

Tuesday, March 14, 2006

### Nick Valensi Of The Strokes

Currently on tour in support of their third studio project, "First Impressions of Earth", [The Strokes](#) rolled into Nashville, Tennessee for a sold-out show at the historic Ryman Auditorium on Monday, March 6th. Epiphone's Don Mitchell sat down with guitarist Nick Valensi thirty minutes before show time and talked about the tour, the new project, the [Epiphone Elitist Nick Valensi Riviera P-94](#) and more:

**EPI:** Tell me what's going on with the Strokes these days.

**NICK:** We just got back from the UK ten days ago and have started the US tour. We did three nights in New York last week to kick things off and this is the second city we've been to. And we're going to many more. (laughs)

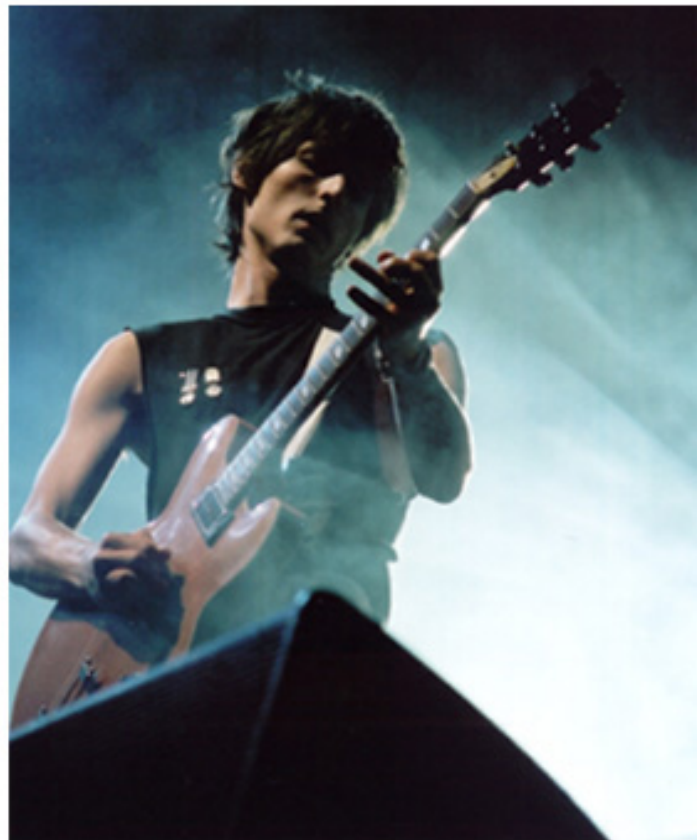
**EPI:** How long will the US tour last.

**NICK:** We'll be touring the US for about two and a half months.

**EPI:** You must be pretty excited that the first few US shows have sold out so quickly. I think the one tonight was on sale for about two hours!

**NICK:** It is encouraging and we're excited.

**EPI:** You're scheduled to play the [Gibson Amphitheatre](#) later this month and they actually just added a second show on March 31st because the first one sold out so fast.



**NICK:** That's great. I remember that venue as the Universal Amphitheatre but Gibson Amphitheatre sounds better! (laughs)

**EPI:** How did the UK part of the tour go? Were the audiences there pretty responsive to your music?

**NICK:** Yes. We've been there several times now and have a pretty good fan base. We might even have more fans over there than here. But yes, they were very responsive. Young people in the UK really like their rock music!

**EPI:** I'm sure that makes it fun to play there.

**NICK:** Yeah, it is fun. We sort of got our start over there in a way. In the early days we kind of established ourselves in New York through a lot of self promotion but it wasn't until we got signed to a label in England called Rough Trade Records that we did our first proper tour. Of course that tour was in the UK so that's kind of where we honed our chops.

**EPI:** This tour is supporting the new project "First Impressions of Earth" (RCA Records) which is doing really well for you guys.

**NICK:** Yes, it was released in the beginning of January and was produced by David Kahne who has worked with a lot of people including The Bangles and Paul McCartney.

**EPI:** That's interesting... I know David Kahne has worked with quite a diverse list of artists.

**NICK:** Quite diverse. He's definitely a studio veteran and very professional. That was a change for us because previously we had kind of done things the "do it yourself" way and had a very loose vibe in the studio.

**EPI:** One of the jobs of a producer is to pull the best out of the players. Do you feel like he accomplished that with you?



**NICK:** Yeah, he definitely pushed me as a guitar player. Just having someone there who really knew his s\*\*\* and expected a certain level of musicianship inspired me to play my best. I would come in every day feeling like I really needed to nail my parts so I didn't waste everyone's time and f\*\*\* things up.



**EPI:** Has there been a single released in the US yet?

**NICK:** “Juice Box” was the first single and I think the second one is about to be released which is “Heart in a Cage”.

**EPI:** So how did Nick Valensi the kid become Nick Valensi the guitar player?

**NICK:** My father was a bass player that kind of dabbled in guitar and he put a guitar in my hands when I was really young. I don’t remember the first time I held a guitar and in fact I don’t really have any memories without the guitar. I’ve been around the instrument my whole life and have always identified with it.

**EPI:** Did you teach yourself how to play or go through the mundane lessons that most of us hated as kids?

**NICK:** My father taught me a bunch of open chords and my first few songs like “Pretty Woman” and Bob Marley’s “No Woman No Cry”. By the time I was eight I was pretty proficient when it came to D, F, G open chord type stuff and then when I was twelve, I really immersed myself in guitar. I was one of those kids who would hear a song once or twice and then be able to play it back to you. That was my thing and I had a lot of fun figuring out solos and chord progressions to songs. I studied music but it was in my own young kind of ignorant way. I understood things in a very primitive way back then and later, when I finally had someone explain things to me, it all made sense.

**EPI:** Being a family oriented guy myself, I think it’s cool that your dad turned you onto guitar and taught you your first chords.

**NICK:** Very cool and actually, my father ended up passing away when I was ten so playing guitar was like the one thing that kept a part of him with me. That really had a lot to do with why I pursued it with such intensity... and now here I am today. (laughs)

**EPI:** Yes, and actually making a living at this!

**NICK:** Yeah man, living the dream... (more laughter)

**EPI:** Did you ever think back then that you would actually be a full time musician one day?

**NICK:** You know, I always thought I had a chance to be honest with you. But I was always pretty realistic about it too and realized that it's not just talent or passion or drive. There's also a lot of luck involved and a lot of hard work.

**EPI:** I know you've been playing your Epiphone Riviera for years now. How did you hook up with that particular guitar?

**NICK:** Actually what happened was that Albert, the other guitar player in The Strokes happened upon a little money a few years back and decided to buy a new guitar. He went to this guy in New York who sells guitars out of his apartment and found a strat from the 80s and a Riviera. He liked them both so much that he ended up getting them both. We had a gig a couple of days after that and at the time I was playing a strat that I really didn't like. Albert knew I didn't like it so he told me I should give the Riviera a shot. I used it on that gig and I haven't stopped using it since. It's the guitar that I've used on every recorded song and every live show to this day.




**EPI:** When did you switch to the P94 pickups?

**NICK:** I did the first couple of shows with the original humbuckers and then I changed them to P94s just because I'm kind of a midrange guy. I don't really get out of the midrange much and that's where I like it. Albert's got a really sparkly, bright sound and obviously Nikolai is playing the bass so I like the niche I've carved for myself in the middle. The P94s just do that for me. I was always a big fan of P90s but obviously they wouldn't fit into the old humbucker spots so the P94's were the way to go. Plus, I think the P94s look really cool too.

**EPI:** I have to tell you that the [Epiphone Elitist Nick Valensi Riviera P-94](#) is one of my favorite Epiphone models.

**NICK:** I love it too. It's an exact copy of my guitar and I've found this guitar to be better than any hollowbody I've ever played. It's just so versatile. I can play blues, country, jazz and when it comes to doing all out rock stuff, it's great. That



was the idea, to make a guitar that was very versatile that you could do anything with but keep the cost down so it wouldn't cost a s\*\*\*-load of money. Kids can know that if they shell out just a few hundred bucks for this guitar that they're getting a professional quality instrument that this dude from the Strokes has used on every recording and at every show. And the best part is that it's affordable. You don't have to shell out two thousand bucks for a professional instrument, and why... I find that s\*\*\* stupid.

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