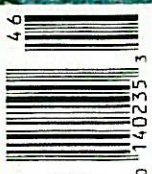


★ EXCLUSIVE: 'BLIND FAITH,' BY JOE MCGINNISS, THE AUTHOR OF 'FATAL VISION' ★
U2'S 'RATTLE AND HUM,' MICK JAGGER, JAMES BROWN, FASHION TAKES THE NIGHT

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Rolling Stone

GUNS N' ROSES
HARD-ROCK HEROES



34790



W. Axl Rose

The Hard Truth About Guns n' Roses

By Rob Tannenbaum

Finally, some bad boys who are good

A SECOND AGO, THINGS WERE MERELY TENSE. Izzy Stradlin, Guns n' Roses' scruffy rhythm guitarist, is slumped on a dressing-room counter, sullenly draining his second bottle of red wine and testing the wattage of a portable stereo.

Sitting on a couch, trying to talk above the racket, are Axl Rose, the group's singer, and Slash, the lead guitarist. Slash, whose copper skin is still wet from a postconcert shower, is wearing shorts and holding a bottle of Jack Daniels, his only constant companion. Axl is wearing jeans, cowboy boots and a T-shirt that says, WELCOME TO DETROIT, MURDER CAPITAL OF THE WORLD. Axl and Slash are getting increasingly angry with Izzy, who grins obliviously and cranks up the Rolling Stones' "Stupid Girl."

At the base of the wall nearest the door, there is a fresh hole the exact size of Axl's boot. This evening's concert, the last of three mid-August dates opening for Aerosmith at Pine Knob Music Theatre, near Detroit, went so poorly that the band left the stage five minutes early. And when the Gunners don't play well, trouble ensues. While the band members sit in the dressing room, their sound mixer and a bus driver are being fired for alleged incompetence.

Suddenly, there's an explosion. "Violent mood swing!" shouts Izzy, rolling from the counter. A bottle of vodka flies from his hand and smashes against the far wall. "Mood swing!" shouts Axl, leaping from the couch. He grabs a vase filled with roses and pitches it in the same direction.

Just as quickly, Izzy and Axl are seated again. But all that smashed glass hasn't relieved the tension. The bottle of vodka belonged to bassist Duff "Rose" McKagan, who is now without his favorite liquor and is therefore enraged. Slash, too, is pissed at Izzy, who still won't turn down the stereo.

"This is entertaining," says Axl, watching and smiling.

After Slash and Duff have finished yelling at him, Izzy turns remorseful. "Fuckin' Duff, man. I never like to break his vodka. I know he loves that vodka."

JUST ANOTHER ROCK & ROLL BAND BEING ASSHOLES, trashing a dressing room?

Not exactly. For Guns n' Roses, outbursts are not merely the traditional way for a rock star to pass the time between blow jobs. The agitation backstage in Detroit springs from the same hair-trigger temperament that makes the Gunners the world's most exciting hard-rock band. They are young, foolhardy, stubborn, cynical, proud, uncompromising, insolent, conflicted and very candid about their faults.

The tension that is part of the band members' daily life compresses their moods and their music until both explode. Except for Steven Adler, their happy-go-lucky drummer, they are willful and combative. "It's cool that this tension is building up, because it's gotta find its release in the music," Axl says backstage. "If we live that long."

If you don't look any deeper than the band members' tattoos, you might compare Guns n' Roses to Poison, Ratt, Faster Pussycat, Mötley Crüe and any other of the dozens of nearly identical heavy-metal bands currently being pushed by the music industry. The Gunners engage in the same antics, revolving around booze, drugs and women; they trumpet their music as "rebellious"; and they claim to play for "the kids."

But Guns n' Roses don't play heavy metal. They play a vicious brand of hard rock that, especially in concert, is closer to Metallica or to punk than to heavy metal. They are a musical sawed-off shotgun, with great power but erratic aim

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TIMOTHY WHITE

— they veer from terrible to brilliant in a typical set, often within a single song.

And more important, Guns n' Roses really do play for "the kids." Metal bands have their images on a fantasy life that has no relation to the daily reality of being a teenager. Kids may idolize or envy David Lee Roth, but they have little in common with him. Guns n' Roses are young enough to remember what it was like to be seventeen: Slash and Steven are twenty-three; Duff, the only married band member, is twenty-four; Axl and Izzy are twenty-six. Axl remains obsessed with the contradictions of adolescence: the unfocused rage and per-

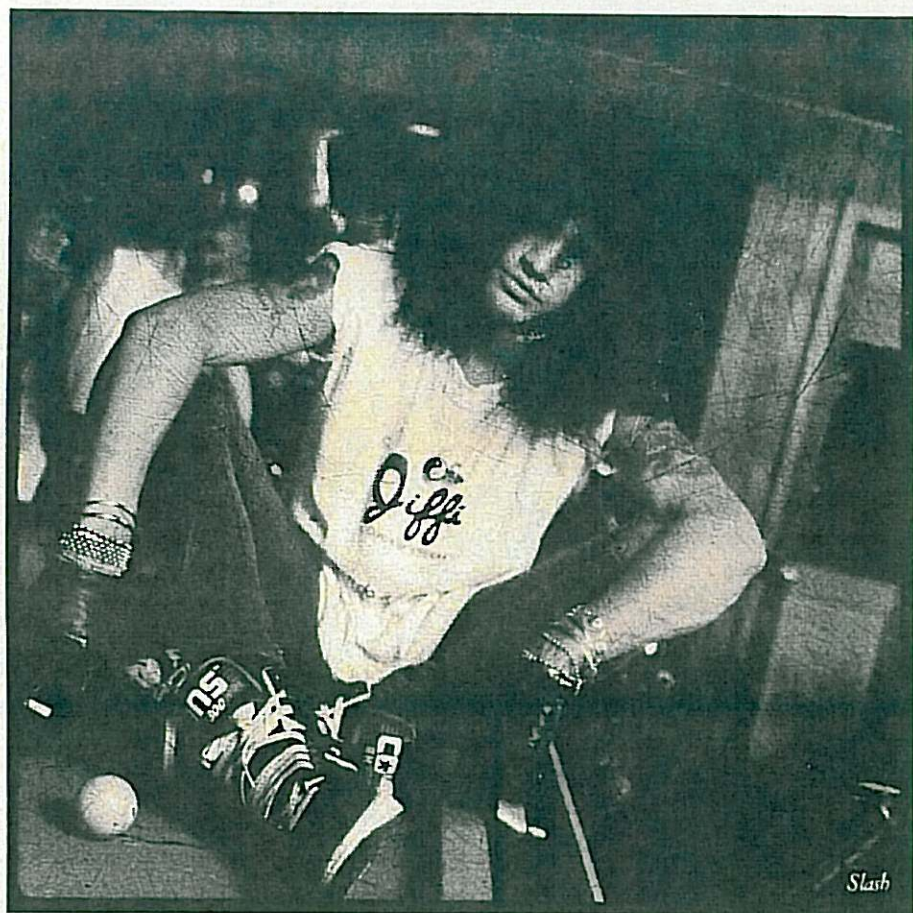
cated to the inner sleeve for the second cover), from album-rock radio stations and from MTV. Eventually, the media caught up and helped "Sweet Child o' Mine" become a Number One single. But the early support, the support that forced MTV and radio to play the Gunners, came from "the kids."

The week of the band's Detroit shows, *USA Today* published a frightening story that helps explain Guns n' Roses' appeal. According to a survey, nearly one in seven American teens say they've tried to kill themselves. More than half of the girls polled said they find it hard to cope with stress, and a third said they often

He holds up his right hand, which is swollen and welted from smacking his guitar onstage. "We fuckin' bleed and sweat for it, you know? We do a lot of things where other bands will be, like, 'Get the stunt guy to do it.'"

NAME A CITY ON THEIR TOUR ITINERARY, AND GUNS n' Roses probably have a story to go with it.

In Atlanta, Axl jumped from the stage to grab a security guard who, Axl says, shoved a friend of his without provocation. The police held Axl backstage while the rest of the band played "Communication Break-



vasive doubt, the insecurity and cockiness, the horniness and fear. The Gunners' songs don't hide the fact that they're confused and screwed up. "We know we are," Axl says with a nod. "But we're trying not to be."

U2 manager Paul McGuinness has called the Gunners' success "the most exciting new thing to happen in our business for a while." They have been embraced by the fashionable, and their concerts are invaded by HIGs (the band's sneering code for *huge industry giants*). Their debut album, *Appetite for Destruction*, which has sold nearly 6 million copies, reached Number One on the *Billboard* charts in early August, having been released a year before. The album succeeded despite resistance from retail chains (some refused to stock the LP because of its gruesome cover art, which was relo-

ROB TANNENBAUM wrote about Bruce Hornsby and the Range in RS 535.

feel sad and hopeless. "I Want to Hold Your Hand" can't mean much to these kids.

Guns n' Roses have less in common with metal acts than with rap artists like Public Enemy, which project a lethal toughness while urging self-improvement, and black-comedy gore movies like *RoboCop*. They also bring to mind the early Rolling Stones, who won a similar notoriety for singing about spite and hostility. And if the Gunners go beyond what the Stones sang about, it's because times are rougher; they are a brutal band for brutal times. Unlike the Stones, they don't keep an ironic distance between them and their songs.

"Our attitude epitomizes what rock & roll is all about," says Slash. "At least, what I think rock & roll is all about, which is all that matters. You know how some bands go out and the whole thing is going completely wrong but they can put on a good show anyway? We're not like that."

Our attitude epitomizes what rock is all about,' says Slash. 'We bleed and sweat for it. We do things where other bands would be like "Get the stunt guy to do it."'

down" and "Honky Tonk Women" with a roadie singing. To avoid a trial, Axl pleaded guilty to assaulting the police and paid a fine.

In Philadelphia, just minutes before a concert, Axl got into a fight with a parking-lot attendant who, Axl says, shoved Stuart, Axl's younger brother and personal assistant. Doug Goldstein, the group's tough but temperate and shrewd tour manager, persuaded the police to release Axl in time for the show.

In Saratoga Springs, New York, a local paper reported, "police and security guards are calling it a night they won't soon forget." "There was nearly a riot," Izzy says. "I get off on that kind of vibe, where everything's just about ready to crack. When there's 25,000 people and they have, like, three security guys. God, it was intense, man. It was just on that fucking edge of 25,000 people coming down to the stage." When fans began sprinting onstage, the band bailed out. Three nights

later, in Weedsport, New York, the Gunners topped that with a show Axl describes as "just, like, psycho."

In Hamburg, Germany, Izzy and Duff beat up the drummer in Faster Pussycat, bound him with duct tape and tossed him in an elevator.

In Chicago, the band members got hassled when they tried to check into the hotel early. A fight was narrowly averted. Later that night, in the hotel bar, Axl punched a businessman who hassled his friends and called the singer a "Bon Jovi look-alike." Dozens of cops broke up the brawl, and Axl and Steven went to jail. Afterward, Goldstein found Slash drunk in the bar, threw the guitarist over his shoulder and carried him back to his room. To show his thanks, Slash peed on Goldstein's shoulder.

There are other incidents, minor by comparison. Like the time Axl jabbed his microphone stand awfully close to the face of a photographer who wasn't supposed to be using a flash. Or the time Axl decided not to show up for a Phoenix concert, leaving the opening band, T.S.O.L., to improvise Zeppelin jams until the Gunners' cancellation was announced.

Then there are the lawsuits. Soon after they signed with Geffen Records, Guns n' Roses dismissed their manager, Vicky Hamilton, who sued the band. (The suit has been settled out of court.) After Slash insulted Poison in a number of interviews, two members of that group poured booze on Bryn Bridenthal, the Gunners' publicist. (The two pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor, but a civil suit is still pending.)

Although trouble seems to follow Guns n' Roses, they say they don't instigate the conflicts, they merely refuse to back away from them.

"A lot of bands in L.A. lay down, 'cause they think they have to," Axl says. "But it's harder to live with your conscience of going, 'Man, I just kissed ass.' You can't live with that. Everybody in this band just goes, 'Man, I can't let this person just fuck me like that.' We fight."

Axl is so sensitive and so erratic that even the other members of the band are awed by — and maybe tired of — his "mood swings." He travels on a separate tour bus, not only because he stays up at night and sleeps during the day but also to reduce friction with the other band members. "Axl's a real temperamental guy," says Slash. "He's hard to get along with."

Izzy, who's known Axl for thirteen years, says the singer used to be far more troublesome. "If it wasn't for the band," Izzy says, "I just hate to think what he might've done."

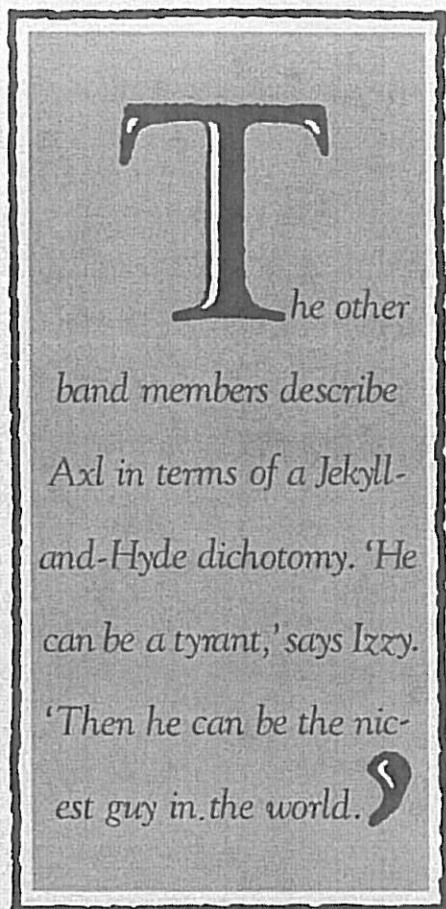
"DAVID LEE ROTH SAID SOMETHING ABOUT HOW EVERY time you get onstage, you're dancing someone into the dirt that didn't want you to get up there, that tried to stop you in some way or another," says Axl. "Whether or not they knew what they were doing or not, you know, it messed up your life somehow."

Axl Rose grew up as Bill Bailey, the son of L. Stephen and Sharon Bailey. He was the local juvenile delinquent in Lafayette, Indiana, and was arrested, by his count, "over twenty times," serving as long as three months in jail and representing himself at trials " 'cause I didn't trust the public defenders for *shit*." A psychiatrist who noted Bailey's high IQ decided that his behavior was evidence of psychosis.

One of Bill Bailey's best friends was Jeff Isabelle, known to all as Izzy. According to Izzy, Bailey "was like a serious lunatic when I met him. He was just really fucking bent on fighting and destroying things. Somebody'd look at him wrong, and he'd just, like, start a fight. And you think about Lafayette, man, there's, like, fuck all to do." Izzy graduated from high school in

1979 (he's the only member of Guns n' Roses with a diploma) and moved to L.A.

When he was seventeen, Bill Bailey discovered that his real last name was Rose. His natural father, a chronic troublemaker whose whereabouts are unknown, had left his wife and family. When Sharon Rose remarried, she and her new husband gave his surname to her children. Axl now considers L. Stephen Bailey his "real dad," but he discovered his hidden past at a time when he was growing his hair, playing in bands and fighting with his parents. So Bill Bailey began calling himself W. Rose. He became so engrossed



in one of his Indiana bands, Axl, that his friends suggested he call himself Axl. Years later, before he signed his Geffen contract, he legally changed his name to W. Axl Rose. The initials — W.A.R. — were, he says, merely an accident.

It's appropriate that Axl has had two different names, because his "mood swings" reveal two distinct personalities. Onstage, releasing years of anger, he's a remarkably charismatic figure. He sings savagely, abusing his vocal chords and working the crowd with an unequalled ferocity. Offstage, his pale skin and strawberry-blond hair make him appear fragile, almost angelic. This is the Axl who listens to the Raspberries, George Michael and Philip Glass and has written an eight-minute ballad, "November Rain," about which he says, "If it's not recorded right, I'll quit the business."

Even the other band members describe Axl in terms of a Jekyll-and-Hyde dichotomy. "He does a lot of

weird shit no one understands," says Slash, "but I love the guy. I mean, he's a real sweetheart."

"He can still be a tyrant," says Izzy, "but then he can turn around and be the nicest guy in the world."

"A lot of the things about my mood swings are, like, I have a temper," Axl says, "and I take things out on myself. Not physically, but I'll smash my TV knowing I have to pay for it, rather than go down the hallway and smash the person I'm pissed at." Becoming a star so quickly has only worsened matters. "With all the pressure," Axl says, "it's like I'll explode. And so where other people would go, 'Oh, well, we just got fucked,' Axl's going, 'God damn it!' and breaking everything around him. That's how I release my frustration. It's why I'm, like, pounding and kicking all over the stage."

As an example, Axl cites Geffen's decision to cut the "Sweet Child" 45 from almost six minutes to under four minutes. "When something gets edited," he says, "and you didn't know about it, you lose your mind, and it's like 'Axl's having a mood swing.' 'Mood swing' my ass. This is my first single, and it's chopped to shit."

A psychiatrist has diagnosed Axl's problem as manic-depressive disorder, a condition that can cause people to swing from impulsive, reckless and argumentative fits to catatonic and suicidal periods. "I can be happier than anybody I know," Axl says. "I can get so happy I'll cry. I can get completely opposite, upsetwise." Many manic-depressives turn to drugs or alcohol to lessen the pain of their illness.

Although Axl takes lithium to combat the disorder, he thinks it's ineffective and claims to be in control of his moods. "Did you ever see that movie — I think it was *Frances*?" Frances Farmer, an actress, was institutionalized because of her emotional outbursts. "I always wonder if, like, somebody's gonna slide the knife underneath my eye and give me the lobotomy. I think about that a lot."

"WAS I, LIKE, A MAJOR DICK LAST NIGHT?"

It's one in the afternoon, Detroit time, and Slash has just awakened with a hangover. After numerous rounds at the hotel bar, he was taken up to his room by Ronnie Stalaker, a burly member of the band's security staff. (Slash says, "His job is to follow me around when I'm drunk.") When Slash threatened to throw his furniture through the locked windows, Ronnie removed the TV from the guitarist's room and slept outside his door to make sure Slash didn't sneak out.

"I'm one of those blackout drunks," Slash says later. "I get so fucked up I don't remember anything. I probably give the impression of being a real asshole most of the time, but I'm not really that bad."

Slash, who refuses to divulge his given name, was born in England, but when he was still young, his parents, an interracial couple, moved to Hollywood, where he "experienced a lot of shit." His father, Anthony Hudson, designed album covers, including Joni Mitchell's *Court and Spark*, and his mother, Ola Hudson, was a clothing designer who made David Bowie's suits for *The Man Who Fell to Earth*. Slash, who was given his nickname by a friend's father, started playing in bands in his midteens. "I had total freedom, all the time," he says. "I used to not come home for weeks."

Because the early-Eighties music scene in L.A. was so volatile, and because the Gunners' memories are so clouded, no one can pinpoint when the band came together. Duff, who had moved down from Seattle, where he'd played drums and guitar in thirty-one different bands, answered an ad Slash had placed in an L.A. paper. Axl hitchhiked to L.A., wandered around and finally found Izzy, the only person he knew in California. Izzy got together with Slash after seeing a cari-

capture of Aerosmith that he had drawn. They played, they fought, they got high, they toyed with the idea of forming bands with names like Heads of Amazon and AIDS. They finally settled on Guns n' Roses, combining the names of two bands that various members had been involved in, L.A. Guns and Hollywood Rose.

Teresa Ensenat was in Geffen's A&R department when she heard about the Gunners in the fall of 1985. Because the band didn't have a phone, it took Ensenat and Tom Zutaut, her A&R partner, several months to find them. Eventually, they found the band living in what Ensenat calls "this thing" — a tiny, seedy studio apartment on Sunset and Gardner. "A fucking living hell," says Izzy. There was no bathroom, shower or kitchen. By stealing lumber from a construction site, they built a loft that slept no more than three at a time.

"I'd fuck girls just so I could stay at their place," Slash says. There were parties in the parking lot next door almost every night, which brought a constant procession of pimps, drug dealers and cops through the studio. If they had enough money to buy hamburger, they burned Steve's drumsticks for firewood. (Even after they decided to sign with Geffen, in the spring of '86, they pretended to be undecided, just so competing labels would continue to take them out for meals.) Axl was banned from the Rainbow, an L.A. club, for two years because of obnoxious behavior. "We would just go out annihilated, pass out fliers and just make everybody in the room know we're here," he says. They lived like vermin, they drank too much, they didn't practice safe sex, they didn't do aerobics. "It was, like, just the complete opposite of what the Eighties was all about," says Slash.

Guns n' Roses didn't have a manager pushing them to record companies. The labels came to them, and the band isn't surprised. "Rock & roll in general has just sucked a big fucking dick since the Pistols," says Izzy. Even after signing with Geffen, Guns n' Roses couldn't find a manager or a producer. "People were very afraid of this band," says Ensenat. Tom Werman, Mötley Crüe's producer, "came down to our rehearsal, covered his ears and left," says Duff. The band broke up briefly, then got together again and agreed to record with Mike Clink, a quiet young engineer best known for his work with Heart and Eddie Money.

Zutaut invited Tim Collins, Aerosmith's manager, to see the Gunners play in L.A. When the band members came back to his hotel room, Collins checked into a second room to get some rest. In the morning, he learned that they had ordered \$450 worth of drinks and food on his bill. He decided not to manage them.

Club ads for L.A. shows routinely read, FRESH FROM DETOX, OR ADDICTED: ONLY THE STRONG SURVIVE. Their drug problems — some were involved with heroin — were common knowledge. Says Slash, "There was a point there where I fuckin' stopped playing guitar and didn't even talk to my band except for Izzy, 'cause we were both doing it. I didn't come out of the apartment for three months, except to go to the market. The one thing that really stopped me was a phone call from Duff, saying, 'You've alienated yourself from everybody.' Since they're the only people I'm really close to, that really affected me, and I finally quit."

Without the band, Slash says, "I'd probably OD or something. I'm not into 'life for life's sake.'" Asked if the band can survive drugs and personality conflicts, he responds, "It doesn't matter. What kind of priority is that?" Mick Jagger, Slash suggests, "should have died after *Some Girls*, when he was still cool." The guitarist says he could die in a heavy-metal AIDS epidemic, which would also strike several other well-known L.A. bands, "since we all fuck the same chicks."

"I've got a bad drinking problem," he says. "It's the only thing that brings me out of my shell enough to be able to deal socially." Slash doesn't get drunk until after the shows, but he drinks steadily all day long, and his hands shake. "I'm an alcoholic in the sense that I need to drink all the time," he says, "but I don't have a physical dependence on it the way some people do." One of the Gunners' favorite stories is how Rick Nielsen of Cheap Trick invited them to his house, then issued a tequila challenge to Slash. The story ends with Nielsen drunkenly assaulting the band and Izzy kicking Nielsen in the balls. "I didn't kick him hard," Izzy says, shrug-



ging. ("That's way wrong," Nielsen says. He acknowledges that he invited the band members to his house and got drunk with them and that the evening ended in a physical confrontation. But Nielsen says he fought with Slash, not Izzy. Nielsen also says he didn't start the fight but did end it: "I decked that asshole.")

"Drug use is not in the past," Axl says. "We scare the shit out of each other, because we don't want to lose what we have as a family."

"Guns n' Roses are what every L.A. band pretends to be," says country singer Steve Earle, who is both Ensenat's boyfriend and a friend of the band. "But I don't think drugs or anything else is as important to anybody in that band as being in Guns n' Roses is."

It seems their drug use is triggered by boredom, and their current schedule doesn't permit much down time. When Tim Collins hired the Gunners to open for the Aerosmith tour, however, he didn't take any chances.

Having already spent millions to put key members of his band through detox twice, Collins added a rider to the contract: Guns n' Roses had to confine their drinking to their dressing room. At the beginning of the tour, Guns n' Roses agreed to leave the arena soon after their sets, so that they wouldn't tempt Aerosmith. Members of the two bands had met years before, Slash says. "Our guys were selling drugs to their guys."

THE AEROSMITH-GUNS N' ROSES BILL WAS A GREAT success, drawing at least two generations of rock fans. The tour concentrated on outdoor sheds, ministadiums that seat about 15,000, and it's here that the Gunners found their audience.

The sheds are set out in the suburbs, where the kids can't damage too much property. For a couple of hours, the only supervision is the security guards, who have nice haircuts and thick arms. You can get a big, warm, flat Miller Lite for \$3.75, if you have proof you're over twenty-one or if one of your feet touches the ground. The guys in the audience wear black T-shirts depicting the last band to play at the venue, and their dates wear K Mart knockoffs of the clothing L.A. models wear in music videos.

Although Aerosmith was the headliner on the tour and was applauded enthusiastically, the kids seemed to regard the band as history, a band they knew from the radio, like the Doors or the Troggs. Their response to Guns n' Roses' set was much more powerful and demonstrated an unusual emotional connection with their songs and attitude.

"The sincerity of the band shows," says Slash. "That's why the crowds are so fuckin' violent. Not to say that I condone crowd violence and riots, but it's part of the energy that we put out."

"At times, like in Philly, I think I could've easily started a riot," says Axl. "It's great watching 'em go crazy and beat each other up, but I don't want to see people get hurt."

"I hate to even mention anything like that, but I guess we are playing with fire," says Duff. "I would seriously hate for anything to happen, but we're not the kind of guys to really change our ways." It seems that a violent incident is inevitable, the same way the Stones were destined to have an incident like Altamont. "I've watched that movie [*Gimme Shelter*] probably a hundred times," says Axl.

Like a number of current rappers — to say nothing of TV, movies and most of society — Guns n' Roses issue a lot of vague and contradictory signals about violence and drugs. But Axl and Slash argue that their lyrics don't advocate certain behavior, they only describe it, and often in grim, dissuasive terms. Slash cites "Mr. Brownstone," an ugly depiction of gradual heroin addiction that he and Izzy wrote on acoustic guitars one night while stoned. "So there's a bunch of kids strung out 'cause we said [heroin] was cool," says Slash. "And we never said it was cool. They misunderstand it, and it pisses me off. We never made any messages, but if kids are gonna take it that seriously, then that fucks me up. Because then it's my fault. And it's Izzy's fault, and it's Duff's fault, and it's Axl's fault, and it's Steven's fault. I don't want to be a part of fucking up kids' lives."

By the end of the year, Guns n' Roses will release a new album: four tracks from *Live ?!*@ Like a Suicide*, their 1986 indie EP, and four new acoustic songs, including "I Used to Love Her, but I Had to Kill Her," a track sure to incite controversy. The song is "a joke," says Izzy, who co-wrote it with Slash. "Wife beating's been around for 10 million years or something. I mean, I don't advocate it. I understand it. But I don't treat women any differently than I treat men." [Cont. on 164]

GUNS N' ROSES

[Cont. from 68] Slash is less cavalier, and more irresolute, when grappling with the question of responsibility. Here's the conflict: On the one hand, Guns n' Roses didn't get where they are by acting responsibly or claiming to be anyone's role model. On the other hand, the kids who constitute the majority of their audience and put the Gunners at the top of the charts, who believe in the band and don't have security men to protect them or tour managers to post bail — these are the kids most susceptible to a disaster. So Slash is apprehensive about the kids' reaction to "I Used to Love Her": "If some guy goes out and kills his girlfriend," he says, "that's gonna fuck my head up. I mean, this is serious. It's affecting the lives of people you don't even know, which is definitely a scary thing, to have that much power."

ON AUGUST 20TH, GUNS N' ROSES played at Castle Donington, in Derby, England, with Iron Maiden, David Lee Roth and several other bands, in the ninth annual Monsters of Rock Festival. During "It's So Easy," many in the crowd of 107,000 began to slam-dance. Three times, the band members say, they stopped playing in order to calm the audience. At the same time, they enjoyed the rabid response. After they left the stage, they learned that two fans had been crushed to death during their set. In a creepy parallel to the Stones' Altamont show, Guns n' Roses' video crew had taped the incident.

Anticipating a wilder response when they headline next year, they are trying to design barricades that will reduce the risk of a fatality. But as Duff says, "We're not the kind of guys to really change our ways." They will continue to play concerts with festival seating (which increases the chance of additional injuries) because, they say, shows with assigned seating are too dull — "like driving 55 instead of 150 on an open straightaway," Axl says.

"I don't know really what to think about it," Axl says a month after the Castle Donington show. "I don't want anybody to get hurt. We want the exact opposite."

He does not feel that the Gunners' emotional performance — "just on that fucking edge," in Izzy's phrase — makes them responsible for the deaths. "We didn't tell people to smash each other," Axl says. "We didn't tell people, 'Drink so much alcohol that you can't fucking stand up.' I don't feel responsible in those ways."

If Axl seems upset but not quite distraught, it's because he believes that Guns n' Roses did all they could to prevent the deaths. Leaving the stage, he told the crowd, "Have a good fuckin' day. And don't kill yourselves."

MORRIS LEVY

[Cont. from 99] to suggest that she did any work for Levy. But in April of that year, the bureau overheard the following:

LEVY: I'm giving you a \$50,000 bonus today.

ESPOSITO: Oh, wonderful.

LEVY: Ain't that good? Because you worked hard last week.

ESPOSITO: Fantastic.

LEVY: If you be a good girl.

Levy claims that Esposito was an investor in his retail chain, Strawberries, and that he was paying her dividends. But the FBI's Ferreira presents a different view in his affidavit: "Vincent Gigante has developed a stranglehold on Morris Levy's recording-industry enterprise, in effect turning Levy into a source of ready cash for the Genovese LCN [La Cosa Nostra] Family and its leaders."

Father Louis Gigante told ROLLING STONE that he is not aware of a business relationship between Levy and his brother, Vincent. "I know Morris intimately. We became very, very, very close." In the 1970s, Levy arranged for Tito Puente and other Latin artists to play at religious festivals that Father Gigante staged in the shellshocked South Bronx. Father Gigante was also with Levy the last time the record executive ran afoul of the law.

On February 26th, 1975, Levy, Father Gigante, Roulette employee Nathan McCalla and a woman friend of Levy's, identified as Chrissie, were leaving Jimmy Weston's, a Manhattan jazz club. As Gigante tells it, three strangers began to flirt with Chrissie. Levy took offense, and a fight ensued. Two of the men turned out to be plainclothes police detectives, and one of them drew a gun. McCalla allegedly held the hands of Lieutenant Charles Heinz while Levy punched him in the face, knocking out his left eye. Levy and McCalla were indicted for assault, but the case never came to trial. Since the case papers are sealed, it could not be learned why the charges were dropped.

Nate McCalla was commonly thought to have been Levy's "enforcer" until he disappeared in the late 1970s. He was found murdered in 1980. A former army paratrooper, McCalla stood six feet one inch and weighed 250 pounds. Levy was so fond of him that he gave him his own record label, Calla, which recorded soul singers Bettye Lavette and J.J. Jackson. Levy also gave him a music-publishing company, which McCalla, a black man from Harlem, called JAMF — for *jive-ass motherfucker*.

"If I was going to describe Nate, I'd recall the song 'Bad, Bad Leroy Brown,'" says an attorney who did legal work for McCalla. "He had hands like baseball gloves. But he was as gentle as a Great Dane." Most of the time, that

is. Once in the mid-1970s, McCalla went to Skippy White's, a record store in Boston, to collect a delinquent debt. Says an eyewitness, "Nate had a medieval mace and chain and was slinging it against his hand. The boss immediately wrote a check." McCalla was thought to have his own shady connections. A Motown Records memo from 1969 warned that McCalla and gangster Sonny Franzese were trying to muscle in on a trade group of black disc jockeys.

Though it is not known why McCalla was killed, Washington, D.C., homicide detectives think they have some clues. In 1977 a rock concert was held at the Take It Easy Ranch, on Maryland's Eastern Shore. The concert was sponsored by Washington disc jockey Bob "Nighthawk" Terry, but law officers believe that the Genovese family had a financial interest. According to a police report, tickets were counterfeited by two men, Theodore McNair and Howard Brown, and the concert lost money. Brown and McNair were shot dead. Terry vanished, and his body has never been found. McCalla, who was traced to the scene of the concert by the FBI, disappeared soon afterward.

In 1980, McCalla turned up in a rented house in Fort Lauderdale, Florida — dead from a gunshot wound to the back of his head, which had literally exploded. Police found him slumped in a lounge chair in front of a switched-on television. The rear door was ajar, and keys were in the lock. McCalla had been dead for at least a week and was badly decomposed, all the more so because someone had sealed the windows and turned on the heater. No suspects were apprehended.

LEVY PREDICTED FOR MORE THAN A year that he would win his case. He seems genuinely shocked to have lost it. Shortly after his indictment, Levy said he planned to sell Roulette and his farm and move to Australia. He recently sold his record labels and music-publishing companies for a combined \$16.5 million. But right now, Australia doesn't figure in his plans. For the first time, Levy speaks of the possibility of going to prison.

"I can't go no place till all this is behind me," Levy said on a recent afternoon at his farm. "If they're gonna continue to harass me, I'd just as soon move on. But right now I've got my other problems. I've got to win my appeal or serve my time."

He grew reflective. "The music business was a beautiful business," he said. And he, Morris Levy, was the last of a breed? "Yup. And the government will finish burying me off. The government don't like the mavericks and impresarios. It used to be Horatio Alger stories; now they want no-talent bums. Stick your head up above the crowd, you get it chopped off."

DELILLO

[Cont. from 121] Noise, university professor Jack Gladney attempts to calm his obsessive fear of death through his work in the Department of Hitler Studies.

In his case, Gladney finds a perverse form of protection. The damage caused by Hitler was so enormous that Gladney feels he can disappear inside it and that his own puny dread will be overwhelmed by the vastness, the monstrosity of Hitler himself. He feels that Hitler is not only bigger than life, as we say of many famous figures, but bigger than death. Our sense of fear — we avoid it because we feel it so deeply, so there is an intense conflict at work. I brought this conflict to the surface in the shape of Jack Gladney.

I think it is something we all feel, something we almost never talk about, something that is almost there. I tried to relate it in *White Noise* to this other sense of transcendence that lies just beyond our touch. This extraordinary wonder of things is somehow related to the extraordinary dread, to the death fear we try to keep beneath the surface of our perceptions.

There's something of an apocalyptic feel about your books, an intimation that our world is moving toward greater randomness and dissolution, or maybe even cataclysm. Do you see this process as inevitable?

It could change tomorrow. This is the shape my books take because this is the reality I see. This reality has become part of all our lives over the past twenty-five years. I don't know how we can deny it.

I don't think *Libra* is a paranoid book at all. I think it's a clearheaded, reasonable piece of work which takes into account the enormous paranoia which has ensued from the assassination. I can say the same thing about some of my other books. They're about movements or feelings in the air and in the culture around us, without necessarily being part of the particular movement. I mean, what I sense is suspicion and distrust and fear, and so, of course, these things inform my books. It's my idea of myself as a writer — perhaps mistaken — that I enter these worlds as a completely rational person who is simply taking what he senses all around him and using it as material.

You've spoken of the redemptive quality of fiction. Do you see your books as offering an alternative to the dark reality you detect?

Well, strictly in theory, art is one of the consolation prizes we receive for having lived in a difficult and sometimes chaotic world. We seek pattern in art that eludes us in natural experience. This isn't to say that art has to be comforting; obviously, it can be deeply disturbing. But nothing in *Libra* can begin to approach the level of disquiet and dread characterized by the assassination itself.