

Ryan Kershaw interviews Italian Guitar Retailer 'G&E Musiclab'

RK: Hi Enrico and Carlos, thanks for chatting with me today for the Guitar Association of New Zealand. Tell us a little about G&E Musiclab. What is G&E's main market and how does it differ from other music instrument stores in the area?

G&E: Hi Ryan, many thanks for your compliments! We hope to see you soon and have a chat about guitars (and a coffee too!) G&E Musiclab shop was created in 1997. After working for years in generic musical instrument shops, we wanted to create a store for just guitar and bass players. Our goal was to create a reference point for these musicians with the added bonus of a laboratory for repairs and custom work.

RK Recently I travelled across France and Italy to many guitar shops, on the hunt for a new acoustic. I had a feeling that I would find what I was looking for in a smaller store, with more experienced staff. Near the end of my travels I ended up finding what I was looking for at your store in Florence. Part of what made your store stand out was the great customer service – do you think being an independent store encourages a certain hospitality that sometimes disappears in larger stores?

G&E: We created this store for passion and hope that this is shown to and reflected in those customers who come to visit us. Perhaps larger chain stores can at times come off similar to supermarkets where human contact it is not as personal

RK You also offer luthier services including custom guitar maintenance/repair and violin making! What are the common changes you are asked for regarding guitar repairs or hardware alterations?

G&E: As far as the repairs are concerned often breakages of various kinds, in particular headstock. We perform refretting, fretboard leveling and what is feasible with wood.

For hardware changes, bridges and machineheadsubstitution are the most widespread along with upgrades of pickups and their circuits.

RK: I'm sure that readers would love to discover some Italian music that they have not heard before. Who are some great Italian guitarists that you can recommend?

G&E: Antonio Forcione, Giovanni Baglioni for their acoustic work, Luca Colombo and Massimo Varini for electric guitar

RK We talked about the lack of places for Italian musicians to play, and the binge drinking culture affecting the success of young Italian musicians (a worldwide problem me thinks...) what are your perceptions of this and what do you think would be some good ways to start helping the situation become more positive?

G&E: In Italy we have the bad habit to start music evenings later, often around midnight.

We think this limits the ability of many to participate. It would require that the places

where you do music would start, for instance, around 9 pm. The problem is that when the musicians began to play, many in the public have already been drinking heavily and are not interested in music.

RK: Is there a song that you hear too much when customers come in and play your guitars?

G&E: Stairway to heaven is no more at number 1! AC/DC's Back in Black is probably the most played along with Nirvana, and the evergreen Smoke on the Water!

RK: What do you think people should look for when buying a guitar?

G&E: The initial feeling on the instrument is important, The guitar that you buy must be good looking for you - although not essential-, be a brand known (although cheap) to have a good playability, a comfortable neck and give good vibrations - in every sense – for a positive feelings between the body of the player and the instrument. Consider then that especially in electric guitars there are many possibilities to change the sound even then.

RK: You have a working relationship with Lizard Academy. Lizard Academy is highly respected in Italian music education. Can you tell us how you are involved with them and a tiny bit of what they do?

G&E: Lizard school was founded by Giovanni Unterberger who was the pioneer of fingerstyle in Italy. Later it expanded to include many other instruments and various musical styles. With the guitar being the most popular of instruments, our cooperation has lasted for years. We offer discounts to students of the school. In recent years have created a section for primary schools and provide their guitars.

RK: With my guitar purchase you set up the action and put on a new set of strings (NZ music store staff take note!). Do you find that these little extra things you do help to make for a happy client base? I'm guessing that you have a lot of friendly regulars who make G&E their trusted 'one-stop shop'.

G&E: We try to always have an eye for the customer, not just the usual ones, but also for those who come for the first time. Even New Zealanders ... haha!
It's the little things that show the passion for the guitar.

RK: Thanks again Enrico and Carlos. G&E is a great little shop with friendly and knowledgeable staff, and I shall be back again next time I am in Florence. To say goodbye, what would be your 3 best bits of advice for the Kiwi guitar players out there?

G&E: Keep in mind that the guitar and the bass instruments are alive and they need to be maintained, possibly by professionals.
Change the strings often to get the best sound out of it. Often intonation problems are

due to old strings. Wipe the metal parts each time you finish playing. When visiting Italy do NOT leave the guitars in the car!
Play what you have inside because it is better to be unique than clones of others...

Here is the site for G&E Musiclab: <http://www.gemusiclab.it>
and their Facebook page: <https://it-it.facebook.com/gemusiclab/>

Note from Eric: If you do not understand Italian, you may be better off Googling "GEMusiclab" and then clicking on "Translate Page" to see the website in English (sort of!).