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"It feels like old times. Anthony (Jackson) is back in the band, and I've started to play my Les Paul again."

— Al Di Meola

talking about recent live performances in support of his new album *Flesh on Flesh*.



Al Di Meola

1. How do you define "fusion"?
2. Why has "fusion" developed a bad reputation?
3. What are your favorite jazz recordings?
4. What are your favorite rock 'n' roll recordings?

20 GUITARISTS SPEAK THEIR MINDS



JAY AZZOLINA: A clean-toned player with three independent releases that mix traditional and fusion styles (and whose latest, *Live at One Station Plaza*, features a bass-less trio with Gary Versace on Hammond organ and Adam Nussbaum on drums). Born: Meriden, CT. Lives: Hastings-On-Hudson, NY. Latest CD: *Live at One Station Plaza* (Azziz Records).

1. I remember the term first being used to describe the landmark recording *Bitches Brew*. Miles had created a new sound employing open blowing with variant rock grooves in a primarily non-swinging environment. His bands, and later Mahavishnu Orchestra and Weather Report, all had similar ingredients for what I would characterize as early fusion. The interesting thing is that most of these musicians were young, gifted jazz players who came out of the jazz tradition. At around the same time Chick Corea recorded *Hymn of the Seventh Galaxy*, which eventually led to his Elektric Band. Fusion guitar playing formed a new identity, with players like Allan Holdsworth and Scott Henderson. Those guys were, and still are, stretching the boundaries of rock and jazz.

2. Back in the '70s and '80s, jazz purists frequently lambasted these fusion groups. Suddenly some of their favorite jazz artists strayed into the loud, non-acoustic, non-swinging world of rock-fusion. But there was really no denying the raw force and brilliance of what was happening onstage. I was never the same after hearing Mahavishnu in high school or seeing Miles with his electric band. Today there are only a handful of musicians that are carrying on the tradition of really going for it. I think many fusions have gone in the opposite direction, creating and contributing to smooth jazz.

3. Miles Davis, *My Funny Valentine*; Elvin Jones, *Live at the Lighthouse*; Keith Jarrett, *Facing You*; Larry Young, *Unity*; John McLaughlin, *Extrapolation*.

4. Jimi Hendrix, *Are You Experienced?*; Jeff Beck Group, *Truth*; Johnny Winter, *Johnny Winter*; Cream, *Fresh Cream*; Yes, *Fragile*.

JENNIFER BATTEN: First coming to prominence in the 1980s with pop superstar Michael Jackson, Batten now gives legendary fellow guitarist Jeff Beck all that he can handle in the diminutive Brit's touring band.

1. A dated phase of some jazzers trying to cross over to a rock audience.
2. I think it got the reputation of becoming chops for chops' sake — ego-driven, macho music.
3. Weather Report, *Heavy Weather* and *Mr. Gone*; Pat Metheny, *Bright Size Life*; Afro Celt Sound System #1; Chick Corea, *Tap Step*.
4. Peter Dinklage, *So*; Jeff Beck, *Blow By Blow*; Led Zeppelin, *Physical Graffiti*; Van Halen, *Van Halen* and 1984.



HIRAM BULLOCK: First gaining visibility as a member of the great band for David Letterman's debut late-night TV show (with keyboardist Paul Shaffer, bassist Will Lee and drummer Steve Jordan), Bullock now blends solo releases with side work. He's also present on several of the *Live in New York* CDs by the late bassist Jaco Pastorius.

1. A mixture of rock and jazz, usually highly-technical, with lots of notes, odd time signatures, and fast, fast, fast.
2. Because it's often unmusical. To quote my good friend Marcus Miller, "It's a lot more fun to play than it is to listen to."
3. Miles Davis, *Kind of Blue* and *Miles Smiles*; Gerry Mulligan, *Mainstream*; Cannonball Adderley, *Quintet Live*; Ella Fitzgerald, *Live in Berlin*.
4. Allman Brothers, *Live at Fillmore East*; Jimi Hendrix, *Electric Ladyland*; Steve Miller, *Number Five*; Eagles, *Hotel California*; Rolling Stones, *Sticky Fingers*.



LARRY CORYELL: One of fusion's guitar godfathers (with John McLaughlin, Al Di Meola, Bill Connors, and John Abercrombie), from the early-1970s band Eleventh House and recently reunited The Count's Jam Band to Coryell's 1998 CD *Cause and Effect* (with keyboardist Tom Coster and drummer Steve Smith) and his latest

solo release. Born: Galveston, TX. Lives: Indian River County, FL. Latest CD: *Cears of Avalon* (High Note Records).

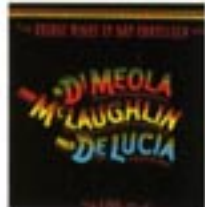
1. Fusion originally meant "jazz-rock," and we thought of it as scary in 1965-1966 because we respected jazz too much and didn't want to sully it, but at the same time we felt the originality and energy of rock music was too interesting to ignore — if that only meant we would play jazz lines through distorted amps rather than clean.

2. Fusion got a bad name from the jazz police, whether musicians or critics, who felt that jazz should just be straight-ahead. In some instances they were right. I didn't want to go so much in the direction of funk and R&B; I wanted to go more towards contemporary classical music with some funk references, i.e. my composition "ism" from the first Eleventh House recording on Vanguard. Interestingly enough, the intelligent funk and R&B did make its way to the fore ("Mr. Magic," "Taxi") and was very successful. It depended on the players — in these instances, Grover Washington Jr. and Bob James, slouches not.

3. Miles Davis, *Kind of Blue* and *Milestones*; John Coltrane, *Giant Steps*; and the two records Jim Hall made with Paul Desmond.

4. Jimi Hendrix, *Axis Bold As Love* and *Electric Ladyland*; Beatles, *Rubber Soul*, *Revolver*, and *Sgt. Pepper*.

AL DI MEOLA: A youthful, blazing electric guitar hero with fusion icon Return To Forever, Di Meola took a Latin turn with *Elegant Gypsy*, and joined Paco De Lucia and John McLaughlin for 1980's acoustic shred-fest *Friday Night in San Francisco*. On his latest CD, *Flesh On Flesh*, the guitarist shines as a composer, mixing both extremes in a successful kind of contemporary fusion. Born: Jersey City, NJ. Lives: still New Jersey.



1. A blend of different music styles, of course.

2. There are a number of critics who have always been stuck in preserving traditional jazz — hell-bent on crushing those of us with something new to say — resenting any success labeled under the jazz/ fusion banner.

3. Miles Davis, *Kind of Blue*; John Coltrane, *Giant Steps* and *Ballads*; Miles Davis & John Coltrane, *The Complete Columbia Recordings*; Wayne Shorter, *Footprints*.

4. Beatles, *Sgt. Pepper* and *Magical Mystery Tour*; Jimi Hendrix, *Electric Ladyland*; The Who, *Tommy*; Led Zeppelin, *Led Zeppelin*.



CARL FILIPIAK: Many modern guitarists mix traditional jazz and fusion within their playing styles. But Filiptak's latest CD, *Looking Forward Looking Back*, does it literally between originals and covers of Charlie Parker and John Coltrane, plus the work of fusion thunder-drummer Dennis Chambers. Born: Baltimore, MD. Lives: Baltimore, MD. Latest CD: *Looking Forward Looking Back* (Geometric Records)

1. Fusion is the sound of jazz-informed musicians borrowing elements from rock. It's the element that connects the music of the Miles Davis *Bitches Brew* era to current artists like Pat Metheny and Allan Holdsworth. The common denominator is the serious grasp of the jazz vocabulary.

2. In some small circles, jazz is defined as a certain period in history. As a result, some fusion players found themselves in the unfortunate position of being too rock for the jazz world and too jazz for the rock world. There was also a point where the emphasis on technique was more important than the music. That, coupled with the fact that many players jumping on the fusion bandwagon didn't have a real grasp of the jazz language, probably alienated quite a few listeners.

3. George Benson, *The George Benson Cookbook*; Pat Martino, *The Visit*; Wes Montgomery, *Smokin' at the Half Note*; Jim Hall, *Live*; John McLaughlin, *Extrapolation*.

4. Jimi Hendrix, *Electric Ladyland*; Beatles, *Revolver*; Jeff Beck Group, *Truth*; Cream, *Wheels of Fire*; Yardbirds, *Over, Under, Sideways, Down*.

DAVID FIUCZYNSKI: After his genre-defying 1994 CD *Lunar Crush* with keyboardist John Medeski, Fiuczynski upped the bar with the 1995 debut and 2002 live CD by his incomprehensible jazz/funk/opera/hip-hop hybrid, *Screaming Headless Torsos*. His 1999 solo disc, *JazzPunk*, indicates Fiuczynski's extreme musical parameters. Born: Newark, NJ. Lives: near Northampton, MA. Latest CD: *Black Cherry Acid Lab* (Fuzelicious Morsels)

1. I've always approached it from the 'Third Stream' context at the Third Stream Department initiated by Gunther Schuller and headed by Ran Blake at the New England Conservatory (and even they may disagree!) — taking two streams or styles and fusing them to become a new style. This goes beyond just the context of jazz-rock or jazz melody/harmony over rock grooves, which is cool too.

2. It's kind of like New Age. I love the idea of gentle, calming, spiritual music, but a lot of sugary-sweet schlock has been produced under the New Age banner. Similar with fusion. When you mostly have vehicles for loud, fast lines (for which we guitar players are the worst perps) and no composition, lyricism, soul, pocket, even experimentation, then there's no wonder that a lot of people get turned off. Why don't we just wank off at home? That's what most other people do.

3. Bad Brains, *I Against I*; Wagner, *Prelude To Tristan or Isolde*; Beethoven, *Eroica*; when Eric Dolphy plays the blues (with Charles Mingus or George Russell); something with Indian mandolin master U. Srinivas.

4. Jimi Hendrix, *Led Zeppelin*; Beatles, *Nina Hagen* (first two records), early Van Halen.

ROBBEN FORD: After leaving the Yellowjackets upon the release of their 1981 debut album, Ford created a solo career with equal footing in jazz/fusion and blues. Known for his stellar tone and tasteful phrasing, Ford even released a surprising instrumental funk CD in 1997's *Tiger Walk*. Born: Woodlake, CA. Lives: Ojai, CA. Latest CD: *Blue Moon* (Concord)

1. Fusion is a combination of disparate classic forms of music coming together in some form.

2. It became a weak substitute for great jazz. The problem was that so much of the music had no real roots in any tradition.

3. Miles Davis, *Kind of Blue* and *Miles Smiles*; John Coltrane, *Live at the Village Vanguard*; Laura Nyro, *New York Tenderberry*; the first Paul Butterfield Blues Band album.

4. The Who, *Happy Jack*; Beatles, *Sgt. Pepper*; Beach Boys, *Pet Sounds*; Pretenders, *Up Close*; Talking Heads, *Remain in Light*.

