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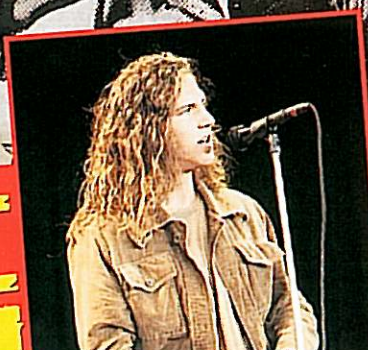
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# SLASH

"I was dead for eight minutes!"



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Slash at his home in Los Angeles: "I just get the fuck out of there! It's just boring!"

# "I GREW UP ON DRUGS, PARTIES, ALCOHOL AND WOMEN,"

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Once the record was finished, and it came out really good, I thought, 'I might as well tour

on a it 'cause Guns isn't doing anything.' I'm gonna start touring in March and we're gonna do fucking clubs, man."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Listening to my album, you can hear which songs I was heavily involved in on the records we've done. As far as Guns' sound is concerned, the heavy stuff is the part that I get into. If you take that aspect of Guns aside,



you've got me; not Axl or the other guys, just the sound that's me. It's not supposed to sound like Guns, but we are all Guns, so anything we do is gonna sound like Guns. That's why Guns sounds the way it does."

**Duff used his solo album to get everything out of his system, like punk, rap and other stuff. Are you too firmly rooted in hard rock to do something like that?**

"When it comes to writing, I don't have any interest in rap or punk. There are certainly elements of punk in there somewhere. See, I was never a punk guy even when it was a big thing and I was hanging out at clubs. There are elements in punk rock that I dig – you know, all the great punk bands. But the great punk bands were still great rock'n'roll bands.

"A lot of the punk scene was bullshit, especially here in LA. I never conformed, I never became part of a scene, I never cut my hair and I never changed my clothes. I'd never change to become part of a scene, I just like what I like. And all the punk songs that I like are just fast rock songs, right? As far as styles go, my record is just me."

**You are an all-out rocker, right?**

"Yeah, it sounds like I wanted it to sound like. We didn't spend enough time on arrangements to make it perfect, but I don't care. I just did it, and it is what it is. The thing is that it's very spontaneous and pure. My favourite records are what my record is subconsciously influenced by, like Aerosmith's 'Rocks' and the Who. Without thinking about it, that's more or less how I made my record.

"One of the reasons that Guns can be so complicated is because the pressure is so heavy to make the quintessential record. Like, who needs all that fucking hassle? Whether anyone gets into it when my record comes out or not, I like it and it matters to me. There's some material that Guns does that I don't like. But as a band we all work together. There are some aspects of Guns that I'm not too thrilled about, so this was a chance for me to do a simple, off-the-wall-it-doesn't-matter record, ha ha."

**You've said that your album has a kind of 'Appetite For Destruction' feel to it. Do you regard that as Guns N' Roses' most exciting and complete record?**

"When I say 'Appetite For Destruction', I probably mean that I've used the same approach. When we did 'Appetite...', I didn't have to deal with the pressure that I did on the 'Use Your Illusion' albums. I didn't have the money, for one. I went in there with a half-stack and a Les Paul when I did 'Appetite...', as well as when I did my record, so that's the only reason it has anything to do with 'Appetite...'. When you hear a song like 'My Michelle' or 'Welcome To The Jungle', that was basically what I went back to. With 'Use Your Illusion' we had 36 songs, so I used the same material. When we did our 'punk album' (1993's cover album 'The Spaghetti Incident'), on some songs I didn't even use my own equipment. We just jammed about really

quick, you know.

"Another thing is, I know I say my 'Snakepit' album, but it's really a band. I'm only doing the press because everyone else seems to know who I am at this point. Eventually I'd like to make it known as a band, actually. I don't want it to sound like it's Slash's little group. I don't know if this is just a one-off. We'll see what happens."

**Two songs on the album, I feel, differ quite a lot from the others – the instrumental 'Jazz Da Pit' and especially 'Lower'. The latter has this dark, moody, Alice In Chains feel to it. Have you heard that interpretation before?**

"No. Actually, I haven't played it to anyone yet, and I didn't think you'd heard it! I played it for the Metallica guys the other night, but that's it."

**Hold on for a second. From what I understand, you and Metallica have been bitter enemies since the tour you did together in 1992. Have you patched things up now?**

"Yeah. I told Lars, like, 'Just don't fucking talk shit about Guns, because that means me. We're good friends, and if you talk about Guns

'the bag of shame', and it's full of cassettes with all these people singing the same songs – how amazingly different every song sounds with a different singer! Eric was the guy that I liked. I tried out guys from bands that you know (former Quireboys singer Spike; the legendary Michael Monroe from Hanoi Rocks, who is currently in Demolition 23; ex-Little Caesar vocalist Ron Evans) but it just wasn't right. Then this guy Eric come up and his voice was awesome! Also, at that time I was like, 'I don't have time to spend the rest of my life looking for the next Axl or the next big lead singer.' I just wanted something where we all get together, have a good time and the spirit is there. 'Lower' is what it is, and it's really not influenced by anyone. It's one of my favourite songs."

**Is 'Lower' as 'down' as the lyrics suggest?**

"It's actually about (porno actress) Savannah and Kurt Cobain, or at least it's fucking influenced by them. When we got into writing the lyrics that night, those were the two people that came to mind, because they both offed themselves, you know, ha ha. Not that that's funny; I mean, Savannah used to be a girlfriend of mine. I was a little depressed about it, and there was a lot of public stuff going on that had my name on it. I was like, 'Fuck, what is she gonna shoot herself for?'"

**How did that affect you?**

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

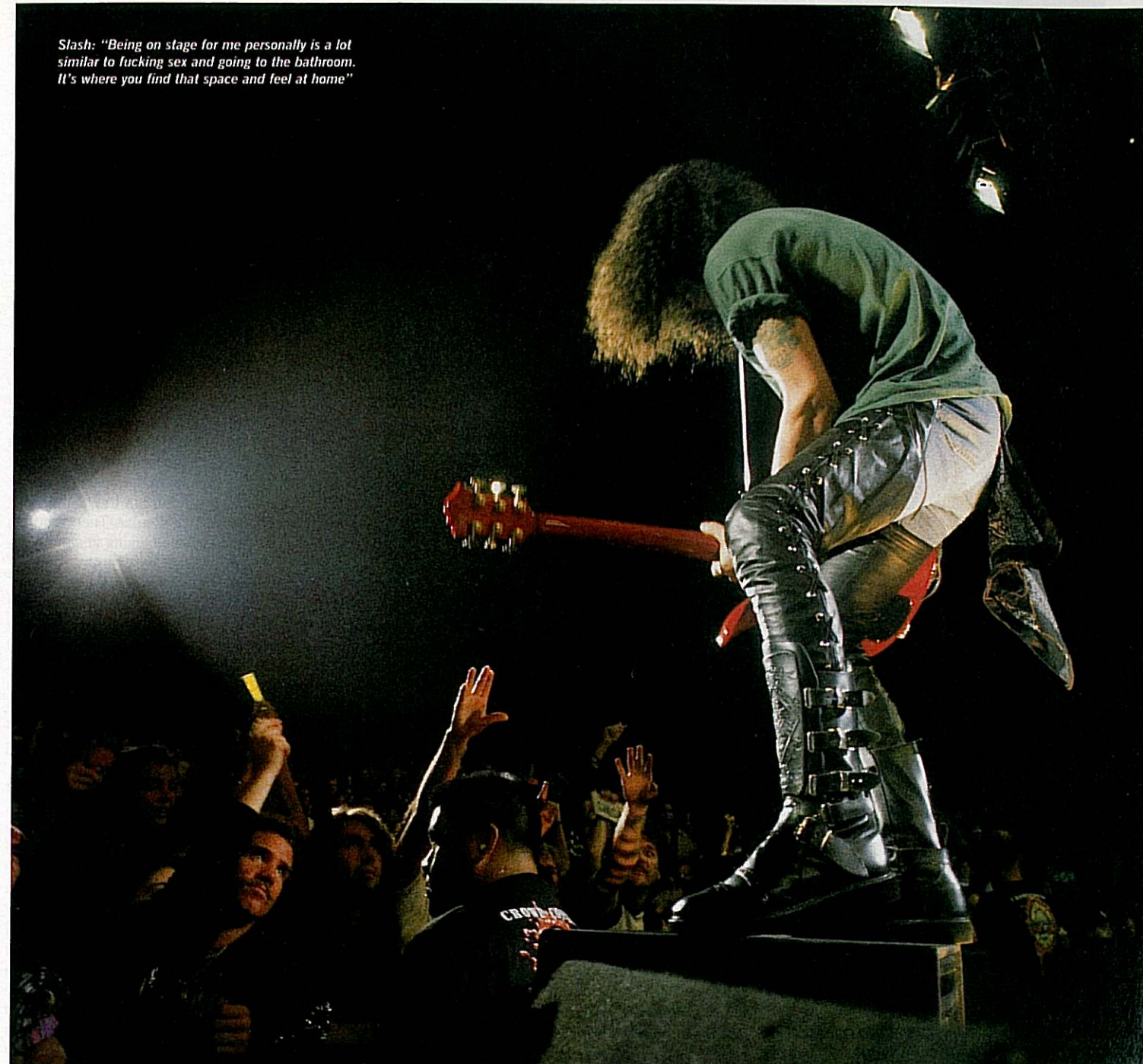
**'Neither Can I' also appears to be about someone you knew who committed suicide.**

"Yeah, 'Lower' and 'Neither Can I' were written at different days, but have been influenced by the same stuff that's happened. I'm not that kinda guy who sits there watching the news and then makes statements about politics and what's going on in society. But I think with 'Neither Can I' we got into this thing with suicide. Around that time, people were off shooting themselves. And there was the fucking O.J. (Simpson) bullshit, a completely overblown situation with an ex-football star. They should put him away and get it over with. He's guilty, I'm positive.

"When we were writing the lyrics, I guess we were in that dark mood without even thinking about it. There was a lot of teenage suicides, and then obviously there was the people we know who recently shot themselves. It goes back in the past to OD's. Like, I'd just gotten out of hospital for fucking OD'ing at one point. All this stuff that's been going on over the years just came out on paper. I divided the lyrics fifty-fifty between me and Eric. It's new for me to actually sit down and write and entire song."

**Do you mean that you came out of hospital last year?**

"No, this was a while back. I was like dead for eight minutes. It wasn't recently, okay? There was an incident that happened, but it was a



Slash: "Being on stage for me personally is a lot similar to fucking sex and going to the bathroom. It's where you find that space and feel at home"

couple of years ago.

"Anyway, there's also some stuff that won't make any sense to anyone. 'Be The Ball' is inspired by a book called *Fear And Loathing In Las Vegas*, written by a guy who's pretty famous in the States, Hunter S. Thompson, who used to write for *Rolling Stone* magazine. He wrote this great book about these two guys getting in the car and driving to Las Vegas. They take all kinds of mescaline, mushrooms, acid, heroin and coke, and put it in the trunk and take off to Las Vegas. What happens is they stay at a hotel where there's a policeman's convention, and they're hallucinating.

"I designed this pinball machine for Guns, and they said: 'Why don't you write a pinball song?' So I took the concept of looking at a pinball machine through a ball's point of view – which is up the ramps, around the tunnels and through the hole. I called it 'Be The Ball', but it's about life in general, and if you were to

drop everything and fucking leave your wife and kids and fucking going for it. So it's a cross between a Hunter Thompson story of risking it all and going off to the sunset, and looking at life through the eyes of a pinball. The old cliché sounds corny, but in order to survive in this business you have to do that – drop it all."

**I hate to sound repetitive, but isn't 'Soma City Ward' yet another one of these depressive songs about a guy going crazy on drugs?**

"Yeah, ha ha! You know what soma is? Soma is a drug they give you if you're in a psychiatric ward, and it's supposed to calm you down so you're easy to work with. In other words, it makes you a vegetable mentally. That's a totally fantastical song, one of those off-the-wall subjects. We do have a lot of songs about this subject, yeah.

"I mean, that's basically where we come from. If we spent most of our time hanging out

in the park with acoustic guitars under the trees, and there's a sunset and naked girls running around, that'd be something we'd write about too. Unfortunately, I haven't seen that recently. I've seen it in clubs, but there were no trees, no grass and no sunset, ha ha!"

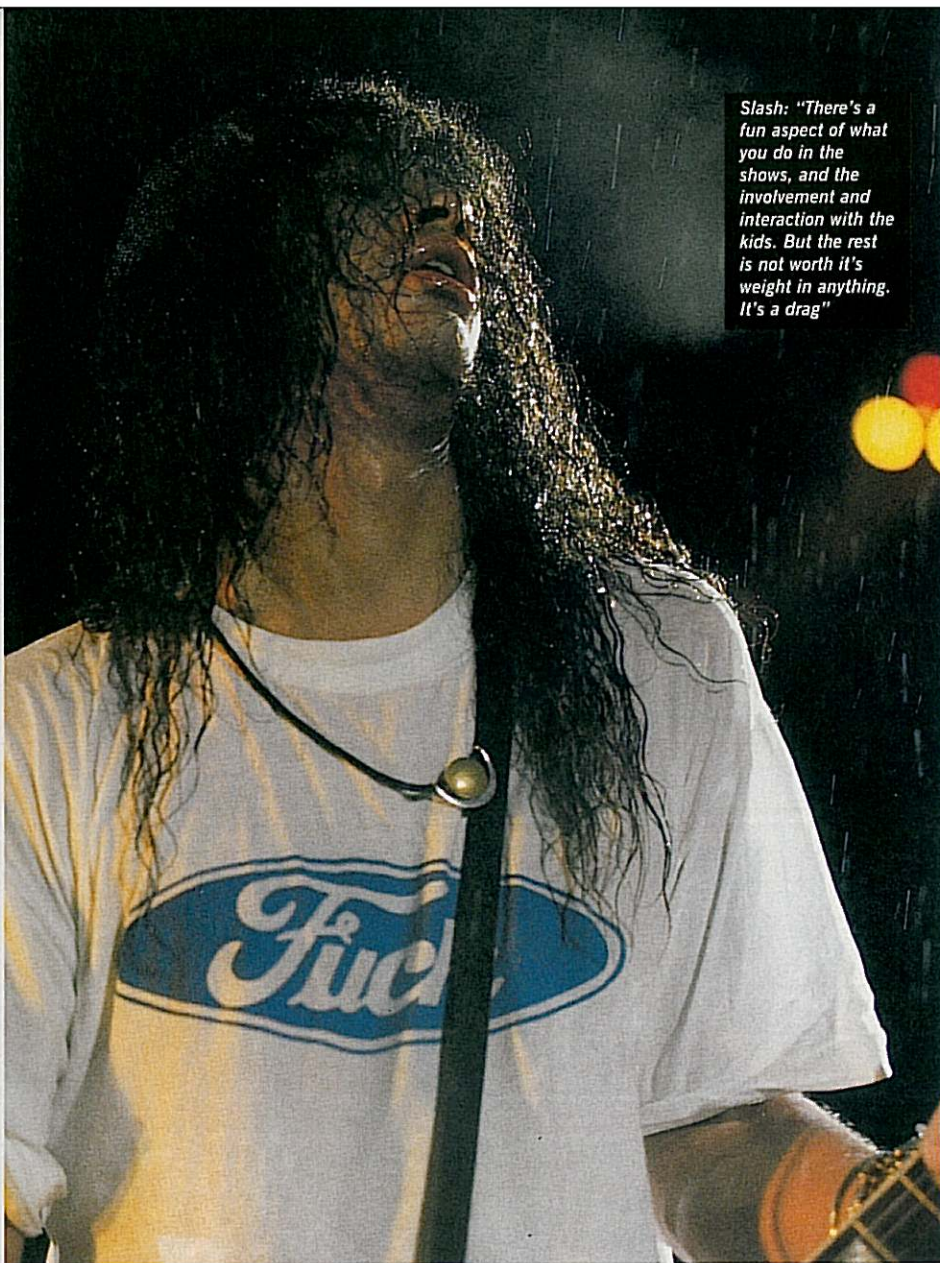
**What you're describing now sounds just like that party-all-night-long-till-you-drop number, 'Doin' Fine'.**

"Yeah, 'Doin' Fine' is about a party. That's basically the antithesis of what we were just talking about. It takes place at someone's house though, and not in the garden."

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

"It can be. I grew up on drugs, parties, alcohol and women. But I had great parents who were really cool. I happened to be one of those kids that was given freedom. I went in no particular





Slash: "There's a fun aspect of what you do in the shows, and the involvement and interaction with the kids. But the rest is not worth it's weight in anything. It's a drag"

direction, but always had the moral set. I've had some extreme party situations, but I would still get up and deal with what I had to, so there's a balance.

"You can go over the edge, which I've done a few times, but luckily I'm still here. And I've learned from those experiences, so I don't do that anymore – I try not to. Some nights I've come home fucking piss-assed drunk, and the cops are out there and I shouldn't be doing it. I still take my chances, but at the same time I know I have to take care of business. It depends on how far you wanna fucking take it. If you wanna pull a Jim Morrison, that's one thing and it's your own decision. If you wanna sort of mix the both of them and keep you head together, you can do that.

"You can fuck your brains out with as many people as you want, but you still have to deal with the responsibilities of life's everyday challenges in order to keep ahead. Nowadays, screwing is not easy because of the Aids thing. As far as drugs are concerned, you are your own boss and you do what you think you can handle. If you wake up face down in the street one day and don't know where you are, that's not anybody else's fault but yours. If you can't make it to your meeting the next day, you miss soundcheck and the gig, then basically you need to rethink your situation."

**On the Metallica tour, you threw some legendary outrageous parties with different themes every night.**

"Yeah, the Guns party situation was something that was very expensive and we had to stop it after a while. That was an Axl thing, too. But it was fun and we got to experience a bit of that. It was so expensive that we couldn't do it any more. And that's what I mean by taking things to any extremes you can handle, and that's how I look at things in general. But sometimes you end up taking things too far, and you look back and go, 'I fucked up.'

"I have moments when I try to fix situations that I took a little too far. So for anybody interested, it's about being smart enough to balance things out. Have a really fucking good time, but at the same time you can't just do that and that's *all* you do. You'll lose, trust me on that one."

**Do you find it hard to sit at home relaxing and doing nothing?**

"I like to stay busy. When I'm at home, I think about what I'm gonna do. I really have no interest in just settling down.

"I got married, and that's an extreme for me. She's pissed off at me now because this is all I do, and then I go out with my friends. She doesn't keep the same kinda crowd that I do,

so we usually don't go out together. I'm hanging out with Matt. We're fine, but she's pissed off at me because I didn't come home until 6.30 yesterday morning! It's no big deal. She knows who she married and she deals with it. When she hangs out with me, I hang out with her acting friends.

"But as far as just being at home, settling down and relaxing is really hard to do, unless I'm practising or sleeping. When I get up in the morning I'm on the phone settling up for a tour, so I get the fuck out of there! It's just boring."

**Are you scared of returning home to nothing after a tour, and being strung out on something, because you can't handle it? That happened after the 'Appetite...' tour.**

"I just didn't know how to handle it. In some shape or form, I must've been on the road since I was 12 years old. Not because of my family or any problems there, but because there was stuff to do 'out there' that I had to do. There was girls and guitars and all kinds of shit to get into on the street, so I did that.

"When I finally moved out of the house, I didn't live anywhere in particular. Then I'm in Guns, and we're living in a fucking shack on Sunset Boulevard, and we're trying to take a shower every day! You just keep moving, and then you get on the road in some cheap bus and you keep touring. When the Aerosmith tour ended, and we'd all of a sudden become a big band, we had no idea. People will call you up from the management and say you've sold so and so many records, and we're like, 'Whatever.'

"You go off to a party, and all of a sudden they drop you off at the airport. You've spent the last years of your life as a vagabond, and they drop you off and say: 'You have to buy a house to invest your money in. You've sold three million records.' So you buy a house and sit there. What are you gonna do now? Everyone's in separate houses, and the next thing you know somebody comes over with smack and off you go. Then it's a whole year of fucking drug abuse, and then you've got to get out of that and get the band together. It's not really so much being scared as having no fucking experience. I'm still learning how to try to settle down."

**After having been through this, is there someone inside your head that continues to remind you to avoid that from happening?**

"Yeah. The last time I got strung out I almost went to prison and I had all kinds of major issues. I was really far gone, and I took it to a point where I'm lucky to be here, right? We got together and did the '...Illusion' records for two and a half years. When it finally ended I was like, 'Oh boy, I've got to stay busy. If I don't, I'll be sitting in the house doing an ounce of blow and drinking half a gallon of vodka, because I have nothing else to do. I'm not gonna do that again.'

"I keep busy, and I'm married now, and that's a responsibility that keeps me on an even keel. I built a studio in the house, and that way my brain is doing something, as opposed to some big tit slut coming over, giving me some smack and going down the tubes, you know. That can happen, because we come from a lifestyle that's generally directed in the downward spiral position. Anyone who works

for a living would do the same thing and keep working. If you're Jack Nicholson, I suppose you could party your ass off all the time!

"All things considered, you can be looked at publicly as being a rock star with an endless amount of money, but it's more expensive playing for what keeps you going as a band than some people think. It's not like an endless fountain of money. Also, once you let yourself go, your career is over. All of a sudden, then years down the road, all the chicks are hanging out with someone else. You're sitting there and can't find a good dealer because you can't afford it. There's reality and a tunnel to look through and see what's at the other end, so you don't completely lose it."

**There seems to be three different types of characters that appear throughout the lyrics: wannabes, users and losers. Is that because these are the kinds of people you frequently encounter in your life?**

"Well, I didn't have any general ideal in any shape or form as to a theme through the record. We wrote the lyrics and the vocal melodies the same night that we recorded the vocals, every single day straight for 13 days. That's just the frame of mind we were in. There's a lot of bullshit in this business, and I think it came out on paper – stuff that we deal with, my experience, and things that I'm surrounded by. It was the first time I was forced to write lyrics, besides doing a line here and there for Guns N' Roses. I had a good time doing it, because Eric's a good lyricist too.

"The kind of people you mention, I definitely come across a lot. Not to sound negative or anything, because there is a fun aspect of what we do, being the time we spend up on stage. I don't wanna sound like that guy from Pearl Jam, whatever his name is, because he said this in a paper a while ago: 'There's a fun aspect of what you do in the shows, and the involvement and interaction with the kids. But the rest is not worth it's weight in anything. It's a drag.' The logistics of being able to make it on stage and do your thing is a real pain in the arse.

"We deal with a lot of creeps. There are fun moments, like hanging out in the bar with the crew, but realistically it's eighty per cent bullshit that you have to deal with. And you have to keep your head above water and face it, otherwise you go down and it takes over. You really have to be on top of things, even if some of it is so ridiculous that it doesn't make any sense. That's life on the road and in the recording industry. It goes with the territory.

"If you're lucky enough, you can be successful to the point where people show up at your shows and like you. The amount of support makes you feel you can continue to go on. The stress that's pulling you backwards is really heavy. Maybe subconsciously some of the songs are influenced by experiences over the last 10 years that me and Eric have gone through."

**Is it more fun playing live these days? Do you treasure those moments more now, when the stage is virtually the only place people look at you for the right reason?**

"This feeling of being on stage, the calm and the serenity, regardless of how manic the gig is, for me personally is a lot similar to fucking sex and going to the bathroom. It's where you find that private space and feel at home. I have to compare it to that, because those are the only three places where I really feel I'm having a good time and feel totally myself – on the toilet, having sex and on stage, ha ha. Not in fucking videos, walking down the street and getting recognised; not when you show up at somebody's gig and get hassled; not dealing with attorneys; and not in everyday life in public. There's nothing to be said that's positive about that. But I have no complaints, because I guess it's here to remind me that if I hadn't worked hard enough I wouldn't be here."

**You're very soft-spoken. Are you a very sensitive person?**

"I don't know... Yeah, I'm very normal and very sensitive. Not sensitive in a way of being overly self-conscious and all that crap, but I care about what other people that I deal with feel. I think I went through a period when I was 13 when I was really rowdy, but that was just a phase. But as soon as I started playing guitar I

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

just more or less... No, I still have my bad moments! But I don't like being inconsiderate to other people without it being necessary. I like to avoid conflict if possible, and I don't see any reason why anyone should treat anybody rudely unless necessary. I ran into a singer from another band, that I won't name, the other night who got in my face. Then I wanted to kick this fucking guy's ass. That's a different subject altogether, and I don't go looking for trouble."

**What is your formula that helps you cope with the attention?**

"Vodka! No, ha ha. You just deal with it. There's no secret to it. You basically kick back for a second and think about what you're doing and then confront it. I don't know if it's good or bad, but it's a reality we have to deal with. There's attention everywhere, like a universal thing, so on a constant level there's attention

going on at this planet. Freaking out to a certain extent because of attention is stupid, cos it's gonna be there anyway."

**In a press statement a few months ago, you once again used the 'us against the world' expression. Do you still feel that way after all these years in the limelight?**

"Nah... I shouldn't really have said that, because of the way it sounds in print. It's more a case of me, Tom (Maher, manager) and the rest against the obstacles we have to deal with on a daily basis. It's not against the world in general. Not conform to some sort of bullshit standard and someone who approaches you and tries to make his own rules for you. It's basically against the powers that be."

**I know you don't want to talk about everything that's surrounding Guns N' Roses right now, but there's a lot of people who want to know what's really happening.**

"None of the rumours have been accurate, because no one has gone public with anything. The band is still together. There's a little bit of congestion going on, because I'm going on tour and Axl wants to do a Guns record right this second. Unfortunately, I can't back down from my situation because I have to drop the ball. It's too late for that. So there's a little conflict, but no one's quit and no one's been fired or anything like that. It's sort of dormant, and we just have to wait and see what happens."

**What about Duff re-forming his old punk band, Ten Minute Warning?**

"I know he went up to Seattle a while ago and played around with this old band of his or whatever, but it was nothing serious. Right now he's out in the county riding his bike, ha ha."

**Are you affected by hearing new rumours about the band every week?**

"You know, I don't read anything. I don't watch MTV and I don't read rock magazines. I just sort of do what I do. I know some of the climate around town as far as what people might be thinking as

far as business and attorneys are concerned. There's no hiding anything in LA. There's this big network of rumours, but I don't pay any attention to it."

**Realistically, though, isn't it going to be a long time till Guns N' Roses deliver a new album?**

"Not necessarily. The only thing I know at this point is that I'm gonna take the 'Snakepit' thing on the road in March. We'll be touring till summer and then we're off. What happens then I don't know.

"There are some things that need to be sorted out. Axl wants Guns to do a lot of ballads and stuff, and I want to do rock stuff. I don't care about the current musical climate or what is commercially viable. That's why my record sounds that way it does. I'm just a street-level guy, and I don't fucking live on the beach in Malibu. And I'm not gonna conform to any of that shit either." ★