



By Ken Volpe - GJD

Every year the Winter NAMM show seems to come around quicker than the year before. I guess my perception is that as I get older, time goes by quicker. Wouldn't you agree? As I write this, I am on a plane flying back to New York City where the temperature is 8 degrees above zero and I am reflecting back on the 2009 NAMM show that took place in Anaheim, California.

The one theme that keeps running through my mind is how manufacturers keep going deeper in their development of retro products. Before I get into my thoughts about this retro craze (details in Part 2), I'd like to tell you about some of the happenings from the show.

I arrived late Thursday afternoon in sunny Anaheim. Hunger pangs from lack of food on the airplane (although who misses airplane food) kept me from really settling in my room. Just as well since I was meeting a friend for dinner in downtown Disneyland.

Before we ate, we wandered around and checked out some of the local outdoor musicians performing. The one guy that caught our attention was Brother Yusef. His music is a blend of a traditional acoustic blues guitar with soulful vocals. He plays a Taylor steel-string in various alternate tuning and uses a Capo as well. He's got major chops and a great vibe; a true performer in every sense. I couldn't help but think, "Why is someone who is so talented playing in a Disney courtyard and not on stages throughout the world." I would imagine that he gets paid pretty well and loves what he does, but it just doesn't seem right. If you ever get out to Disneyland be sure to check Brother Yusef out and see for yourself.

After dinner, my friend and I went to see Matt O'Ree. Matt is a blues rocker based in New Jersey. I've known Matt for a while and actually have interviewed him on GJD. It's the first time that I've seen him live. Man, he and his band play with some serious fury and intensity. Matt's main axe is a Gibson Les Paul and he plays the heck out of it with an equal blend of technique and taste. There are two things about his playing that I really enjoyed. First, he almost makes his Les Paul sound like a Strat at times, or it seems that he is playing Strat like riffs but doing it on a Les Paul. The second thing that I really enjoyed is his very unique blend of blues, rock, funk, and jazz. After Matt's show my friend and I parted ways and I was ready to crash back at the hotel.

One of my favorite parts of NAMM is the social aspect of it and catching up with old friends. But this year I was limited because I had to leave early on Saturday to get back home for

business. Friday was my day to stay focused and take care of all of my business which included press conferences, appointments and networking. One of the most amazing things about NAMM is how much you can get done in person in such a short period of time. One of Friday's highlights was the Paul Reed Smith "Press Only" private demo. Paul had a very unique idea. He hired a crew to set up a Studer 24-track recording rig. The artist would first demo one of the new PRS products and then they would play back the performance on tape. So you got to hear what the products sounded like both live and recorded. A new acoustic guitar and new amp were the featured products. I have to say it was a fascinating demonstration and the Q & A section afterwards was quite humorous. For those of you who know Paul, he has a great sense of humor.

Some of the other highlights of the day for me were playing the new fantastic Collings electric guitars with Lollar mini humbuckers. Man, I need one of those Guitars asap. Also, I enjoyed hearing Scott Henderson demo the versatile new John Suhr Hedgehog amplifier. After that I was able to hear and see some more awesome product demos from companies like Ernie Ball, Fender, and Celestion. Towards the end of the day, I was able to check out DigiDesign's long awaited Pro Tools 8 recording software. This really caught my interest since I am planning to upgrade to this new system in the near future.

For more info on some of these products, check out Jim Basara's in depth reviews coming later in the week on GJD.