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GUNS N' ROSES



PHOTOGRAPHS BY HERB RITTS



Is
THE
WORLD'S
most **EXPLOSIVE**
BAND
About TO
Self-destruct,
or
is it
JUST
Trying
to
GROW UP
in
PUBLIC?
2
REPORT
from
THE **ROAD.**
By
KIM Neely

It's late July, and as usual, Guns n' Roses are screwing everything up. They're out on the road with devil-may-care attitudes and no set list, serving up a bunch of unfamiliar songs and saying their new records'll be done when they're done.

To make things worse, Axl Rose is carrying on like an Apache. He stormed into his home state for a concert and compared the fans there to prisoners at Auschwitz. He showed up two hours late for a New York show and launched into a tirade against his record company and various other institutions, including this magazine. He steamrolled into St. Louis, and before he left town, a riot had broken out. During an encore in Salt Lake City, he got ticked off because the Mammals weren't rocking and said, "I'll get out of here before I put anybody else to sleep." Then he did.

And the hits just keep on coming. Ted Nugent of Damn Yankees has declared his band's shows free-for-all for fans with cameras. Mötley Crüe's Vince Neil has gone on MTV and challenged Rose to a public fight. Even the band's old drummer, Steven Adler, has gotten into the picture: He's suing Guns n' Roses, claiming they encouraged him to do heroin and then matched his job away while he was trying to clean up.

Not since the Sex Pistols has one band caused so much controversy. From the day they burst out of a grimy Sunset Strip hellhole and into the public eye, Guns n' Roses have been nothing but trouble. They wrote a song that pissed off blacks and gays, and a couple of others that riled feminists. One of them said 'fuck' on television. Another got arrested for peeing in the galley of a passenger plane. They did drugs, lots of drugs. They drank like bandits. Every Monday morning a new rumor circulated that one of them had overdosed. Nobody was sure they'd live long enough to make another record.

Then, as is their habit, they did the unexpected: They

Guitarist Izzy Stradlin prefers to
By HIMSELF. Axl calls him "Mr."

cleaned themselves up. They put their personal and personnel affairs in order and went into the studio. There were a few setbacks, but everything seemed to be going smoothly — all things being relative, of course.

Less than two months ago, only a few tracks away from finishing two new albums ('Use Your Illusion I' and 'Use Your Illusion II'), Guns n' Roses hit the tour trail. Before a week was out, they were already in the news. Every day brings word of some new disaster, some new outrage, some new lawsuit.

As of this writing, Guns n' Roses are very much a band teetering on the brink, and America is watching. Will they survive? Do they even want to survive? The question most everyone seems to be asking is this: Is the world's most explosive band about to self-destruct?

LOS ANGELES, MAY 18TH, 6:00 P.M.

In four days, Guns n' Roses shove off for Wisconsin to kick off their tour. Today, however, the band's notoriously mercurial lead vocalist, Axl Rose, seems remarkably calm. He's phoned with a casual offer to "go get a burger or something" and arrives at the restaurant — a Fifties-style joint called the Burger That Ate L.A. — garbed in shorts, his custom Axl sneakers and a lightweight black blazer. Rose chooses a table outside and orders a burger, a chocolate malt and chili fries. While he waits for his meal, his attention is captured several times by attractive females passing on the street. After his second or third double take, Rose grins embarrassedly, then explains that girl watching is something he has come to enjoy. For a long time, he says, women just tended to make him mad.

"I know what the problem was," Rose says. "I had an extremely volatile relationship with Erin [Everly, Rose's former wife]. And I was projecting strong negative feelings about myself onto other people. I was attracted to

people with similar dysfunctional traits, people that I was going to end up not really getting along with. And it wasn't good for me or them; it just made me despise being with anyone or meeting anyone or having good thoughts linked to someone."

For a man who's so often thought of as unreasonable and unyielding, Rose has spent a lot of time trying to get a handle on his famous temper. For the past several months, he's been involved in some heavy therapy; during one intensive period the singer underwent five-hour sessions five days a week.

"I'm getting a lot more comfortable with things," Rose says. "I'm still not very good at handling stress, and I was told that that was because of the way I was raised. I basically had my family screw up any positive, productive form of release. Rebelling in my music kept me from going to jail." ("Somewhat," he adds with a smile.)

"I have to retrain myself," Rose says. "It's not something that's gonna happen overnight. And my sexual attitudes and attitudes toward women . . . I went through some heavy things in childhood. I formed really strong, serious opinions, lodged them in my subconscious and have been acting on them ever since. There were ugly, violent situations, and they affected me negatively."

Rose doesn't intend to stop with healing himself. "I'd like to be part of an organization working with child abuse," he says. "Sexual abuse and child abuse. I figure

you gotta start there."

Rose is just digging into his fries when a middle-aged woman approaches with her daughter, who looks to be about seven. The woman asks apologetically if he would mind autographing a menu.

Rose looks at the little girl. It's clear that she's terribly excited; she keeps tugging at the hem of her dress, and she's having trouble standing still. Finally, blushing profusely, she musters up her courage and gifts Rose with a blinding tin grin.

Rose is delighted. He smiles back at the girl, who now looks as if she's about to faint. "What's your name?" he asks.

"Erin," she says shyly.

For the briefest of instants, an expression of "This could only happen to me" flashes across Rose's face, but he recovers so quickly that the girl never notices it.

"That's a real pretty name," he tells her.

THOUGH AXL ROSE SPENDS THE MAJORITY OF HIS TIME onstage at warp speed, off the stage his manner is so languid that he gives the impression of carefully considering each movement before he makes it. Clearly, he is not a

man who likes to be rushed.

It is this trait, perhaps, coupled with his well-known perfectionism, that has made Rose the primary target of criticism concerning the recent setbacks in the recording of the band's new albums, which at press time were said to be ready for a mid-September release.

While the wait has seemed interminable to hungry fans, the fact is that Guns n' Roses didn't begin work on the albums in earnest until last fall. That it took the band two years to begin the recording had a lot to do with what occurs when several musicians who have spent years on the road — perhaps the finest form of escapism known to man — are suddenly deposited on their doorsteps and told to get on with their lives. For Guns n' Roses, the panic set in when their 1988 tour supporting Aerosmith ground to a halt.

"All of a sudden we got off the road, and it was like wind and fucking tumbleweed," says guitarist Slash. "I mean, people moving into houses and buying cars and shit. It didn't kill us, but it did become a bit of a pressure, because everybody around us wouldn't leave us alone."

"People thought we had attitudes," Slash continues, "and that wasn't the case at all. We were really fucking unhappy. It was depressing because the sense of abandon was gone. In a way, we were really streetwise and hip to things, and at the same time we were really naive. That's where it screwed with us, because it totally took our in-

nocence away."

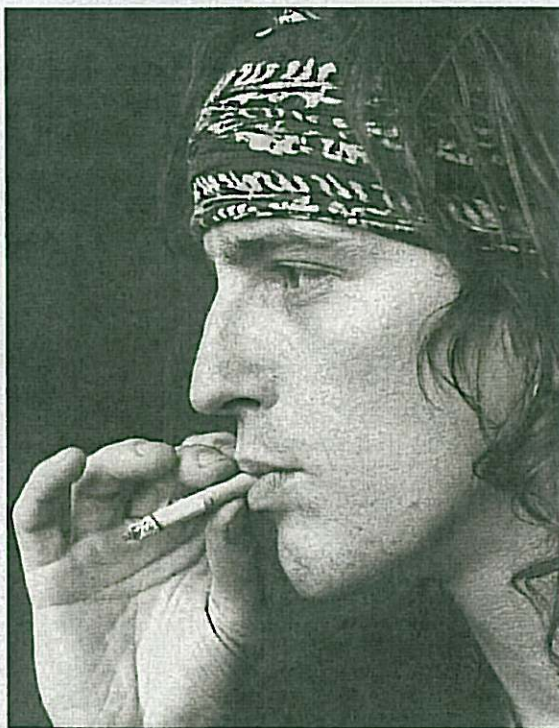
TRAVEL
INVISIBLE."

As a means of dealing with the pressure, most of the band members turned to drugs and alcohol. They began to drift apart, eventually isolating themselves from one another completely.

By early 1990 most of the band members had cleaned themselves up sufficiently to begin recording, and they entered

the studio. But their attempts to lay down tracks with Adler failed miserably. In the summer of 1990 they reluctantly dismissed him.

By last fall, with new drummer Matt Sorum and keyboardist Dizzy Reed in place, it appeared that Guns n' Roses were finally ready to kick into high gear. The group had laid down instrumental tracks for the albums, and all that remained was the addition of Rose's vocals and the mixing chores. But after twenty-one tracks had been mixed, the band, unhappy with the way the mixes sounded, replaced engineer Bob Clearmountain with Bill Price and started over from scratch. Then, in early May, Guns n' Roses fired their manager, Alan Niven, after Rose refused to finish the albums until Niven was replaced with the band's comanager, Doug Goldstein. The rest of the band members went along with the decision to



prevent a meltdown.

Rose doesn't say much about the Niven split; he seems to regard it as only one of a series of changes that had to be made before he could get on with the business of finishing the albums and starting a tour. Rose also contends that there haven't been any "delays" in the making of the records — only a series of release dates thrown out by wishful-thinking record executives.

"People want something, and they want it as soon as they can get it," Rose says. "Needy people. And I'm the same way, but I want it to be right —

Bassist "They LIKE

I don't want it to be half-assed. Since we put out *Appetite for Destruction*, I've watched a lot of bands put out two to four albums, and who cares? They went out, they did a big tour, they were big rock stars for that period of time. That's what everybody's used to now — the record companies push that. But I want no part of that. We weren't just throwing something together to be rock stars. We wanted to put something together that meant everything to us."

Apparently, they did. The sophistication of the *Use Your Illusion* material will be a shock to fans who may have been expecting a double dose of *Appetite for Destruction*-style slam. The stylistic diversity of the tracks is staggering: an industrial cyberpunk tirade ("My World"); Elton John-inspired piano ballads ("Estranged" and "November Rain" — the latter featuring Rose on piano and augmented by lavish orchestral arrangements and a choir); Stony shuffles ("Dust n' Bones," "14 Years"); a psychedelic offering called "The Garden," featuring mind-fuck guitars and a guest appearance by Alice Cooper; a defibrillator-charged monster called "Coma"; and the last track to be completed, "Get in the Ring." Guns n' Roses' serpent-tongued serenade to a few magazine editors (they name names) who've pissed them off.

"I've had a good understanding of where I wanted Guns n' Roses to go and the things I wanted Guns n' Roses to achieve musically," says Rose, "and I can't say that everybody's had a grip on that. We're competing with rock legends, and we're trying to do the best we can to possibly be honored with a position like that."

"We want to define ourselves," Rose adds. "*Appetite* was a cornerstone, a place to start. That was like 'Here's our land, and we just put a stake in the ground. Now we're going to build something.'"

LAKE LAWN LODGE, DELAVAN, WISCONSIN, MAY 25TH, 3:30 A.M.

It's prime time for Guns n' Roses. Despite an out-

break of rowdiness backstage that had the managers of both the headlining act and the opening act, Skid Row, sweet-talking various venue bigwigs, the consensus is that the Wisconsin shows have gone off extremely well. Even the rain — which began early this morning and is still falling — didn't dampen the fans' enthusiasm.

At the hotel, a hallway party is taking shape. Someone

has ordered pizza. Dizzy Reed is being teased mercilessly about four girls who are passed out on his bed, namely because it's a little too obvious they've been out on the soggy grounds of the amphitheater.



DUFF McKAGAN WANTS TO STUDY Law. WEIRD People AT HARVARD," he SAYS.

("You can tell who the new guys are," someone snickers. "They get the muddy chicks.")

Rose returns from the venue in good spirits, and a small group gravitates to his room, where he begins cracking bottles of champagne. By 5:00 a.m. the others have straggled out of the room, and Rose is ready to talk. He takes off the knee-high splint

that was designed for him yesterday by a group of doctors and tennis-shoe designers after he discovered that performing in the clumpy plaster cast he was wearing (he injured a foot during a New York warm-up show) was going to be painful. Rose is proud of the fact that rather than flying into a rage when he discovered that the cast was going to be a problem, he kept the reins on his temper and found a rational way over the hurdle.

"I guess for a few years you can act like nothing bothers you," Rose says, "or you can act upset and that's just how your life is. But then you reach a stage where you're an emotional and physical toxic-waste dump, and the things that got you where you are start to aid you in self-destructing. Then you have to face those issues."

"Everybody in the band is realizing different situations like that," Rose continues, "and we talk to each other about it. None of us are qualified to be anybody else's therapist — all you can really do is be a friend."

He pauses for a long time. "There's a lot of desire to keep what we have together," Rose says. "I mean, we already lost one guy. Actually, we lost a lot of people. It would've been nice to stay with Alan. It would've been nice to work with certain photographers, certain security, road crew, stagehands. . . . Whether you're glad you're in a situation or not, there's always a part of you that goes, 'I wish I could've been happy there, just stayed happy somehow.'"

Rose gets up, stretches and walks out onto a wooden deck to gaze out at the lake. The rain has stopped, and everything smells fresh. Rose was born in the Midwest and owns a parcel of land here in Wisconsin on which he

reportedly plans to build a house someday. The singer often displays a keen appreciation for symmetry, and one gets the feeling that the decision for Guns n' Roses to kick off their tour here had a lot to do with an instinctual need on Rose's part to get back to his roots.

Once he begins talking again, it's clear that's the case, but not for the reasons one would expect. Apparently, Rose wasn't drawn to the Midwest to strengthen his bond with the area but rather to sever it.

"I know the Midwest better than most places," Rose says. "A lot of scared people are living in their houses, and I don't ever want to be that way. You just have to be really aware of stagnation. If you're shutting out the rest of the world without really knowing what it's about, it's like you're in a cocoon; you're a butterfly that never hatches. There are people from my hometown that are, like, 'I remember when you bagged on this place, and I hated you for that, but the best thing that ever happened

to me was you pulling me out of this place.'"

"I'm going to play Indianapolis in a couple of days," Rose says, "and there's a lot of people I'm not having come to my show. There's a lot of people I am. There's a lot of people I'm realizing are more important to me than the people I've worried about my whole life."

Rose lights a cigarette. "I wanted to be buried here," he says. "I bought land here specifically for that reason. I mean, if you're from Lafayette, Indiana, you can go to California and know it isn't your real home. Alpine Valley was where I decided I would go, so I bought a place to be buried here. I don't think it's gonna happen that way now. And that's weird, but it's cool."

"I'm going to look at it and see if I want to sell it," Rose says. "There were reasons why I bought that particular piece of land, with those particular trees and that particular smell and that particular vibe, and picked out the land with my stepfather. Those reasons don't exist anymore. And I'm okay with it."

"I'm kind of excited," he adds, smiling. "I'm wondering where I'm gonna call home. It's like opening up the world for me."

NOBLESVILLE, INDIANA, MAY 28TH.

Riled about a crappy stage and a county curfew that requires large gatherings to be completed by 10:30 p.m., Axl Rose begins his homecoming show and promptly lays into the local authorities. During the five-minute tirade, the singer remarks that only Indiana would have such a curfew. "I grew up in this state," Rose says. "It seems to me there are a lot of scared old people in this fucking state, and basically, for two-thirds of my life they tried to keep my ass down." Then he addresses the fans, whom he considers to be in the same position he was in not very long ago. "I got a lot of cool prisoners here in Auschwitz," Rose tells them. Following the show, Guns n' Roses are fined \$5000 for breaking curfew. Rose's "Auschwitz" comment will make headlines for days, but few reporters will interpret the comment the way Rose intended it. "I wanted to tell them that they could break away, too," he later tells the *Los Angeles Times*.

THE SPECTRUM, PHILADELPHIA, JUNE 13TH, 2:00 A.M.

The last time Guns n' Roses played the Spectrum, Rose got into a scuffle with some parking-lot attendants who tried to prevent him from entering the premises to do his own show. He narrowly escaped being arrested.

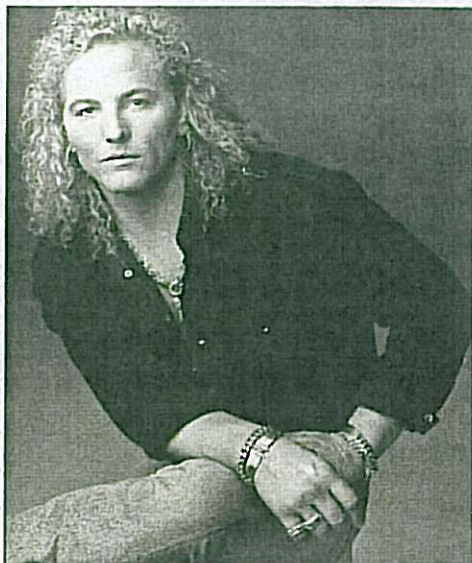
Rose hasn't forgotten the incident — he mentions it briefly from the stage — but the show goes smoothly, save one tense moment in the middle of "Welcome to the

Jungle" when he halts the proceedings to chastise a pair of brawling fans.

Afterward, in the band's hospitality room, which has been made homely with a scattering of candles and a few scarfs draped over lamps, the members of Guns n' Roses unwind with some friends. AC/DC, Led Zeppelin and Queen blare in the background. Rose, seated Indian-style on the floor, is being administered a back rub by his current girlfriend, model Stephanie Seymour. Bassist Duff McKagan is leaning against a pinball machine, talking to a member of the band's crew. Slash pops in briefly, takes a look around, makes an aside about being sick of the groupie scene and then decides to head on to New York, where the band has a show in a few days. Matt Sorum and Dizzy Reed are basking in the attention of a cavalcade of young ladies wearing too much make-up and too little clothing.

Rhythm guitarist Izzy Stradlin, as usual, is nowhere to be seen. One usually sees more of his dog, a good-natured Ger-

**"I feel like
MATT SORUM**



G N' R SAVED My Life," says Keyboardist

man shepherd that has its own backstage laminate, than of Stradlin. What the guitarist does with his time is a topic of debate among the other band members, because the only time they really see much of him is onstage. ("It's Izzy's goal," says Rose, "to be Mr. Invisible.")

In the band's *Appetite for Destruction* phase, Stradlin was regarded as something of a mess. His sole contribution to Guns n' Roses' public-fuckup file came during that period — an arrest that occurred when, confronted with an overlong line at the lavatory on a plane, he christened the kitchen area instead. (The caper earned him a staggering fine, numerous headlines and a rather embarrassing nickname, compliments of his wiseass band mates: Whizzy.) Today, however, Stradlin is clear-eyed, witty and entirely unpretentious; he is probably the only member of Guns n' Roses who manages to lead a somewhat normal life. He spent most of Guns n' Roses' rejuvenation period traveling; by the time the band began work on its albums, he had seen the sights in Germany, Spain and England, with stops in Paris and Amsterdam thrown in for good measure. Stradlin says that travel is the reward of success he cherishes the most. Meeting the Rolling Stones ("That was excellent") runs a close second. Everything else, he says, he can live without — including the drugs that were so prevalent in the band's early days. "I feel a lot better because I've stopped," Stradlin says. "I don't fuck around with that stuff. I just reached a point where I said, 'I'm gonna kill myself. Why die for this shit?'" The guitarist says that he had his last drink a year and a half ago (with good company — Keith Richards and Ron Wood) and that while he doesn't have any real regrets about his partying heyday, he wouldn't want to relive it, either. "We used to do a lot of funny shit," Stradlin says, laughing. "But I don't miss it. There's nothing like throwing up out a bus door going

sixty-five miles an hour."

Stradlin spends his off time either skateboarding or bicycling; he also hauls a motorcycle around with him on tour. While the rest of Guns n' Roses fly on a chartered MGM Grand jet, Stradlin travels by himself to avoid the isolation inherent in being part of a protective entourage. "If you're driving or something, it keeps you in touch with the rest of the world," Stradlin says.

Asked about his reputation as the most press-shy band member, Stradlin says he avoids interviews because "I've read so much bullshit about our band."

"At first," says Stradlin, "I thought it was funny. Then I was like 'I don't need this.' Why should I try to explain our version when they're gonna write whatever?" (He does, however, find doing the rare interview useful — like, say, when he's lost touch with two of his old Indiana friends, Mike Gold and Troy Kendall, and thinks that crediting them as early influences in a magazine article might prompt them to look him up.)

SOMEONE IN LED ZEPPELIN," says Drummer



**(top) "BASICALLY,
DIZZY REED**

me," says McKagan, "is that I'm just a fuckup drunk and don't give a shit." Though he is still known to tie one on occasionally, he is far from the two-gallons-of-vodka-a-day guzzler he was in the band's early days. McKagan had a rough time a few years ago, when Guns n' Roses' future looked dubious; he says that not knowing whether the band was going to survive was a big factor in his drinking. After things began to look more secure, McKagan decided he had had

enough of the booze. He quit for seventy-one days and still considers that a milestone; he also says he plans to return to abstinence eventually. "When I have kids, I will stop drinking for good," says McKagan. "I'm not gonna be like my fucking dad. I came to that conclusion when I was in the second grade."

McKagan's bull-in-a-china-shop manner gives the impression that he doesn't put much thought into anything, but he'll surprise you. For starters, he's not stoned. McKagan was an honors student before he dropped out of high school to tour with various punk bands, opening for acts like Black Flag and the Dead Kennedys; he says he intends someday to pick up where he left off. "I talked with a counselor," McKagan says. "I have to take one year of junior college. But if I ace junior [Cont. on 102]

apartment, no food, no nothing, and if you guys need to know where to get hold of me, I can't tell you where I'm gonna be." The next day he got a phone call telling him he was in the band. "Basically," Reed says, "they fucking saved my life."

Matt Sorum, despite a stint on the road with the Cult, seems more excited about being in Guns n' Roses than Reed does. Sorum describes his experience in Guns n' Roses so far as "one big unbelievable trip."

"You know," he says, "like getting on the plane? — I felt like someone in Led Zeppelin."

A monster drummer, Sorum got his professional start in 1976, on the L.A. club scene; he played in a series of hard-rock bands, "went with the skinny-tie thing for a second" with an Australian New Wave band called I.Q., spent a few years touring with a guitarist named Gregg Wright, then returned to Los Angeles and began working as a session drummer, his most impressive résumé entry being a stint as hired gun for Gladys Knight. Shortly afterward, he hooked up with the Cult.

"In the Cult," says Sorum, "every night was a big party. Now I take it a little easier." Sometimes. The drummer did endear himself to the staff of the Four Seasons Hotel in Toronto recently when, after a few too many Jägermeisters, he hit upon the idea of swinging from the chandelier in his room. "It wasn't like the movies," he says. "I fell on my ass."

Bassist Duff McKagan, the punk spirit of Guns n' Roses, has something of an image problem. "I think probably the most inaccurate thing that's written about

Stradlin contributed more songs to the *Use Your Illusion* albums than any other band member. But he isn't counting. "I have a few on there," Stradlin says. "But they all get mixed together. Once they're on tape with Axl singing and Slash playing guitar, I just look at them as Guns n' Roses stuff." His nonchalance about his own songs notwithstanding, Stradlin is eager for the albums to be released. "Then I can go to a truck stop," Stradlin says. "I never play our music at truck stops, but it's always a kick to see Hank Williams and then see one of our songs. That's like 'Yeah, we made it.'"

Reed says he was beginning to think he'd never make it when he was asked to join Guns n' Roses. The keyboardist had been in L.A. for six years and hadn't made a penny playing music; he met Guns n' Roses in their early days, when they moved into a studio next door to the one occupied by his band. "Having a keyboard player in the band was something they talked to me about a long time ago," Reed says. "I never really thought it would happen." When it did, it happened because Reed, who had only a day left to vacate the apartment he was squatting in, placed a panicky call to Rose. "I go, 'Dude, I'm starving, as of tomorrow I'll have no phone, no

enough of the booze. He quit for seventy-one days and still considers that a milestone; he also says he plans to return to abstinence eventually. "When I have kids, I will stop drinking for good," says McKagan. "I'm not gonna be like my fucking dad. I came to that conclusion when I was in the second grade."

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gin work as a \$600,000-a-year plastic surgeon. But when he crashes into a judge's fence in Grady, South Carolina, Stone is sentenced to perform a few days of free clinic service in this "Hee Haw from hell."

Can our hero find happiness in a burg where people say "fiddlesticks" instead of "fuck"? Seems he's tempted, what with pretty Julie Warner around as a divorced mother who studies law and regularly swims nude. Grady's no redneck town either; it boasts several blacks, a Germanophile mechanic and a homosexual, all living in harmony with such cracker-barrel types as a crusty old doctor (Barnard Hughes), a bearded mayor (David Ogden Stiers), a Daisy Mae clone (Bridget Fonda) and a hunky insurance salesman (Woody Harrelson).

The actors treat these characters with a refreshing lack of condescension. And Caton-Jones, a Scot, shows real flair and feeling for American quirks. But the script, credited to four writers, is too tame. Capra knew that rubes could be just as tangled as city slickers. His films had bite. For all its antic charm, *Doc Hollywood* is disappointingly toothless.

that he sings while sewing up his patients. Then MacKee finds he has throat cancer. Looking to his peers for comfort, he finds only forms, tests and medical evasions.

Hurt is an exceptional actor who manages MacKee's descent into hospital hell with rare subtlety and power. When writ-



Dr. William Hurt learns to kill with kindness.

er Robert Caswell and director Randa Haines (*Children of a Lesser God*) stick to MacKee's ordeal, *The Doctor* is riveting. But the film quickly dissolves in bathos. Caswell switches into the soap-opera mode, and Haines directs accordingly. Unable to show his feelings to his wife, Anne (a wasted Christine Lahti), and son, Nicky (Charlie Korsmo), MacKee reaches out to another cancer patient, June (Elizabeth Perkins), whose treatment has made her bald. Dr. Jack even takes June dancing in the desert, where they relish life's fleeting pleasures in a wide-screen sunset.

Does cancer make MacKee a better man? You bet. When he loses his voice, he wears a blackboard around his neck and writes "Sorry" and "Start again" while looking imploringly at his neglected wife. He rejects his unethical partner, well played by Mandy Patinkin, and begins communing with pigeons on the hospital roof. Hollywood's operation on Dr. Rosenbaum's book may be a box-office success, but the book died.

- P.T.

The Doctor

DESPITE THE CONGRATULATORY reviews, this movie is an even more depressing specimen of the feel-good boom than *Regarding Henry*. *The Doctor*—based on a gritty nonfiction book by Ed Rosenbaum, M.D.—trivializes an intriguing premise: What happens when the doctor becomes the patient? Jack MacKee, played by William Hurt, is a smugly prosperous San Francisco surgeon so detached about his work

Guns n' Roses

[Cont. from 40] college, get up in the high threes or a four-point figure, I can get into Harvard, 'cause they like weird people at Harvard these days." McKagan says he'd like to study law; as hard as it is to picture him hobnobbing with the Ivy Leaguers in his leather pants, it appears he's serious.

Other intriguing findings about Duff McKagan: He detests being called a rock star and threatens to "fucking strangle" the next person who does so. A musician's musician, he's working on a solo album on which he plays every instrument. He's the true-blue type when it comes to women. ("I was married on our last tour, and I never cheated once," McKagan says. "I guess that makes me a schmuck.") Despite a divorce that left him smarting, he still longs to meet Mrs. Right. ("She'll be the happiest woman in the world, goddamn it!") And finally, if you ask Duff McKagan about his views on religion, this is what he'll probably tell you: "I think the Bible's a good story, you know? I mean Jesus was . . . back in those times, the Romans were just squashing everybody, and here came this guy who had positive thoughts. I think that's all there was to it. And he turned all these people on to these positive thoughts. All of a sudden all the people were going, 'This guy's fucking groovy.' And the Romans were like 'Not that groovy, because he's fucking taking over all of our people we're squashing, so we're gonna kill him.' And there's no such thing as the Immaculate Conception. His mom got fucked to have him, you know? Come on. He was just a positive guy who wanted to spread love and goodness. And the Romans did not dig that. And they fucking squashed him like a grape."

THE ROYALTON HOTEL, NEW YORK CITY, JUNE 16TH, 1:00 A.M.

Earlier today, Rose decided to organize a spur-of-the-moment band dinner; at around ten, Guns n' Roses and their entourage departed for the Old Homestead steakhouse, where at this very minute they are running up a \$3000 tab on champagne and surf 'n' turf. Everybody, that is, except Slash.

Rose conceived the get-together as a come-if-you-want affair, but by the time the invitation got to Slash it sounded like attendance was mandatory. As a result, the guitarist is boycotting the event.

It isn't hard to figure out which room is Slash's—you just follow the sound of Metallica's "One," which is blasting from behind his door. The guitarist, hair still wet from a shower and wearing a pair of shorts, opens his door and immediately throws down the glove. "I don't know what there is to talk about," Slash says.

The introverted guitarist, who hides behind his hair not as a concession to rock & roll fashion but because he doesn't want anybody to see his eyes, can be outright gregarious if you manage to knock down

the protective wall he keeps around himself. Slash is funny and extremely engaging, and these days, most people who talk with him come away a little stunned by his lucidity. In early 1990, Slash gave Dick Clark a coronary (and lent an otherwise boring American Music Awards show its only moment of unbridled rock & roll spirit) when he repeatedly used the word *fuckin'* during an acceptance speech. Today the guitarist wouldn't be as likely to commit such an alcohol-soaked faux pas.

"I'm no angel," Slash says, "but I know I can't get hooked on dope again, because it just does not work for me. It's just an alienating drug, period. And so I've been cool. I deal with a hell of a lot of business, and Axl does, and Duff does. If something has to get done, we get it done."

Getting things done is Slash's *raison d'être*. The guitarist, who can't stand idle time, got through Guns n' Roses' long period of inactivity by indulging himself with a spree of guest appearances, playing on albums by Iggy Pop, Bob Dylan and Lenny Kravitz, among others.

"The most stress I feel," Slash says, "is from anything getting in my way. If it's Axl wanting to be on his schedule and me on mine, which is a lot faster paced, I'll stress on that. I'll stress over anything that slows me down."

Slash seems to have accepted the occasional flare-up arising from his and Rose's warring internal timetables as par for the course; it's clear that he sees the tension as a necessary evil, the spark that makes for the combustible energy at the heart of their creative collaborations. It's also clear that he never takes Rose, or any of his other band mates, for granted. "You know, I love the band fucking with all my heart," says Slash. "I mean, there will be a point when this will all finish, the tour will end, the album will die and I'll keep jamming with cats that I dig playing with. But then we'll just go do another record. I don't think anything's really gonna break us up. The only thing that ever made it look that way was just our own fucking insecurity. We just flip out, because everything seems to be so much."

"Sometimes you go, 'What the fuck is it for?'" Slash says. "Then you try to look where to escape to, and there's nowhere to go. We've been doing it for so long that we really would all feel sort of lost and lonely if it fell apart and we had to go out and do solo records. Because it wouldn't be Guns. None of us could reproduce that. Axl's got so much charisma—he's one of the best singers around. It's his personality. He can go out and do something. What freaks me out is, if the band falls apart, I'll never be able to shake the fact that I'm the ex-Guns n' Roses guitar player. And that's almost like selling your soul."

Slash appears to have spent a great deal of time lately pondering the side effects of Guns n' Roses' success. For starters, it's disheartening for him to see Guns n' Roses being lumped into the pop-metal mainstream they fought so hard to distinguish themselves from. "We're [Cont. on 107]

N O W P L A Y I N G

MOBSTERS

Credit this baby *Godfather* for at least looking good. It's too bad that the star hunk playing gangsters—Christian Slater (Lucky Luciano), Patrick Dempsey (Meyer Lansky), Richard Grieco (Bugsy Siegel) and Costas Mandylor (Frank Costello)—spend so much time primping that they forget to act. Rookie director Michael Karbelnikoff seems at a loss to do anything with the incoherent script co-written by Nicholas Kazan, who has taken a sharp fall from *Reversal of Fortune*. *Mobsters* doesn't even work as an excuse for a nap: The rubouts are too damn noisy.

ANOTHER YOU

Writer Ziggy Steinberg's name is funnier than his script for this droolingly stupid comedy, which has Gene Wilder posing as Lincoln and Richard Pryor passing as Joe Frazier.



LIFE STINKS

It's a rank day indeed when top banana Mel Brooks is reduced to directing, co-writing and starring in a farce about the homeless. Brooks plays a greedy billionaire bastard who wagers he can live for thirty days without cash and learns that money isn't everything. It's hard to judge what stinks worse—the tasteless jokes or the hypocritical piety.

Guns n' Roses

[Cont. from 102] still spitting at what's supposed to be right and correct in this business," Slash says. "And when the record comes out, if we've done a good job, we can just go on being ourselves. I look in a T-shirt shop and see pretty much seventy-five percent of the bands that I hate, and us. Fucking Appetite got so popular that kids' moms were listening to it. That reminded me of when punk rock died."

The guitarist is also bummed that Guns n' Roses' leap from poverty-stricken street rats to wealthy celebrities has fueled a perception that they're fat-and-happy sellouts. "Jimi Hendrix said the more money you make, the more blues you can sing," says Slash. "For somebody to sit there and go, 'Well, you're just a rich rock star now, and you're spoiled,' I won't even take it. I'm like 'Fuck you.' We lived in a shun. We lived in a way that people wouldn't fucking live for two minutes. I worked my ass off to be here, and we work our asses off now. You know, my mentality hasn't changed. I still never have any cash on me."

NASSAU COLISEUM, UNIONDALE, NEW YORK, JUNE 17TH, 11:10 P.M.

"I'm sorry I'm late," says Axl Rose, who just climbed out of a helicopter that brought him two hours late to the show.

"I know it sucks," he tells the 18,000 fans who have been waiting for Guns n' Roses to take the stage. "And if you think it sucks, why don't you write a letter to Geffen Records and tell them to get the fuck out of my ass!"

The band launches into "Mr. Brownstone." At the end of the song, Rose addresses the crowd again. "There's a ROLLING STONE coming out with us on the cover," says Rose. "Do me a favor: Don't buy it. And if you want to read it, steal it."

Rose doesn't stop there. Clearly, he is on a roll, and Rose, when he is angry, has an excellent memory. He spits out a few choice words about a Herb Ritts photo session yesterday (Rose didn't want to do the shoot on the day before a show and only did so because it was the only opening in Ritts's schedule) and then he works his way backward, all the way to Guns n' Roses' first ROLLING STONE photo shoot, in 1988. (The photographer kept them at a New Jersey biker bar until dawn, and they had a show that night.)

During the remainder of what will turn out to be a phenomenal show, Rose will stop several times to issue streams of biting commentary. By the end of the night, the *Village Voice*, Jon Pareles of the *New York Times* and a Philadelphia newsman who praised Guns n' Roses and slagged Skid Row will all fall under the hammer.

Some, however, don't get to see the rest of the show. Some leave. In a car full of long-faced Geffen staffers, all of whom have been advised, via a messenger from a cer-

tain dressing room, to get out of Dodge.

IT'S BEEN SAID THAT YOU CAN'T CONSIDER yourself fully acquainted with Axl Rose until you have at least once wanted to tell him to fuck off. Those who know him well, though, rarely do. Because it's apparent to anyone who spends any time with him that, for all of Rose's seething rage and vicious wordplays, for all the time he spends lashing out at the rest of the world, he usually isn't fighting anyone but himself.

"I guess I get mad because of some form of fear about my own weaknesses," Rose says. "Everybody has theirs, and mine happen to be in what I do. And what I do is sing and run and get my picture taken. I've always needed high maintenance to keep my act together. Nothing really comes naturally except the desire to sing."

"I used to jump ship every three days," Rose says. "And I wasn't crying wolf. It would usually come down to I was leaving but there was no place to go. What am I gonna do, go to Paris, do poetry? Look at art museums and hope that not going after what I set out to do didn't eat me alive? Go pump gas? I was leaving to pump gas a few times, and ready for it. Then, I don't know, something in me would go, 'You can deal with this now.' It just took time to be able to deal with it. And that's when I would get hassled for not doing photo shoots and interviews, because at that time I needed to be able to deal with just being able to stay here. And that took a lot of time. A lot of my anger came from people not understanding that I needed that time. I would turn myself inside out to certain people, and they still wouldn't get it. They're no longer with us, because I just didn't feel safe, ever."

Those around Rose say his therapy has helped him make a great deal of progress. At the very least it has helped him deal with the depression that so often made him feel suicidal in the past.

"For over two years," says Rose, "I lived in a black room. Blackout curtains, black floors, black walls. It's what I always thought I wanted, and sometimes it was really cool and sometimes it was a nightmare. And for two years, I worked on trying to put my head together and find answers, because I couldn't find a reason to stay alive. I know a lot of cool people, but I wasn't thinking about them missing me or me missing them - I was just like 'Hope they'll be all right, and I want out of here.' I just wanted to leave."

"I don't so much want to leave anymore. I'm finally starting to settle into my life. Ever since that point, it's been rough, but I knew I'd walked into my life. And the touring is the combat zone of it."

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI, JULY 2ND.

The trouble starts as soon as Rose arrives at the show, when someone with the promoter begins hassling him like an over-excited fan. Guns n' Roses take the stage, and immediately, Rose begins feeling uncomfortable about the security staff of the venue. He sees a security guard shove a

fan. He sees numerous bottles and cameras in the crowd; several bottles are lobbed at the stage, two of which hit McKagan. Meanwhile, a gang of bikers in the front row has been intimidating other fans. One of these bikers begins making a nuisance of himself, screaming Rose's name and trying to get his attention. At one point, Rose interrupts the show so that the biker can hand him a card with his name on it. Shortly afterward, Rose notices the biker taking pictures. He asks venue security to confiscate the camera, and when they fail to, he dives into the crowd. As he's holding on to the biker, venue security jumps Rose; he slaps one security guard. Guns n' Roses' bodyguards retrieve Rose from the melee and get him back onto the stage. He has lost a contact lens, can't see and is furious at having been manhandled by security staffers who have been hired to protect him. He stalls off the stage. His band mates follow.

Ten minutes later, when the houselights are turned on, fans begin rioting. Guns n' Roses offer to play a few more songs, but by that point things are too out of hand. They are advised to leave the building.

It takes police several hours to get the riot - which results in sixty injuries, sixteen arrests, \$200,000 in damages to the brand-new amphitheater and the loss of most of Guns n' Roses' equipment - under control.

DALLAS, TEXAS, JULY 8TH.

Rose - stressed out over the fact that he's about to face 20,000 drunken Texans who've heard nothing for a week except that he sparked a riot - is two hours late for Guns n' Roses' first postriot gig.

When he takes the stage at the Starplex Amphitheater, this is what Rose says:

"It's hard to figure out why we get up onstage to do this, because at some times it's fun, but other times it takes all the physical fucking energy we've got to get up here and do what we do for a living."

"For the last few days, I'm watching CNN and reading this shit in the St. Louis papers about how I incited a riot, and they're talking about 'and in the band, they have a recovering heroin addict, and once, Axl Rose was seen driving down the street in a Jeep yelling obscenities at his former wife' - what the fuck does that have to do with St. Louis?"

"And I had to realize that no matter what we did tonight and how good or bad we played, there'd probably be one person in the press here that for some reason didn't dig it, and he'd write about something else and write some lies."

"Now at the same time that that won't have an effect on Dallas, and it shouldn't affect me, it fucks with the entire thing called rock & roll in general. Because who are the main people that watch these news things and read this shit? They're all in their forties to fifties, sittin' there eatin' their bran flakes and drinking their coffee."

"I ain't knockin' getting old. It's a fact of life, unless you die before you get there, you're gonna get old. But just because you're old doesn't mean you have to deny

young people their humanity. And so now there's a lot of people reading these negative things about Guns n' Roses, and if their kid likes Guns n' Roses, he's gonna get smacked in the head or something, because the paper said it was an evil thing."

"And that really makes me go, 'Fuck, what's the point?' But I'll tell you what the point is. We're up here and what we are doing is something that is dying in America - it usually stays at an underground level and doesn't get as successful as Guns n' Roses - and that's freedom of expression. And basically, that's all we fucking are. Guns n' Roses is just a prime fucking example of freedom of expression..."

IT'S LIKELY THAT, NO MATTER HOW MANY positive changes Guns n' Roses make in their music or their own lives, they will never escape their early image - as rabble-rousing, heroin-shooting, cocaine-snorting, whiskey-chugging fiends who spend all of their time brawling and begging for trouble - primarily because nobody wants them to.

It is truly depressing, after spending time with the members of Guns n' Roses and listening to them talk about their dreams and goals for their band and what a constant battle it is for them to survive the pressure they're under ("We're like a fucking grenade," says Slash, "and it's like everybody's struggling to hold the pin in") - to see the parade of rock-bashing reporters and publicity-hungry musicians who invariably crawl out of the woodwork during their toughest trials and compound that pressure.

Usually, when they're faced with some new uproar that has the public wanting them tarred and feathered, Guns n' Roses get through the ordeal by sticking together. "Have you ever seen a pack of raccoons in the wild?" asks Slash. "You come up against 'em, and they all fucking get huddled together? That's how we are. Like a fucking gang." He also says that their experiences in the past have toughened them up. "After you stress out enough over shit like this, all you do is just get jaded and wait for the next thing," says Slash. "I don't know if that's good or bad. I mean, it's a loss of innocence that sort of takes a little bit of the sparkle out of your eyes sometimes. But at the same time, when something does happen, then at least you can deal with it and not have it beat you."

Sometimes, the best survival tactic is to let everything slide and get on with what it is they do. Izzy Stradlin sums it up best.

"We've got the gigs booked," the guitarist says with a wry smile, "so we'd best show up and play."

Then, almost as an afterthought: "Cause I don't want to be on CNN anymore." ■

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