

"I thought you were the landlord, man," says Slash, opening the door.

In the time it takes to shake hands, the coil-headed cartoon character becomes a regular human being—a likeable, down-to-earth one at that. His cramped two-room pad is cozily trashed. "I had a couple of chicks up here last night," he apologizes with a sheepish grin. A Fender combo amp, resting atop the guitarist's traveling stereo system, hisses in one corner, opposite a TV set which mutely beams an episode of *The Frugal Gourmet*. Slash's trademark top hat rests on a pile of debris on the kitchen counter. A bottle of Absolut sits on a cluttered table. (It is sealed, I note. This will be a Heineken interview.)

The guitarist's domestic disorder parallels the topsy-turvey doings of his band over the past four years. Guns N' Roses have struggled with drugs, maturity, success, personnel changes and countless highly publicized scandals, rumbles and riots. The most recent upset has been the departure of rhythm guitarist Izzy Stradlin'. He's being replaced on the road by Gilby Clarke, a crony of G N' R's from their helter-skelter early years in Hollywood.

Yet for all the upheaval they have emerged triumphant with two new albums, *Use Your Illusion 1* and 2. Simultaneously released, the discs promptly raced one another to the top of the charts.

Illusion is a sprawling, naively ambitious project (as much of rock and roll once was) which somehow hangs together—thanks, in large part, to Slash's stun-gun axe work. Despite powerful, manic playing for his own band and outsiders like Iggy Pop, Lenny Kravitz and, most recently, Michael Jackson, he remains a sadly underrated guitarist. Surprisingly, Slash is often his own biggest detractor:

"I'm not a technical musician at all. I'm not that great a right-hand picker, as far as speed picking and all that heavy metal shit goes." He laughs self-consciously. "It's all about emotion to me. I can sit on one note forever. I'm just trying to express myself as well as I can within the context of a song, and I'm really not concerned with breaking new ground or anything."

While emotion and spontaneity rank



high with Slash, he seems to abhor permanence of any sort. He has a perfectly fine house of his own—a permanent house—just a few miles away from his Burbank digs. So why is he holed up in this crash pad? Perhaps, since Guns N' Roses are on a break in their tour, he wants to maintain the discipline of living in hotel rooms?

"Discipline? Me?!" he spreads his arms incredulously, grinning like Alfred E. Newman. No, Slash's natural state seems to be one of perpetual transition; he's always in the middle of doing several things at once. For example, he recently took advantage of the GN'R hiatus to slip off to Africa and photograph wildlife—an obsession of his along with guitars, cars, girls and all the more obvious amenities of life in rock's elite lane. Slash's embrace of chaos is very much in keeping with the Guns N' Roses experience. As he outlines GN'R's early history, it soon becomes apparent that things have always been chaotic for these guys...

SLASH: Guns N' Roses began with Road Crew, a band that I started with Duff [McKagan, GN'R bassist] and Steven Adler [ex-GN'R drummer]. It was a killer group, but we just couldn't find a singer. Eventually, I met Axl [Rose, GN'R singer] and Izzy, who were in a band together. Axl and I formed a band called Hollywood Rose. We played together for a while, had a falling out and then broke up. Izzy and Axl reunited and joined L.A. Guns, which turned into Guns N' Roses-L.A. Guns plus Hollywood Roses. Eventually, Duff drifted into Guns N' Roses, too. But things weren't working out for Axl and Tracii [Guns]. So Axl and I patched up our past differences and I became part of Guns N' Roses.

GUITAR WORLD: Do you feel that you've grown as a musician as a result of the *Illusion* albums?

SLASH: I think the whole band grew. Aside from all the hype and bullshit that surrounds us, the individuals in the band are really conscientious about music and what

we're doing. We never intended to be some SLASH: Yeah. Well, it's a contemporaryhuge popular circus; playing music has always come first. So I think we've grown a hell of a lot. We've gone through some really traumatic experiences—a tremendous amount of stuff-but on the positive side, all the emotion comes out in the

GW: What sort of traumatic experiences are you talking about?

SLASH: Oh, just stuff. Women, drugs, and Marshalls breaking down.

GW: Life in general?

SLASH: In my shoes, that's basically it. GW: On the Illusion albums, Izzy Stradlin' is credited with rhythm guitar while you're credited with lead and rhythm. How does that break down on any given track?

SLASH: It's simple. Izzy, even on the songs he wrote, put on a very bare-bones guitar part—just basic chords. And sometimes, very rarely, a single-note melody. He has one guitar solo on Illusion I-at the beginning of "Back Off Bitch."

GW: You also solo on "Back Off Bitch." SLASH: Yeah, I play the main solo, I used to play this high-end trill thing for the first solo, but I could never play it consistently. So I just took it off altogether and let Izzy put a lead on, which is really a lot cooler.

"contemporary-metal" style solos on the new albums.

metal style song. [laughs] I mean, it's so generic in that way. It's like E, D, D flat, D—that kind of thing.

GW: Those fast arpeggios in there almost sound like you're tapping them.

SLASH: I'm just picking them: I can't tan to save my life. I've never even seriously tried, though I do it as a joke sometimes. I haven't messed much with tapping because I've always thought of it as being Eddie Van Halen's personal statement, and it was so shitty to see everybody rip it off. Eddie's as great as he ever was right now, but he's being overshadowed by all his imitators.

The only thing I do along those lines is, if I'm playing a blues lick down on the fifth and third frets, instead of using a pick, I'll tap the same riff on the 15th and 17th frets to bring the whole thing up an octave. But I don't think I've ever recorded that—and I don't do it live because I don't want to be seen with my right hand on the neck. It's just such a clichè.

GW: When did you begin working on the keep the guitar in time with them. Illusion albums?

SLASH: Well the material basically spans the band's entire career. Some of it was actually written before Axl, Izzy and I met. Some of the material came from old ideas GW: Your solo on that tune is one of the few that we really liked, but never finished.

GW: When you started the album, was Steven Adler still on drums?

SLASH: Yes, that was the summer before last [1989], although those sessions didn't last long, mainly because of Steven. See, he never quite made it to that growing-up period that the rest of us went through. It was always just a big game for him—fun all the time. That's a rock and roll attitude, which I've always appreciated, but Steven was just out there [on drugs], and I had just come back from that. So he couldn't lie to me about it. But he still kept trying to lie.

I didn't want to go into the studio because his playing was so far off. He'll argue with me even now and say, "I played great." But he didn't—he couldn't. The guy was nodding out all over the place. That went on for a couple of months, and then I cancelled the studio time because it was a waste of money. So the only song on the album that Steven played on is "Civil War." He thought he was great, but we had to edit the drum track like mad just so we could play along with it. Even then, I had to remember where the drum mistakes were to

You know, [Aerosmith's] Steve Tyler asked me the dumbest question one time: "Is there going to be another 'Welcome To The Jungle' on the new album?" Of all people to ask me something like that! Why should we want to do it again? But Steven

[Adler] would have been happy just to do the same thing again on the new album. He wouldn't have made it through the record. And I don't mean to knock him. I'm just pissed off at him. I haven't said anything in public about it so far, though he's slandered us like crazy and is trying to sue us about stuff that's total bullshit. But I know for a fact that Steven's scared to death of me. Because I've known Steven since I was 13, and I know him too well. So I'm like, "Steven, what do you think you're doing?" But he's not even doing it; somebody else is pressing his buttons.

GW: How did you find your new drummer, Matt Sorum?

SLASH: We didn't know what to do at first. Obviously, we couldn't simply put an ad in the paper. We wanted someone who would fit in as a person and who could play, and we knew we didn't want to hire some session guy. Then I went to a Cult show on a whim, and Matt kicked ass. So we hired him. [sheepishly]....Sort of stole him from the Cult. Let's just say we made him an offer. I was desperate! And Matt fit in within the first five minutes. No weird attitude. No rock star trips. None of that crap.

So we worked for a month on 30 songs and then went in the studio—I guess it was the summer of last year—and recorded basic tracks. We ran through 30 songs in 30 days. Then I worked on guitar parts and overdubs for five weeks. I played a lot of guitar on this record, though five weeks isn't bad for 30 songs. Axl went in and did vocals, then in the middle of the sessions we went out on the road. From that point, Illusion was thrown all over the place; we recorded the album in like ten different studios or something.

GW: Did hitting the road break your stride? SLASH: It broke the record company's stride! It didn't break ours. We were happy. They kept saying, "When are we gonna see that record, guys?" Our attitude was, "We don't know. When it's done, it's done." GW: You grew up in Hollywood, around the music business. Does that help you deal with the whole rock stardom thing?

SLASH: It helped me to get off drugs. I had already seen the patterns and I've never met an addict that was able to sustain any kind of creative or financial success; they either die or lose everything. Watching the people I grew up around subconsciously taught me stuff I didn't even know I knew. I think I'm lucky because I went through the drug trip early in life, as opposed to having it build up and hit me when I was 30. But I have to admit, I never really thought about drugs until I got to a point when I just realized that things were getting a little too hectic. I'm 26 now: it's been two years and I haven't had a problem with it. I'm no angel, but I'm not slamming and all that stuff.

And that's one of the reasons that Izzy,

even though he's completely clean, has to be away from any sort of drug activity. He doesn't know how to deal with it. Whereas with me, people can do whatever they want and I don't give a shit. I'm comfortable being on the same planet with them.

GW: A lot of recovering addicts have to isolate themselves completely.

SLASH: Yeah I know, and I can't be around that. I hate that. Those people are so screwed up-they're clean but they're unhappy. It's like, "So-and-so was more pleasant to hang around when he was throwing up all over the place. Now I can't deal with him at all."

GW: Is Izzy's recovery the reason he ostracized himself from the band?

SLASH: That's probably one of the factors in his unhappiness. He was definitely struggling to keep himself clean. That's why he traveled separately from us and so on. But basically, we just came to the conclusion that Izzy wasn't putting in the time we thought was necessary for the good of the band. It had been building up for a long time. And finally Izzy came out in the open with me and Axl and said he didn't want to deal with the work that was involved. So we decided to work with someone else.

GW: How did you find Izzy's replacement, Gilby Clarke?

SLASH: When we decided to look for a new guitarist, I put the word out as discreetly as possible. A couple of my friends recommended Gilby-he's a guy that Axl and I sort of knew from Guns N' Roses' early days. He was in another band at the time, but we had lost track of him. Axl and I auditioned 17 guitarists or so, and he's the one who fit in the best. He had to learn about 30 songs in two weeks in order to be ready for the tour on time, and he's done a great job. We're really happy.

GW: Rumor has it that Dave Navarro, of Jane's Addiction, was also considered for the position.

SLASH: He didn't work out. He's got a little too much going on right now with his own personal situation.

GW: Is Gilby now a permanent, recording member of Guns N' Roses, or is he just filling in for the tour?

SLASH: Chemistry between musicians is something that takes a while to develop. So right now we're just touring. We don't have any plans for recording or writing togeth-

GW: Has Izzy left the band for good?

SLASH: That's something I have no idea about-how this is going to affect Izzy and his attitude. He may be happy not doing this anymore. Or he might really want to come back and make the effort that he wasn't making before.

I just can't understand how he could let something like this just fall apart. I mean the guy didn't want to tour or do videos; he

hardly wanted to record. I just never thought he was one of those guys that this would happen with. It's a lot different than the Steve Adler situation. So I don't know what's going to happen a year from now: whether we'll be working with Gilby, Izzy or somebody else altogether. A lot of things are up in the air right now. But we've got a heavy duty tour going on, and we've got a killer band to do it.

GW: Guns N' Roses now has a full-time keyboardist, Dizzy Reed. Has that altered the way you orchestrate your guitar parts? SLASH: I had to get used to the idea. At first I thought, "We don't need no stinking keyboards!", and I really gave Dizzy a hard time. He was the new guy, and I would be like, "You screwed up there. Just don't play." Now he's really part of the band and I love him to death. But he probably remembers how bad it was at first.

But getting back to your question, keyboards can be difficult to deal with, especially when mixing. It's difficult to balance them with guitars without sacrificing at least one instrument's dynamics. So I had to make sure I didn't lose the guitars' dynamics. I also spent a lot of time mastering the album, to ensure that certain guitar frequencies weren't lost. Now, I think the keyboards are great, especially live. They give us many more expressive options.

GW: In contrast to Appetite For Destruction, there are a lot of different styles on the new albums. Did that lead you into using a lot of different guitars?

SLASH: Yeah. I played about 20 guitars. I have my main guitar, a handmade [replica] Les Paul. But I also use Strats, and I use Travis Beans for slide, which I picked up from [Aerosmith guitarist] Joe Perry. I saw him play once, and he sounded cool-and the guitar didn't look too funky. Looking cool is important with guitars.

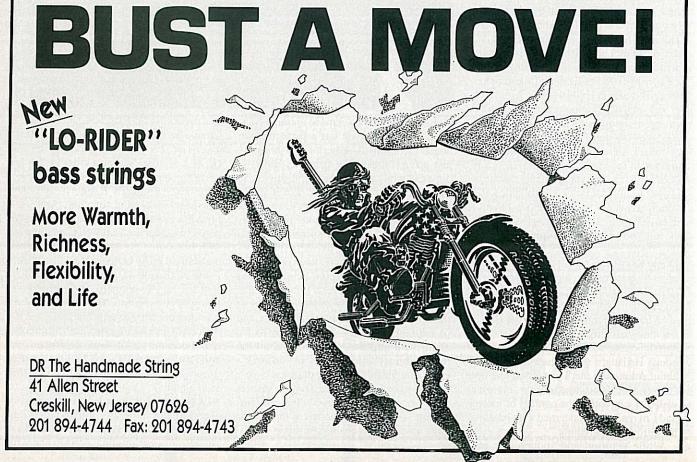
I also use a Dobro for slide. I'm not a good slide player, to be honest. What I try to do is go for an unusual tone-just thick chords— but the licks are pretty generic, because I don't know much about slide playing and I don't sit around and practice it. I can't even begin to play slide on my Les Pauls because their actions are too low.

GW: Your Travis Bean only has five strings. Which string do you remove? And how is the guitar tuned?

SLASH: I remove the low E, and it's tuned to a variation of open G; G, D, G, B, G, But the Dobro was in regular tuning for (Illusion's) "You Ain't The First."

GW: How many guitars do you own in all? SLASH: About 45. I bought everything I used on the new album-and, let me tell you, it was a very expensive record. [laughs] For example, I used a Music Man-the model used by Keith Richardsfor real light touches on certain songs.

continued on page 89



They're these little Strat things with interchangeable pickups. They're more airy than Strats. I also used Guild acoustic guitars: a 12-string and a big dreadnought. I used a banjo on "Breakdown." I don't know anything about banjos, so I just tuned it like a guitar. I bought a Gibson Explorer and a Gibson Flying V—the most expensive guitars I've ever bought.

GW: Did you get real vintage ones?

SLASH: Yeah, both of them are '58s. I didn't use the Explorer on the record because I got it afterwards. But I used the V for "Knockin' On Heaven's Door." For certain things it has a killer sound.

GW: Six-string basses pop up on quite a few songs.

SLASH: Do you hear them? They're mixed in just to make certain songs more heavy. I also used one on *Appetite*; "Welcome To The Jungle'"s got one. You can hear this "brriinnng" in the chords when it goes to the slow parts; that's the six-string bass. I used to rent them, but I finally bought one. Unfortunately, they're very inconsistent, those Fender....

GW: Fender Bass IV's? Like a Jaguar-style body?

SLASH: Exactly. Tobacco sunburst or whatever. They're very inconsistent. The intonation is way out and they're just a pain in the ass. But I finally found one that's usable, so I bought it.

GW: But your main squeeze, of course, is the Gibson Les Paul. Do you generally prefer Standards, Customs or what?

slash: Standards. I have a '58 and a couple of '63 Customs, which look great. One of them's got the three pickups. But they're [the Customs] too thin-sounding for me. So everything I use, besides the goldtops, are Standards. I also have two handmade Les Paul copies, one of which is my main guitar—the one with the zebra pickups. The guy who made it is dead now. My other handmade Les Paul copy was done by another guy who also passed away. So I can't contact these guys to get another guitar. I got a Ouija board, but it didn't work. Gw: Why a Gibson replica?

SLASH: They're better than the ones made by Gibson. Sorry—I love Gibson dearly. They really try hard to give me guitars, but they just don't sound right. They're still trying to build me one. So mainly I use old Gibsons that I bought. I've spent something like \$400,000 on guitars in my career. And Gibson's only given me three guitars that I use live. Two of them are the first two guitars they ever gave me, while the third's a goldtop I got more recently. But even these I won't use in the studio-they're just not good enough. I'm real particular about tone. I can hit one chord, and if it doesn't have the right combination of warmth and brightness I just can't use the guitar. If the bot-



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SLASH

tom is too low or the high is too high, it'll just bug me the whole time.

GW: I've also seen you play a B.C. Rich on

SLASH: My first really good guitar was a B.C. Rich Mockingbird. But after the band got signed, we got strung out and I hocked it. Never got it back. But a while ago I bought another one from this guy I met at the Cathouse [an L.A. club] one night, I used it in the video for "You Could Be Mine." B.C. Rich saw the video and were ecstatic. They called up and I said, "If I could get one without the tremolo bar..." 'Cause that's the only problem with the one I have. The Floyd messes up the sound and the sustain. Sustain for days is my big thing. GW: One of your signature riffs—the main one in "Sweet Child O' Mine"-has incredible sustain. Was there any trick to that? SLASH: No. I still do it live, and it sounds

pretty much the same. Les Pauls are great for sustain. I can find the right spot on stage, hold the G string in a certain position, and sustain it for ten minutes. That's all that's happening on "Sweet Child."

GW: What can you recall about coming up with that riff?

SLASH: It was a joke. We were living in this house that had electricity, a couch and nothing else. The record company had just signed us and were on our backs. There was a lot of shit going on. We were hanging out one night and I started playing that riff. And the next thing you know, Izzy made up some chords behind it and Axl went off on it. I used to hate playing the sucker.

GW: What kind of pickups do you like in your Les Pauls?

SLASH: Everything has Seymour Duncan Alnico II's, except for the old Les Pauls with the PAF's in them; I leave those the way they are. But Alnico II's go right into anything else. The way I discovered those pickups was kind of a fluke. They came in that Les Paul copy I was talking about.

GW: It's fairly well known that you re-cut

all your guitars after you do basics, because you can't stand the sound of headphones. SLASH: I can't use headphones. It's very rare that I keep anything off the basic tracks. The basic tracks were especially a joke on Appetite; I was just there for the general feel for the rest of the guys. I got loaded drunk and played the basics with headphones on. Some good stuff that came out of it, but I decided to scrap it all and go in and just blast out the monitors and overdub everything. The only time I kept anything through headphones was on a punk EP we did that's going to come out eventually, which we mostly cut live in the studio. But on *Illusion*, I kept maybe one solo I did with headphones; they just sound so

doesn't sound right. I don't use any effects, but I do use [room] ambience. If I'm playing at home, I turn the speakers a certain way. I can't play directly in front of a cabinet. So headphones are just altogether

GW: Are your amps mainly Marshalls?

SLASH: Yeah, I have one head and one cabinet. That's all I use in the studio. And I think I used a Mesa/Boogie for certain lead lines. Live, I use two Marshall stacks-one for clean sounds and one for dirty sounds. My guitar technician [Adam Day] switches between them for me because I can't use a foot pedal. I never know where I'm going to be, and I used to kick them off the stage. It's hard enough for me to use a wah-wah pedal. I have to have four of them on stage. **GW**: What kind of wah-wahs do you use?

SLASH: They're custom-made by EMB Audio. [Slash uses four pedals that feed a central module via cables with XLR connectors-GW Ed.] They have a sound all their own. In the studio, if I want that real Crybaby wah sound I'll just use a Crybaby. **GW**: What kind of strings do you use?

SLASH: Ernie Ball .010's. As far as picks....I know there's one here somewhere. [Rummages through litter on coffee table] I just use the heaviest I can find. Tortex. Here, someone gave me this one.

Gw: So it's standard shaped.

SLASH: So you're a player, right? GW: Yeah.

SLASH: That sounds like something you'd say to someone in prison—"You play, right?"

GW: Tell me more about this punk EP you mentioned.

SLASH: It's just a bunch of songs that different guys in the band really like. There's a Steve Jones/Sex Pistols song called "Black Leather." A song called "I Don't Care About You" by Fear. And "Ain't It Fun" from the Dead Boys-sort of a tribute to Stiv Bators. There's a total of six songs on it now, and we're talking about doing a Hanoi Rocks tune.

GW: Did you connect in a big way with the punk thing?

SLASH: Yeah! I never went so far as to say, "Oh punk is hip now, so I'm going to change my look and everything I do." It's just that punk was an attitude I totally related to. But it was only cool in its first year. By the time it came to L.A., it was just gay. I'm sorry. There were a couple of cool bands, but it was like the biggest poseur scene. I started playing during that time. I used to spend a lot of time at the Starwood. and down where the China Club is now. What was it called then?

GW: The Cathay de Grande.

SLASH: Yeah. I used to hang out there, and it was just the coolest; I loved the rebelliousness of it. I believe in that shit, and I dug the chicks, who were just great. I'm



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sterile to me and I can't play for shit if it

not a violent person, but I love that violent attitude. Even at our shows, it's part of our thing; break down the barriers and kick ass for three hours. I don't like it when it gets so violent that people are maliciously beating each other up. But the punk scene was a big influence, especially on Duff. I almost wish that atitude would come back and kill what the record business is right now. I hate it! I hate being a part of it.

We've always done everything in our power to stay away from the norm. But then all of a sudden we *became* the norm. Appetite took off, and what I call the copy-

ing period set in. And all of a sudden it was no longer fun to be in Guns N' Roses, to have that "go into a liquor store, rip off a pack of cigarettes and play your guitar all day" attitude. I think that's one of the main reasons we didn't know what to do with this new album. We were real frustrated with being so *acceptable*. We're not Mötley Crüe. We're not gonna do something that *appears* a little bit dangerous so we can sell records.

GW: That sort of predictable "dangerousness" is so wimpy.

SLASH: I know. "I'm gonna be dangerous right now, okay. I'll only be dangerous 'till I get to the bank."

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GW: Are Guns N' Roses to the Nineties what the Rolling Stones were to the Sixties? SLASH: I don't know. Those kind of labels hit us all the time. That's one reason why, when we played with the Stones, I never took a picture with them or even made an effort to meet them. I'd love to meet them, but not on that level. There were so many paparazzi around. You know the theme: bad boy band of one era meets the new model? Screw that! But I'll tell you, the Stones are the only band I can listen to at a given moment, no matter what mood I'm in. I can listen to Aerosmith or AC/DC or Steely Dan for certain things. But I can always listen to the Stones; if I had to go on a desert island, that's what I would take. But I never think about trying to be the Stones or anything like that.

GW: You met up with a formidable talent of another kind recently: Les Paul.

SLASH: Yeah. I played on his tribute album, which is on hold right now. I knew the project was disorganized, but I decided to do it anyway. I put the band together with Iggy, and [drummer] Kenny Aronoff. Fernando Saunders played fretless bass on it, but it didn't sound right, so I took it off and put Duff on it. And Lenny Kravitz does background vocals.

GW: Did you do a Les Paul song?

SLASH: No, no. We did a song that was supposed to be a Guns N' Roses' song, but Steven could never play. It's a slow blues shuffle called "Burnout." It's really different now, though, 'cause Iggy's singing.

GW: Did you get to meet Les?

SLASH: Yeah. I jammed with him. It was the most humbling experience in my life. He and his rhythm player are amazing. They play chords like...I mean, how they get from one of these chords to the other just blew my mind. And Les is a great guy. Funny, eccentric, and very, very smart. Once, before this tribute thing ever happened, he called me up out of the blue. I picked up the phone and was like, "Whoa, Les Paul!" We talked for an hour.

GW: How do you feel about being considered the father of the "back-to-basics" movement in rock guitar?

SLASH: I don't feel that way. I'm real proud of the work that went into these records, although most of the stuff was spontaneous. The guitar parts on Appetite were more worked out. With Illusion, I just did the guitar lines the day we recorded. In order to give each song its own unique quality, I'd do all the overdubs for one song before moving on to the next. And to this day I can't remember some of what I played. I can't duplicate it live. So I feel puny as a guitar player. I like what I do and I know where it comes from, and I'm proud of the fact that it is for real. But I'm way far removed from feeling like the father of anything.

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Slash & Burn

Guns N' Roses' Slash overcomes his humility to offer insights on the art of vibrato, avoiding "standard rock licks" and the importance of string muting.

BY WOLF MARSHALL

SLASH CLAIMS TO have no personal style as a guitarist. This despite the fact that on any given Saturday afternoon, his signature Guns N' Roses' riffs and licks bounce off the walls of music stores around the globe.

He was at first more than a little reluctant to do this lesson; his technical skills and grasp of theory, he believed, were not sufficient. Once the guitar was in his hands for a few minutes, however, his reluctance gave way to enthusiasm. He offered valuable insights about rock guitar fundamentals and rhythm approaches, and into his personal solo techniques and concepts.

We launched our exploration of Slash's guitar approach with a look at his vibrato technique—which defines most rock guitarists' individual sound as distinctly as a signature of a fingerprint.

"To me, vibrato is basically a moving bend, but not going as far," he explained. "The hand sits the same way [compare Photos B and E], but the physical action is different. I pull down sometimes, push up sometimes, and move back and forth other times. The technique is about conveying emotions-execution is on an emotional level. I think it's very important to make vibrato lock into the song's groove—tempo-wise and feeling-wise.

Slash fashioned a simple, gutsy lick to illustrate his point (Fig. 1). Played entirely on the 2nd string, the lick is an absolutely definitive demonstration of rock guitar vibrato and string bending. Notice Clapton-esque, blues-based, anchored hand position and the dominant use of the 3rd finger for fretting (Photos A-E). The thumb anchors the wrist, which actually does most of the oscillation during the vibrato. Other fingers execute the phrase-the index finger mutes the 3rd and 1st strings around the vibratoed 2nd string (right-hand palm muting silences the 4th-6th strings) and the middle finger helps bend the string (reinforced fingering) (Photo E).

"Another thing I like to do is catch other strings with my fretting finger when bending, and use the resulting string noise musically," Slash said. "It's

















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aggressive. You hear this a lot in my playing." Photo E depicts one of these "snagged-string" bends. In this case Slash simultaneously bends and applies vibrato to both the 2nd and 3rd strings. "If I'm playing on the low strings, I'll definitely pull them down for vibrato," he says.

Figure 2, a signature Slash lick, features a funky, rhythmic feel, varied palmmuting (indicated by the abbreviation P.M.) and chromatic passing tones (F-F#-G). "I like to bend and shake chords too," he says. "For example, I might take this C5 chord and yank the strings downward with my 1st and 4th fingers [PhoFIGURE 1

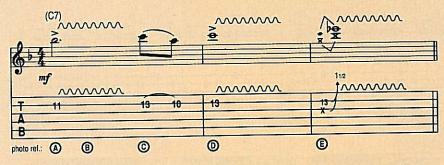


FIGURE 2

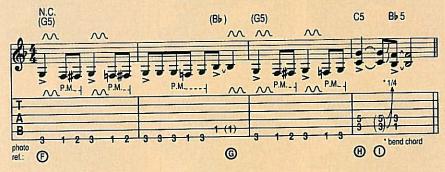


FIGURE 3

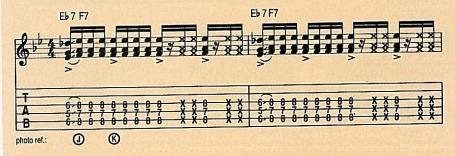




FIGURE 4



tos H and I]. I use similar maneuvers in the 'Paradise City' riff when we're playing live."

Slash is quick to point out that he never gets bogged down with technique to the point where he allows it to intrude on the music: "I don't practice technique because it's virtually impossible for me to sit around the house and practice at all. But I play all the time. When I'm in town, I go out and jam to keep my chops up—mostly blues, I-IV-V things, James Brown stuff, old r&b. I'm always playing, but whatever I play has to be a song with a groove, to which I can apply the right kind of riff and solo. I'm kind of single-minded that way."

So how does one cop a groove with the potential for the "right kind of riff and solo?" According to Slash, it starts with rhythm. "I always concentrate on rhythm and groove to get my right hand going. I might start with a rhythm like this" [Fig. 3]. Slash strums a heavily accented 16th-note chordal pattern on muted strings, embellishing the sparse changes with sliding chords, double-stops (two-note chords) and a consistent, scratchy r&b feel. The pattern follows a funk-based IV-I progression (F7-C7).

Note Slash's use of left-hand muting (indicated by x's in the staff and tablature), as applied to the F7 chord form. The 6th string is "choked" by light pressure from the 2nd finger's tip; the 2nd and 1st strings are muted by the fleshy side of the index finger (Photos J and K). To mute the F7 shape, loosen your left hand's grip on the strings without actually lifting your fingers. Check out the loose, but controlled, right-hand wrist action for strumming in Photos J, K and L. This keeps the 16th notes rhythmically "in-the-pocket"-smooth, even and funky. "I love r&b-the old rock and roll kind-like James Brown. I get a lot of rhythm ideas from that music. They're not note-for-note steals, but more the feel and mood-the groove."

Slash next illustrated the kind of fill he often plays over a C7. Playing around with the shapes depicted in Figure 4, he created a tasty fill consisting of seventh chords and bluesy, descending-sixth double-stops. Again notice the all-important left-hand muting. In this example, the index finger prevents the idle strings from sounding (Photos M—O).

"To put a lead on top of this, I'd probably mess around with this [plays Fig. 5, a classic C minor pentatonic blues lick]," Slash continues. "This is a variation of the first rock lick I ever learned. It's so standard—the number one all-time standard rock lick—but it always works. I use some form of it all the time, and I like to repeat it to get an energy flowing. This is my favorite position [Fig. 6]. C is my

FIGURE 5



FIGURE 6

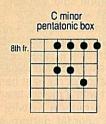


FIGURE 7

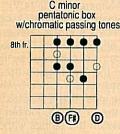






















FIGURE 8



favorite key. It puts this shape in the center of the neck [8th position] and, using related notes, I can go high enough [to the 20th position] or low enough [to the 1st position] around the lick to build a solo the way I like. There are a million things to do in this area-it's one of those spots on the fingerboard that just seem so fluid. You can be moving along and just land there, and it feels good. You can just sit there and milk two notes, or you can really rip in it! The possibilities are endless.

"To escape from the confines of 'standard rock licks,' I like to add chromatic passing tones. For instance, I could take anything from here [plays a C chromatic scale: C, C#, D, D#, E, F, F#, G, G#, A, A#, B] and add it to the lick. There are lots of different passing tones that work in this position." Some of these tones are illustrated in Figure 7. Slash begins by playing Figure 8, a C minor pentatonic line with the added 9th (D). "B to C is

real strong too [Fig. 9]," he adds. "I think F# sounds good in the middle of a ripping lick." [Fig. 10] The F# blue note is used as a true passing tone in Figure 10, chromatically connecting the G and F notes. "They're everywhere on the neck!" he says.

Figure 9 is another example of a passing tone used in a characteristic Slash phrase. The lick is similar to one heard in the "Sweet Child O' Mine" solo-an improvised variation which succinctly

A PRIVATE LESSON WITH GUNS N' ROSES' SLASH



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РНОТО Z



PHOTO AA



PHOTO AB



PHOTO AC





PHOTO AD

'Back Off Bitch' and 'Don't Damn Me,' on Use Your Illusion."

Slash summed up his approach to guitar with this thought: "The most important thing is to play the way you feel. Just go with whatever emotion and music come to you. If you hear more notes, play more notes; if you hear fewer notes, play less. If you hear some 'out notes' in the song, fit them in—they may just be the magic notes! A producer might say, 'That's out of key!' It may just be out of

demonstrates the concept. Here Slash adds the notes F#, D# and C to what is essentially an E minor pentatonic (E-G-A-B-D) lick. "I think of these sounds as

'classical' [trills between F# and G (Photo Y), then between C and B (Photo AC)]. They sound Jimmy Page-ish to me—scale-oriented. I use stuff like this on

Wolf Marshall, the "dean of rock music educators," has written a series of groundbreaking transcription books for Hal Leonard Publishing. Marshall's column "Rock Basics" appears every other month in Guitar World.

key—or in the key of Z somewhere—but if it's in the emotion, go with it." ●

FIGURE 10



FIGURE 11



FIGURE 12

