods and the talents of a formidable guitar player.

‘Love Finds A Way’ was developed during the summer of 2010 and became a single, released via CD Baby, along with another song ‘Way To Burn’.

The long pieces ‘Reasons For Believing’ and ‘Closer To The Truth’ were late inclusions in this compilation.

Ben: “During this project it was important to use the original multi-tracks where possible. In reviewing available pieces, the producer happened across these songs and realised they probably summed up my musical approach: song-based with a focus on melody, orchestration, and a good heavy riff!”

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