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## An Interview With Monte Rosa



Eric Monte Rosa (left) and Orlando Vitto (right) with their Epiphone Masterbilt acoustics on the set of their latest video

One of the hottest latin bands on the Miami scene these days is Monte Rosa. Drawing on influences as diverse as traditional Cumbia to the pure rock of Jimi Hendrix, the duo of Eric Monte Rosa and Orlando Vitto have found a successful mix of Alternative Latin. Currently enjoying the success of their self titled CD Monte Rosa, Epiphone's Don Mitchell recently spoke to the duo about the band and how they got to this point:

**EPI:** Hey guys, let's start by telling me about your musical roots.

**ERIC:** My roots are mostly Latino based and more specifically drawn from my hometown of Barranquilla/Colombia. Cumbia, Vallenato, and other styles were part of my musical life there and I even discovered rock there too but not as in depth as when I started playing in the U.S.A. Bands like Guns N' Roses, Metallica, Led Zeppelin, AC/DC, The Beatles and players like Jimi Hendrix, Eric

Clapton had an influence as did bands like Pearl Jam, Radio Head and Nirvana. I could go on but there's too many to mention. I just like music that's loaded with good rhythms, tons of attitude and vibe, cool arrangements, good vocals, and good lyrics.

**ORLANDO:** There was always music playing in my house. My parents listened to Latin music like Salsa, Merenge and Venezuelan Folk. My mom also loved Elvis Presley and my sisters were into the Beatles. I think the first rock song I ever heard was Twist and Shout when I was seven. In my teen years I got into all the classic rock like Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd, The Doors and later Pearl Jam, Nirvana and that whole Seattle thing. I listened to a lot of stuff but I guess my main roots are in classic rock

**EPI:** Who initially inspired you to pick up guitar?

**ORLANDO:** I was really inspired by my mom and sisters who played piano. My uncle also played piano and was into rockabilly and blues. I'd hear him playing and think it was so cool but I always liked the guitar. When I was fourteen I saw Slash playing a Les Paul and I knew I wanted that guitar!

**ERIC:** Yeah, Slash really inspired me too. This man can play and is not just about the licks. He's about the melodies and the intensity of the delivery. I think "Appetite for Destruction" by Guns 'N Roses is one of the greatest rock albums ever. Others like Jimmy Page, Eric Clapton, Randy Rhoads and Zakk Wylde also inspired me.

**EPI:** At what age did you start performing?

**ERIC:** I started performing at house parties when I was seventeen. I would do covers to entertain my friends and of course the girls! That's what it was all about in the beginning... and now too! (laughs) Seriously though, those were some great learning experiences and gave me my first taste of writing and performing.

**ORLANDO:** The first gig I had was when I was sixteen.

**EPI:** Do you guys write primarily on guitar?

**ERIC:** Yes, and for me playing guitar is actually what made songwriting more natural for me. Since I started playing guitar, writing has been non-stop. It's now a way that I view life, through my guitar and my lyrics.

**EPI:** Do you have a certain formula you follow when writing?

**ERIC:** No, it's never the same structure for me. I try to be willing to experience

everything in life so I can write about situations that people can identify with.

**ORLANDO:** Well, Eric has been writing since he was a teenager... a long time ago! (laughs) Just kidding dude, but the first song we wrote together was "Recuerdos". It was that song that re-connected us and pushed us to start Monte Rosa. We just sat with our acoustics, he had a riff and from there it grew to the pre-chorus and then the chorus. It just sort of flowed. The next day we had the lyrics and the first Monte Rosa song was complete. It's nice when there is a good vibe with the people you work with.

**EPI:** You and Vitto have been in bands together for quite a while so I'm guessing that you guys have a pretty good musical connection by now.

**ERIC:** Yeahhh! We've known each other since 1997 and really started working closely when we started building and producing Monte Rosa. That's when we discovered we had more than just a musical connection between us. There is this very brotherly kind of friendship between us which is important when you're working ten to fourteen hour days in a recording studio or on the road together.

**ORLANDO:** We just clicked from the beginning. I remember hearing Eric and I knew I wanted to be in a band with him. I loved the songs, which in my opinion is the most important thing, and I loved his voice.

**EPI:** Latin music has exploded in popularity recently. Why do you think Monte Rosa is finding such success in a hugely competitive business?

**ORLANDO:** I think every business is competitive but if you work hard, have a good product and believe in yourself you're bound to have some success. It's also important to surround yourself with people that believe in you. Our management team (ICF Communications) and label (Fabrika) have been great to work with.

**ERIC:** I agree, we are hard workers and so is our team of people including our Manager, Record Label and Publicist. You can talk about "being lucky", but I'm a true believer that what you work for is what you get. You have to wear both the "business professional" and "performing professional" hats. It's a full time job.



**EPI:** You were chosen to have a song on the inaugural Jack Daniels Studio #7 CD in 2004. How did this great opportunity come about?

**ERIC:** Actually, we just gave one of our friends a CDs and he happened to pass it along to the guy who was putting this Jack Daniels project together. It was that simple! We had just finished mixing and mastering the album and BANG... this opportunity came into our hands. It was an awesome kick start to our career. It got us a lot of exposure here in the south Florida region as well as some national exposure since there were something like 10,000 CD's distributed.

**ORLANDO:** It was a great promotion for us because it came out a couple of months before the CD and a lot of people got to hear the first two singles before the CD was released.

**EPI:** I know that you are playing Epiphone Masterbilt acoustics on tour. When did you first discover them?

**ERIC:** A friend recommended them when we were in need of some great sounding acoustics for a live presentation and the Masterbilt's were awesome! We now have two professional sounding and looking acoustic guitars that really kick ass!

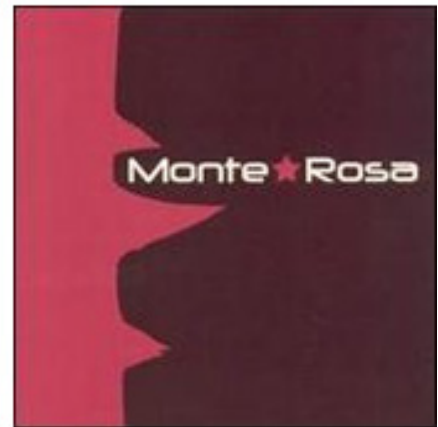
**EPI:** What is it you like the best about your Masterbilts?

**ORLANDO:** We've recorded with them, played live shows and just played them at home and they sound really good in each situation. I think the pick-up system is great! It's very simple with just a volume knob but the sound this guitar produces is very natural and it really captures the essential natural sound of the acoustic guitar. They've worked perfectly and the intonation is right on. We used them in our latest video, "Mi Cielo Perdio un Angel" and they look great too!

**ERIC:** The simplicity of the electronics is cool. I just plug-in and go with no EQ or mix hassle. I've played other acoustic guitars with the whole EQ, Condenser mic thing but the Masterbilts left me in awe! Our sound engineer loves them too because they're easy to EQ at the board. They just have a nice flat signal with the perfect balance of bass, mids, and brilliance and are perfect for live gigs and recording too. I'm very picky about the sound from my instrument and I love these.

**EPI:** Your self-titled CD was released in June. I just heard it today for the first time and it sounds great! Very nice songs and great guitar sounds throughout. What was it like to produce your own music?

**ERIC:** It was the best! We made all the decision about which songs ended up on the CD so we feel good about that. Plus it was great because Vitto and I got to work with some of the best musicians on the scene and some of our friends.



**ORLANDO:** It was awesome to express ourselves musically like this. To see your ideas go from scratch to a mastered CD was a beautiful thing.

**EPI:** Do you enjoy studio work as much as playing live?

**ORLANDO:** I love the studio process of getting a great sound but it's also great when the whole band is grooving hard on stage.

**ERIC:** I like studio work up to a certain point but I become eager to let the fans enjoy the music. There is something really cool about the studio though. Seeing a song come alive from 2 or 4 tracks of just guitar and vocals to 32 to 48 tracks of instruments is a lot of fun. You get to the final mix and go Wow! This is it! This is what we were hearing in our heads! Sometimes it's even better than what we imagined. It's a really cool feeling.

**EPI:** A lot of younger players aspire to reach the level of success that you have found with Monte Rosa. What main piece of advice would you give to a young band trying to "make it"?

**ORLANDO:** Practice, practice, practice. Work hard and be persistent and last but not least, write good songs.

**ERIC:** Look and listen to the successful artists that you like. I can tell you that the "formula" for success is right under your nose. You just have to really want it. Its' all about hard work and good "know-how".

**EPI:** Are there any tricks you've found to becoming a better guitarist that might help younger players?

**ERIC:** Guys, I have bad news. You have to practice. That's it. Luck is for the untalented.

**ORLANDO:** Yeah, there's no trick. You just have to practice a lot.

**EPI:** Thanks guys and we are excited to see what 2006 has in store for Monte Rosa!

**ERIC:** Thank you all at Gibson and Epiphone for your support, it was always my dream to own some of your guitars and that dream is even better now that I'm part of your family of artists.

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