

# Interview With Fingerstyle Guitarist Adam Miller

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As 2010 comes to a close, we here at *Guitar International* are taking a look back at the year that was, of all the great albums that came out this year, all the killer concerts that took place and the amazing guitarists who made this year a great year for the guitar. When looking back over the past 12 months

one guitarist stood out to us as having been one of our favorite live shows, and who released one of our favorite studio albums, Australian guitarist Adam Miller.

While he's not a household name, yet, in America, this talented Aussie is a guitar monster. His command of the instrument is on par with the best in the business, and his sense of melody and groove make his music accessible to fans of the guitar and fans of music alike. I first encountered Adam as he gave a short performance at the Cole Clark booth at last summer's NAMM show in Nashville. Despite all of the noise and commotion that was happening around us, I found myself transfixed as Adam launched into a solo Fingerstyle piece that literally stopped me in my tracks.

After hearing Miller perform live, and being blown away by his technique, musical emotion and groove, I was happy to get a chance to check out his third studio album Out of My Hands. With my hopes high, I sat down to listen to the album, and Adam's performance on the record exceeded even my high expectations.

The album features eleven of Miller's original compositions for solo guitar and ensemble. Upon listening to the album it becomes apparent that not only is Miller a talented performer, but a gifted composer as well. Songs such as "Day Gig" and "Traffic" are as funky as it gets, digging deep into the pocket and getting even the most timid listener up and dancing around the room.

On the other side of the coin are the more intimate ballads "Finding Home" and "Rushing In." The later, a solo-guitar piece that showcases Miller's ability to manipulate textures and dynamics to create excitement and engage the audience.

Since Adam made since a monster first impression on us, we had to share his music and his story with our readers. So we'll let Adam take it from here as he talks about his early influences, choice of guitars and gigging in Australia.

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**Matt Warnock:** I first met you at the Summer NAMM show back in Nashville. How did the rest of your trip to North America go this summer?

**Adam Miller:** It was great, a lot of hanging out and playing guitar. I took a trip up to Montreal to check out the Jazz Festival and Guitar Festival that they have up there. It was really cool, I got to hang out with Charlie Hunter and then play on some really expensive, boutique, handmade guitars, which is always a great time.

I also got to do a class with John Scofield when I was there, which was a blast. Then I made a stop in San Francisco where I got to do a show with one of the editors from Acoustic Guitar Magazine and then headed on home. Overall it was a great trip, always a good time when I come to North America.

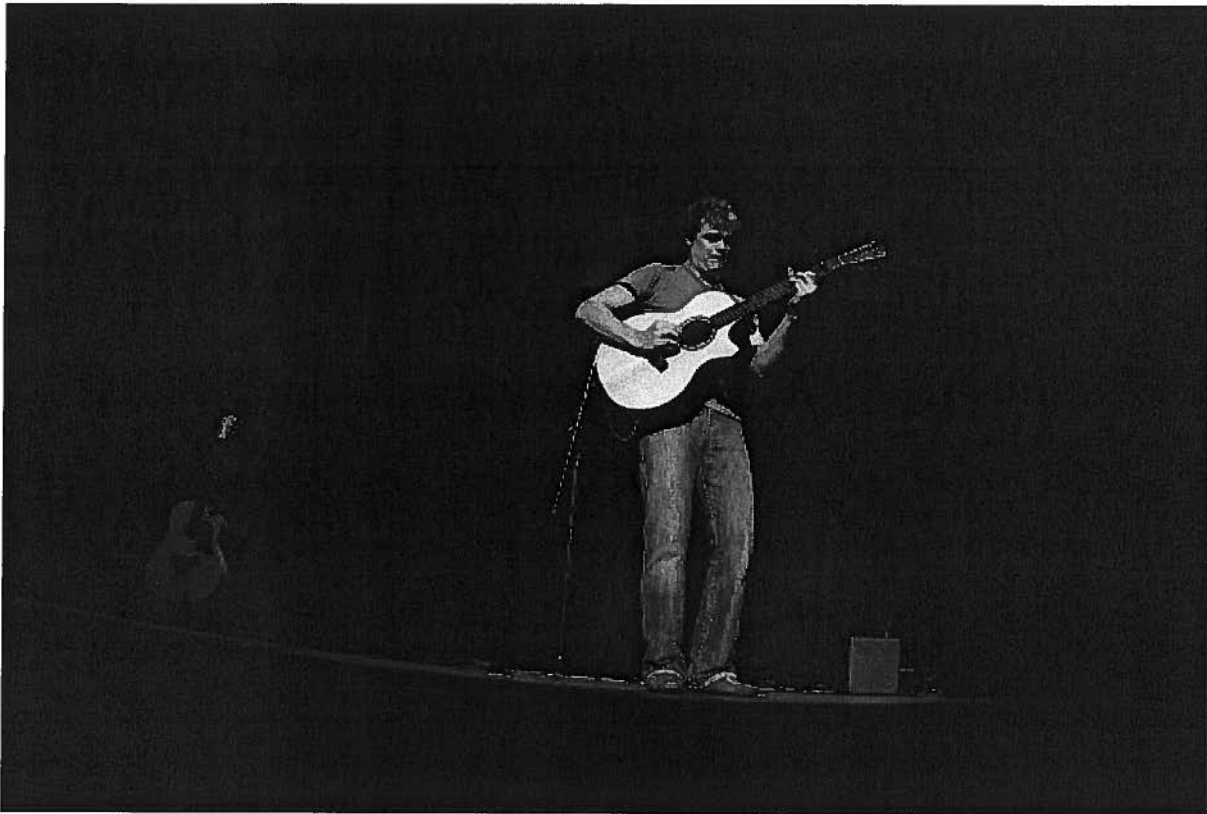


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**Matt:** With Fingerstyle guitar starting in America, though it's since branched out all over the world, how do you find the reaction to audiences in the U.S. to your playing as compared to crowds back home in Australia?

**Adam:** Well, all of the shows I've done in the U.S. were at trade shows such as NAMM. I would say that in the U.S. it's easier to get people out to check out a Fingerstyle guitar concert, where in Australia it's more of a fight to fill those seats. Though I've toured with Tommy Emmanuel and that wasn't much of a fight to fill the halls. [Laughs]

In Australia it's harder to get those kinds of regular gigs going on, and to fill places once you've got those gigs booked. Which is a bit odd, because in Australia Tommy is quite literally a household name, not just guitar players know him everyone knows him. He's quite an ambassador for the acoustic guitar, which is great for the genre and for music in Australia.

**Matt:** You've mentioned Tommy as an early influence, but were you also influenced by the American players such as Phil Keaggy or Michael Hedges, those kinds of players?

**Adam:** No, to be honest not at all. I actually haven't even checked those guys out to this day, for some reason they really haven't come onto my radar yet. I got my first Tommy Emmanuel album when I was 8 years old, which would have been the second album he released where he played electric guitar, and I just loved it. I don't really know why I was drawn to it so much, it's hard to know why you like certain music when you're that young, but it really spoke to me on a very deep level. I got into that and started playing guitar from that perspective.

During my high school years I pretty much only listened to Tommy, and at the time his albums were mostly electric guitar with very little acoustic guitar, so it gave me a foundation in that style of

music. Later on I got into bands such as the Red Hot Chili Peppers and Rage Against the Machine, which was a major influence on how I approach groove and rhythm. After that I got into a lot of jazz players such as Scofield, James Muller and Martin Taylor, who's more into the Fingerstyle realm with a jazz feel to it.

In Australia, I could play the kind of Chet Atkins style of guitar, but it ended up trying to be different and coming at the Fingerstyle stuff with a new angle, almost out of necessity to stand out from the crowd.



**Matt:** I was just going to comment on that. When I hear your playing, you use the percussive stuff, like Andy McKee does, but in a way that is more groove oriented and less percussive. How did you work that angle into you playing?

**Adam:** I don't exactly play that tapping stuff as a drummer would, it's more subtle than that, and for the most part it's totally worked out, I'm not that clever to just throw it in on the spot. [Laughs] It actually came about the first time I heard John Mayer play, on his first album. That opened up a new door for me. I realized that that was more of what I was going for, without the vocals.

Then, I got his first DVD and he talked about Charlie Hunter as being an influence on his playing, and Charlie has since become the biggest influence on my playing in the past eight years. Charlie and Tommy are still the two players that I'm trying to meld in my playing, especially Charlie's technique.

I never thought it was possible to play a bassline and a melody at the same time, so I never even bothered trying, but after I heard Charlie doing it, it really opened up a whole new realm for me in my playing.

**Matt:** During your tune “Day Gig,” you play these really fast, legato runs that sound as if they were influenced by rock and even metal. Have you checked out any players in those genres such as Steve Vai or Paul Gilbert?

**Adam:** I think it actually comes from Tommy, because he did play a bit like Joe Satriani back in the day. Growing up playing guitar, you end up playing Metallica at least for a short time in your upbringing, so that stuff has crept into my playing over the years. Also, doing gigs over the years I’ve played in many different bands and in many different genres, so it all comes together over time.

With that song in particular, I was just writing about all the different things we have to do as musicians to make things work, so I was just being a little silly with some of those moment to inject some humor into the song. All the phone calls and the unanswered emails that I seem to always get. *[Laughs]* It’s all part of being a musician.

The melody actually came from an exercise I was working on that blended a bassline and a melody line, so that’s where the song grew from that initial idea into the finished version on the record.

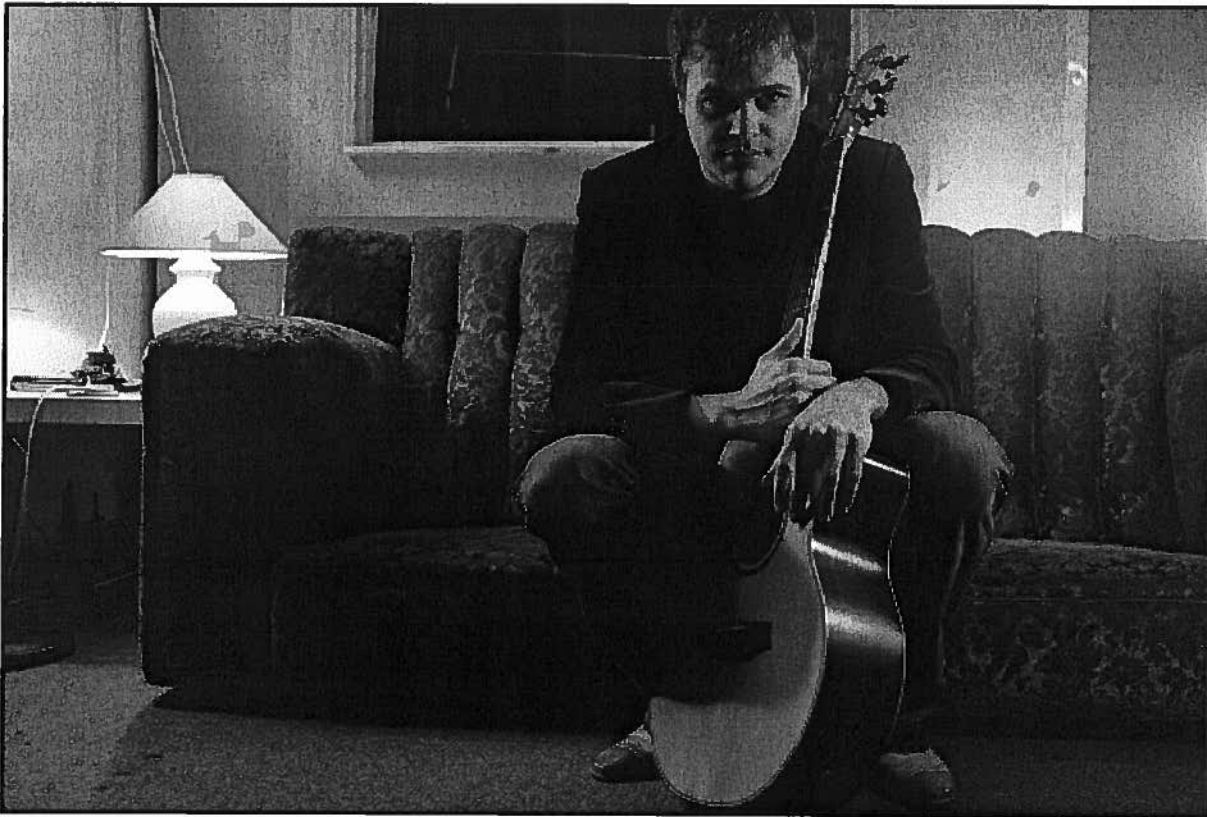


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**Matt:** Talking about your technique a bit, your right hand is solid all the time. Do you work on your technique every day, or has that developed over the years just from playing so much on a regular basis?

**Adam:** I think my right hand really developed from all of that “boom-chick” sort of playing. I certainly worked hard on getting that stuff down when I was growing up. My first solo acoustic was actually opening up for Tommy Emmanuel, which was the day I met him. It was a bit freaky and there was a lot of pressure.

Leading up to the gig a lot of people told me to just focus on my timing and groove and I'll be cool, which is something I've always done, and by having that in my playing it gives me a solid foundation to work from, especially when I'm under pressure such as the gig with Tommy.

I've always been a guy who focuses on tempo and groove, which I got a lot from studying guys like Robben Ford, who has impeccable timing and rock-solid groove.

**Matt:** When I saw you at NAMM you were at the Cole Clark booth representing the brand at the show. How did you first become introduced to these instruments and what convinced you to sponsor them as your main guitar maker?

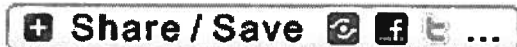
**Adam:** Well, Adam Cole and Bradley Clark make the guitars, and they used to work for Maton guitars, which is the guitars that Tommy plays. 98% of Australians want to play those guitars. They're the Martins of Australia.

When I heard that these guys were branching out and building their own instruments I knew I wanted to check them out, and after I did I just fell in love with the sound. Their pickups are one of a kind and I think they are the best sounding pickups around, just fabulous tone and always consistent across the board.

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