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Exclusive Interview!

SLASH

20th Anniversary of GN'R's
Appetite for Destruction

THE UNTOLD STORY!



HINDER
"LIPS OF AN ANGEL"



THE ROLLING STONES
"START ME UP"



SLAYER
"POSTMORTEM"



12 SONGS!

LIPS OF AN ANGEL
Hinder

MR. BROWNSTONE
Guns N' Roses

START ME UP
The Rolling Stones

PAIN
Three Days Grace

1979
The Smashing Pumpkins

THE STUMBLE
Freddie King

POSTMORTEM
Slayer

LEVEL
The Raconteurs

THE HOUSE OF THE RISING SUN
The Animals

3 LIBRAS
A Perfect Circle

CAVATINA
John Williams (from *The Deer Hunter*)

ANARCHY IN THE U.K.
Sex Pistols

20
SHOWOFF
LICKS!

DIAL TONE:

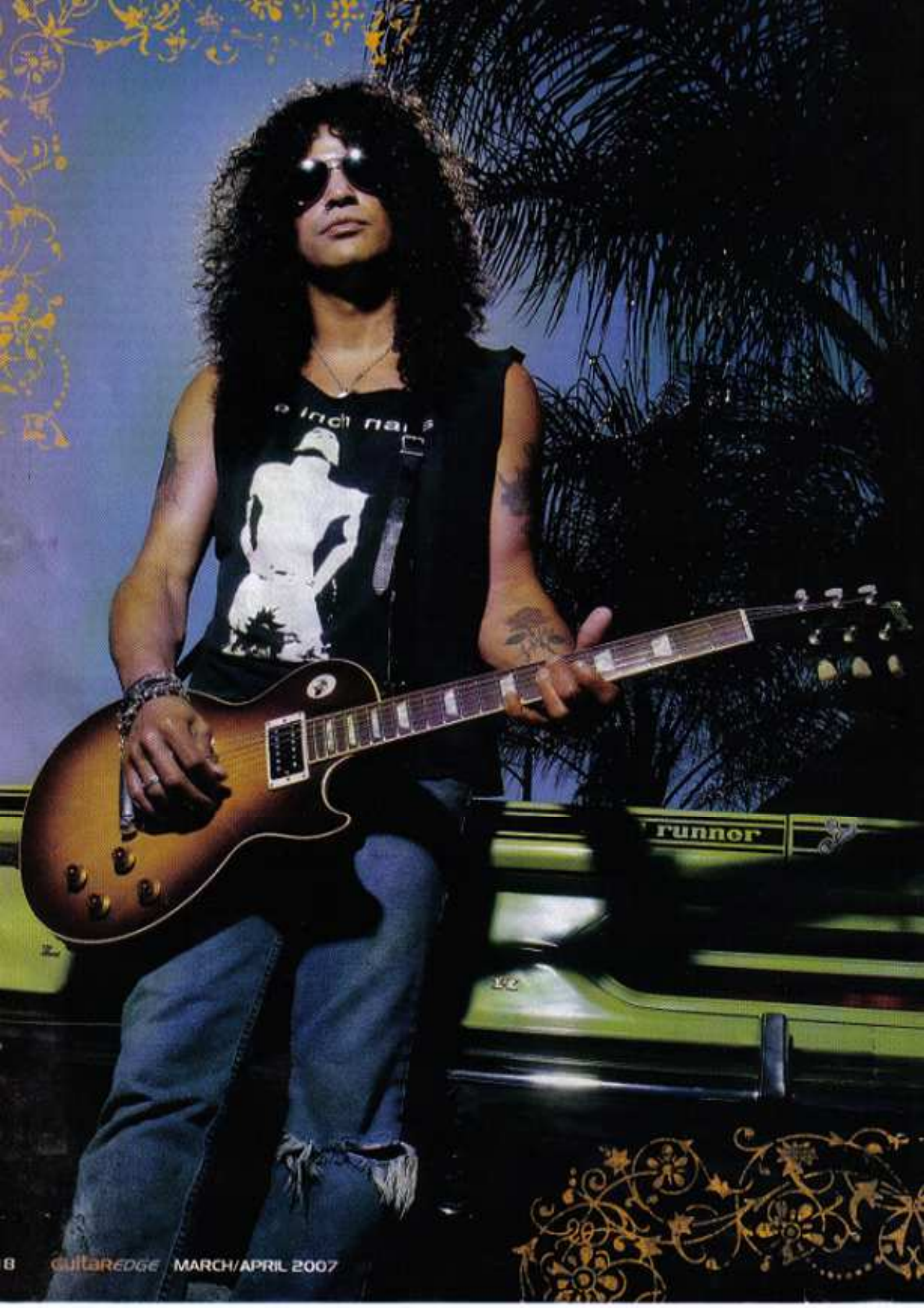
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BACK TO THE JUNGLE

On the album's 20th anniversary, former Guns N' Roses—and current Velvet Revolver—guitarist **Slash** recalls the making of *Appetite for Destruction*, one of rock 'n' roll's finest masterpieces.

By Robert Cherry

It's hard to believe that 2007 marks the 20th anniversary of *Appetite for Destruction*, and still harder to believe that Slash was only 19 when he and the band first started writing the album. That it was recorded at all remains somewhat of a rock 'n' roll miracle.

Formed in 1985, Guns N' Roses—singer W. Axl Rose, guitarists Slash and Izzy Stradlin, bassist Duff "Rose" McKagan, and drummer Steven Adler, as they were listed in the liner notes—lived up to the title of their full-length debut in ways not seen since Aerosmith's drug-hog heyday and the Sex Pistols' rabid-baiting auto-destruction.

The excesses of the band's early days—the drug addiction, the homelessness, the arrests—have been widely and sensationally reported. So have the shuddering after-effects: McKagan's exploding pancreas, the stadium riots, fan deaths, as well as the messy break-up and chronic megalomania that today leave Rose as the only remaining original member of a group bearing the name Guns N' Roses.

But more crucially, those early days are documented on the 12 songs that make up *Appetite*. "We lived in an intense party atmosphere and were the Antichrists of the neighborhood, so there was a lot of social tension that was definitely amusing," says Slash in a chilled-out voice that belies his aggressive yet lyrical guitar style. "Those were some really great times, and it was definitely reflected in the music. It's one of the reasons that particular album means a lot to me. We did the whole thing our way."

If the band's lifestyle (deathstyle?) teetered on the proverbial brink, it was a dedication to the music that pro-

vided order in their lives and momentum to the recording. In the ways that mattered, Slash assumed an almost workman-like approach to the job, albeit it one catered by Jack Daniels and overseen by a talented and sympathetic producer, Mike Clink.

"I was rolling into the studio every day at 12 o'clock, and I would be done at 9 or 10 at night. But after that, I had no idea where I was going to go or how I was going to get around or where I was going to sleep. So every morning, Clink would be like, 'I wonder if Slash is going to make it in today?' It was just the lifestyle I was living. It was constant chaos. But I would show up at noon every day like clockwork, open up a bottle of Jack Daniels, pour it in some coffee, and that's how we did all the guitars."

To celebrate the 20th anniversary of *Appetite*, Slash sat down with *Guitar Edge* to share his memories of the album, song by song. When prompted that "Welcome to the Jungle" opens the set, Slash says, "Is that the first song?" He adds a disclaimer: "I haven't done an interview like this, so bear with me. This is all to my own personal recollection. You can quote me on it, but it doesn't mean it's totally accurate."

But as with his guitar playing on *Appetite*, it's not the accuracy that counts, but rather its spirit. And as always, Slash has spirit to burn—and a good degree of accuracy, as it turns out. To enhance the experience as you read along, I'd recommend you cue up the album, turn up the volume, and press Play. *You're in the jungle, baby...*

"Welcome to the Jungle" is such a classic opening track and a great introduction to the band. Do you remember how it came together?

"Welcome to the Jungle" started out with the main riff of the song, that descending riff, which I played for Axl at my house one afternoon. I have a vivid memory of that. At some point later on, the band was rehearsing and Duff came up with the breakdown section in the middle and I came up with the intro. That part was written with the delay in mind—I think I had just gotten one of those Boss delay units. It was one of those things where the synergy was such that the song came together in one afternoon. I remember the lyrics being especially poignant because they were written about Axl's experience in the streets and his whole summation of moving to Hollywood.

"It's So Easy" is the next song...

"It's So Easy" was a song that basically was written with West Arkeen. West was a really good friend we did a lot of writing with, especially Axl. When that particular song was first written, it had this light, strummy feel because it was written with open chords. It was a lot slower. It was very cool, though—sort of beatnik-sounding. It sounded like it was written on the back of a train.

I turned it into more of a power-choed type of deal. There were a couple of riffs I introduced to it, and it sounded a lot more rocking by the end. That was always my forte—anything that was written on acoustic or an electric played at less than 11, I would always turn it up to 12.

This song, and almost every song on the album, has a great beginning, middle, and end—the elements of good storytelling. Was there a conscious effort to structure the songs that way?

That's another one of the magical things about the band at that time—it always came together in a subconscious way. You might hear something in your head and apply it. We'd just get excited about anything that sounded good—at least from a musical point of view. I think Axl's approach as a singer and a lyricist was a little more methodical.

"My biggest saving grace was probably that I was so committed to guitar playing. No matter how crazy I got, I always had that focus to keep me together."

And what about "Night Train"?

"Night Train" is a funny story. We wrote the chorus when Izzy, Axl, and I were walking around Hollywood drinking Night Train. At the time, it was just sort of a day in the life. Then Izzy and I were hanging out at this little studio apartment we used to live in and we got the basic arrangement down. Then I got the flu or strep throat or something, and Duff, Axl, Izzy, and Steve managed to get more of the arrangement down without me. I remember being completely pissed off because I couldn't be there. I hated missing anything.

The end of that song has one of your great blazing solos.

It's funny, too, because if I were to play that same solo now, it would be way more fluid. But part of the beauty about that solo is that I wasn't technically capable of playing as fast as the song was going, so the solo has a little bit more of a rocky feel to it, which is cool.

And the next song, "Out To Get Me," doesn't let up the pace at all.

It started with that intro lick, which was Izzy's, and I remember hearing it and going, "That's awesome!" The way the song sounds on record is exactly how it sounded in my head from the second I heard that riff. Izzy's stuff was always easy to expand on. He would always have a classic line that you could make into some humongous riff. We just ripped into that lead line.

You're known as a soloist, but you also have a talent for weaving all of these little parts into an arrangement.

We weren't what you'd call a patient lot, so spending a lot of time working on one particular tune wasn't really our forte. But if something hit you right away, the ideas just started coming out. That was definitely the time when the littlest thing would trigger a whole chain reaction of ideas. You'd almost be tripping over yourself coming up with new ideas as the song progressed. That was fun.

Next is "Mr. Brownstone," which was pretty controversial at the time.

I guess that was the most direct heroin-suggesting song on the record. Izzy and I wrote that sitting in his apartment, loaded. And as most junkies do, we started writing lyrics about the perils and the boredom of the whole thing, the sort of redundant process we were immersed in.

Were you actually heavy users at that point?

It was sort of on and off. There was a heavy point in the beginning, and then it was like a whenever-you-can-get-it kind of thing. But, yeah, by that point we were pretty strung out. At least Izzy and I were. There was a period of about a year, after we got our record deal and before we went into the studio, when the band didn't do anything. During that period we were partying pretty hard. We were looking in all different directions for any kind of entertainment. Plus, they gave us a little bit of money, which at the time seemed like a lot.

My biggest saving grace was probably that I was so committed to guitar playing. No matter how crazy I got, I always had that focus to keep me together. It was a huge priority that took precedence over everything. That's what kept me from going down the toilet like most people do when they go to that extreme.

The tone of the album changes a bit with "Paradise City."

We had a manager courting us at that time, and she gave us a ride to San Francisco to play a gig with Jetboy. While heading back in the van, we started writing "Paradise City." It started off with those basic chords and then



Marshall

Marshall



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the melody, and I remember writing the words. Originally it was "Take me down to Paradise City, where the girls are fat and they got big titties" [laughs], which we changed into "where the grass is green and the girls are pretty."

When was the synthesizer part added to the song?

That didn't come in until Axl was putting his vocals down on the record, so I had no idea about that until we got to the mixing stage. All of a sudden there was that part. Being the guitar purists that we were, Izzy and I were like, "What, what, what!" But Axl won that battle, so it stayed on there. All things considered, it was never that big of a deal, but it introduced a certain electronic thing that didn't fit well. Axl had a tendency to do that from time to time—to bring it in on the back end.

And "My Michelle" opens with that chiming intro, which gives it a real "doomy" feel.

Basically, it started with the heavy riff. I remember doing the riff first, then making up the intro to it. I'm really into good intros. The Stones, the Beatles, the Who, and Aerosmith often had great intros, and those were some of my favorite songs of all time—something that started off quiet and crescendoed into this big crash. If I ever came up with a good riff, I'd always have to think of a cool intro to support it.

Next is "Think About You," which always sounded out of place to me. The chorus sounds almost like a New Wave song.

That's a song that Izzy had in its entirety when we first started. I was never a big fan of it because it was just too lightweight. But at the same time, it was one of those songs where Izzy had written the lyrics, so it was sort of like that Aerosmith song "Combination" [on *Rocks*], which Joe Perry wrote. It was Izzy's babbling "Combination" song. I enjoyed recording it, though. I managed to get some ideas down and could walk away feeling satisfied with the way the song sounded.

And what about "Sweet Child O' Mine"? That was such a huge MTV hit.

That song was written after we were signed and there was nothing much to do. Another management team was courting us, and these people went so far as to lease us a house above Griffith Park. We pretty much demolished the place. But I remember Duff, Izzy, and I were sitting in the living room next to the fireplace—we had no TV set—and I was playing the intro riff and they were playing chords behind it. And next thing you know, it was turning into something. I really just thought of it as

"Sweet Child O' Mine" seemed completely sappy. I had no idea it would become the biggest song the band ever did."

a joke, but lo and behold, Axl was upstairs in his bedroom and he heard it and started writing the words.

The next day, we were rehearsing at Burbank Studios—doing a preproduction kind of thing—and Axl wanted us to play what we had been playing the night before. Pretty soon, it shaped itself into a song, and all of a sudden it took on this serious kind of tone. It was really hard for me to accept, but that song became Axl's favorite. I think a lot of it had to do with the lyrics. They had a serious, personal side to them.

Was there some contention in the band about playing a ballad?

I don't think anyone in the band had as much of a problem with it as I did, because I was just such the hard-rock guy. Some ballads I could deal with, as long as they were bluesy. But "Sweet Child O' Mine" seemed completely sappy. Not so much from a lyrical point of view, but that whole intro riff. I like playing the solo section, but I would've written that song off as history if anyone else had complained about it. I had no idea it would become the biggest song the band ever did.

And "You're Crazy"?

"You're Crazy" was written around the same time as "Mr. Brownstone." It was originally a slow acoustic song that we wrote while sitting in the living room one night. Then Axl, Izzy, Duff, and I went down to a rehearsal studio that we were working out of and, of course, turned everything up to 12. All

of a sudden, it took on this real break-neck speed. Axl actually enjoyed making the adjustment.

"Anything Goes" is quite different. It has a talk box part on it.

"Anything Goes" is one of the older songs on record. If you look at the credits, there are a lot of writers listed for this one because that song was around before Axl and I first hooked up. By the time Guns N' Roses got to it, we'd changed the chorus and the verses around, and Axl rewrote the lyrics.

When I recorded the solo on it, I bounced back and forth between the talk box and the electric guitar. If you listen to it, the talk box dips in EQ when it switches over. I didn't know any better because I didn't have one to use live. I remember when we were mixing it, Izzy asked, "Did you mean to do that?" I was like, "Just shut up."

And, finally, "Rocket Queen." You play some nice slide on this one.

That was a riff I had when Duff and I first hooked up. We had a band together with Steven way before Guns started. We had that riff, and at some point I brought it back into the band. The cho-

rus was something Axl had been working on that had nothing to do with the rest of the song, but we somehow managed to incorporate it.

It was a pretty interesting operation because the chorus was in a completely different key. I remember when we played it live I would have my roadie bring me the slide, but by the time that song came up in the set, he'd be drunk. And by the time he got it on my finger, the solo section would be over [laughs]. It was very Spinal Tap.

When *Appetite* was finished, did you have any idea the album would become such a classic?

We had no idea it was going to be such an iconic record. Who would've thought? We had no idea that was going to happen, even a year after it was released when we were still just an opening band. We didn't really see the developing onslaught of fans and how important a statement that record was.

When I was a kid, there were certain bands and certain records that were the most important background music of my life. And the fact that this record turned into that for so many people, I could never ask for anything more.

"As far as the band ever getting back together, it's so far-fetched. I think the more time that passes, the less likely it will happen—and it was pretty unlikely five years ago."

Regardless if the band couldn't keep it together, that one thing alone was totally worth it.

And this wouldn't be an interview about *Appetite* without the obligatory question: Can you see the original line-up ever getting back together?

There's no real easy, positive answer for all of it. There's been a lot of negative stuff bandied around over the last ten years, but I'm way past saying anything negative. As far as the band ever getting back together, it's so far-fetched. I think Izzy's gone and jammed with them a couple of times, but I don't think anyone has any interest.

I've obviously moved on and have a lot to do with Velvet Revolver, so that's where my head is. Obviously it's not an idea that I'm entertaining in any way, shape, or form at this point. I think the more time that passes, the less likely it will happen—and it was pretty unlikely five years ago.

What can you tell us about the new Velvet Revolver disc?

When we did the first one, it was great because we all came together and just blew that one out and had a great time doing it. Now, everyone's individual talents are coming to the forefront and it's becoming one of those records where, from the songwriting point of view, everyone's really shining. We didn't take a lot of time on the first one—that was a very spontaneous record. So this one has been a little more like everyone's best effort. **GE**



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