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"I Grew Up on Drugs, Parties, Alcohol and Women."

sings Guns N' Roses axeman Slash. Claiming to have been on the read since he was 12, his lifestyle provided inspiration for his debut solo album, 'It's Five O'Clock Somewhere'. Martin Carlsson travels to Los Angeles to meet with Slash, and finds out about his solo venture and his past, present and future with Guns N' Roses.

At what point did you decide to go ahead with your solo project, Slash's Snakespit?

"Actually, I've always been saying that I would never do it. But the back of my mind knew that I was contradicting myself. I knew I'd end up doing it. The band was off the road for a while, and everybody just kind of split up after being on the road for two and a half years. Everybody sort of did their own thing."

"I built a studio called Snakespit in my house and started writing songs. The material that I wrote, like 17 songs or something, Matt played drums on and I played the arrangements and we recorded it. After all that was set and done I was like, 'Wow, what will I do with this stuff?' We had so much fun doing it that I wanted to keep the momentum going and didn't want to sit around. This was a few months ago, and we recorded it really quick."

"Mick got Mike ten from Alice in Chains to play bass. I auditioned all these singers and found Eric Dover, who was in the beginning, and I already had Matt and Gilby had just been kicked out of Guns N' Roses but was still with me. I didn't kick him out, anyway."

"We had so much fun making the record and we did it so quickly. It was just so much back to the old ways that I'm used to, as opposed to where Guns is so big now that you just can't fucking do things like that any more."

"Once the record was finished, and it came out really good, I thought, 'I might as well tour on it'. 'cause Guns isn't doing anything.' I'm gonna start touring in March and we're gonna do fucking clubs, man."

Were you excited, or possibly worried, by the prospect of doing your own thing?

"I mean, you have moments of anxiety where you wonder if you can pull it off not having your regular guys behind you. But I'm such a driven type of person that I handle all the business, so I knew what I'm doing, what is gonna happen and how it's gonna go."

"We're musicians suffering from LSD, and I don't tell you what LSD is (Lilith, Sex and Death, perhaps?). We're just the jocks, sort of the underdogs. We're putting it out and we're gonna jam without taking it too seriously. It's not going to be the next Guns N' Roses or the next big fucking thing. We wanted to get away from the pressure of having to live up to that every day. I was just coming down the street and a fucking school bus goes by. All the kids just want, 'Slash! I just wanna go out and fucking play, and not to worry about such major topics as Guns does. I can't break it, because Guns is a big band and it goes with the territory. It's inevitable that when you get to that point you have to deal with everything that goes along with it."

"It's not like in the old days, when you pack up the van, throw the shit in the back and drive to the Whisky (a club in Los Angeles), ha, ha. That's what we wanna do."

Do you really think that's realistic? No matter how you look at it, you're still Slash from Guns N' Roses. You can't put the clock back."

"I'm trying to look at it differently. We get in the tour bus, and we have one truck for the equipment, so that's obviously different. We drive up to the gig, do soundcheck, and we're gonna stay in those halfway house-hotels. If people get nasty into it and it becomes a little bit chaotic, then whatever. Still, the club environment is not like driving up to a stadium with 200 fucking kids chasing your time, you know, it's a little bit different and it should be more relaxed. I imagine. I really don't know what to predict."

You started off the album with a very bluesy and heavy song, 'Neither Can I'. What does blues mean to you?

"Man, that is what I was raised on. See, people always ask people about their influences. As far back as I can possibly remember, with my parents being from the old school of rock'n'roll and me being surrounded by the music business ever since I was little, I grew up on all sorts of different kinds of music. But as far as guitar playing is concerned, I naturally went in blues and rock direction.

When I was younger I used to read interviews with guitar players. I really dug, and seeing where their heads were at and where they were coming from. But when you're actually a musician, you realise that, 'I don't know, I've always liked sort of R&B rock, black-influenced rock stuff, and the black influence goes back to the blues, as far as I'm concerned. Ask any English musician and he'll tell you the same."

I feel that in many ways your album 'It's Five O'Clock Somewhere' sounds like Guns N' Roses. Would you agree with that?

"Listening to my album, you can hear which songs I was heavily involved in on the records we've done. As far as Guns is concerned, the heavy stuff is the part that I got into. If you take that aspect of Guns aside,
Keep busy, and I'm married now, and that's a responsibility that keeps me on an even keel. I built a studio in the house, and that way my brain is doing something, as opposed to some big tit slut coming over, giving me some smack, and going down the tubes.

I have to defend the band. You can talk about Axl all you want, I know the situation there. But when you say Guns N' Roses it's a whole, and you're talking about me and the guys who make the fucking tour happen. We really did our best to keep it together. So I just lost his face and we worked it out.

I love James (Hetfield, James Hetfield). I love Axl (Rose). I don't know, I just don't see them talking about them. It was always them talking about themselves. And if there was a problem with me, fine. But there wasn't. It was only four situations that were Axl-related. They were taken out of the whole band situation because the guy could have said Axl. Everyone knows who Axl is. Don't say Guns, because that's me. Anyway, we hung out the other night and I played it to a few other people. It's been very well received by people who I know would tell me if it sucked.

"Some of the stuff you're mentioning, I didn't think of Alice in Chains. Is it because of Mike Inez?"

Not at all, Axl, just that there's depression, Alice in Chains feel it, and Eric's meaning vocals add to it as well. It's been taken. Some that's me and him wrote together. All songs were written musically before the vocals were added, which is a really backwards way to do it. I've got tapes at home, we call it a bag of shame, and it's full of cassettes with all the vocals singing the same songs so how interestingly different every song sounds with a different singer. Eric was the guy that I liked. I tried cutting out guys from bands you know (former Quebrady singer Spike), the legendary Michael Monroe from Hanoi Rocks, who is currently in Demolition 23; ex-Little Caesar vocals, Ron Capone (but it just wasn't right). This guy Eric came up and his voice was awesome! Also, at that time I was like, 'I don't have time to spend the rest of my looking for the next Axl or the next lead singer.' I just wanted something where we all get together, have a good time and the thing is there. 'Lower' is what it is, and it's really not influenced by anyone. It's one of my favourite songs.

Is 'Lower' as 'down' as the lyrics suggest? It's actually about (gona actress) Savannah and Kurt Cobain, or at least I'm fucking influenced by them. When we got into writing the lyrics that night, those were the two people that were in my head, because they both disappeared so abruptly (you know, he, ha. Not that, that's funny). I mean, Savannah used to be a part of my life, I was a little depressed about it, and there was a lot of public stuff going on that had my name on it. I was like, 'Fuck, what is she gonna shoot herself for?'

How did that affect you?

"Anybody shooting themselves is gonna affect you. It's not so much the press and stuff as, you know, there's always a possibility of stopping something like that from happening."

Neither Can I also appears to be about someone you knew who committed suicide.

"'Lower' and 'Neither Can I' were written at different dates, but have been influenced by the same staff that's happened. I'm not that lensia guy who sits there watching the whole situation, and then makes statements about politics and what's going on in society. But I think 'Neither Can I' went into this thing with suicide. Around that time, people were off shooting themselves. And you were thinking, 'What is O.J.? (Simhion Snibal)? A completely overtaken situation with an ex-football player. They should put him away and get it over with. He's guilty, I'm positive.

What were the lyrics, the ghost, I guess we were in that dark mood without even discussing it. There was a lot of teenage suicides, and then obviously there was the people who we know who recently shot themselves. It goes back to the post 90s. Like, it's not gotten out of hospital for fucking OD'ing or being in rehab, and still going down the drain. They take all kinds of medicinal, marijuana, acid, heroin and coke, and put it in the trunk, and take off to Las Vegas. What happens is they stay at a hotel where there's a policeman's convention, and they're hallucinating.

"I designed this pinball machine for Guns, and they said, 'Why don't you write a pinball song?' So I took the concept of looking at a pinball machine through a ball's point of view — which is up the ramp, around the bunks and through the hole. I called it The Ball", but it's about life in general, and if you were to drop everything and fucking leave your wife and kids and fucking going for it. So it's a cross between a Hunter S. Thompson nothing of risking it all and going off to the sunset, and looking at life through the eyes of a pinball. The old cliche sounds corny, but in order to survive in this business you have to do that — drop it all.

I hate to sound repetitive, but isn't 'Soma City Ward' yet another one of those depressive songs about a guy going crazy on drugs? "Yeah, ha, ha! You know what's some. Soma is a drug they give you if you're in a psychiatric ward, and it's expected to calm you down so you're easy to work with. In other words, it makes you a vegetable mentally. That's a totally fantastic song, one of those off-the-wall subjects. We do have a lot of songs about this subject, yeah.

"I mean, that's basically where we come from. We spent most of our time hanging out in the park with acoustic guitars under the trees, and there's a sunset and naked girls running around, that's something we've written about too. Unfortunately, I haven't seen that recently. I've seen it in clubs, but there were no tans, no grass and no sunset, ha!"

What are you describing now sounds just like that party-all-night-long-til-you-deep number, 'Don't Feel'.

"Yeah, 'Don't Feel' is about a party. That's basically the antithesis of what we were just talking about. It takes place somewhere house though, and not in the club."

Is this how life as a rock star is? It really is like the myth kids read about?

"It can be. I grew up in drug dealer, partying and woman. And I saw, I'm not in particular friends who were really cool. I happened to be one of those kids that was given freedom. I want in particular..."
Do you find it hard to sit at home relating and doing nothing? 
I’ll stay busy. When I’m at home, I think about what I’m gonna do. I really have no interest in just settling down.

I keep married, and that’s an important responsibility that keeps me on an even keel. I have to be in the house most of the time because my brain is doing something, as opposed to sitting around. The stress of that is a little bit of smoke and drinking half a gallon of vodka, because I have nothing else to do. I’ll keep myself busy.

If you wanna call me a dunce, I know of people who are doing a lot worse, but I think the key is to keep yourself occupied and thinking about something else.

What is your formula that helps you cope with the attention? 
I don’t talk to you. I just sit there and think about the things that I’m doing. My brain is doing something, as opposed to sitting around. The stress of that is a little bit of smoke and drinking half a gallon of vodka, because I have nothing else to do. I’ll keep myself busy.

If you wanna call me a dunce, I know of people who are doing a lot worse, but I think the key is to keep yourself occupied and thinking about something else.

Atax wants to do a lot of ballads and stuff, and I want to do rock stuff. I don’t care about the current musical climate or what is commercially viable. That’s why my record sounds the way it does. I’m just a street-level guy, and I live on the beach in Malibu. I’m not going to conform to any of that shit either.

What about Duff re-forming his old punk band, Ten Minute Warning?
“Duff knew he was going to Seattle a white guy and played around with this old bunch of his, but it was nothing serious. Right now, he’s just riding the county riding his bike, his bike, he’s playing guitar, trying to figure out how to stay busy and keep away from all the attention.”

Is there something that needs to be said off, all wants Guitars to do a lot of ballads and stuff, and I want to do rock stuff. I don’t care about the current musical climate or what is commercially viable. That’s why my record sounds the way it does. I’m just a street-level guy, and I live on the beach in Malibu. I’m not going to conform to any of that shit either.

In a press statement a few months ago, you once again used the ‘anti against the world’ tagline, promising to keep that way for all those years in the limelight.
“Nah...I should really have said that because of the way it sounds in print. It’s more of a case of me, Tom (Maher, manager) and the rest of the artists that have to deal with daily and weekly. It’s not against the world in general. Not conform to some bullshit standard and someone who approaches you and tries to make your rules for you. It’s basically against the powers that be.”

I know you don’t want to talk about everything that’s been happening to you, but there’s a lot of people who want to know what’s really happening.
“None of the rumors have been accurate, because no one has poked with anything. It’s been a little bit of a circus.”

What’s it like to be famous?
“I don’t know...Yeah, I’m very normal and very sensitive. Not sensitive in a way of being overly self-conscious and all that crap, but I care about what other people that I deal with feel. I think I went through a period when I was new to the world, and I was really new, but that was just a phase. But as soon as I started playing guitar and singing all over on that, I’m just more or less...No. I still have my bad days, but I can’t let it get to me. I don’t want to let it get to other people without it being necessary. I like to avoid conflict as much as possible, and I can’t wait for any reason why someone should treat anybody rudely unless necessary. I am a singer from another planet, and I have to learn to communicate with other people who live in my world. I am a little bit of a different person altogether, and I don’t go looking for trouble.”

“Not necessarily. The only thing I know about this is that it’s been a little bit of a circus.”

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