



By Ken Volpe - GJD

One of the biggest struggles for a guitarist is their relationship with their pick. But on the contrary, that reminds me of a joke. There is a girl for every guy but a guitarist has his pick. (If you don't get that joke, you're probably not a very good guitarist. LOL. So much for my attempt at humor.)

This constant pick wrangling is about learning how to use a pick effectively, how to hold the pick, what type of pick to use, and so on... For some players this potential conflict continues throughout their playing career. So allow me to introduce the V-Pick and to discuss some of the challenges of picking in general.

Vinni Smith, the founder of V-Picks, has a really interesting story to tell and the result was the development of the V-Picks. I first played them at the 2008 Winter NAMM show and was skeptical right off the bat. But after speaking with Vinni and hearing his claims about the V-Pick I decided to open my mind and give it a shot. As most of you know, a specific type of pick is a very personal thing to a guitarist.

Let's go back and discuss some of the challenges I mentioned earlier. In my opinion, the greatest challenge is finding the technique that works best for your playing. The type of pick is actually a secondary issue. Myself, and many other believe that the key to great picking technique is two-fold. Number one, your picking arm needs to be relaxed so it can execute playing notes with ease and accuracy. The second thing is to log a lot of practice hours on the instrument.

Let's address some specifics on holding the pick. Or course, there are exceptions to the rule and a lot of this is subjective. Tucking the pick in between your thumb and your index finger where only about 20% of the tip of the pick is showing is the most common approach. I tend to agree with that. A lot of players grip the pick too tightly, and the result is a tightening of the wrist that leads to a lack of dynamics. Dynamics is basically the ability to play soft and loud on command. Many players grip the pick tightly because they are afraid to drop the pick and because of frustration of not being able to pick well. Kind of like grinding your teeth when you are stressed; you don't always know that you are doing it.

Another negative factor from when you grip the pick too tightly is that a harsh tone can abound. In other words, the sound that the guitar produces can be brittle. So this is where the genius of the V-Pick comes in. Because of the material used in the V-Pick, it automatically grips

to your thumb and finger without being sticky. Right away you will notice that you are picking with less forced effort and not falling prey to some of the negatives that I just described. I might add that this struggle can happen to players of all levels.

Since I have been using the V-Picks from when I met Vinni at the NAMM show, I have tried a variety of V-Pick models. If you go to his website, www.V-Picks.com, you will see for yourself the vast varieties of picks. It's kind of interesting because of the nature of these V-Picks, it even makes the choice of what shape and size you prefer a different decision. I ended up using the Large Pointed model. To be honest, I would mainly use this model for practicing on my electric guitar. The thickness for the pick and the tone that it produces was not exactly what I was looking for, with both my acoustic guitar and my electric guitars. To reiterate, I will practice with the Large Pointed model and then gig and record with my standard plastic plectrum. However, this brings me to my next point. A few weeks ago I noticed that V-Picks came out with another model called the Ultra-Lite. This new pick is what I have always been looking for. It has all the benefits of the other V-Picks in terms of relaxing your grip and it is equally as toneful as my old stand-by. It is also the most flexible or bendable of the V-Picks which is even another advantage. Like I said earlier, guitar players are very sensitive about their picks and they don't really like change. To me, the Ultra-Lite model gives me benefits but in the same token, it doesn't bother me that it feels so different.

Let me close by telling you one other thing. I had a gig the other day where I was a featured soloist and I felt comfortable using my V-Pick for this occasion. To me that speaks volume in terms of turning the corner and not looking back. As a matter of fact, yesterday I couldn't find my Ultra-Lite and I started to freak a little bit until my lovely wife found it. The only negative about the V-Picks is that they are clear and can be hard to find. However, they are really not that expensive so just buy a bunch and problem solved.