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An Interview With Matisyahu Guitarist Aaron Dugan



Guitarist Aaron Dugan has quite a diverse background in music. His musical journey includes everything from Heavy Metal to Jazz, to Folk, to Hasidic Reggae but the one thing that has remained unchanged is his love for guitar... and oh yeah, his [Epiphone Riviera!](#) Epi's Don Mitchell recently spoke with Aaron about his musical journey:

EPI: Tell me about your first experience with guitar:

AARON: My parents got me a guitar when I was ten. I played it for like a month and then put it in the closet. Then when I was fourteen we moved out to the suburbs where I didn't know anybody. Since I really didn't have anything to do I just sat around playing guitar all the time. I was listening to bands like Van Halen, Metallica and stuff like that so I kind of became a metal head at that point. My dad was a bass player and he listened to the Grateful Dead and the

Beatles a lot so that stuff influenced me to play as well.

EPI: That's a pretty well rounded group of bands to listen to.

AARON: Yeah, then when I was in Junior High I was getting into bands like Dinosaur Jr. who have this great guitarist named J Mascis. He was a really big, big influence on me and still is to this day. Then I had a friend introduce me to the Funky Meters and people like John Coltrane.... that changed my whole thing. I had a band that just covered Meters tunes when I was in high school. When I got into college I got into more jazz and guys like Bill Frisell and Nels Cline were big influences.

EPI: Did you study music seriously at any point during these phases or was most of what you did by ear?

AARON: In the tenth grade I took some lessons from this guy who had studied with Greg Howe and he taught me a bunch of metal licks. Then the summer before I went into twelfth grade I went to the Berkeley Summer Guitar Session. That was in 1994 and it opened me up a whole lot. After that I came back to Philly and studied with a couple of jazz teachers.

EPI: Looking back, do you think it's more important to learn through study or by ear?

AARON: I think they both go hand in hand. If you really want to play you're going to learn some by ear. But for me it's always been good to have both. I learned a lot from teachers but I used to play along with jazz records too and that would be some of the best practice times I had.

EPI: So learning licks off of albums helped you develop.

AARON: Yes, but not only learning the licks but the whole vibe, the time feels and all of it. It's not really so much about the notes but about the spirit you play them with.

EPI: What happened next for you?

AARON: I kept studying jazz with a local guy who is actually a vibraphone player and then I went to Temple University with an undeclared major. One day I realized it wasn't working. What was the point of going to college with an undeclared major, taking all these liberal arts classes, when all I wanted to do was play music anyway? There was a local community college that had this really great music program and a great jazz instructor named Ben Schacter, so I transferred and it was great. I'd be there from like nine in the morning until midnight everyday playing or studying music. I met some amazing musicians

there and the people I met there eventually lead me to New York and The New School University where I received my Bachelors Degree in Performance Jazz in 2000.

EPI: Which brings us to now! I guess your main gig is playing with Matsiyahu?

AARON: Yes. It keeps me busy for sure. We've done something like 200 shows this year.

EPI: How did you get hooked up with a Hasidic Reggae band?

AARON: I knew the singer from college before he was religious. A couple of years after we graduated he called me out of the blue and asked me to play this gig at Union Square Park. We've now been doing this for like two and a half years.



EPI: The band is doing really well!

AARON: The CD is selling really good which in a way kind of weirds me out (laughs), I guess I really didn't expect it.

EPI: Are there any other projects you're working on?


AARON: I do have other bands that I play with. One is Ducarriganigan that is kind of a progressive folk thing. I also work in a band called Astro-Cusion which is like an afro Cuban, space rock thing. That band is a lot of fun!

EPI: It sounds like you have a lot going at once.

AARON: I think it's important to keep a lot of things going; at least it is for me. You never know when one thing is going to fall apart and I'm not one of those guys that thinks, OK, I'm in the band and if it doesn't make it I'll become a doctor or something!

EPI: Tell me about your [Riviera](#).

AARON: I had an [Epiphone Joe Pass](#) a few years back that I loved but since it



was a full hollow-body it had a tendency to feed back when I was playing rock. I started shopping around and went to this guitar store in Manhattan and tried a bunch of guitars. I saw this [Riviera](#) on the wall that had all these punk rock stickers on it. I tried it out anyway and the tone was just amazing. I've been playing it since 1999.

EPI: I guess you took the stickers off?

AARON: Oh yeah...definitely!

EPI: Thanks Aaron for chatting with us and we look forward to seeing what lies ahead for you.

For more information about Aaron visit www.AaronDugan.com.

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