

A PERFECT CIRCLE'S TROY VAN LEEUWEN GETS AROUND

A PERFECT CIRCLE GUITARIST TROY VAN LEEUWEN COMMANDS A well-rounded view of current heavy rock. He sees his band as a natural evolution from '90s progressive-metal groups such as Tool — which just happens to be the other band of A Perfect Circle frontman Maynard James Keenan. How's that for circular?

"When New York bands like Tool and Helmet started to hit," recalls Van Leeuwen, "I noticed a lot of people here in L.A. trying to latch on to that heavy, tuned-down-low sound — you know, like Black Sabbath with an indie-rock singer. That direction eventually spawned bands like Korn, who just took it a step further."

For Van Leeuwen, A Perfect Circle's debut album, *Mer De Noms*, ventures yet another step beyond. "The music is mature and emotional," he says. "It's about more than just being mad and pointing the finger. There are ethereal qualities, ambience, space, acoustic instruments."

Ironically, Van Leeuwen hadn't been seeking a gig when he joined A Perfect Circle. After his previous group, Failure, lived up to its name, he decided to concentrate on studio work, playing on Orgy's debut album and on remix sessions for Korn, Depeche Mode, Limp Bizkit, and others. "But when Maynard invited me down to check out the band, I was convinced," he says. "It seemed like a genuine exchange between musicians who knew when to add something and when to step back — a really good chemistry." Perhaps even more refreshing than the album's bold textural shifts and progressive arrangements is the fact that it has become a major hit — quite an accomplishment in today's formulaic rock climate.

One of the guitars that helps Van Leeuwen navigate his band's ambitious dynamics is a Yamaha AES1500 hollowbody. "It's an extremely well made guitar, and it's very versatile," says Troy. "It can go from that pristine, hollowbodied clean sound to a fat, high-gain sound. I even use it to simulate parts of the record that go between acoustic guitars and heavy sounds. I split the coil on the neck DiMarzio™ humbucker for a clean sound, and then I go into heavy mode just by flicking the switch to the full-humbucker bridge pickup."

Heavy rock from a hollowbody? "Yes," says Troy. "A lot of players automatically turn to a mahogany solidbody when they want a heavy sound, but you can definitely get a thick sound out of a hollowbody like the 1500. In fact, the 1500 has a great heavy sound. It's rounder than a solidbody, but it can still cut. Like on any hollowbody, you have to be careful about feedback — it can get out of control if you're not careful, but the 1500 is great for times when you are deliberately creating feedback, like A Perfect Circle does a few times during the show. Sometimes I use a flange with feedback to get that wild, swirling, out-of-control effect. You don't necessarily know where the sound is going to end up, but you get lots of interesting things."

The band members have already started writing material for A Perfect Circle's next album, though that project won't be completed until Keenan finishes work on Tool's upcoming release. In the meantime Van Leeuwen will be focusing on his new band, Enemy. "It's me singing and playing guitar, plus a rhythm section," he says. "I'm probably going to use the AES1500 in places, and Yamaha is also building me a modified AES800 solidbody with a set neck instead of the usual bolt-on, just because that's what I feel most comfortable with. It may even get its own model number."

Is Van Leeuwen surprised that such an offbeat and ambitious record as *Mer De Noms* has done so well? "Definitely," he nods. "It's cool that a band like this can be up there charting alongside a lot of stuff that isn't so — sorry to say it — good. I see it as a glimmer of hope, proof that music can still be something more than a product entirely defined by the business end of things."

Troy with the
AES1500B

