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# ALEX SKOLNICK

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**Latest albums released in '14 and '15, Planetary Coalition and Metal Allegiance! What to look for in 2016**



You may have heard of him referred to as one of the greatest guitar players of all time... Alex Skolnick has earned tremendous popularity for his metal guitar in the band Testament, just over 30 years of thrash gone classic songs and contemporary heavy metal; associated with acts such as Slayer. The Testament/ Slayer tour is announced for 2016 kicking off in February just after the Feb. '16 Axes and Anchors Cruise. Alex will be performing on board- "make sure to pack your very cool jazz trio!" There's going to be tons of heavy metal onboard, Zakk Wylde, Michael Schenker, Yngwie Malmsteen, Tracii Guns, Dario Lorina, the list goes on for one incredible cruise, the days also will be including many fun events and even guitar workshops.

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**Planetary Coalition, the 2014 album produced by Skolnick was a Grammy award nominee**

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**Metal Allegiance, released in December of 2015 also stunning!**

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[www.alexskolnick.com](http://www.alexskolnick.com)

Lucky Hek82, I got the opportunity to chat with Alex and ask him some questions about his guitar work. The curious thing was how Alex is an incredible record producer. I found out this-and-that about his unbelievable talent and I will share a thing-or-two with you. Alex certainly has musical interests outside of Testament that are diverse and he is culturally educated. In fact, his knowledge and expertise of music are unparalleled after having created such a successful career; having built his name as a famous metal guitar player.

Those fans who are very familiar with Alex's work will know that he loves Jazz and acoustic guitar, and to play a modernist style with his jazz trio; while under the influence of course, of his more familiar metal shredding. He creates a unique and fresh sound for the many songs he's producing. Anyone who has heard the album Planetary Coalition would strongly agree that the songs are very original and are strongly culturally diverse with various ethnic backgrounds in their sonic atmospheres.

It wasn't that he was trekking on foot around the planet picking musicians up for the record, or finding them first in his dream mind and then making astral journeys as they answered the calls of his soul... He actually met some of the

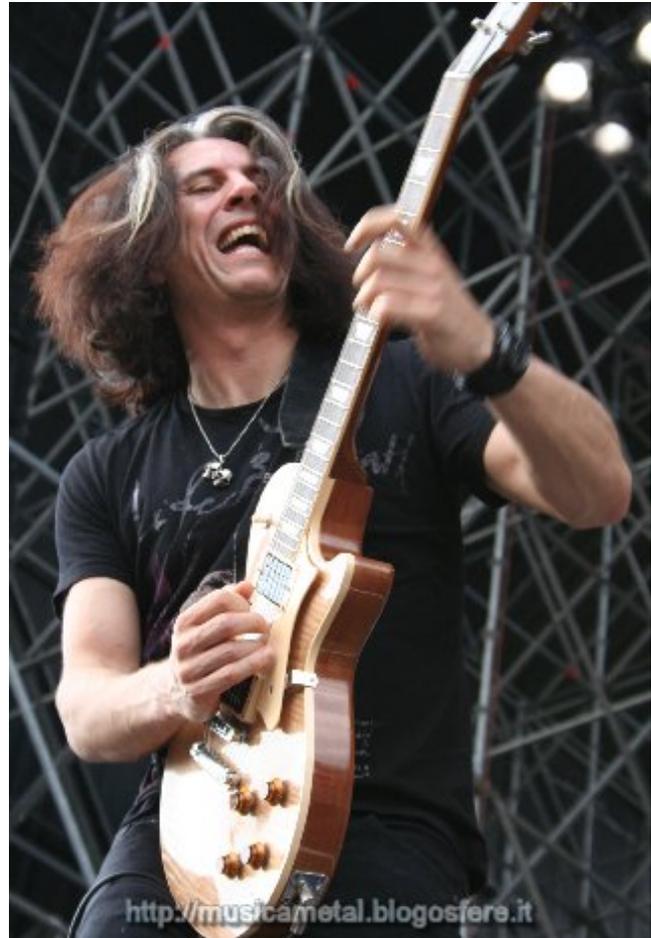
players in New York where his studio is based, like violinist Rachel Golub. Alex had already worked with the Mexican guitar duo Rodrigo y Gabriela on a song for their album. He sought out the local expert Santoor player Max ZT who brought along Japanese bass player Moto Fukushima... a true visionary! So, all of the musicians flocked together surrounding the project forming the great coalition for this album.

**“Alex certainly has musical interests outside of Testament that are diverse and he is culturally educated”**

-Kate Toohey- Schank

## Chat w/ Hek82-

Hek82: Radio Hek82, we are talking to Alex Skolnick a well-known and phenomenal metal guitar player, whom we know from the band Testament



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that we have loved for 30 years.

Alex: Just over 30 yrs.

Hek82: I have admired your skilled playing for many years and so its wonderful to be speaking with you.

Alex: Thank you so much!

Hek82: I've heard of these albums that you've produced recently, in 2014 it was an album called Planetary Coalition which is really a phenomenal album and it was up for a grammy award.

Alex: Yes, it was considered for a Grammy award and it made the first round of nominations. Not the second, but still it was a big deal.

Hek82: Well, it is my pick. A fantastic album and definitely a winner in my book, a remarkable achievement. I came across another one of the albums that you produced in 2015 which was Metal Allegiance. A little more recent.

Alex: Barely 2 months!

Hek82: Very enjoyable. Just want to express my admiration again for what you've done with your work producing new music and never before been heard sound.

Alex: Thank you so much.

Hek82: Absolutely!

Alex: Well, I guess I have a lot to say about the whole identity I have outside of Testament which I'm most known for. It's one thing I'm able to do, but I do have other projects wherein I'm able to really express myself as a producer and a composer.

Hek82: Yeah! You are so well known as a metal guitar player. So, it's surprising to hear songs like the ones on Planetary Coalition which are very diverse in style. Just wonderful to hear a metal player who really appreciates such a broad range of styles of guitar playing. How is it that you were able to put this album together? 5 continents, a global world vision- 27 musicians on Planetary Coalition.

Alex: Yeah, well- I think it reflects my tastes as a listener. The music you hear on that album is what I like... if you were to look at me through a picture window, when I'm in alone I'm probably not going to be listening to Slayer. I love that music and I've been listening to metal ever since a young age.

Hek82: And you're so close to it always!

Alex: I got away from it doing other styles of music about half of the time since I was with Testament. I like to broaden my vocabulary.

Hek82: M-hm.

Alex: So, not to disrespect heavy metal but just doing other styles of music. But, that is one side of what I do and it's a youthful side. I was able to come back to it feeling more developed. I have to keep a balance with other music I listen to. That could be classified as acoustic Jazz such as what I do with my AS Trio. I play a lot of acoustic guitar. I think there is so much magic there in just the naturalness of acoustic guitar. Collaborating with other instrumentalists who play natural instruments. I like the thought of not being limited by nationalities or cultures and just being open to it.

Hek82: M-hm.

Alex: It's been a long time vision of mine to do an album like that where I collaborate with artists from different cultures. That's what I wanted to do. And doing acoustic guitar. Initially, the acoustic record wasn't necessarily going to be a world music record and vice versa. But I decided to put this together, it just made sense. It's something I've wanted to do for years.

Hek82: Wow, I have to ask you how did you find these musicians? All from different countries and excellent players. Considering too the fact that there are unique instruments on this album that aren't commonly played. Like the Santoor, the 72 stringed instrument...

Alex: Actually, a type of dulcimer.

Hek82: Played with a hammer.

Alex: Other instruments like the Kanun, which is similar but more specific to Turkey.

Hek82: There are some Middle Eastern stringed instruments too.

Alex: I heard them and thought, I want to record that!

Hek82: Were you traveling around the world and found these players?

Alex: Well, since the late 90's I've lived in New York, which has a very diverse music community. I actually just put the word out that I was looking for world musicians as a core band. That was where I found Max ZT, the hammer dulcimer player through my engineer on the record. Max brought in the bass player he works with, Moto who's Japanese. Although we don't have any tracks specific to Japan he's a very multi-cultural bassist and does most of the songs throughout the album. Those guys became the core along with a great violinist I work with Rachel Golub. Occasionally people call me for sessions ...

Hek82: Okay...

Alex: I've done a lot of sessions with artists you might not have heard of- so I chose someone I knew, she'd spent time in India even though she's American and I knew she'd be good for specific

tunes. And some of them knew me- there's a guitar duo Rodrigo y Gabriela who are actually very well known.

Hek82: Yes! I've heard of them, the Mexican guitar duo. They're wonderful. Very cool.

Alex: And you know, they're on a high level in the music industry, they've done TV shows like the David Letterman show, they sell out Radio City Music Hall, you know they're at that level. They've been adding my electric guitar to their acoustic so, I always wanted to do some acoustic work with them. They put me on tour in 2009 and '10, and one show we did they had a group supporting them called Trio Joubran which is a trio of Oud players from Palestine based in Paris.

Hek82: Cool!

Alex: We hit it off, one of those players; Adnan Joubran plays on the record.

Hek82: Wow.

Alex: And then we have a song right next to that tune with an Israeli percussionist. So we have very different vibes that can exist on the same record!

Hek82: Right! You've brought them together into all of those amazing songs.

Alex: There's another tune on there called Salto and it's named after the region of Salto and the musicians from there actually tracked me down. They also play Folk music and drums, they're from the rural part of Argentina called Salto. Anyways, so once I got the core group and some of the musicians I needed just started filling in the gaps, I knew I needed somebody from Africa.

Hek82: Sounds perfect.

Alex: So I got the recommendation that I need and I found Yacouba Sissoko who plays the Kora which is beautiful sounding instrument. And I got a recommendation for Yihan Chen who plays the Pipa,

Hek82: Way cool, a traditional Chinese 4-stringed instrument!

Alex: I've always loved that instrument.

Hek82: So amazing how they sound and how they're played- the whole tradition and culture.

Alex: Something I've always had in mind when I would hear those instruments was that I knew what I could play and I'd be able to imagine the music in my mind and what I could do. So, it wasn't just that I felt I wasn't getting any younger but I actually had time open up in my schedule where I could do this. It just turned out to be really fun to realize the vision.

Hek82: Great.

Alex: Now was the time to really explore and study the music. Then get together and work with these musicians and it was one of the most fun and favorite things I've ever done.

Hek82: The percussion is wonderful as well, and I noticed all of the different hand drums that were used.

Alex: Hard to name all of them there were many, but Nittan Mitta is one who is a Tabla player. He's great on the track inspired by India, Passage to Pranayama with vocals by Kiran Ahluwalia. A core percussionist who played throughout named Luke Notary who's American but he's very well-versed in World percussion. Quite a few great percussionists. the Israeli artist is actually a percussionist as well, Gadi Seri.

Hek82: Very cool sound on each and every song. One of my favorites I have to tell you is Django Tango. I'm quite familiar with the music of Django Reinhardt. who is a Romanian born artist who played in France a unique Gypsy Jazz style of his own. My brother is a player and he plays Django Reinhardt.

Alex: Oh, cool!

Hek82: So, for you to have created something new like Django Tango in that style really takes a lot of expertise.

Alex: Thank you, I love that style and I listen to that a lot. That's music I never planned on playing but I put it on purely to listen to, just for the atmosphere.

Hek82: It is nice to listen to.

Alex: And you absorb it. So, I think I did well at that and I wanted to play it like something that you would hear in a French Cafe, played by a Gypsy Jazz guitar player.

Hek82: Absolutely.

Alex: There are some great musicians there from Buenos Aires, the urban part of Argentina which is very different from the rural part.

Hek82: Congratulations to you again for having been able to put all of this together. Some of the artists I had heard of like Rodrigo y Gabriela, so it's cool that you worked with them. Excellent. It's so admirable. I have to say that I also really like the Metal Allegiance album.

Alex: Thanks.

Hek82: I had in mind that Alex Skolnick is really a great producer as well as a great guitar player. It's so cool.

Alex: Thanks. People wouldn't know, my role in Testament I'm grateful for as well as being a part of the history. It's not exactly the same as being the main producer/ songwriter/ decision maker. I try to steer and direct them. The real drivers in Testament are Eric and Chuck. I'm there in the car and trying to give directions but not really knowing which way it'll go.

Hek82: But for having put so much effort into your playing with the band Testament, it really has gone classic.

Alex: My contribution is definitely appreciated which is wonderful. It's also nice to have something which I can say hey- I produced and put together an album. In the case of Metal Allegiance there are three other co-producers/ songwriters- Mark Menghi, Dave Ellefson and Mike Portnoy.

Hek82: Portnoy. When I saw this album come out I just thought, where do these guys find the time? Look what they've come up with!

Alex: It was over a year ago, and it was at the holidays.

Hek82: I know you're all super busy! On the road and everything else... that you were able to do the Metal Allegiance album at all is too cool.

Alex: It was amazing that we were able to do it and I just love how it turned out. I'm super proud of it.

Hek82: It sounds great.

Alex: It's funny because I had just finished Planetary Coalition and I was pretty exhausted. And PC had over two dozen musicians. So, I thought to myself that the next thing I would do would be something very simple. I'll do a duet or something like that... like a jam...

Hek82: Just a get together and jam, ha!

Alex: It's funny. But it was just the right time for me to work on these sort of grand projects. I'm very proud of how they turned out.

Hek82: Neat-o! And 2016 is going to be a fantastic year as well, that I don't doubt. Testament is going on tour with Slayer...

Alex: That's correct!

Hek82: Fabulous again! Two great bands together.

Alex: Metal Allegiance is touring as well...

Hek82: Oh, really!

Alex: Yeah. I'm also doing Jazz rock with Stu Hamm, a great bass player.

Hek82: What about the Skolnick Trio...?

Alex: Skolnick Trio is going to Europe for the first time on a proper tour. We'll be there much of February. A new album is coming out with that mostly live with a couple new songs... what else- I'm going to be on the Axes and Anchors Cruise which is at the end of February...

Hek82: Oh, you are going to be on that! Hopefully a well deserved respite but I know you'll be playing on that as well which is work.

Alex: Yeah, so I go straight from that to the Slayer tour. there's a bunch of summer dates. There's a new record we're going to put out sometime next year, and I'm also doing a camp with a few players.

Hek82: The G4 camp! That looked cool with Satriani and even Steve Vai stopping in...

Alex: Eric Johnson... so, it's nice pretty humbling actually.

Hek82: Awesome!

Alex: The big guys... I'm excited.

Hek82: Well, I'll tell you that it had been very wonderful to speak with you and I'm so happy that I got the opportunity to talk to you personally about some of these albums.

Alex: Thank you, Kate.

Hek82: And to hear what you've been up to lately and are promising for 2016. So, thank you! Anytime you feel like catching up, do contact me.

Alex: Ok, alright!