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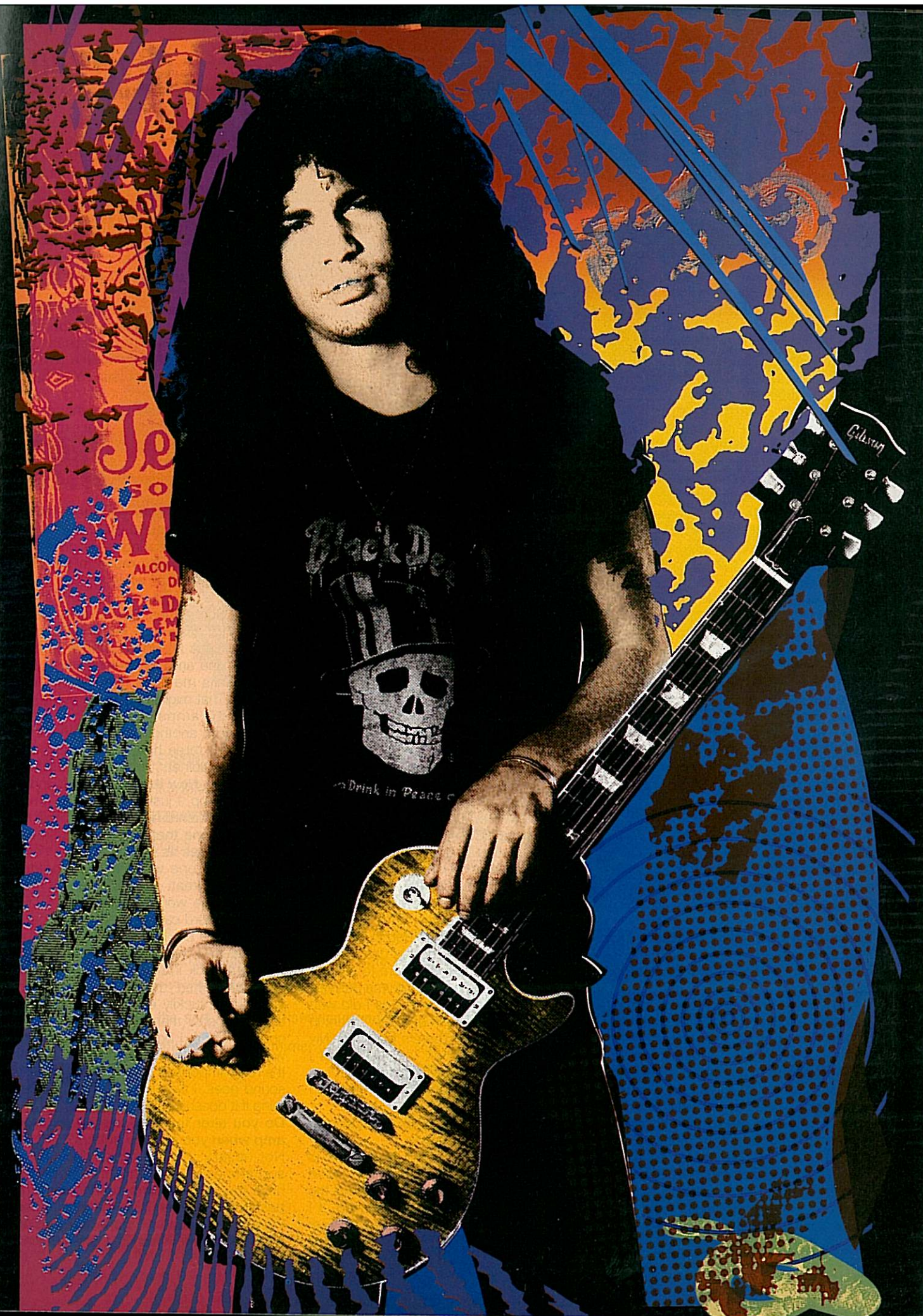
"Guitar player looking for bass player: Alice Cooper, Aerosmith, Dolls, Led Zeppelin and Fear. Call Slash."

Thus read the original ad that brought Duff McKagan and Slash together, leading to the formation of today's most popular rock band. Now, however, with the bright lights of fame permanently focused on the band, a simple ad like this would have probably drawn half the known world to their doorstep, as Slash and Duff searched for two new members, to replace Izzy Stradlin and Steve Adler, on the current Guns N' Roses tour. Which is why they wound up promoting from within their closed circle of friends, Gilby Clarke from the L.A. band, Kill for Thrills, on guitar, and Matt

Sorum from the Cult, on drums, who felt like kin-folk from the get-go.

For his part, Slash has done his best to ignore the heat and go on writing and playing as he had when the Guns N' Roses audience was the sum total of the band's best friends. He used the time between records to do several guest performances, some great (Iggy Pop, Les Paul), some not so great (Bob Dylan). While *Use Your Illusion I and II* showcase a large number of songs that were started or developed from the *Appetite* era, Slash infuses his songs with a greater variety of guitar styles and tones than he has shown us in the past. As our host, he was both gracious and honest as he gave us a tour behind the scenes of this new work.

By John Stix • Photograph and artwork by Robert Knight and Jim Evans



Do you still get inspired by other guitarists?

Not really. I still like the same ones I liked when I was younger. Bonnie Raitt's great. Billy Gibbons is one of my all-time favorites. I copped a lot of my stuff from listening to him. There are a lot of great players, but I've been listening to them for years. I dig Zakk Wylde. I really like some of his stuff.

Has rock 'n' roll changed very much since "Johnny B. Goode?"

I think it's changed a lot. There's more imagination. Not necessarily from all bands, certainly, but I do see it happening. I really like Nirvana and Soundgarden, Alice in Chains and Raging Slab. As far as songwriting and vocals, people are going for something that I didn't see happening a few years ago. As far as guitars, Eddie was great when he opened this whole new thing. My style is a bit more old-fashioned. The only thing about my guitar playing I like is that, even though it's sort of old-fashioned and it's not all that complicated, it does have emotion to it. I think that was lacking in a lot of guitar players for a while.

When you recorded for the Les Paul album, did you get to spend time with him?

Yeah! He's great! I jammed with him over at Fat Tuesdays. That must have been one of the most humbling experiences in my life. I was like, "Christ! Get me off the stage!"

How was the recording?

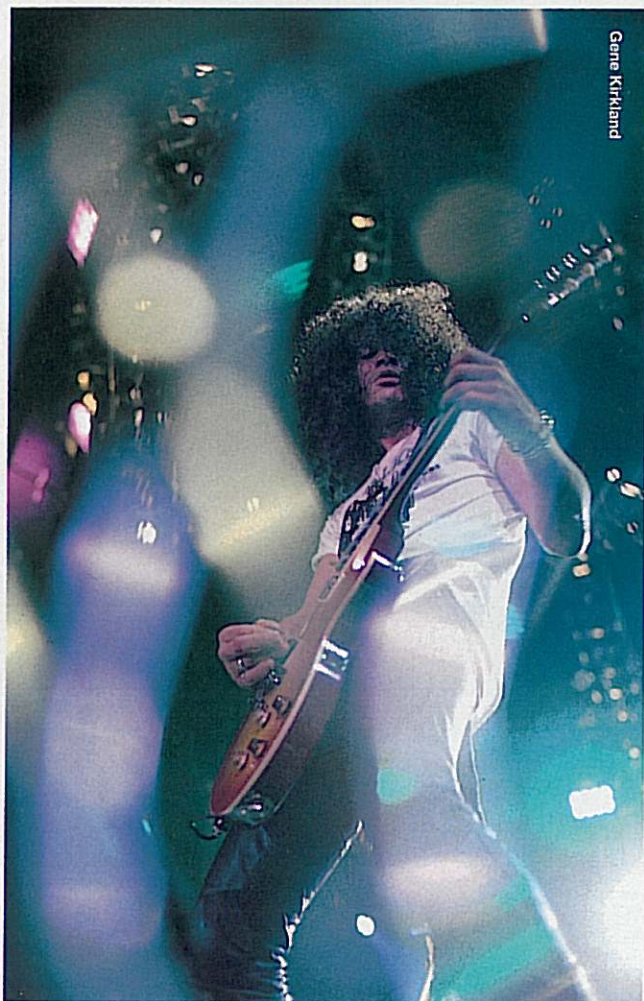
It was my own tune, "Burn Out," so I just played it my way. That was cool. I got Duff to play bass on it because the original bass player didn't sound right.

Did Les play with you?

No.

In the case of Michael Jackson, Iggy Pop or Dylan, was anybody there for interaction, or was it just a technological guesting?

When you don't actually work on the spot with people that you're doing it for, it won't happen. When I started the Michael Jackson thing, I hadn't met him yet, or talked to him. I talked to his manager and the producer, and it was very cold at first. It was a year later, when he called and asked me to play on something, that it turned into a more personable kind of thing. He was at the studio when I did it. So that was cool. It's called "Give in to Me" There's a totally spontaneous solo on that. It wasn't necessarily perfect, but it had the right energy to it, so I left it on there. Michael gave me no



Gene Kirkland

direction at all. He wanted me for the gig, and he knew what it would sound like. He never questioned anything I was doing the whole time. By the way, contrary to popular belief, I'm not playing on "Black or White." I did play it live with him on television. One of the special things about guesting is that it's basically like hanging out and having a beer. You go in and do what you do. It's very off-the-cuff, and it's supposed to be a lot of fun. I learned to only work with people I admire and respect. The Bob Dylan thing I seriously regret. It's no big deal. It's no water off my back. If you were to ask me my opinion of the session, it was definitely murder. All four of the songs I did with Iggy Pop were done in one day. I went in and it was just fun. There's the song "My Baby Wants to Rock 'n' Roll," that I wrote with Iggy in the studio. That's a real spontaneous, off-the-cuff riff that I wrote on the spot.

Is it sometimes more fun playing on other people's records?

Playing on other people's records is great, because you're basically called upon to go in and add to the material the best possible stuff that you can do. If I enjoy the material and it's different from what I normally play, then obviously, I

learn something from it, and I have to adapt my style to enhance that music. I like to do it in one take, if possible. I'm into that. I can't sit there and work out a solo for somebody else's record. I might learn the song and play to it a few times at home first, but then I go in and just rip it out; that's where my energy level comes in. If I have to do it too many times, it's dead.

So in some ways there's actually more pressure on you.

There is more pressure, because there's not the time to analyze the material. You have to go off your gut feelings. With my band, there's not that much pressure because that's my natural thing to do, and I do the best Guns N' Roses guitar playing that I can do, just because it's natural.

Do they give you the time to get the sound you want?

I get my sound really quickly. I know pretty much in the first ten minutes whether I can make it sound good or not. Sometimes you have to get a lot of amps, especially with Guns N' Roses. I have to find one amp in particular that just hits me right, right off the bat. That might take trying out 10 to 20 amps. But when you're

working with another band, you have to rent two or three heads, and maybe a couple of cabinets, and that's basically how to do it. Now that I've finally found a recording amp, I just take my own amp, which is a Marshall head and a cabinet.

That's the one that you would use for Guns N' Roses as well?

Yeah. I had one when I did *Appetite*, which was great. I stole it from S.I.R., and when we were rehearsing at S.I.R. after the record came out, my idiot roadie at the time brought that amp down by mistake, and they took it back. When we went back into the studio a couple years later, I had to find the ultimate amp again, and, luckily enough, I found one that was better than the first one. Since I could afford it, I bought it. I don't like to waste time dicking around with amps. It's really important, though, as far as my sound goes. I won't play through something if it doesn't sound right.

Do you alter the tone settings on the amp when you change guitars?

Not usually. Maybe a presence thing sometimes. I have the amp sound. I have the way the amp sounds with my best guitar, the one I use the most. Then I adjust the sound of the amp by using different guitars, which is a different kind

of approach.

Rather than adjusting the amp, you're changing the guitar?

Right. I'm into guitars and the way they sound. I'm not necessarily into amps. I don't collect amps.

In the live set you play a Travis Bean for slide. I noticed you did a lot of overhand slide stuff. Is that how you do it when you're sitting down, or is that functional for live?

I recently discovered I like doing it that way live. In the studio I do it both ways. It depends on what kind of sound I want to get. For "Bad Obsession," I didn't do it overhand in the studio. I did it regular. But for "The Garden," where it's got a big solo section, and slide all the way through it, I did that overhand. On "You Ain't the First," I used a dobro and played that regular as well.

And what's the difference for you?

It's a feel thing. I just recently discovered doing it overhand as opposed to underhand, and it's got a certain kind of vibrato. It's harder to get as much control standing up than it is sitting down. But I like doing it that way, and I can do a lot wilder vibrato overhand than underhand.

Did you record the slide on "Bad Obsession" with a Travis Bean?

Yeah, a really nice one I've had for a long time. I don't use it live because it's way too gorgeous a piece of wood to take live, but the reason it sounds the way it

does is that I take the tone control down to where it's about a notch above being off altogether.

Did you practice slide guitar?

No. I'm not the most accomplished slide player, but I'm getting better at it. I'm not into slide guitar per se. The band Raging Slab has this girl who is an awesome slide player. I dig the sound that she gets. I use it more for heavy chords and I like that sort of cheesy sound it has.

Is there a difference between slide and dobro for you?

Well yeah, because dobro is a lot more subtle, and it's one string as opposed to chords. The dobro I used is awesome. It's an old one with an Hawaiian girl etched into the wood on the back. It's killer.

On Use Your Illusion I and II, you have a killer tone on "Locomotive." It reminds me of Michael Schenker.

"Locomotive" is played on an Explorer. What I do is turn the tone knob down. On some songs, like "Estranged," I take the tone knob and I turn it all the way down on that particular pickup. "Heaven's Door" has that same sound in it for the solos, and that's my Explorer on the rhythm pickup, with the tone down. I never use wah-wah pedals for that. It's different for me and I like it. I must have used 20 guitars on the record.

The "Heaven's Door" solo sounds more controlled than the others.

Yeah. There's two solo sections on that

song. I'd been playing those solos off-the-cuff since we started playing that song. But when we went in the studio to do it, I played it completely differently than I've ever played it. I did this whole melody off the top of my head. I did one solo one day, and then the next solo the next day, and they're both one take.

When you record, is there a vocal going through the monitors or headphones?

There's usually no vocals on tape yet, unless there's a scratch vocal. I know the vocal sound in my head from playing the song at rehearsal. I only use headphones to do the basic track with the band, to get the live feel. But I hate headphones with a passion. You're forced to do it when the whole band's playing together. But then I go back into the studio and do all the guitars over, using the room monitors so I hear the whole band.

Did you do a lot of pre-production?

On this album we rehearsed with Matt for a month, and then went in the studio and did basic tracks for 30 songs in 30 days.



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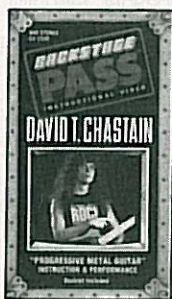
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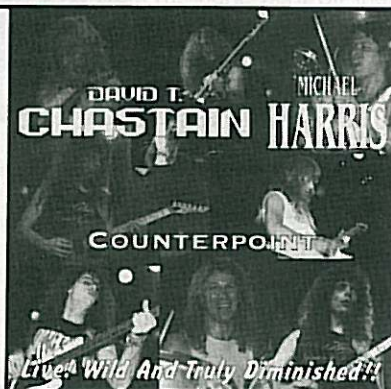
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songs you recorded first and the ones you recorded last?

As far as recording goes, as soon as I got in the studio I started doing the guitars. I was really into it, so nothing suffered. Nothing's better than anything else. Some stuff didn't call for that much work, some stuff called for really concentrating, but there's a lot of songs that we've been dicking around with over the course of a long time.

What influence did Mike Clink have on your playing?

He has a good ear and if I'm overplaying, or if I might be a little bit out of pitch, he'll let me know. I can take it home and listen to it that night if I disagree. By the next morning, I'll either keep disagreeing, and we'll keep it on there, or he might be right. The outro solo on "Heaven's Door," I did the first day after I came up with the melody for the first solo. I did the second one and he wasn't really happy with it. I thought it was fine. I took it home and listened to it. The next morning, on my way somewhere, I stopped by the studio and just pulled it off one more time and did it way better.

Did you change your approach because there was more piano this time?

I don't know if I'd put it that way. I'd say that because there's piano, I wrote guitar parts to go along with the piano, and to

go along with the piano chords, which might not have been the same had it been just guitar by itself.

There's also a sonic thing you have to think about, too.

Yeah, but I never think about it, because I play the way I play along with piano. It's not a conscious thing. I do it, so it sounds good to me.

How do you deal with a long song, like "Coma," that's got a lot of changes? Was that also recorded live with the band?

We recorded all that with the band. You've got to understand, we can play anything live that we record. That being the case, when we start rehearsing material, we get it together so we can pull it off live and have it sound just as good as what goes on the record.

The Def Leppard view is "It's a record and we'll do anything we want."

They piece a lot together and edit things. We don't do any of that. We write all the songs as a band, together. We play them together, regardless of who wrote it. And we get it to the point where it has the right feel and the right sound, with just the members of the band.

For Appetite, you'd come up with a song in an afternoon. If a song takes more than a day, will you scrap it?

No. "November Rain" has been around since before *Appetite*. It's been worked

on here and there. It used to be twenty minutes long. I came up with most of the picking lines that go throughout the song when Axl was playing on a piano and I played it on acoustic. Usually you get an idea in a day, whether or not the song's worth doing. If you decide the song is worth doing, then you work hard on it during the course of a night, to get it to where everybody's comfortable. It evolves after that. When we'd finally gotten an arrangement for "November Rain," years later I came up with a couple of new parts. When we went in the studio, I came up with most of those solos. The tail-end solo, that high-pitched thing, I came up with when Axl came up with the piano chords a long time ago. That and "Estranged" Axl's been kicking around for a while, and I've heard him screwing with little ideas on the piano for them. When I wrote the guitar, I wrote it quickly. If something doesn't inspire me right off the bat, it usually means I can't get into it.

Could it be because you had onions for dinner, or is it the song?

No, it'd have to be the chord changes, or something. One of the nice things about working with Axl and Duff, and even Izzy, is that we usually like each other's ideas. There's a lot of songs I wrote that Axl couldn't come up with any lyrics for, which are really cool grooves, but they didn't happen right off, so we never did them. Usually, if an idea's good from the get-go, and everybody likes it, then we'll use the song. If there's a song that takes too much contemplation, then we usually don't play it.

Why do rockers love to solo on the ballads?

I love playing ballads, I have to admit. It gives me a chance to express a bit more of the subtle and slower side of my playing.

"November Rain" also has one of the more melodic, bendy, major key solos.

Yeah, as compared to Guns N' Roses of four years ago, I guess time and experience make you better. If you want to grow, you will, and so on this record, I got into a lot of things that I wouldn't have been able to do a few years ago. "November Rain" would be one. All those notes I'm playing aren't in any particular position where I know what I'm doing. All the passing tones and stuff like that are off of feel alone, and I don't think I could have played that well a few years ago. There's a song called "Perfect Crime,"



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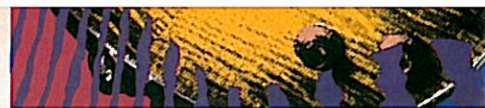
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which has got a pretty "out there" solo in it. There's a lot more going on in my guitar playing than there used to be, and hopefully it'll always be like that, where I keep expanding.

Speaking of growth, you once said to me, 'Never again will I do intros without a click track.'

We did "Civil War" with Steve Adler, and it was that same kind of a situation. And before I could put the guitars on, we had to edit the drums because he was so out of time. He couldn't keep his meter together. So it was another one of those situations where I had to judge when he was gonna come in. On the new stuff, we didn't use a click track, but I had Matt count in everything. Matt's got really good time, so it wasn't a problem.

Was there anything that you learned from recording this particular time?

I finally managed to be able to get feedback in the control room. This is something I've been wanting to do since the last record, and we could never seem to find a way of doing it. Mike Mayhew, our bass tech, and Adam, my guitar tech, developed this feedback generator with a Mesa/Boogie in the studio. I can't technically explain how it works, but my Marshall's going in and it's coming out through the monitors and then the board is going into another amp. So the same thing I'm playing through my Marshall is

coming out of this other amp, which is giving me feedback. I can control it so that it's not too loud. I can even turn it up right where the feedback part comes. It worked really good. The beginning of "You Could Be Mine" has got feedback on it which sounds like more than one guitar, but it's just one guitar.

You've always tuned down a half step. Is that for the heaviness or the vocal?

It's for both. It's for vocals, and though we're not Metallica, I do tend to go for a heavy sound for hard rock stuff. I think I used to tune down to D in Road Crew, the band that I was in before Guns N' Roses. I don't get too much slack on my guitar. Adam knows everything about what I do and how to do it. He takes a lot of pressure off me. All my guitars, including the old ones, get tuned down like that.

It was a good touch when you played the 6-string bass on "Right Next Door."

There's 6-string bass on *Appetite*, too. It adds an undercurrent even if it's mixed back—it fills things out. I have to approach the way I play it a lot more carefully than I would guitar. Those 6-string basses are not very consistent as far as how they're put together. I used a Fender, with a Mustang style body.

I've been told "Live and Let Die" is a special song for you guys?

It's one of those songs, like "Heaven's

Door," that Axl and I have always loved. It's always been a really heavy song, but we'd never discussed it, and didn't know that we each liked it. We were talking one night about a cover song and that came up, and we're like, "Yeah! Let's do it!" So I went to rehearsal with Izzy and Matt and Duff, just to see whether we could sound good playing it, and it sounded really heavy. It's actually heavier when we play it live than it is on the record, because of the horns and synthesizer. Live it's got more bottom to it.

On "Double Talkin' Jive," your classical guitar tag was a real surprise.

I don't know where that idea came from. It popped into my head, and I picked up a real nice Spanish guitar, which I kept. It came out of nowhere, so I spliced it on the end. It's played with a pick. Duff's playing acoustic, strumming behind that, too. Then I put the lead on top.

Was the slide melody for "The Garden" composed?

I came up with it that day in the studio, so there wasn't much practicing involved. I had the basic idea, improvised it, and did it a couple of times. I played it overhand.

This solo is particularly focused, in terms of where your energy is. I thought of Jeff Beck.

That's cool. I like Jeff Beck. That's another one—that was one take. It's aggressive. I think I have my regular Les

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Paul with the Alnico pickups that I use most of the time. The same one I used on the last record.

"Don't Blame Me" may have the loudest mixed solo on the records.

Really? I love that song. That's one of those songs I introduced to the band that was already complete.

You went for a Hendrix vibe at the beginning of "Bad Apples." Is there an effect on that?

It's just a clean guitar. I think I used a Jazz Chorus for an amp. I use that a lot. I hardly ever use a Marshall for playing really brittle, clean parts. On this particular song, for the beginning, I might have used a Strat, or I have this little Music Man guitar that Keith Richards had. I used that because it sounds great for clean stuff. This song was written complete, too.

I think it's the longest solo on the disk and sounds flat out live.

What's funny is that I play it that way most of the time, too. It doesn't change that much, and that's the way I've been playing it since the day I wrote it. It's like, you write a song, but you leave the solo out. Then when the band is playing on it, when you get to the solo section, you just rip. If what you go for the first time you play the solo is what feels right and what you think should sound right, that usually sticks all the way up until recording.

At that point it can change?

Yeah, but it doesn't usually. The only things that's weird is, on some of the songs I improvise to the point that when we go to play them live, if we haven't played it since we recorded, I have to listen to the record again.

When you leave something on a record, are you in love with it or are you happy with it enough to call it a 'captured' performance?

When I leave something on a record, it's usually got to be something that kicks my ass, and at the same time, a really good performance. Then I'll leave it, even if it has a little mistake in it.

What effect did you use on "Coma?"

Mike put something on the little rhythm part between the chords. I don't know what he used. I was going for a certain kind of a sound. Since I don't use effects, I don't know anything about them, except for echoes. I told him what I wanted, and he managed to pull it out of his rack somehow.

I remember you saying you'd use a wah because you can control it, but you wouldn't use a flange because it's electronic.

Right. I never planned on doing that till I was in the studio, and I had this idea. I think it was because when you listen to something coming out of the monitors, and you're recording it, you can hear

emptiness that you don't necessarily hear when you're playing it live with the band. So you make little changes to the sound just to make it more dynamic and more interesting.

There's a great mood in the breakdown.

When I wrote "Coma," it was over a pretty short period of time, but it was not a one-day song. I kept playing around with the ideas, and then tying it together. This is another song that was basically arranged when I brought it to the band. I wrote the whole song, amazingly enough, on acoustic. When I play with the band live, and electrically, I turn the volume down, tone it down for that middle section. I was actually looking forward to doing that part when we were in the studio.

"Civil War" sounds much improved on *Illusion II*.

It's the same version, just mixed better. It was ironic in the timing when it came out. When we recorded that, it wasn't in our normal studio. I didn't have a normal amp. It was one of those things where we had to do it because we were doing it for a benefit album, and it was a rush thing. The song was great, but Steven couldn't play. It took two days just to get the drums. That's out of the norm for us. I had to use a rented amp, and I wasn't particularly happy with the sound. Then Clink tried to mix it in a couple of different studios. I wasn't happy with the mix, and we usually don't use Clink to mix. We sat in on the mix, but I couldn't get it right. I didn't like the studio. When it came time to use it for our album, we had it mixed by Bill Price, who is awesome. He did the Pistols, the Pretenders, the Nymphs. There's a classic story that goes with the mixing. We couldn't work with Thompson-Barbiero, who were the two guys who mixed *Appetite*. At first, we chose not to work with them, and then by making that decision, they took on another gig, and we didn't have anybody to mix it. Then we asked them to do it and they couldn't, because they were working on Tesla. Being that we don't know that much about mixing and because we were so close to the music, we got to a point where we didn't even know what it was supposed to sound like anymore. Bill Price is somebody that we originally wanted to produce the album, in the early days, because he'd done the Pistols and the Pretenders. We really liked the sonics on those records. So we got in touch with him and he came out,



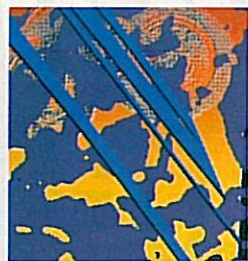
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Continued on page 146

NO ILLUSIONS

Continued from page 78



and he brought a whole new life to the album. He has a great overall idea of what separation's all about, as far as instruments go, especially

because there were so many things going on in some songs. He was great to work with, and he has great ears, so it was a real relief, 'cause I thought the album was destroyed. The hiring of Bill Price is one of the reasons this album took so long to get out. And then, of course, because we're so brilliant, we decided to start touring *before* the album was even mixed. Which wasn't our fault. It was more the fault of our old manager, because he booked these gigs and we hadn't finished the record yet.

One thing I've noticed about your approach to soloing is that when you play rock 'n' roll, like in "14 Years" and "Shotgun Blues," you have a tendency to use more of the whole neck from the first fret on up.

You know why? If it's a good rock 'n' roll tune, you start out low, going in with this mean tone, and then you go up to the point where you're screaming, and then it ends. It's an energy thing, where you go in and you just can't stop. I think my straight rock 'n' roll style lends itself to that more than the heavier stuff. I tend to stick to melodies for the heavier stuff, where the straight rock 'n' roll stuff is totally wild. There's no strict melody.

"Yesterdays" is a pretty straight blues, a Stevie Ray Vaughan/Strat thing.

Yeah, it is a Strat. That was a conscious thing I went for. Even though there's not many notes, it was just a sound and a feel. After I did the basic track, I knew that's what I wanted to sound like. What I do when I get up in the morning, before I go in the studio, is pick the song I'm going to play; I get down to the studio and go, 'Okay, get me this guitar, and this, and this, and this is how we're going to do it.' And it doesn't usually change. It's very rare that the idea that I have for the guitar sound is one of those things where we do it and go, 'No, that's just not right.' I usually know beforehand. Would you know beforehand because you've played the song a bunch of times?

No, it's because I just know what it should sound like. I didn't have a Strat when we were rehearsing it, but it felt the same, and when we play it live, I go for the same thing on a Les Paul.

Was it intentional to have that "Day in the Life" piano ending?

Oh yeah. Axl wrote that and I think that

was part of it. When we did it in the studio, he might have extended it a bit more. Some of those songs were thrown together quickly. So when we rehearsed, it wasn't necessarily exactly the same as in basic tracks, because we didn't have a set ending.

The beginning of "Break Down" reminded me of "Patience."

That's a five string banjo tuned to guitar because I don't know anything about banjo. It's something I wrote off-the-cuff when Axl came up with that piano part.

"Pretty Tied Up" was some of my favorite free-form soloing of yours.

Thanks. All this stuff was just so spontaneous, so there's nothing much to say about it. I appreciate the fact that people like it and probably see more into it than there is.

"So Fine" has that great "Schenker" tone.

That's a slide, too.

The hook in the solo is memorable. It's closest thing to "Sweet Child o'Mine," as a simple, memorable guitar hook.

That's it. When we were rehearsing that, I was playing a blues solo, like filling the gap, and when I went in to do the actual guitar overdubs, this was another one of those things that I just heard in my head all of a sudden. I don't know why I didn't hear it before. Same as "The Garden." I sat down and played it overhand, too. It happened really quickly, which is great. If they just come in a couple minutes, it keeps you from going crazy in the studio.

What are your studio habits?

As far as the schedule goes, I try to keep a normal working day, where I go in at 10 or noon. But there were days when I stayed up too late the night before, and I'd go in at five. The one thing that's really important is to be able to go in and finish what I set out to do that day.

Do you set realistic goals?

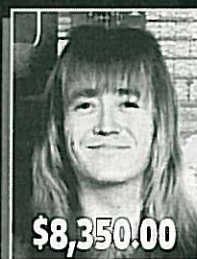
Yeah, I didn't have too many problems with trying to finish. But I did so many guitars on each song or I covered for Izzy on a lot of stuff, so I would get really frustrated when there was just no way that I was going to be able to finish the whole song in one day. I didn't like it when songs overlapped, but it would happen, because once you're not inspired, and you start getting burned out, there's no sense of trying to continue going that night. Usually I won't admit it, but Mike would tell me, "Look, you're pretty tired. Why don't you come in the morning and do it?" And he'd have to force me out of the studio.

Did it ever seem overwhelming?

No, it was exciting. It was a challenge that I was really into. Adding it all up, as far as this band goes, with the amount of stuff I was involved in, besides just the actual getting to the studio and playing, I was working 25 hours a day on it. ■

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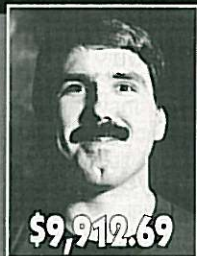
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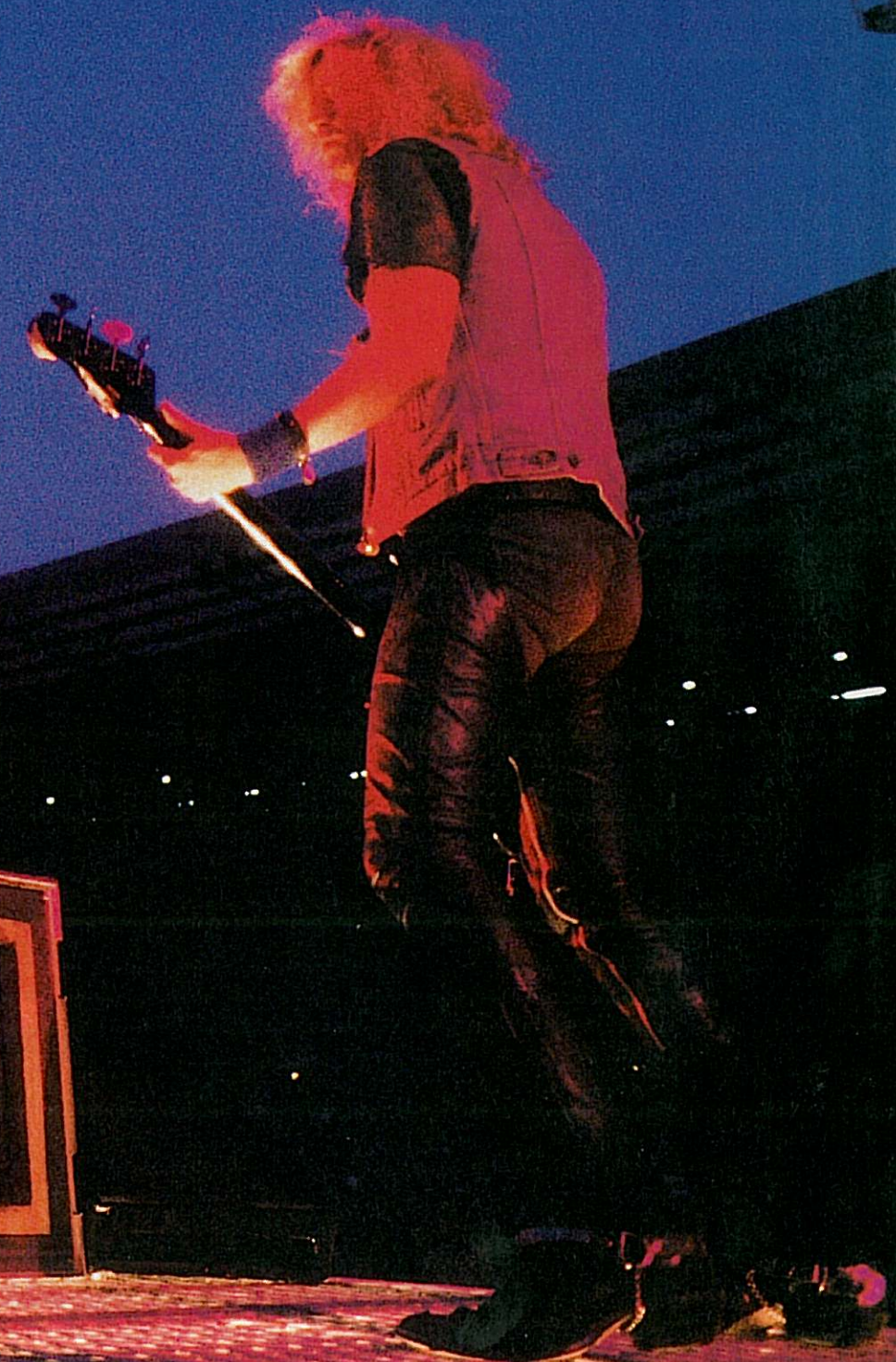
Bionic Bass

DUFF MCKAGAN

The living incarnation of King Crimson's Twenty First Century Schizoid Man, to his neighbors, Duff McKagan was brother to seven other kids. To the hungry dinner crowd, he was a budding chef of some reknown. On any given Monday, he was the drummer in one local band; on Tuesday, perhaps several thousand miles away, he was the guitarist in another. When he left behind his fashionable punk roots in Seattle, to move to L.A. at the age of 20, he became known as a hot bassist on the scene, which is how millions know him now, in Guns N' Roses. With a solo album almost in the can, which he hopes to eventually tour behind, he may soon be known as perhaps the hardest working bionic bass player in rock 'n' roll history. Always ready to do whatever it takes in order to play at the drop of any of his several hats, Duff put on his thinking cap for an intensive discussion of his many musical identities.

By John Stix • Photo By Robert John

Guns N' Roses



Does being a drummer and guitarist influence you as a bass player?

Being a drummer gives you a great insight. I know exactly what's going through Matt's head on any riff. I still play drums.

Does that language become part of a bass language?

Sure. I use the bass not only as a singing instrument, I also use it as a percussive instrument. I'm no Steve Vai on the bass, but the beginning of "Sweet Child" sings. The more abrasive songs, like the beginning of "Right Next Door to Hell," is what I mean by percussive.

Do you enjoy listening to Billy Sheehan?

I completely respect Billy and he also respects my playing. We're friends. It's

two different ballfields. For somebody to look down on somebody else because, 'he's not technically as good as I am,' is wrong. I play bass kind of like a lumberjack would cut down a tree. In music in general, there's room for everything.

You are a guitar player and now you're playing bass. Is it any less difficult?

That's the great misconception. In the general scheme of things, you're saying people don't respect bass players as much as guitar players, because there's two less strings, right? Maybe I even thought that way a long time ago. But there's a definite art to playing bass, and sticking to that art of being the bass player and keeping the groove. I love playing bass. I'd much rather be a bass

player than a guitar player.

When you first switched to bass, did you think, 'Oh, this will be easy?'

No. I'd moved to L.A. in '83, and I knew there were a million guitar players, a lot of whom were technically a lot better than I was. So I sold all my stuff up in Seattle and bought a bass and a little combo bass amp, and I was going to play bass, basically, because bassists were hard to find. I used it to get my foot in the door. The first person I met in L.A. was Slash.

How did you meet?

Through an ad he put in the paper. The ad said something like, "Guitar player looking for bass player: Alice Cooper, Aerosmith, Dolls, Led Zeppelin and Fear. Call Slash." I liked the name Slash, so I answered the ad. We met in Canter's deli. I had to learn a whole new train of thought of attacking music. It is a whole different ball game. I don't know if this is a good analogy, but a guitar player is more of a ballet dancer, whereas a bass player is more of a street dancer. Or, a guitar player is a jig saw, where the bass player is that lumberjack who cuts down big trees.

Had you decided to switch to bass when you knew you were moving?

The day before I moved.

What were you doing in Seattle?

I moved to L.A. when I was 20, but I'd been touring in punk bands since I was 15. I started on drums, but I was often times in two bands, where I'd have a gig in San Francisco playing drums and the next morning you'd find me with my thumb out hitchhiking to Portland, to get to my other gig playing guitar.

Were these original or cover bands?

Original bands. The first single I played on was with a band called the Vains, not to be confused with Vain. It was '79, and I was actually playing bass then. Then I played drums on a single in a band called the Fastbacks, who are still around. I was about 15, going on 16. I played drums on a few records of a band called the Fartz, which were a very popular cult hardcore punk band. If you listen to those records, you can see where a lot of the speed metal comes from now, 'cause we're talking '79/'80, when there was no such term as speed metal.

Did you think you would do this for a lifetime?

I knew I would. I'm the last of eight kids, and like I said, I was only 15 when I started touring. I told my mom, 'I can't go to school. I've learned what I need to learn. I just want to get on the road.' After having seven other kids, she's like, 'Okay, whatever you want to do.' But, at that point in your musical life, you don't really think, you just do. You react. You go. You don't know any better than to just keep going. I couldn't name any one par-

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ticular band that I thought, 'Okay, well this is *the* band.' I was never one to go, 'I really want to make it to the top and make a million bucks.' That's not what rock 'n' roll's all about. I just knew I wanted to play, and that was my life.

Why did you make the move to L.A.?

Why did I move out of my nice, safe, Seattle surroundings? Because it was safe and nice and comfortable. I flipped a coin. It was either New York or L.A. and it went heads, so I went to L.A. My car never would have made New York anyway.

Were you making the music you wanted to make in Seattle?

Sure, but I started getting a bit too comfortable. Then I started getting very fidgety. It's really easy to sit in your home-

town and grow up. I feel proud, then envious, of Soundgarden, Nirvana, and all those cats, that they got to stay home and the record companies moved up there to them, and gave them a way to put their noise on vinyl, without them having to move to L.A. and having to go through that.

So you moved to L.A. and met Slash.

I met Slash the week I moved there. He had some songs, I had some songs. Steven Adler was playing drums. The band was called Road Crew, so we played the song, "We Are the Road Crew," by Motorhead. We played "Mama Kin," by Aerosmith. I think "Back off Bitch" was one of the songs. We're rehearsing, we're humping our gear

down to this tiny place that doesn't have storage. Even if it did, we weren't able to afford to keep our stuff there, and it was in a bad area. I don't know if I would want to keep anything there. We never actually did a gig because we couldn't find a singer. I was going to sing, but we didn't have a P.A., so that's about as far as it got. Road Crew was very short-lived. Maybe two months. Then I met Izzy and he moved in across the street. I lived in this real bad neighborhood in Hollywood. I was working as a cook at a Black Angus. I was a dishwasher when I was 13, and a prep cook. By the time I was 18, I was a full-on line chef. So with Izzy, we see each other walking down the street, and I think he saw me carrying a bass and he goes, "Me and a buddy of mine (Axl) just got a band together. Do you wanna play bass?" I said, "Sure." I'll try anything once. So I went out there, and there was a drummer and this other guitar player. I dug Izzy's whole vibe and Axl and I instantly hit it off. After we had done a couple club gigs in L.A., I booked us a tour. I said, "I'm going to see if this works." I came into rehearsal one day and I said, "Okay guys, let's tour. I've got all these numbers for all these clubs up and down the West Coast and Canada." Axl and Izzy were like, "Yeah!" We knew this guy with a car, so we knew we could get there. But the drummer and the lead guitar player left the band. The first gig was coming up in about four days, so it turns out that Izzy and Axl also knew Slash and Steven. I said, "Hey, let's get Slash and Steven in the band." So we rehearsed for three days and made the first gig. That was that.

Any songs from that road trip make any of the records?

All of them. "Back off Bitch" was one. Axl started "November Rain" back then. A good quarter of the two *Illusions* is from back then. I was reading reviews where people think we sat around trying to write songs that match *Appetite*, when they don't realize that the songs were from a long time ago. We didn't have the time or money on *Appetite* to record a lot of them. We said, "We'll keep this and this for the next record."

What amp were you playing through at that time?

The first amp I bought was the Gallien-Krueger 800RB. Just the head. That's when my sound started taking form. I was blowing speakers left and right, so I had to steal speakers out of music stores. I didn't know that the 800RB took a 400 watt EV speaker to take that much power. Now we're playing bigger places and all that, so I use three 800RBs.

When you're alone, what do you play?
I never play bass alone. I have never once done that.

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player if you never practiced, or played alone? How did you try to achieve what you wanted to achieve on the bass?

I don't rehearse by myself. That doesn't mean I don't rehearse. Slash and I rehearse, sometimes eight hours a day.

How good did you want to be at your instruments?

Every instrument I've played, I'd always attack it as opposed to being technically great.

How much do you need technique to be able to interpret what's coming from the heart?

In music, you don't have to do anything exactly right. If it feels good and it sounds good to you, that's rock 'n' roll music. That's what it's all about. Even if nobody else likes it. But, if you don't spend enough time to get your fingers to do whatever it is you feel and you want them to, you can't do it. I was fortunate to be from a large family who were all very musical. I got a lot just from hearing all my brothers and sisters play. Eventually I'd play something I heard on the radio, or something my brothers and sisters were playing, like a Jimi Hendrix record. I could figure out the chords in five minutes, without ever learning a chord in my life. I was gifted with that instinct.

Tell me about working with two different drummers?

Very important question. When we went to try out drummers, I got really depressed, because it's hard, especially for me, as I used to play drums. I know what goes through a drummer's head, and I know how it should be. It was really scary, 'cause Steven was the drummer since the beginning of the band. We're used to our style.

Did you try out all the drummers?

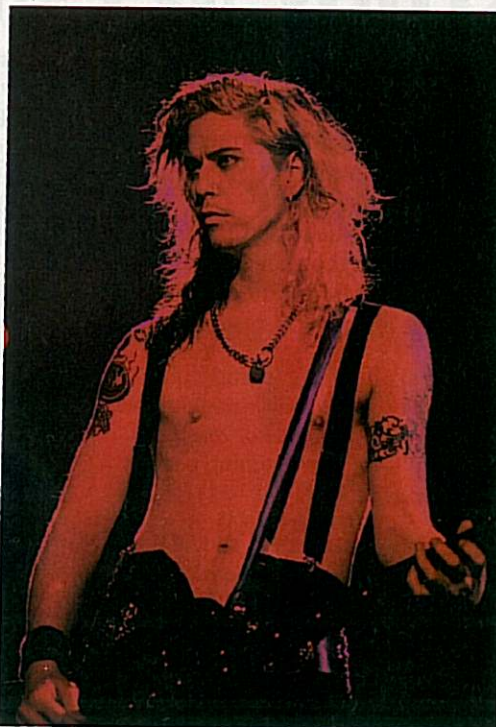
Yeah, we did, as opposed to just talking to them to know they weren't right. They tried out with Slash and I. Since our albums weren't out, we'd usually have them learn "Jungle," "Brownstone," maybe "Paradise City"—things that they might be familiar with.

Did some of the drummers try to play Steven's stuff?

Yeah, and in some signature rolls he does, like at the end of "Paradise City," you have to. We put a lot of weight on Matt's shoulders, because we were slated to go into the studio and record these 38 songs. All in all we did 35 to 38 songs. And we still have that punk rock thing in the can, that other album we recorded.

Other album?

We recorded a punk rock cover record. It's coming out next year some time. We



Robert John

play one of them live, by the Misfits. It's a song called "Attitude." We recorded "New Rose" by the Damned, "Ain't It Fun," by the Dead Boys, "Down on the Farm," by U.K. Sub, "I Don't Care About You," by Fear. I don't remember what else we did. We all had a great time with it.

Is this record more live than *Illusions*?

We did it a bit more live. We didn't have to articulate as much as on our own stuff. I sing on "Attitude" and "New Rose." Axl and Michael Monroe trade off lines on the Dead Boys song. It's something the band has always wanted to do, and we just did it while we were in the studio, as opposed to regrouping and learning the songs over again, and coming back a year from then and doing it. Matt had four weeks to learn all these tunes, and they weren't recorded, so we had to show him the songs, as opposed to just giving him *Appetite* and saying, "Learn these songs for the road." But Matt had all the nuances of these songs, like "Coma," which has 50 million parts.

As much as you knew the other guys weren't right in five seconds, did it take five seconds to know Matt was right?

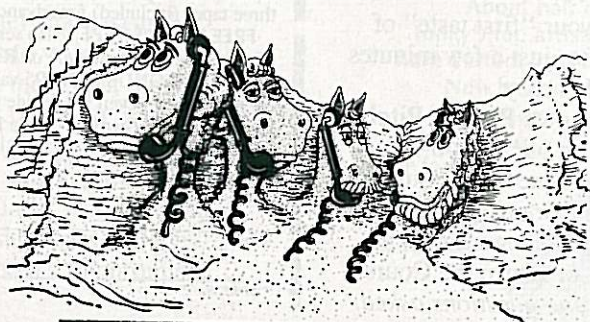
It really did. We saw him playing in the Cult. We didn't steal their drummer away. We talked to Ian first. It was their last gig of the tour, so it fell right into place. I was crossing my fingers, 'cause he seemed perfect. Then when he came in for an audition, I was like, "Okay, yeah!"

Was personality a piece of the puzzle?

That's as important as playing, really. There were a couple try-out rehearsals with him, and then we hung out, and he was instantly one of the bros.

When working in the studio, is the big thing to lock up with the bass drum?

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Definitely the bass drum. Of course, my bass amp and cabinet are in a different room, but I'm in the same room with Matt. I use a lot of eye contact. When he hits a crash, I watch exactly when he hits the crash, but first and foremost is with the bass drum.

Where was your favorite rhythm section groove on *Appetite* and the two *Illusions*?

Probably "Brownstone" or "Rock Queen" on *Appetite* and everything, really, on *Illusion*. With Matt, you can't go wrong on anything. We have a serious backbeat groove, especially live. If we were to record all the songs right now, there'd be a lot more groove to it, and it'd be a lot heavier. Did you record both records in a similar fashion, from the bass point of view? Exactly the same.

Were you thinking it's scratch bass? No. We record really live, so everything was pretty much keepers. I fixed up just a couple of little things. We'd do two or three songs a day. We recorded all those songs in a 30 day period. Songs like "Estranged" and "Coma" would be whole day things.

Were you physically in top shape? Yeah! My callouses were all there, brother! I had to rehearse with Matt six or eight hours a day. Even with Steven, before we do a record, I like to go in at least two or three hours early with the drummer and rehearse, and then have Slash and Izzy come in.

When you're playing for keeps, how much are you being aggressive and going for the best, and how much are you saying, 'This is the record, I just want to play the part right'?

It's always aggressive. Clink won't let you be otherwise. When I'm in the studio I'm ready for war.

Does the E tuning give you any problems with strings flapping?

If you went down another half step, you might start running into a few problems. Tuning down, you get a thicker, heavier sound. The basses that I use, the Fender Jazz Specials, are slightly different. My basses are made an RCH longer, to allow for the strings flapping. My particular model was only made for a year or two. It's got sort of a Jazz neck and Precision body. It has a Precision pickup and a Jazz pickup in the back. The first bass I bought, the white Fender Jazz special, that I bought at the Guitar Center, had inadvertently been screwed up when they made it. As opposed to the neck being perfectly conical, mine is half eggshaped. Somebody in the shop filed it too much. I was so used to that bass, that when I went to try other basses, something wasn't right. It's like, wait a minute, something's different with these other Jazz Specials. I went down to the custom shop, and sure enough,

they spun it through this graphic computer and found what was wrong—or, for me, right—with the bass. So now I have all my necks custom-made exactly like that one.

The sound of the bass on *Illusion I* and *II* seemed fuller than on *Appetite*. That's weird, because I used everything exactly the same.

It might have been the mix, but it seemed to growl more.

Wow. I've just become 'Duffer.' I tried to match the sound, because I loved the sound that I got on *Appetite*. Mike Clink and I worked at it. We didn't record at the same place. Maybe we did get a bit more balls out of it, but I've played with the same equipment since day one. I use exactly the same equipment onstage that I record with. I'd done a lot of recordings before *Appetite*, but not playing bass and not with the budget we had for *Appetite*. This was the big deal, and I had time to actually sit down and go, 'Okay, now I want to get a sound that I can live with when I'm 65 years old.'

Do you record with a DI?

And I mike. I have my old stand-by 2x15" EV 400 watt speakers, in an Acoustic cabinet. I use one GK 800 RB head, just mike the bottom 15", and then DI. When we go to mix, I always push up the live sound just above the DI. That gives it a nice round sound.

How did Mike Clink help to get that sound?

The magic about Mike is, he gets on tape exactly what's being played. This is what rock 'n' roll recording is all about. It's simple, dry; that's it. Don't mess with it. Don't trigger any samples on it. I would never allow that to be done. Just record the band, live. We're not a studio band. He saw that, and we knew that, so you just press play and record. He got all our sounds perfectly.

Was recording the basics in 30 days important to you? What if you needed more time?

We had 30 days booked at A&M to do the basics, and we didn't want to go someplace else to continue. I like that pressure. To me it's good.

After you're done with your part, how much do you participate?

I'm basically the only one Slash will even let in the studio. He doesn't like anybody around when he records. He gets real nervous, but I drop by. Sometimes he'll call me and say, "Come down, man, and listen to this thing I did." Who am I to tell Slash what to do? But I love playing with the guy. I might make a suggestion here and there, which he listens to, 'cause he knows if I make a suggestion it's at least valid. I don't know where he comes up with his stuff. His solos are never random, off-the-cuff solos. He thinks, he maps them out, but they're not contrived.

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BIONIC BASS

What's your take on the 6-string bass?

Slash played the 6-string on two songs. I was gonna play it, and he was screwing around with it. He has a completely different attack to the 6-string than I do. I said, "Slash, why don't you give it a try?" He was havin' fun and he was attacking it in a real cool way, like he attacks a guitar. I don't think there's any use for it in the usual context of a band. 5-string basses were originally made to compete with all the low sounds on the new synths. It doesn't get that original, good rock 'n' roll bass tone. The strings are closer together. I'll tell you, in rock 'n' roll, a bass guitar has four strings and non-active pickups. It's just you and the bass and a cord.

Most bass players stick to one bass for a real long time.

I just retired my original white bass. It's at home. But, like I said, I had to get the other basses made exactly like it. Me and John Paige at Fender worked together. It took a long time. I didn't know it was gonna be this difficult.

Tell me about your solo record.

I got a solo deal with Geffen. The record's called *Believe in Me*. I recorded the majority of it while we were on the road, which kept it pretty fresh. I've been recording all over the place, from London to Seattle. I did some drum and piano tracks in Dallas for a song called "Lonely Tonight," where I went in after we played three hours. It was four in the morning and I recorded till one or two in the afternoon.

Is that how you would prefer to do it?

It is. At first I was going, 'Okay, we'll try doing it this way.' Jim, who engineered the Guns N' Roses record, is co-producing it with me. I didn't know if it would work or not, or if you'd be able to tell by the tracks that I was tired. But you get a second, third or fourth wind, and it puts you in this state of mind. I don't know how to explain it, but it's great. Matt played drums on one song. Rob Affuso from Skid Row did drums on one song. I did drums on the rest of them. Bas sang on one song when we were in London, and Rob played drums in Denver and Snake played guitar on one song. I pulled some real bluesy stuff out of him that he didn't realize he had. I turned off all the lights and lit some candles. It's piano, bass, and just a kick and a snare. It's real bluesy, low, subtle. We just got him in the mood. It took a while but he just let go. I said to him, just pretend you're on a porch somewhere.

When do you think it will come out?

I'm almost done recording, but I'm not going to release it till late summer or early fall, because I'm going to tour on it. I'll play rhythm guitar and sing, Slash is going to play lead, Matt will play drums,

and this guy London McDaniel is going to play bass. Teddy, who plays with us now, is gonna play keyboards, sax and harmonica.

For recording, you did all of the parts yourself?

Yeah. I did drums first and there was nothing to play along to. I did demos of everything up at my house.

You would do the concert, having played over three hours, and then you'd go play drum tracks by yourself?

It's refreshing, actually. I don't use a click track, either. My time is naturally pretty good, but on some songs, you don't want to have the greatest time. You've got to go mostly with how the song's going to go. In my head, I sing the song.

What kind of consistency can you get for sound when you go from town to town, or doesn't that really matter?

Well, with drums it does. I have a real consistent sound, bass-wise, because I use the same bass that I've used on both records, and I use the same technique of recording my bass. With drums, there has been a problem, so Matt made a sample of all his Yamaha drum sounds. In a couple places I use it. I play one of Matt's extra sets. It's a Yamaha Recording Series drum set, but every room is different, and some of them aren't so great. What I'm doing with four songs, where the drum sounds are not that great, is triggering. It's still me playing the drums, but Matt's sound is triggered.

Is "So Fine" an indication of your style?

Of my personal style? Yeah. On our record, you've got to know that Slash and I together wrote the majority of the stuff. For my record, just expect the unexpected. This has been a dream of mine, since I was 15, to do something myself. I was always a big Prince fan, especially of the early stuff, like *Dirty Mind*, that he did by himself. Now I'm afforded the chance to do it. Some of the songs are bits and pieces of stuff I've written years ago. I have an 8-track up at my house, and I've got 40 or 45 complete songs.

Do you feel that you want to be that much better because now you have a brighter spotlight?

I'm not a spotlight-monger. That's not why I play. But I know what you're saying. I've been put in the spot now. There's just three original members left, the kids up front are checking us out a bit more, and there is a heavier load on my shoulders. I'd be lying if I said there's no pressure, but I don't think any of us really feels it. To us, when we go out and play, we're still just the band, even though we're playing bigger places and getting all this press. But, when you're the talk of the town, you've gotta yell a bit louder, I guess.