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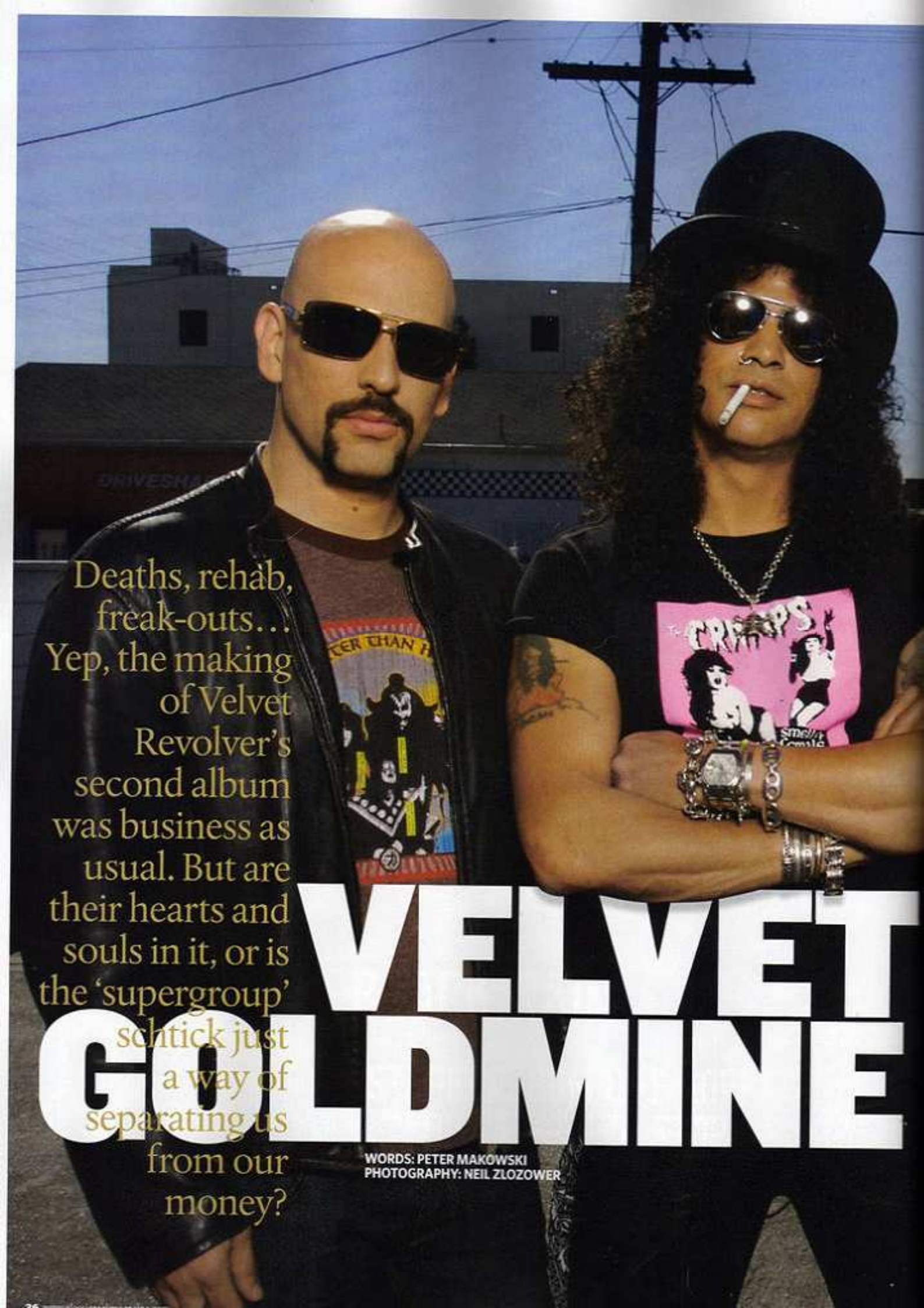
CLASSIC ROCK

\$9.99



274676286

PRINTED IN ENGLAND



Deaths, rehab,
freak-outs...
Yep, the making
of Velvet
Revolver's
second album
was business as
usual. But are
their hearts and
souls in it, or is
the 'supergroup'
schtick just
a way of
separating us
from our
money?

VELVET GOLDMINE

WORDS: PETER MAKOWSKI
PHOTOGRAPHY: NEIL ZLOZOWER



“We are really careful to protect this as a band. It's not a platform for me and Slash, as much as there are people who try to make it out to be that way. It's a rock'n'roll band and that is what's so great about it — because there aren't many great, grand rock'n'roll bands any more.”

Velvet Revolver are on a roll again, and so is their flamboyant, combustible, more-than-occasionally-self-destructive lead singer Scott Weiland. Dressed in smart/casual rock designer chic, eyes enveloped by a pair of Bono-esque fly shades, in one hand he clutches a pack of Camels, in the other a tin of old-school lozenges. Constantly alternating between sucking and smoking, he approaches each of our questions with caution — like a blind man in a dark tunnel manœuvring each step to avoid potholes or, in this case, any chance of a critical backlash.

VR guitarist Slash has been waiting for this since the band's inception: “I always had a strong feeling that from the beginning everybody wanted to really hate us,” he sighs. “It just seemed that anybody who had a pad and a pen was conspiring to a negative experience regardless of the fact that people were coming to gigs and having a good time. We were getting a lot of attention but it felt like people wanted some kind of drama. It's not a big deal; I've been through that before.”

There's no doubt that VR have courted controversy from the get go. Spawned from rock royalty and featuring a frontman whose private life makes Peter Dinklage's look like cover material for *Idol* Homes, they

seemed to arrive on the scene with more baggage than you'd find at Heathrow Airport's lost property department. And the drama continues: during the recording of the new album both Scott's and drummer Matt Sorum's brothers died within days of each other. Both fatalities were coincidentally and tragically drug-related. Even more recently, Weiland hit the headlines of the gossip columns after an altercation with his wife who – in a bizarre reversal of roles – destroyed a hotel room and set fire to Scott's wardrobe (this was eventually blamed on a bi-polar disorder).

In the midst of all this chaos Velvet Revolver have managed to rehearse, record and master their second album, *Libertad*, in a matter of months – approximately the amount of time it would take one of Axl Rose's recording engineers to brew a pot of tea. To these ears, it's of far superior quality to its predecessor. More solid, organic and cohesive, Weiland sounds like he's definitely got his feet under the table: his presence and unique vocal styling give the group the edge and melody that would be missing if they had hired a more pliable, down-home vocalist (like, say, John Corabi). As Slash admitted: "Had I known that it would have taken someone as complex as Scott to be in the band when I was auditioning singers, then I probably would have been too intimidated to try. There are a lot of levels of depth to this guy and, yeah, he has a lot of shit going on but, again, it isn't anything I haven't seen before."

"And let's face it, we could have got someone else who wasn't as capable, and squeaky clean, and it would have been boring."

Classic Rock is in LA for a head-to-head with three of Velvet Revolver's main players – namely Scott, Slash and Duff McKagan – where we managed to a cover a variety of topics including a last-minute change of producer, Guns N' Roses... and, of course, drugs, junkies and whores.

"The whole smack thing... I knew when I was doing it, it was wrong. No matter what anyone tells you, doing a world tour with a heroin habit has to be one of the most excruciating things ever."

– Slash

Let's start off with the new album. Rick Rubin was meant to produce it but he was replaced by Brendan O'Brien. What happened?

Duff: We need to go back a bit before that. We had come off the road after touring for 18 months. I don't care who you are, if you're five guys on the road that long you are going to get sick of each other. So we took some time off and it was hard getting started again. We don't talk a lot. We don't talk about music, we don't talk about business, anything like that. What we do well is play music and we kind of forgot that. Once we got together in one room again, it was all good. So then Rick Rubin comes around and he wanted to do the record and we said: "We're ready to go." He said great, so we picked a rehearsal space that he really liked. He showed up about a week later and said: "I'm going on vacation – you need to write some more songs." Four or five weeks pass and we find out that he wasn't on vacation, he was working with U2. He came back – and by this point we had about 50 songs – and he told us to write more songs. When a guy like Rick Rubin comes along and says: "Write more songs", you begin to doubt yourself.

Slash: I've known Rick for a long time and I don't want to disrespect him, but his way of working was too slow. Rick had about four different projects going at the same time – one minute it's U2, then Metallica, then Linkin Park – and he kept telling us to write songs. We're pretty diligent, we have a lot of integrity when it comes to songwriting. After a few months of working with Rick we started getting a little disinterested. At some point there was a business glitch and that raised a red flag and we said: "Y'know, there's other producers out there..." That's when Brendan's name came up.

Scott: We needed somebody to get into the frontlines with us. We had to move forward and get off the fence. We had to make a decision because the fence post was sticking up our asses. We called Brendan O'Brien and it just so happened that a project he was working on [Bruce Springsteen] fell through the day before. He was with us a few days later and that's when things took on a life of their own.

Is it true that *Libertad* was initially going to be a concept album?

Duff: That was a comment made by Scott. He had that idea. But that was even before we wrote the songs. We had the title of the record before we even started recording, which was something new for us.

Scott: I've made nine records including this one and I didn't want to make just another rock record. So initially I had an idea that I wanted to make a concept album but, as we started writing, the marketplace got littered with concept albums and so we scrapped that idea. But along the way some things happened on a personal level that were pretty heavy for me and some of the guys. Things also happened on a global level. I've never been a person who's politically overt in the songs I write. On past records I was consumed with my own state of being. Being a heroin addict for a long time took up a lot of writing space. So after about three and a half years of not having to worry about being a junkie, [it] freed up a lot of space in my notebook. Since then, when listening to the final mix on headphones, I've come to the conclusion that without trying to make a concept record there is actually a theme throughout the record. It's about the undeniable search for freedom, the eternal struggle, and that theme rings out in every song. I think fans probably wouldn't expect some of the different directions and sounds from the guys that used to be in Guns N' Roses. All we did was drop the various influences and have the balls to put them on record.

Did the success of your first record, *Contraband*, mean there were external pressures with this album?

Scott: No, actually it was quite the opposite. I think to sell three million albums regardless of who we are individually is quite a feat these days, it doesn't happen very often. With this record I think we all felt a complete sense of freedom and daring and I believe that allowed us to push even further.

Slash: They call it the sophomore jinx. I think because there's a certain amount of collective arrogance with us that we refused to accept that. But at the same time, because we couldn't get our shit together to get in the studio to do the record, it was sort of like this distant black cloud, the fuckin' second record thing. But we refused to believe it.

Duff: I never felt outside pressure. We're our worst critics. We're pretty brutal on each other. We're so insular when that whole writing process is happening. I don't even know what's going outside. Working with Brendan, he thinks about singles and that kind of stuff. I don't know what makes a great hit, I've never figured out that formula. I just grew up listening to great music.

What are your expectations for this album?

Slash: I think that probably the only thing I want to get out of it is that if I can listen to the record – being as critical about rock'n'roll as I am – I would like other people to like it for the same reason. You don't have to love us, but if you like this type of music, this is about as genuine as it gets and that's all. As far as expectations? I live so fucking much in the present I try to not dwell on what I am trying to achieve, because when you set all these predetermined goals is when you get fucked.

With the recent demise of Audioslave are you wary of being labelled as a supergroup?

Duff: I thought that about Audioslave when they got together and I'm sure people are thinking that about us. It doesn't play into the band's collective psyche. So long as the feeling is there... We don't have this masterplan to make three records and call it a day.

Slash: The supergroup thing, granted that's an easy label to put on us. But we had no interest in being tagged with that. We had a lot of press when the first album came out and there were a handful of key questions that we got sick of, and that was one of them. I feel sort of vindicated that we've done another record and we've managed to grow over the course of time. Had we really been set in that ideology of being a supergroup that was created to sell a lot of records, we probably wouldn't have got too far. We wouldn't have had the creative tenacity to be able to hang on, because it's a lot of hard work [laughs].

Scott: We all grew up as kids right around the punk rock thing, and having that as a major influence as to what we're all about, that's always cast a shadow on how you perceive your music. There are certain little idiosyncrasies that are attached to a massive rock band or supergroup that I cringe at. The thing with Stone Temple Pilots is we sold 50 million records, Guns N' Roses have sold 70 million – there's not much more commercial than that. But I think what enables those bands to maintain a certain level of success is the integrity that there is in the music. It's all about protecting protect your legacy. And that's the same thing we do with Velvet Revolver.

There was a rumour that the band are not going to feature any Guns N' Roses or Stone Temple Pilots songs in the show any more.

Slash: Okay, this is the deal. I did say that. But

Scott Weiland (right) with Slash:
Liberated isn't a concept album, but
"there is actually a theme throughout
the record", says the frontman.



Five Velvet Revolvers,
are very hairy collar.



the way it came out is not necessarily what I meant. What I said was that at this point I'd rather not have to lean on those songs. It's like Pete Townshend not wanting to smash his guitar every night. We originally did it when we first started because we didn't have enough songs. We'll still be playing those songs, but I don't want to feel like we have to. And there's not a whole lot of songs by either of those bands that we feel comfortable doing.

Looking at it from a fan's point of view, how would you feel if you went to see a band and they didn't play any of your favourite songs?

Slash: I don't know... I feel there's enough strength in the new record that we can do all that and get to the end and then maybe do a Doors song [laughs]. I'm not trying to erase my legacy with Guns N' Roses.

Talking of which, this year is the 20th anniversary of Appetite For Destruction. Any comment?

Duff: It's an awesome legacy to have. It's hard to believe that we were 21 when we wrote those songs. That was a big part of my life, but it was just a part of it. I remember some of it – I don't remember a lot of it. It gives me something extra when we play the world – people know me. We didn't reinvent the wheel, we just happened to be connected to punk rock and the 70s Nazareth thing. It was a weird mixture of things that a whole generation latched on to.

Slash: It's something that the record company's not recognised. There's no new special release.

How do you feel about that?

Slash: That's record companies. Fuck 'em. I care, but what are we going to do? I don't deal with those people any more. I'm sure Axl wanted to do something, but nothing came out of it.

Have you heard any of Chinese Democracy?

Slash: No. I'm sure it's got some amazing shit on it

"There's not a whole lot of songs by Guns N' Roses or Stone Temple Pilots that we actually feel comfortable doing." – Slash

cos I know Axl and what he's capable of. So I'm interested to hear it but patient enough to wait until he figures it out. Because I don't have anything to do with it, it's easy for me to say that [laughs].

Slash, you've recently been to rehab and cleaned up your act, right?

Slash: Yeah, I've actually been clean for about 10 months, so we'll see how long that lasts [laughs]. I don't really get into talking about it that much. One of the catalysts was I was having problems at home, problems with my wife because she had a problem. And we came from two different problems. And there was all this bullshit with the band, toward the end of the tour I was drinking bottle of wine after bottle of wine, cos I know how to do that [laughs]. So at one point my wife came to the conclusion that she needed to go to rehab. So when she went I knew

when she came out I was going to have to go, because that was the only way we could sort things out. So while she was gone I went on a fuckin' smack binge. Well, it was Oxycontin – it's easy stuff, you get it from a doctor so you don't have to deal with dealers and all that shit. That went on for a couple of months, then I went into rehab and got some clarity. Being loaded worked for me in the early days but nowadays I cannot be effective or as convincing to anybody stoned. I guess it just doesn't fly any more [laughs]. Sometimes the idea of having a drink sounds nice but I know it won't stop at that. And the whole smack thing – I knew when I was doing it it was wrong. No matter what anyone tells you, trying to do a world tour with a heroin habit has got to be one of the most excruciating things ever.

How does being sober sit with the image you project – the rock 'n' roller with a bottle of Jack Daniel's?

Slash: I don't know. There's a part of me that's used to hiding behind that stuff because I'm not necessarily the most outspoken person. So that was my crutch. As far as the image goes, I don't know how important that is. Worrying if I could be creative without dope wasn't an issue because when I was working I made sure it was just a couple of drinks and that was it. I've written some great stuff smashed out but not the majority of it.

Finally, do you feel that you've grown up as a band and worked through your various personal problems?

Scott: Yeah, definitely. I mean, it was like that from the beginning. That was one of the main reasons that I joined a band again. I would not have joined the band if they weren't a bunch of junkies and whores, no matter how successful they could have been. Cos those are the only types of people that understand me and have my back. **X**

• Libertad by Velvet Revolver is out on July 3 and is reviewed in next month's Classic Rock.



GN'R

Guns N' Roses: the most dangerous band in the world? Perhaps. But still the biggest? There's only one way to find out...

VELVET REVOLVER

REFEREE: JON HOTTEN



VS



GUNS N' ROSES

Okay, deep breath: *Appetite For Destruction* 15 times platinum; *Use Your Illusion I and II* each seven times platinum; *G.N.R. Lies* five times platinum; *The Spaghetti Incident* platinum; even that so-so *Live Era* thing went gold. Most tellingly for comparison purposes, the *G.N.R. Greatest Hits* record (which wasn't actually a greatest hits, but let's not argue the toss here), released in 2004, currently stands at triple platinum in the US.

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

Can't be accused of slacking here, as they have embarked upon numerous tours. Possession of a ticket offers the added value of the 'will-he, won't he' rollercoaster ride that only ends when the, um, great man takes the stage before your very own eyes. And hopefully before the last 'nighttrain' home. Despite cancellations, G.N.R. have managed gigs of some description in 2001, 2002, 2006 and 2007.

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

Big Wazzy don't do interviews, which of course is a masterstroke. Everyone loves a nutty recluse. The less he says, the more interested we get. What's his house like? Who's he going out with? Has he had plastic surgery? Which airport employee will he duff up next? Not only could he get on the cover of any magazine in the world by agreeing to talk to them (yes, probably even *Time*...), but he's a favourite of the tabloids, too.

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

Just the one for Axl, but it was a doozie. His marriage to Erin Everly was ended in 1991 with recriminations from both sides and a lawsuit alleging domestic violence from Everly. The claim was settled out of court. Who knows (or cares) about the other G.N.R. blokes?

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

Axl's never been a rehab man, but has made mention of how therapy has helped him to understand himself. Well at least someone does, then.

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

Beginning with Steven Adler, Axl managed to oust the entire original G.N.R. line-up while retaining control of the name. Then he really got cracking. As it stands at the moment, G.N.R. consists of Axl, keyboardist Dizzy Reed, guitarists Robin Fink, Ron 'Bumblefoot' Thal and Richard Fortus, bassist Chris Pitman, drummer Tommy Stinson and drummer Frank Ferrer. In the meantime, since Slash, Izzy, Adler and McKagan split, Gilby Clarke, Matt Sorum, Josh Freese, Brian 'Brain' Mantia and Paul Hoge have all come and gone. Oh, and Axl employed and fired a man with a KFC bucket on his head - AND WE TOOK HIM SERIOUSLY...

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

We don't think that Axl can claim the *Greatest Hits* as entirely his own work. So, er, a big fat nothing in the last decade or so. Not even the long-promised re-recorded version of *Appetite For Destruction*. Come on Axl, you don't have to write any songs to do that. Having said all that, however, songs from *Chinese Democracy* can be heard unofficially (see page 12).

★★★★★☆☆☆☆



Record sales



Gigs played

Column inches



Divorces



Rehab visits

Membership turnover

Actual releases

VELVET REVOLVER

By anyone's standards a double-platinum debut, as 2004's *Contraband* was, should count as a considerable success. But these aren't anybody's standards. It's a success on the scale of Stone Temple Pilots rather than Guns N' Roses. And it was outdone by the quickie *G.N.R. Greatest Hits* package. Still, it's a safe bet that *Libertad* will outsell *Chinese Democracy* this year... Although having heard both, if *Democracy* does finally see the light of day in 2007, it could legitimately kick *Libertad*'s ass. See next month's CR for the full review of the Velvet's second release.

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

Toured the US and Europe twice each, plus Australia, New Zealand and Japan and appeared at Live 8. Have done the hard yards to establish their band. VR like to turn up and jam with other folks, too.

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

Slash and Duff have always been happy campers as far as the media are concerned. Will be quotable on any subject at the drop of a phone. Scott Weiland's tortured, stropky rock star act is wearing a little thin though. Does he actually have anything to say? Media outside of the music press not bothered.

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

Slash has been married a couple of times, and chalks up extra kudos for having his second wife, Perla, manage the band, in vintage Tap style. Although Slash was reported to have filed for divorce from Perla last April, it transpires that was just rumour. Instead, the pair checked into rehab and have come out the other side. They were last spotted together in public at Anna Nicole Smith's funeral.

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

Off to a winning start as Weiland was completing a court-ordered rehab at the time he joined the band. Duff understood, as he'd had a famous spell of his own, when his pancreas 'exploded' in 1994, and he was given a month to live if he didn't quit drinking. He did. More recently, Slash has kept the drugs quota up in the 'sex, drugs and rock'n'roll' angle of VR. Just last summer he checked himself into rehab as his drinking spiralled out of control and he reached for the Oxycontin. He's clean now, though.

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

Very poor effort. Despite some raucous rock'n'roll personalities and Slash's early admission that it wasn't 'ideal' that the band had hired a singer who immediately went to rehab, VR appear to be a rather cohesive unit. They even seem to actually LIKE each other...

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

One album out and another one - *Libertad* - due on in early July. In addition to that, Duff estimates they wrote around 50 songs while working with Rick Rubin in preparation for this second album (which was ultimately produced by Brendan O'Brien), and actually recorded 18 of them, including a cover of Talking Heads' *Psycho Killer* which will likely surface as a future B-side. So, two albums in four years and a forthcoming EP, is good going.

★★★★★☆☆☆☆



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CHOSEN FEW



20 years on from *Appetite For Destruction*'s release, Paul Elliott – the only UK journalist at the album's LA launch party and the author of many early GN'R interviews – recalls the drugs, the women and the chaos. **Plus:** Slash, Adler, producer Mike Clink and the Rocket Queen herself on the making of *Appetite*...



Young Guns go for it: Slash, Steven Adler and Axl Rose give it their best shot on stage at Nottingham Rock City, October 5, 1987.

March 17, 1987. It was just another beautiful day in L.A. The sun was shining, the Hollywood Hills a blur of green through the smog. Sunset Boulevard thrumming with late afternoon traffic.

In a small hotel room just off Sunset, I sat facing the five members of Guns N' Roses, the hottest new band in L.A. On the floor, cross-legged, was singer Axl Rose, shirtless under a fake-fur coat. Beside him, rhythm guitarist Izzy Stradlin pulled another cigarette from his pack of Marlboro Lights. On the bed were drummer Steven Adler, lead guitarist Slash and bassist Duff McKagan, the latter having only just woken up after I'd been interviewing the band for an hour. The room was filled with cigarette smoke, the floor littered with empty beer bottles. In the far corner, the band's manager Alan Niven was keeping a watchful eye on his charges.

Guns N' Roses' debut album *Appetite For Destruction* was to be released in the summer on the heavyweight Geffen label, and I was in L.A. to interview the band for UK rock weekly *Sounds*. The previous night I'd seen them play live at legendary Whisky A Go Go club, just a half a mile away up Sunset. They sounded good, and they looked great. Axl, certainly, had the aura of a star in the making. But still, I wasn't sure about Guns N' Roses.

I'd heard their EP *Live ?!@ Like A Suicide*, and it was pretty good, but in the photo on the sleeve Guns N' Roses looked like any one of a thousand L.A. hair metal bands. Tougher than Poison, maybe, but that wasn't saying much. During the interview they'd talked a good fight. They trashed other L.A. bands and said they were different, better. But every rock band said that. Until I heard the album, the jury was out.

Slash produced a Walkman from inside his black leather jacket and walked over to me. "Listen to this..." he said. As the rest of the band watched, he placed the headphones over my ears, dialled the volume up to very loud and pushed 'play'. What I heard was a rough mix of a track from the album: a song called *It's So Easy*. And it was electrifying. The riff just slammed into me. It had the punk rock fury of the Sex Pistols mixed with the swagger of *Rocks*-era Aerosmith. It was mean and dirty, really nasty stuff. Axl sang the verses in a low sneer, full of venom. And just when it seemed like this song couldn't get any better, Axl snarled: "Why don't you just... FUCK OFF!"

Slash was grinning as he clicked off the tape and took the Walkman from me. I just smiled back at him, speechless. I simply couldn't believe what I'd just heard. This one song was 100 times better than anything on the EP. And if the rest of the album was as good as this, Guns N' Roses weren't just the best band in L.A. — they were the best band in the world.

"THIS IS THE ONLY REAL ROCK'N'ROLL BAND TO come out of L.A. in 10 years," Axl had told me that day. "Van Halen was the last."

I had to agree with him. In 1987 hair metal was still at its peak and L.A. was its spiritual home. Kings of the Sunset Strip scene were Mötley Crüe, the self-proclaimed Bad Boys Of Hollywood, whose hedonistic excesses had assumed mythic proportions. The Crüe had sold millions of records, but Izzy Stradlin got it right when he dismissed Nikki Sixx and co as "teen metal" — in essence, kids' stuff. And the same could be said of Poison, the prettiest of L.A.'s pretty boys. "Poison fucked it up for all of us!" Axl stated bitterly. "They said everybody was following their trend."

From the outset, Guns N' Roses were keen to distance themselves from the hair metal scene. They felt an affinity with Metallica, who had relocated from L.A. to San Francisco five years earlier because L.A. was full of bands that looked — and played — like



"It's not like it's a Zeppelin or a Queen record..."

Still hungry: Slash on 20 years of *Appetite For Destruction*.

20 years have passed since *Appetite For Destruction* was released. Is it strange to hear the album discussed in such reverent terms?

Yeah, I mean, it's not like we're talking about the making of, like, a Zeppelin record, or a Queen record or something like that. Albums that were projects, you know? *Appetite*... was basically just an off-the-cuff recording. Guns were a club band, and like most first records from club bands, it was mostly made up of material that we had been playing on stage for a while. We were pretty rough around the edges, and had virtually no studio experience. We went in there and threw the album together pretty quickly.

Do you have a favourite song from *Appetite*...

Paradise City is still my favorite. We wrote that as a band, all five of us together in a van, on our way back to LA from a gig in San Francisco. There's a lot of spirit and energy there. It just encapsulates a lot about that time period for me.

Any tracks you're not too fond of?

I always had a hard time with *Think About You*. It was one of the songs that Izy wrote that was very indicative of the sort of Hanoi Rocks thing that was going on at the time. I never really got off on playing it all that much. And after that would be *Anything Goes*, which is probably the silliest song on the record. By the time we recorded it for *Appetite*... that song had been played by so many different configurations of the band, and gone through so many revisions. It came out cool in the end I guess, but it's a little choppy as far as the arrangement is concerned.

There are some great Guns tunes from that period that didn't make it on to *Appetite*... Why didn't you record, say, *November Rain*?

The thing with *November Rain* was that back then it was, like, this



20-minute epic that just went on forever. We were never able to edit it down until we did it for the *Use Your Illusion* albums.

That song always seemed to be particularly close to Axl's heart. I'm surprised he allowed it to be put on the backburner.

Tom Zutaut [Guns N' Roses' A&R representative at Geffen at the time] was the one who said: "Let's save that for another record." And I think Axl was a little miffed about that. But it was fine with me, I was already fucking petrified about doing one ballad!

Sweet Child O' Mine was enough for you?

Yeah, and I wasn't even crazy about that one. But Axl was bitter about the *November Rain* thing for a while, until we did it for *Use Your Illusion II*. And, actually, there are a few songs on the *...Illusion* records that date back to the *Appetite*... period. We wrote *Perfect Crime* while we were in preproduction for *Appetite*... and *You Could Be Mine* came together right before we went in to record the album.

What resonates with you most about that time spent making *Appetite*...

Just that it was all such a new experience. It was like we were doing everything for the first time. I didn't even know what that record was supposed to be, but when it was done I knew that it was complete - and also not nearly as messy as it could have been. It was a pretty honest representation of who we were and what we were about. There was one time toward the end of the sessions when I took a home a rough mix of *Welcome To The Jungle* to listen to with my girlfriend. I put it on, and I remember that I was really proud of what we had done. I still am.

Richard Breenstock

girls. As Slash, a Metallica fan himself, put it: "LA is considered a pretty gay place, and we get a lotta flak from people thinking we're posers."

I knew Slash was right, because I'd been one of those people. When I walked into the Whisky the previous night, I saw cliché upon cliché. Girls in micro-skirts, spike heels and skimpy tops, some wearing little more than lingerie, their hair fluffed up like extras from *Dynasty*. The guys' coiffures were just as big, and some of these dudes - 'chicks with dicks', as they were called - were wearing more make-up than the girls. This was LA's in-crowd, posers all, and Guns N' Roses were their new darlings.

The Whisky had a glorious history. It had staged so many legendary gigs, from The Doors and Led Zeppelin to Van Halen and the Ramones. But I didn't go into that place thinking I was about to see the future of rock'n'roll. In truth, I was more interested in the other band I would be interviewing a few days later during that trip: Slayer, who had just released the awesome *Reign In Blood*. Now there was an LA band with a difference. Surely Guns N' Roses couldn't compete with that?

Jet Boy were the support act that night. They had a charismatic singer in Mickey Finn, who sported an outrageous electric-blue Mohican. Plus, they had Sam Yaffa, ex-Hanoi Rocks, on bass. But Yaffa looked lost up on that stage, almost dazed, as if the demise of



Let's party: Paul Elliott (left), Steven Adler (second left) and Megadeth's Dave Elstrom (right) pictured in July 1988 in Dallas, Texas.

Hanoi, prompted by the death of their drummer Razzle, had sucked all the life out of him.

Guns N' Roses had idolised Hanoi - and this much was immediately apparent when they kicked into their first song, *Rockin' Life*, a blast of fast and loose rock'n'roll with a punk/glam edge that was pure Hanoi... except for one crucial difference. Where Hanoi's Michael Monroe sang with a sardonic punk sneer, Axl Rose was a full-on screamer, more heavy metal. And there was something about Axl, an intensity that Monroe never had. Both had a certain girlish prettiness, but Axl had a menacing aura: the kind of guy who'd punch your lights out as soon as look at you. Stripped to the waist, his slender arms

covered in tattoos, his skin almost translucent under the stage lights, hair whipped into an artful mess. Axl was magnetic, drawing all eyes to him.

Slash was the perfect foil for Axl. His face was hidden under a mop of dark curls, cigarette screwed into his mouth, effortlessly cool, swaying backwards as he fired off solos. Izy was GNR's Keith Richards, sullen and nonchalant. Duff McKagan had the air of a displaced punk rocker, tall and thin, the way bass players should be. Steven Adler looked the archetypal Californian beach bum: big blond hair, fuzzy chest. He could have passed for David Lee Roth's kid brother. And he was the only one who smiled.

Guns N' Roses meant business. That much was evident on the night. They rocked hard, they looked cool, and the songs they played from the new album - *Welcome To The Jungle*, *It's So Easy*, *Nightmare* - pissed all over anything that Mötley Crüe or Poison had ever come up with.

After the show, a Geffen executive told me he reckoned Guns N' Roses had the potential to be the biggest band in the world. I was reminded of something the band's UK press officer had said to me before I flew out to LA. "They'll make it," she said, "if they live." Certainly, GNR had a heavy reputation. British writer Xavier Russell had nicknamed them Lines N' Noses, and it was widely rumoured that at least three of the five band members were heroin

'GN'R had a reputation. They were nicknamed Lines N' Noses and it was rumoured that three out of the five members were heroin addicts.'

Super furry animal:
Axl, an early study.



The Guns club (l to r) Izzy, Steven, Slash, Axl and Duff.

addicts. Maybe it wasn't just a question of whether Guns N' Roses could live up to the hype. Rather, could they live long enough to live up to the hype?

"THE ONLY REASON WE GET THAT 'BAD BOY' status is because the other bands in LA are such wimps," said Slash when I suggested to him that GN'R were simply the latest in a long line of fucked-up California rock bands. Slash was drunk and in belligerent mood. But then, he'd been drinking all day. Getting drunk, he said, was the only sure way to beat a hangover. And he'd been celebrating into the small hours after the Whisky gig.

I'd met the band around noon at the Hyatt hotel on Sunset. It was another of LA's famed rock'n'roll haunts, where Led Zeppelin drummer John Bonham had ridden motorcycles along the hotel's corridors, thus earning the hotel its *nom de rock*, the Riot House. Even its rooftop pool area was famous as the venue for the end-of-tour party in *This Is Spinal Tap*.

I found the band lurking in the Hyatt's ground floor open-air restaurant. It wasn't hard locating Guns N' Roses' table: it was the one surrounded by hairy men swigging bottled beer, chain-smoking cigarettes and irritating the other diners with their loud banter. All of the band members were wearing sunglasses to shield their bleary eyes from the midday sun.

Izzy Stradlin was the most talkative of the five. He was keen to know what was happening on the British music scene, what new bands were breaking through. Alan Niven revealed his plan to bring the band over to the UK in June for three shows at London's Marquee club. Niven was certain that GN'R could make an immediate impact in the fast-reacting British music scene. In fact it was a hunch that would prove a tactical masterstroke.

All the while, Axl Rose listened intently but spoke little, impassive behind mirrored aviator shades. When he did speak, his voice was surprisingly low, quite unlike his on stage screech. He chose his words carefully, and was noticeably more sober than the others. Axl, it seemed, wasn't one for small talk.

After an hour, it was decided that I would interview the band in my hotel room at the Park Sunset, right across the street from the Hyatt. It was certainly intimate, with the five band members, plus Niven and myself, squeezed into one budget-priced room.

As the interview progressed, it soon became apparent who was running this show. Axl was the band's chief spokesman. Slash and Izzy said their piece. Steven, like most drummers, had less to say. And Duff, like the alcoholic he was, fell asleep.

Axl began by revealing how he and childhood friend Izzy had come to LA from Indiana to form a band. "People used to say to us: 'You guys should go to California.' And when we got here, we found we were five years behind the times. You show up and think you're gonna fit in, and they say: 'So what boat did you get off?'"

I asked if LA was any better than Indiana. "Must be," Izzy said. "I'm still here!"

"We got a lotta shit in Indiana," Axl recalled. ➔

Never mind the ballads

The man who signed GN'R, A&R man **Tom Zutaut**, on his struggle to keep the slow songs off of *Appetite*...

"Most of the songs were actually written before I got involved with the band. Slash and Izzy were probably the main writers with Axl, and Duff also contributed. I mean, he wrote what is probably one of my favourite songs: *It's So Easy*. Before that I didn't even know that Duff could write a song. I thought it was just Slash, Izzy and Axl, and all of a sudden they played this song for me and I was like, 'Oh my god: I thought there was three writers in this band, there's actually four.' So that was a pleasant surprise after you've signed a band.

"But the band were just oozing song ideas. When we were at Rumbo [studios] doing *Appetite*..., there were two songs written during the period - one was *November Rain* and the other one was *Patience*.

"I was sitting out in the lounge with Izzy at Rumbo and he was doodling on his guitar and I was like: 'That's fucking great - what is that?' And he starts singing it to me and I couldn't believe it. I mean, the guy is just sitting there doodling and he's got a track that I think could be a top five single. And I'm thinking: 'We've got to be really careful' - because when a band first comes out, if they get too polished or have too many songs that are too melodic, then it turns people off.

"With *November Rain*, we were almost done recording *Appetite*..., and I get to the studio and Axl is really excited. He sits down at the piano and he plays *November Rain* from top to bottom and he sings a rough outline of the vocals. And I was stunned. You just knew instantly that it was going to be a really big song. He wanted to add it to *Appetite*..., and I told him there was just no way we could do it. We had already kept *Don't Cry* off of *Appetite*..., and now there was *November Rain* which was arguably a better song. So we had a huge row about it. Because Axl was like 'You're holding *Don't Cry* - why hold *November Rain*? I wanna put it on the record'. We probably talked for eight hours straight and I was able to convince him to hold both of those songs.

"It was very difficult because I wouldn't let the band go into the studio until I thought they had a song that was a hit but that would match the spirit of *Appetite*. For example, they had *Don't Cry* which - by anybody's reasoning could be a hit

- but somehow I felt that, given the aggressiveness of the rest of the material, I didn't think it would really fit in on *Appetite*. And now they have *November Rain*, which was an even better song, and they want to add that to it. And by that point we already had *Sweet Child O'Mine*.

"The reason that song is at the end of *Appetite*... is because I knew that if the radio promotion people heard it they'd try and promote it first. And it wouldn't be right, because it was the one

melodic, more pop song on the whole record and y'know, you wanted them to get to *Welcome To The Jungle* and *Mr Brownstone*. The spirit of Guns N' Roses was about *It's So Easy*, and *Mr Brownstone* and *Nightrain* - it wasn't about *Sweet Child O'Mine*.

"But record companies tend to want to go for the hits first and fuck the rest. So there had to be a way to hide that. I had learned by then that promotional people don't listen to the whole album - they just listen to the first three or four songs.

"I actually taunted one of the heads of promotion at Geffen. I said to him: 'There's a song on this record that's going to be a number one hit worldwide.' And he laughed at me and said, 'What is it?' And I said, 'I'm not going to tell you - listen to the record.' They never found it."

Scott Rowley

• To read Tom Zutaut's account of 'the Rocket Queen incident', visit www.classicrockmagazine.com





Slash's search for a polystyrene mug proved fruitless.

STEVE KATZ

"I slept with Axl to get Steven jealous..."

Adriana Smith was Steven Adler's girlfriend. Until she had sex with Axl for the recording of *Rocket Queen*. Here she remembers the heady days of wine and roses.

By Brooke Ellis

In early 1987, Guns N' Roses were not just another popular LA band - they created a community. They had a large, tight-knit "family" consisting of musicians, roadies, drug dealers and strippers. The band would often write songs with these friends and sometimes even about them, as was the case with the classics *My Michelle* and *Rocket Queen*.

For the latter track, Axl Rose had the creative inclination to record the erotic moans of one of their kindred groupies to colour the track for the band's debut album. Adriana Smith has the distinction of being the only female to appear on *Appetite For Destruction*. She was a young, attractive exotic dancer who, at the time, was also the closest drummer Steven Adler had to a steady girlfriend.

In her first-ever interview, Adriana reveals the story behind her appearance on *Rocket Queen*, and how, even early on, controversy was constant.

You were seeing Steven, but how did you get to meet Axl?

He came to a party at my place. I took a bunch of pills, I was getting blitzed. I knew Steven was seeing this other girl behind my back; he said she was just "driving him around". I really cared about Steven. I loved him. The only way I could get him jealous was to fuck the singer.

I had the party in my bathing suit. I was already on the warpath. Me and Axl started fucking, on my roommate's bed by the way, when Steven came in with that girl. I said: "Oh hey baby, why don't you join us?" He was like: "Uh, that's okay." He got all bent out of shape, that's the reaction I wanted. [I] come back to find out that the girl that drove him over has jumped in bed and taken my place! So Axl starts fucking her! Then my roommate's boyfriend comes in and gets in Axl's face about fucking that girl on his girlfriend's bed, and Axl and Slash and this guy got in this big tussle and they fell through my bedroom window like in a cowboy movie!

[But Steven] and Axl had some kind of rivalry, not just over me, they just did. If Axl was around, he and I migrated toward each other and caused Steven nothing but heartache, then he would go and do something stupid like shoot up in an elevator or sleep with some sleazy chick.

Was it just sex, drugs, and rock'n'roll all the time?

Oh fuck yeah! I remember one time [me and Steven] were having sex in the building across from The Hellhouse - he lived in the fucking laundry room there - and this weird woodcutter guy lived across the street. He had like a pitbull face, bubble eyes and only a couple of teeth. He had a bald-headed wife. He would make Crystal [meth] out of, like, household items. We didn't know what we were snorting but - who cares? - we were just doing it.

He was a strange man. He made me uncomfortable, like he could have been a cannibal! He was a freak! Nobody wanted to go there but we all wanted his drugs. He would scrape this shit on a plate of glass, he had a blowtorch, he was like an insane Meat Loaf! So we were having sex in the laundry room and



Double trouble: Adriana Smith with Axl Rose...



...And with her "true love", Steven Adler.

"I got thrown in jail over 20 times, and five of those times I was guilty. Of what? Public consumption - I was drinking at a party, underage. The other times I got busted cos the cops hated me. So I don't have much love for that fucking place!"

I asked how the band survived before they signed the deal with Geffen. "Sold drugs, sold girls," Izzy said matter-of-factly. "We'd throw parties and ransack the girl's purse while one of the guys was with her." To which Slash added, mischievously: "Not being sexist or anything, but it's fucking amazing how much abuse girls will take!"

Slash was smiling when he said that, but Izzy wasn't when he made his casual reference to selling drugs. Clearly, Guns N' Roses exulted in their bad reputation. I put it to them that another source at Geffen had told me Guns N' Roses "take everything". First there was laughter. "We were just gonna ask you about this bed here..." Steven joked. Then silence... And then, a rustling noise from the corner of the room, where Alan Niven was holding a copy of the *LA Times*. He shook the paper again and Axl swiftly brought the subject of drugs to a conclusion. "Yeah, we take everything - and that goes in every single way. We take everything from what we hear, from what we see and do..."

Was Niven really sending him coded messages? He never admitted it. But Axl was certainly a shrewd operator, and in that interview he proved much smarter than the average rock singer. What surprised me was his open-minded attitude to music. He cited Aerosmith as GN'R's key influence: "In my mind, the hardest, ballsiest rock band that ever came out of America was Aerosmith. Fuck, they were the only goddamn role model to come out of here!"

Yet he also stated: "In the last year I've spent over \$1,300 on cassettes, everything from Slayer to Wham!, to listen to vocals, production, melodies, this and that." Few rockers would ever have admitted to buying a Wham! album. Similarly, few people in the



There's this little tiny window and his eye is peeping at us through that! God! But you know what he did for Steven? He took his drum sticks before their first tour and whittled little grooves in them so they wouldn't slip out of hands when he was drumming. It was a trippy time.

How did you end up appearing on the album?

But propositioned me to do something "not even his girlfriend would do". He sat me down and was all serious. "Erlin won't do this, nobody will do this." And I was like: "Fuck yeah, I'll do it - for the band, dude!" So I directed it. We went into the studio and I kicked everybody out except for a couple of sound guys. I made them turn out the lights. They took the microphones down close to the floor, and there was wood panelling halfway up the wall and then the glass window, so nobody could actually see us. Me and Axl got to it, had sex on the floor of the mixer room. Apparently there was, like, three and a half hours of audio on the reel to reel. We just kinda laid down and Axl, I was having fun and Axl would be like: "C'mon Adriana, just fucking taking it!" It was probably a comedy of errors for the most part. I told them to destroy the tape.

Were you paid for your services?

I think I did it for a bottle of booze or something. Because I wanted to party with Slash! Of course, Slash got pissed about it; him and Steven were childhood friends. The next day I went down and they were mixing it in the studio. I was like: "God, what have I done?" I'm sure in this day and age any girl would be "Oh yeah!" but I was just trying to prove another point to Steven, like: "See? Fuck you!" So there it was, and I wanted no one to say a word about what was on the record, and I didn't let it go on the radio. But it was me, because of Steven. But I was drunk when I did it and I was pissed at him. Eventually I fucking realized and I told him. He was devastated and pissed. "How could you do this to me?" I felt all guilty but at the same time I was screwing every broad in town.

How GNR became huge...

As soon as the touring started everybody kinda broke apart, and all came all these parasites. I became heavily addicted to different substances. Then the band would come back to Hollywood and would be put up in hotels in shit. I'd see Steven sometimes, but fuck... This huge tidal wave called Guns N' Roses hit and I was left addicted and feelin' like a stepchild. I hated Axl, and he was like: "Y'know, Steven's making new friends, and he's going on with his life." I don't know why Axl was fucking counselling me about Steven, and being nice about it. I guess, in a way, he was saying goodbye. You know: "This is it. We're being swept away by fame and fortune." It was just a natural progression, people's lives change. I ended up fucking up, I couldn't get out of bed. I couldn't get out from under the covers. Things just got ugly.

Telling how you feel about appearing on one of the most popular records of all time?

That should have been snarlier and got my name on the album, some credit. Maybe a half of a cent of every album? That would have been a whore for hire, right? Y'know, hey, whatever... I don't think anybody owes me anything, what happened in our lives happened.

Becomes the Rocket Queen?

I'll write that song for a girl named Barbie who was a junkie dealer that he loved. She was the Rocket Queen. I'm the Rocket Queen's stand-in!



Duff, Slash and Steven enjoy a hearty breakfast with smoked hangers on.

late 80s thought Lynyrd Skynyrd were cool, but Axl did. He praised them as the inspiration for a song he referred to as *Sweet Child* (later given its full title *Sweet Child O' Mine*). "In Indiana," he said, "Lynyrd Skynyrd were considered God - to the point that you ended up saying: 'I hate this fucking band!' And yet for *Sweet Child* I went out and got some old Skynyrd tapes to make sure we'd got that downhome, heartfelt feeling."

Most surprising of all was Axl's grand mission

boomed out at deafening volume from an enormous ghetto blaster. Every track was a killer. Clearly, *It's So Easy* was no fluke.

It was around 30 minutes into the photo session when the cops showed up. Three LAPD black-and-whites pulled up on the opposite side of the road. Only one officer emerged, walking slowly over to the house and enquiring with a wry smile: "Where's the party?" Duff replied wearily: "We ran outta beer." The

"I think poodles are disgusting. Everything about them means I must kill them." - Axl Rose

statement. "We've got our progressions already planned out," he declared confidently. "You know, how we're gonna grow. This record's gonna sound like a showcase."

Axl's comments sounded like a plan for world domination. And when Slash played me *It's So Easy*, I started to believe it.

IT WAS AROUND 3PM THE FOLLOWING DAY that Sound photographer Greg Freeman and I arrived at GNR's communal home, affectionately known as 'The Hellhouse'. A smallish, detached two-storey home on a quiet street just off the busy Santa Monica Boulevard, it had seen better days. The white paint on its wood-panelled walls was flaking. The lawn was dead, and no wonder: several cars were parked on it. Duff and Slash were sitting on the front porch, beers in hand. They'd had another heavy night. So heavy, in fact, that they ended up being thrown out of the Carhouse, Hollywood's leading rock club, after trashing the pool room. Blame it on the Jim Beam, Slash said.

A few minutes later, the rest of the band emerged from the house. Axl sported a black leather ensemble - jacket, pants and peaked cap - plus the obligatory snakeskin boots. He posed for photos on roadie Todd Crew's custom-painted Harley Davidson before gathering the rest of the band around him for group shots (one of which would eventually be reproduced on the inside cover of *Appetite For Destruction*). And as the camera clicked away, a tape of the whole album

cop said he'd received a complaint from a nearby resident about the noise, and warned us that he'd be back in 20 minutes. But as he headed back across the road, Axl called out after him. "Hey, how about we take a couple of pictures on your car?" The cop shrugged and said okay, and the band got their picture, perched on the hood. "That's the third lot of cool cops in a row," Axl told me, grinning broadly. The cops hadn't returned by the time we left The Hellhouse an hour later. I had a feeling they'd be back again sometime soon. But as it turned out, the local residents didn't have to suffer much longer. Within a couple of weeks, Guns N' Roses had moved out. And for the next two years, they'd be constantly on the move, out on the road, wreaking havoc all around the world. First stop: London.

Guns N' Roses' reputation preceded them. On June 6, 1987, *The Daily Star* warned of the imminent arrival in the UK of these 'booze-crazed rockers' and branded Axl a 'dog killer'. "I have a personal disgust for poodles," Axl had said, tongue-in-cheek. "Everything about them means I must kill them." But the joke was lost on the *Star*.

The paper also reported a police raid on the band's 'sleazy hideout' - The Hellhouse - which had resulted in a 'vicious battle' that left the singer in intensive care. There was more than a grain of truth in that story, as Axl admitted. "I got hit on the head by a cop and I guess I just blacked out. Two days later I woke up in hospital with electrodes over me." Clearly, not all of LA's finest were 'cool' with Axl after all... ➔



Adler cleans up his act

When there was laundry to be done, the drummer's mom was ready and willing.

Tell us about the recording of *Appetite*...

We began doing preproduction, rehearsing at SIR studios in Burbank. Then we went to Rambo Studios in Canoga Park to record. It was close to my mom's. Every day, she brought us lunch and cigarettes and would pick up our clothes for washing. Heart was recording there at the same time and Nancy Wilson came over to say hi while my little brother Jamie and my mom were there. Nancy was a sweetheart, she sat Jamie on her lap, and he just had the biggest smile.

How was Mike Clink to work with?

I liked Mikey. He made some suggestions on changing my drum set up. He got me a china cymbal and a second tom. I was like, "Ah, what the hell." Then he wanted to change anything. Goes, and I got so pissed! "Fuck you, don't tell us how to write songs!" But we tried his idea out, and it came out great and I said: "I am so sorry". It just came out of nowhere, my complaining, but I admitted that he was right after we did it.

What did he want to change about it?

Halfway through each verse - it was half time, slower, and his idea made the second half double time, faster.

Were you guys partying when you were making the record?

Oh yeah. We had a white van, it wasn't long before Slash wrecked it. After recording one night, me, Slash and Duff went to a party at the beach. We met Peter Sellers' daughter, her mom was a famous model in the 70s (Britt Ekland). She needed a ride home, so we all piled into the van. The whole ride she and I were making out in the back. They dropped us off at Slim Jim Phantom's (Stryke's drummer) house. He was Britt Ekland's husband. I said: "I'll meet you guys a little later" and they took off. It was really late and nobody was home so I got with her in the living room.

When did you first hear the finished product?

Um, I think everybody got together, Wes, Del, the Naked Skydiver chicks, Jojo... Slash had the tape. Everybody loved how it came out and was so impressed with what Axl did with the vocals.

Was Axl there, too?

I don't think so. God knows what he was doing - I don't even think God knows what Axl is doing half the time.

What did you think when you heard your girlfriend Adriana on *Rocket Queen*?

I said: "That's cool, who's that?" Slash said: "It's Adriana." She wasn't like my girlfriend exactly, but... we had some good long nights. Axl came up with this idea to fuck a girl in the studio and record it for *Rocket Queen*, so he called Adriana. They put up a divider up, laid a blanket down, and recorded it. I just felt that out of all the girls around us, he just had to pick the one that I was hanging out with. He knew we were close. But it came out good, it worked.

Brooke Ellis

Guns N' Roses, and Axl in particular, seemed to attract trouble wherever they went. And it was no different when they played that first Marquee gig. The band were buzzing about playing in Britain, home to so many of their favourite bands: The Rolling Stones, Queen, The Sex Pistols, Led Zeppelin. Niven had told them all about the Marquee, its history every bit as rich as the Whisky's. But not everyone in the audience at the Marquee that night was ready to welcome Guns N' Roses with open arms. For a couple of local rock bands that considered the Marquee their turf, these cocky American wankers needed cutting down to size.

Opening up with *Rockin' Life* and one off the new album, a thumping rocker aptly titled *Out Ta Get Me*, GNR were met with a hail of plastic beer glasses and a shower of gob. I remember wincing as a big, sticky lump of phlegm stuck in Izzy's hair. Axl was having none of it. "Hey, if you're gonna keep throwing things we're gonna leave!" Jeers rang out, but by the end of the third song, *You're Crazy*, the barrage was over. Guns N' Roses had passed the test.

The Cult's singer Ian Astbury was so impressed that he went backstage after the show to invite GNR to tour with his band in America. But Astbury's enthusiasm wasn't shared by Sounds writer Andy Hurt. When Axl saw Hurt's review of the gig, in which his singing was likened to the squealing of a hamster with its balls trapped in a door, he was livid and led the whole band to the Sounds office in Mornington Crescent, north London. "Andy Hurt?" he raged. "He fucking will be if I find him!" But the reviewer was absent, so Axl contented himself with a warning note left with another

'It's all techno-pop, even heavy metal stuff. We go against every standard.' - Slash in 1988

member of staff, and the band retired to a nearby pub, where they noted an item on the food menu that left them scratching their heads. Axl asked me about it when I visited the band's rented apartment in Kensington a few days later. "What the fuck is spotted dick?" he frowned. His confusion was understandable. I decided not to mention faggots. Axl would get around to that subject later, in the controversial song *One In A Million*.

Guns N' Roses left London for LA at the end of June following the third and final Marquee show on the 28th. Alan Niven's strategy had paid off: the band were the talk of rock fans and critics all over the UK. And when *Appetite For Destruction* was at last released, on July 21, it was immediately hailed as a classic.

MEMORABLY DESCRIBED BY ONE REVIEWER AS 'rawer than a whore's thighs', *Appetite*... was the best hard rock record since AC/DC's *Back In Black*. It was also precisely the kind of record that 'parental advisory' stickers were made for. Nine out of 12 songs made explicit reference to sex; four to drugs; four to drinking; three to fighting.

Appetite... was loud, rude, obnoxious - gloriously and tenapologetically so. But, crucially, it wasn't one-dimensional. Back in LA, Axl had told me: "I sing five or six different voices, so no one song is quite like another." And what a range he had: wailing like a police siren in the intro to *Welcome To The Jungle*, jive talking on *Mr Brownstone*, blowing a fuse on *You're Crazy*, and revealing a sweet vulnerability on *Sweet Child O' Mine*. Axl got everything right, every last ad-

lib. "Axl knew what he wanted," said the album's producer Mike Clink. "It was an instinctive thing."

Clink himself was in a sense the unsung hero of *Appetite For Destruction*. As Alan Niven stated years later: "I cannot imagine another human being having the patience to get that record made. This band was so fucked up, they made The New York Dolls look as ambitious as Bon Jovi!" Clink, whose previous credits included working on *Survivor's Eye Of The Tiger*, said simply: "I pushed them to work really hard. I had one rule: no drink and drugs in the studio. And if they ever did drugs there, I never saw it."

Alan Niven had modest expectations for the album: "I believed that if we could keep a degree of discipline in place, we could get that record to gold." In America, that meant half a million sales. Mike Clink was a little more confident. He recognised *Sweet Child O' Mine* as Guns N' Roses' secret weapon: a potential hit single. "It was magical - it made the hairs on my arms stand up." He told Tom Zutta that *Appetite*... would sell two million. Zutta disagreed: he predicted five million.

But initial sales were slow. Only 10,000 copies had been sold in the UK when Guns N' Roses returned in October 1987 for five dates in 2,000- to 3,000-seat theatres. It was a bold move, but their hand had been forced. Originally they'd been booked to support Aerosmith in the UK: thousands of tickets had been sold. But Aerosmith cancelled when their *Permanent Vacation* album took off in the US.

Guns arrived in the UK with fellow LA sleaze rockers Faster Pussycat as support act. I travelled up to cold and rainy Manchester for the opening night at the Apollo. Only a thousand people showed up. The balcony was completely empty. But it didn't matter. Kicking off with *It's So Easy*, GNR played a brilliant set, and afterwards they were in buoyant mood

backstage. Axl showed me a souvenir given to him by a fan who'd made the long journey down from Scotland for the gig. It was a ticket for a show that never was: Aerosmith plus Guns N' Roses at the Edinburgh Playhouse.

The tour concluded with a near-sell out date at London's Hammersmith Odeon, during which Axl spoke at length about a friend of the band's who had recently died in New York - their roadie Todd Crew. Todd had been with them on their first trip to the UK, but had passed out drunk for the whole of that first Marquee gig. Now he had died of a heroin overdose. The band played Bob Dylan's *Knockin' On Heaven's Door* in his memory.

Heroin cast a long shadow over *Appetite For Destruction*. It was there in *My Michelle*, the story of Axl's friend Michelle Young, whose mother had died a junkie. It was in *Mr Brownstone*, a song named after a notorious LA drug dealer. And it was in *Paradise City*, which Duff McKagan had written aged 19 while living in Seattle with a junkie girlfriend and dreaming of escaping to LA. "Of course, when I got there," he noted, wryly, "the band I joined ended up with three heroin addicts in it!" But not even the death of a close friend such as Todd Crew was enough to shock them into cleaning up. As Duff would later reveal: "Slash and Izzy and Steven were out of their fucking minds."

And their condition was unlikely to improve given the band's next public engagement: a US tour in November supporting Motley Crue, whose leader Nikki Sixx was himself a fully-functioning junkie. Putting the Crue and GNR together seemed like a



"Better service? Cucumber sandwiches for two, and make it messy." Slash and friend in Dallas's Four Seasons hotel, July 1988.

...for disaster, yet, miraculously, they all survived – only for Slash to OD and almost die at a party in LA mere days after the tour had ended. Slash had been with Sex at that party, but claimed: "I didn't know [Sex] had OD'd – I was passed out drunk in the bathtub." Soon after, Slash was sent to a rehab facility in Mexico. He told me later: "It hurt me – I spent eight days in fucking hell." But it would take another two years before Slash faced up to the truth about heroin: when Steven Adler, his friend since childhood, paid the price for his addiction by losing his job with GN'R – and all the dreams that went with it.

IN FEBRUARY 1988 GUNS N' ROSES WERE BACK on the road, headlining in US theatres. But when a gig in Phoenix, Arizona was cancelled, rumours quickly spread of a split in the band. It was alleged that Axl had failed to show for the gig, and that when he reappeared 24 hours later, the rest of the band told him he was fired. Only after three days of mediation, instigated by Slash and Izzy, was Axl reinstated.

If the rumours were true, Guns N' Roses had almost imploded just as they were on the brink of a major breakthrough. The combination of heavy touring and strong support from MTV had seen the band pick up momentum on the US Billboard chart. By May 1988, when the band supported Iron Maiden in North America, the album had already gone gold, surpassing Alan Niven's prediction. By June it was in the Top 10. And in July – exactly one year after its release – *Appetite*... was the No.1 record in America. The fact that it knocked politically correct singer-songwriter Tracy Chapman off the top spot made it all the sweeter.

On July 23, nine months on from our last meeting, I joined the band on tour in Dallas, Texas, where they were supporting Aerosmith. At last, that dream double-bill was a reality, albeit in America and not poor old Britain. I was writing a cover story for *Rolling Stone* to coincide with GN'R's forthcoming appearance at the Monsters Of Rock festival at Donington Park on August 30.

The band were staying at the Four Seasons hotel, a five-star palace with its own private golf course. I found Izzy and tour manager Doug Goldstein in the bar, taking refuge from the 100-degree late-afternoon heat. Goldstein was grumbling about having his after-morning round of golf disrupted by Steven and Duff, who had commandeered two golf buggies for a race across the course. "They looked like the fucking Banana Splits!" Goldstein hissed.

I asked Goldstein when I could speak with Axl. Goldstein wasn't sure. He told me Axl was "resting".

That night, Izzy took his English girlfriend Emma to see a Rod Stewart show at the venue where Guns and Aerosmith would play the following night: the Starplex, a 20,000-capacity outdoor amphitheatre. "It was very relaxing," he told me the next day, "like a Quaalude." Everybody else went to a rock club to celebrate Slash's 23rd birthday; everyone, that is, apart from Axl, who hadn't been seen by any of his bandmates since they arrived in Dallas. Was he sick? Goldstein said no. Would he do an interview with me? "Tomorrow," Goldstein said.

Inside the club a roped-off VIP area had been set aside for the band and its entourage, 20 or 30 people, including various groupies and hangers-on. I had a long, drunken conversation with Steven Adler and Megadeth bassist Dave Ellefson that ended when Adler dragged a girl off to the men's room. He and many others were in and out of there all night.

In the early hours we returned to the Four Seasons, where Duff invited photographer Ian Tilton and I to his room. Duff had recently married an aspiring musician named Mandy Brix, and was feeling a little lonely. He poured out three tumblers of vodka and added in just enough orange juice to turn the mixture slightly cloudy. Then the phone rang. It was Slash, telling us to come to his room. We took our drinks with us. Moments later Slash opened his door, shirt-faced drunk and naked save for a towel wrapped around his waist. He waived us inside, where a girl lay in his bed, completely starkers. "Thanks for coming, guys!" she sneered. Even Duff didn't know where to look. We got out of there as fast as we could – after Ian had taken some pictures of the happy couple.

We were back at the Four Seasons the following afternoon to ride out to the venue with the band. We sat on the tour bus for a few minutes – I asked if we were waiting for Axl. Izzy shook his head. Axl, he said, would be along later. The atmosphere on the bus was subdued; everyone was pretty hungover. But the mood lifted at soundcheck. They played around with a couple of old Stones songs, and Duff – wearing shorts and cowboy boots – tried on Ian Tilton's newly purchased Stetson. He liked it so much he asked if he could wear it for the gig.

After soundcheck there was still no sign of

Get in the Clink

"It holds up just great. *Appetite* is a timeless record," recalls the album's producer, Mike Clink.

By the mid 1980s, producer Mike Clink's background was primarily mainstream rock (Survivor's *Eye Of The Tiger*, plus the likes of Heart and Triumph). But it was a little live record that he'd worked on in 1979, UFO's classic *Strangers In The Night*, that perked up Guns N' Roses' interest when Clink's name came up as a potential producer for their debut album, *Appetite For Destruction*.

"When I first met the band," says Clink, "we talked about the records that I had worked on before, and they showed me the ones that they liked, and ones that they didn't like. *Strangers In The Night* was probably the one that they liked the most."

On paper, the alliance between Clink and GN'R should never have worked. Instead, the world received one of rock's all-time classic recordings.

What are your memories of meeting the band?

I had never met a band like Guns N' Roses before. Previously I worked on a lot of pop/rock records such as Jefferson Starship, Eddie Money and Survivor, and this was a whole other beast. I mean, these were rock 'n' rollers and they lived the life. They were the real deal but still great guys. They were very wary of me at first – it was a matter of gaining their trust. They didn't trust anyone – they had already had some bad experiences, and weren't willing to open up immediately to anyone.

How were they getting along?

I think they got along great. It was a volatile band, but they really did get along with each other. They would come to the studio in the morning, work hard through the evening, and then when it came time to leave, they would party hard. And they always partied together. I always say they were a gang. They did everything together.

It's impressive how the sound of *Appetite* hasn't dated, even today.

We set out to make a classic record – more 'old school,' à la early Aerosmith. We had the two guitar players playing off each other, backed by a tight rhythm section and a vocalist that sang each song with a conviction I hadn't heard in ages. We didn't use samples – sampling was just becoming or vogue, and hands were triggering the snare drum, and using this bombastic verb.

Is it true that GN'R had *Don't Cry* written/demmed before the first album?

Some of the songs we had for the very first record, were spun over toward [Use Your Illusion]. That and November Rain – there were a bunch of them. They were demmed – demmed meaning we played them in rehearsal. But *Don't Cry* – there is a demo somewhere that exists of that song. That was done maybe a year before I was introduced to the band – it's probably one of their oldest songs.

How does the album hold up today?

It holds up just great. *Appetite For Destruction* is a timeless record. Someone comes up to me every week and says how much that record influenced them and touched their lives. I respect that and am very thankful as well. It's always nice when people pay me compliments about how important that record was in their lives.

Are there any unreleased songs from the *Appetite* recording sessions?

Nope.

Greg Prato





'Axl was distracted. He seemed apart from the rest of the group. The dynamic between them had changed. The singer's isolation had begun.'

Axl, Nobody – not Goldstein, nor the band – seemed concerned about it. But to me it felt weird. Ever since that first time I'd met them, Guns N' Roses looked an acted like a gang. They had that 'us against the world' mentality. But now Axl was on a different schedule to the others. Maybe he was just resting, as Goldstein had said. But after those rumours about Axl being kicked out of the band in Phoenix, it didn't look good.

Just 90 minutes before GNR were due on stage, I interviewed Izzy and Slash in a large backstage toilet-come-shower room. Slash was revelling in the band's phenomenal success. "It's completely against the industry," he said, proudly. "What this industry's about in the 80s is pretty obvious – trying to polish everything up. Everything's like techno-pop, even heavy metal stuff. We go against every standard. Even when we play live to 20,000 people, we're like a club band. We do whatever we feel like doing. That's just the way it is. And if people come expecting us to play hit after hit, it just ain't gonna happen."

On this tour, however, there were some rules that GNR had to abide by. Aerosmith, formerly the most fucked-up band in America, were now teetotal and drug-free, and in an effort to keep them sober, their manager Tim Collins had drawn up a contract forbidding Guns N' Roses to drink alcohol outside of their own dressing room. GNR honoured that contract out of respect for their heroes.

"The vibe between the two bands is great," Slash smiled. "These guys have been through a lotta shit and we have a lot of respect for them. And it's funny – they don't do drugs, they just like to talk about them. They love to ask you about what you did last

night and how fucked up you got."

Izzy added, laughing: "You drag your ass into the gig sometimes and you see these guys and you think, aw, fuck! They're eating watermelon and drinking tea and they go: 'Man, I've been up since nine o'clock this morning.' You say: 'What drugs are you doing?' And they say: 'No, I just been up since nine!'"

I suggested to them that few people would have believed that Guns N' Roses would have survived 14 months of touring like they had. Izzy snorted: "They didn't expect us to last a week! But touring really doesn't faze you, if you get twisted backstage, the walk to the bus is only a few yards, y'know? But yeah, if you get twisted every night, you start draggin'..."

Of course, I had to ask them about Axl. I'd been around the band for 24 hours and I still hadn't seen him. Slash went on the defensive. "You gotta understand that with us, excess is best and all that shit. Axl has to keep from smoking or drinking or doing drugs to maintain his voice. He doesn't hang out that much because the atmosphere that's created by the other four members is pretty, uh..."

Izzy cut in: "...Conducive to deterioration."

"Axl just hangs out by himself," Slash added. "He takes it pretty seriously. He's doing well to maintain a certain sanity level, seeing as he can't go out cos of his position in the band. If he was doing what we were doing, he wouldn't be able to sing at all!"

When I mentioned the rumours about the band firing Axl in Phoenix, Slash responded like a seasoned politician. "That's been one of the stories that's gotten bigger than all of us," he sighed. "And, as little as it was, it's just tense and it's not worth talking about

cos it doesn't relate to what's going on now."

We returned to the dressing room, where Steven was drinking vials of royal jelly. "Builds up cum in your balls!" he explained. Somewhat belatedly, Doug Goldstein presented a birthday cake to Slash with a message in pink icing: 'HAPPY FUCKIN' BIRTHDAY, YOU FUCKER'. A pack of Marlboro Reds, his preferred smoke, had been squished into the cake. 20 minutes before show time, Slash and Izzy were jamming on acoustic guitars, Steven rattling his drumsticks on the back of a chair, when, at last, Axl arrived. He barely acknowledged the other members of the band before disappearing behind a ring of flight cases arranged in corner of the room. Hidden from view, Axl went through his pre-gig warm-up ritual, singing to a loud playback of *The Needle Lies*, a track from Queensrÿche's concept album *Operation: Mindcrime*. The meaning in the song's title wasn't lost on anyone.

Axl emerged from his den just as Aerosmith singer Steven Tyler entered the room, causing general panic as everyone with a beer in their hand tried to hide it. Tyler seemed oblivious; he just wanted to congratulate GNR on their No.1 album. He hugged them all and quickly left. Axl disappeared again to change from jeans and T-shirt into his stage gear: leather chaps and codpiece, snakeskin jacket and wide-brimmed leather hat.

He looked surprised when he saw me. He walked over, his bangles and spurs jingling, and we talked for a few minutes. There was no time for a formal interview. I told him what Slash and Izzy had said about him earlier, and he seemed happy enough with



Slash's 23rd: why have candles when you can have Marlboros instead?

Whole lotta Rose: as the Appetite... tour progressed, Axl withdrew into a world of his own.



that he appeared distracted, which I attributed to him being psyched up about going on stage. But even when he broke away for Ian Tilton to take a band shot, he seemed apart from the rest of the group. The dynamic between them had changed. The isolation of Axl Rose had begun.

Guns N' Roses were brilliant that night: the best show I ever saw them play. At times, Axl was in playful mood, swapping cowboy hats with Duff. But his focus was absolute. Aerosmith might have been the headliners on that tour, but Guns N' Roses were the main attraction, and Axl owned that stage. Just before they'd gone on, Ian Tilton had asked Doug Goldstein if he could shoot from the side of the stage. "Not unless you want to eat a mic-stand..." Ian asked me if that was a joke. I assured him it wasn't.

Guns N' Roses whipped the Texan crowd into a frenzy. Standing beside me at the mixing desk in the center of the arena was Slayer's Tom Araya, a broken arm in a sling and a beer in his good hand. Even between songs he had to shout right in my ear, such was the noise from the fans. It seemed ironic that Axl was there. Just 18 months earlier, I'd gone to LA thinking Guns N' Roses were nothing compared to Slayer. Now GN'R were on a different level altogether.

Guns N' Roses were a phenomenon. They had the world at their feet. But their enigmatic singer was already withdrawing into a world all his own.

But then fame can mess with your head. Earlier that day at the hotel, Izzy, Slash, Duff and Steven had appeared in the lobby and were immediately mobbed by a group of pre-teen kids. Izzy smirked as he signed autographs. "Maybe they think we're Bon Jovi," he whispered in my ear. Seconds later, the kids all ran off. Izzy looked bemused until we realised where they'd gone—to the other side of the lobby, where they were crowded around another celebrity who had just arrived: A-Team superhero Mr. T.

If ever Guns N' Roses required a lesson in the fickle nature of showbiz, they got it right there.