

Dino Meneghin: Unapologetic Pop

"My first halfway-decent gig was with an R&B group at the height of its popularity. It was a real trial by fire."



Some highly schooled jazz players turn up their noses when asked to play pop, but not Dino Meneghin. "A lot of times, that attitude comes out of ignorance," says the young LA-based guitarist. "R&B, blues, rock and roll, jazz — they all come from the same African-American tradition of music. They all come from the same source. And once I started playing R&B and pop, I fell in love with the idea of playing those styles. Now it feels more like home to me than jazz."

Meneghin's jazz-to-pop journey wasn't exactly gradual. Soon after graduating from the University of Southern California's respected guitar program, Dino landed a primo gig: a TV date with Destiny's Child. "That was my entry into the world of professional sideman. It was a weird accident that I was even called—a friend of mine had been playing keyboards with the group. So my first halfway-decent gig was with an R&B group at the height of its popularity. It was a real trial by fire."

Meneghin obviously survived unscathed. He's gone on to collaborate with Aaron Carter, Josh Groban, Robin Thicke, Posh Spice, Jarvis Church, and others. "Most of my work has been as a live sideman, especially with the teen-pop acts," notes Dino. "Like most players, I want to get more into session and studio work, but you have to pay your dues."

Yet Meneghin is making headway on that front, too. He recently clocked studio time with Marc Broussard and Zac Provost and is recording and producing tracks for singer/songwriter/guitarist Liz Phair's upcoming album after a stint as her touring guitarist and musical director.

Dino's work with Liz coincides with the singer's transition from scruffy rocker to high-gloss pop artist, and he embraces the challenges. "It's a guitar player's dream gig," he says. "Liz's music runs the gamut from the early, Stones-influenced things produced by Brad Wood to the new material produced by Michael Penn and the Matrix, with its modern LA guitar sound." Dino defines that "modern LA guitar sound" as a style that blends heavy/crunchy guitars with smooth fretboard finesse—an approach he associates with such Los Angeles session stalwarts as Corky James, Tim Pierce, Rusty Anderson, and Michael Landau, whose work he particularly admires.

Following Landau's lead, Meneghin used to favor Strat-style solidbodies, but his tastes have changed. "Now my favorite guitar is a Yamaha AES1500," he

says. "It's funny, because at one point I actually abhorred archtop guitars. But the flavor of what I was being asked to do changed, so I started moving back to bigger guitars and got really into archtops. Now, if I take just one guitar to a gig, it's the AES1500. It has such a vibe, and I use it for almost everything."

Almost everything? "Well," says Dino, "one thing I'm less inclined to use it for is heavy power-chord stuff. The AES1500 can work for that, but it is a hollowbody, so it doesn't quite get the sort of heavy sound of a solidbody." For that particular sound, Meneghin straps on a Yamaha AES620—or his recently acquired AES920, a sort of upscale cousin to the AES620. "I've been using the 920 on Liz's new record. The pickups are lower output than the AES620's, so they're a little brighter. The ones on the AES620 have more low-mids and a little more 'honk.' You get a little more of the sound of the wood on the AES920. It has a great natural tone played clean, and when it distorts, there's a little more definition. It's a very sweet, solid guitar, while the AES620 is a little more macho."

Meneghin's other studio workhorse is a jumbo-bodied Yamaha CJX acoustic. "That guitar saved the day just yesterday in the studio," he recounts. "I have to choose guitar tones very carefully so they'll blend with Liz's guitars, which are a main feature of the new stuff we're recording, and the CJX was great for that. It's an awesome guitar. No one's paying me to say this, but I've got to point out that the guys at the Yamaha custom shop in Hollywood have been a huge support for me—they have consistently been the most helpful, professional and amazing people to work with. I can't say enough great things about Yamaha."

Meneghin has high hopes for Liz Phair's album-in-progress. "This is the first time in my career that I've worked with someone who's not only a known artist, but who has controversial and important things to say," he concludes. "This is the most rewarding musical experience of my entire career."