

**FREE
CD!**

PAUL WELLER "MOD IS MY RELIGION!"



MUSIC

Music Magazine

**"AXL, VELVET
REVOLVER
AND ME!"
EXCLUSIVE
INTERVIEW!**

**PRINCE
BUSTER**

A SKA LEGEND SPEAKS!

**BON IVER
FLEET FOXES
LIZ GREEN**

**...AND THE 10 NEW
ACTS YOU NEED TO
HEAR RIGHT NOW!**

SLASH

**THE TRUTH
ABOUT HIS PAST,
PRESENT &
FUTURE...**

**BOBBY
BLAND**

**THE PAIN & ANGUISH
THAT DRIVES HIS SOUL**

**DOLLY
PARTON**

**AN AUDIENCE
WITH THE QUEEN
OF COUNTRY**



If your CD is missing please
inform your newsagent.
For copyright reasons the
CD is not available in some
overseas territories.

JUNE 2008 £4.10 US\$9.50 CAN\$13.50
0 74470 77550 8



THE MOJO INTERVIEW

You have cheated death, survived Guns N'Roses and dealt with the megalomania of Axl Rose. Now you're in Velvet Revolver and you've just fired your singer. How do you feel? **"Relieved!"** says **Slash...**

Interview by **JAMES McNAIR** • Portrait by **ROSS HALFIN**

THERE'S HIRSUTE AND THERE'S SLASH, most people's idea of how a 'proper' guitar hero should look. The top hat, the leathers, the priapically cocked Les Paul and the wearing of what appears to be an entire jewellery stall – from flanking Axl Rose in Guns N'Roses to energising Snakepit and Velvet Revolver, the man born Saul Hudson in Stoke-on-Trent, has long cut a dash.

On paper, MOJO's 10am summit with him at London's Metropolitan hotel sounds optimistically early, but Slash, 42, is a reformed character, and he shows punctually having been up since six. Puffing on the first of many Gauloises, and ensconced behind mirror-shades that make him look like a big swarthy bluebottle, the self-confessed sometime kleptomaniac cheerfully reports that he'll be visiting the Marshall amplification factory after our chat.

The guitarist's good spirits are a tad surprising, because the previous week had been testing. When Velvet Revolver singer Scott Weiland announced from a Glasgow stage that fans were watching the band's "last ever tour", it exacerbated already fractious band relations, and sparked a series of on-line spats between Weiland and the group's drummer, Matt Sorum.

"A difficult time? Nah, it's been the most fucking fun I've had in ages!" says Slash, ever the diplomat. But a week later, when Velvet Revolver announce Weiland's sacking, Slash

states: "This band is all about its fans and its music and Scott Weiland isn't 100 per cent committed to either. Among other things, his increasingly erratic on-stage behaviour and personal problems have forced us to move on." It calls for a follow-up chat a few days after our initial conversation in order to clear the air.

In truth, Slash has never been good at bad-mouthing people. Funny, and sharper than your average metal-head, in person he seems a gentler soul than his public persona and years of hell-raising in "the world's most dangerous band" Guns N'Roses might lead one to imagine. Heroin abuse, skull tattoos, pet snakes, thunderous riffing – perhaps it's all been a way of masking a rather sweet interior. Over the years, however, it's clear that he has often tempted fate. His heart-defibrillator is proof of that. So how many of his nine lives does he think he has left? "One," he replies.

On the subject of mortality, one of your heroes, Les Paul, is 93 and still playing; proof you can achieve a lot if you don't burn out too fast. Food for thought, perhaps?

No. Not even for a second! I love Les, and I still speak to him on the phone all the time, but his way is not my way. I invite chaos (*laughs*). I like that manic, devil-may-care environment that rock'n'roll is all about. You learn to deal with or even enjoy a certain amount of madness around you. I'm actually pretty laid-back, but the life I like to lead is the antithesis of that.

Still, the fact we're chatting at 10am suggests you're no longer the party animal of yore...

Some of my bad habits will stay with me

We're not WORTHY

"Slash? Guitar hero!" says Manics' James D Bradfield



"Slash was a guitar hero from the moment you heard him, let alone saw him, the first guitar player for a generation to capture the spirit of Jimmy Page. He could play anything, but had a punk edge. He has impeccable taste – Pistols, Aerosmith, Zeppelin, Stones – but he brought real originality."

◀ forever, but I haven't done any drugs or drink for almost two years. I've sacrificed hanging out in some back alley with my dealer for doing what it is that I'm here to do. Before that, people warned me about shit happening to my body, but I never listened. I was always a spokesperson for abusing yourself to the fucking limit. When I was in Guns we had all these managers around to take care of us, who were like a safety net and an umbrella. You could get away with murder. But recently I've had to stay on my toes.

You still smoke, clearly, but not the Death brand cigarettes you once endorsed?

I never endorsed Death cigarettes. They didn't taste good. The Black Death vodka on the other hand...

Do you go to the gym, do yoga?

Working out and all that bullshit? I can't stand it. And I hate the way society has become obsessed with it. It's lame. In the month that I spent rehabilitating myself, I met all those characters with the yoga mats and the leotards, but I just didn't sign up. I think it's my dad's influence from the British side of the family. You guys hate exercise, right? I do try to get some running in on show days. I'll get on the treadmill for an hour at the hotel. Wanting to do what I do to the best of my ability is a major motivation for me. I'm a helluva lot better guitar player since I've been sober.

Plus you're a father now. You have your young sons London and Cash to consider...

Right. They're a handful and you can't be loaded all the time. I tried that and it didn't work (laughs). They don't think to take a nap when you pass out on the floor.

Naming one of your sons 'London', you're clearly still fond of this place.

It's a combination of things. I knew someone

back in junior high school who had that name, and I always thought it was cool. Plus London was conceived here. We were going to name him 'Guinness', because I credit Guinness with giving me healthy enough sperm to conceive. When we were trying for kids that was all I drank. Up until then I'd been shagging with the best of them for years and nothing ever happened. Except for that time in Japan... I got a letter (laughs).

In your self-titled autobiography, you call yourself "a self-taught zoo-keeper"...

At the peak of the Noah's Ark thing I had maybe 80 snakes, mostly pythons and boas. But when my wife Perla was in the last trimester of her pregnancy with London we started thinking about what might be a safe nursery situation and we opted to get rid of them. It was good in a way. Feeding them all by myself had become a bit of a job. I missed the old days when it was just a matter of finding a couple of dead rats around the corner.

Apropos of snakes, a possibly apocryphal story: A girl has a big pet python. It sleeps in bed with her. One morning when she wakes the python is stretched out beside her the length of the mattress. The creature is rigid and worryingly comatose, so she phones the vet. The vet says: "Don't go near it! Your snake is measuring you before he eats you!"

Bullshit! I've had a couple of close calls with my snakes but I've never been in fear of being eaten. People send doctored stuff to YouTube, videos of big snakes with human-like shapes in their belly, but generally they don't eat anything bigger than they can handle. You do have to be careful when you pick up a snake by yourself, though. Even a fairly small guy like a garter snake can strangle you.

How big are those?

Up to about six foot.

OK, enough with the snakes. What's going on with Velvet Revolver? Things are fractious...

Matt and Scott have had an issue since we had to cancel shows in Australia [Weiland checked in to drug rehab] and now it's all come to a head. And Scott's remark in Glasgow was like... well the rest of us were giving him the cold shoulder. We weren't even going to come to the UK. We only did it because the enthusiasm level for the tour was so high and the gigs were sold out. The band will continue after this tour, but in what form I can't say. I'm not Nostradamus.

But when you see Scott and Matt sniping at each other on-line...

The specific reason why they were doing that was the silliest thing that we'd ever heard. Scott was basically saying our drum tech was singing along with him behind my amps with a microphone and it was making the sound muddy. That's what it was about. Scott got pissed off and went after the drum tech. Then the next night he said Matt was doing it. He was like, "I can hear someone singing behind me..." That's honestly what he thought was happening. Bizarre.

You've expressed a desire to make the third VR album sooner rather than later, but with current frictions and Scott due to play reunion shows with his former band Stone Temple Pilots that seems unlikely.

We'll see what's in the cards. Somewhere along the line with Guns N'Roses my attitude was bad and I was very pessimistic, but these days I try to keep a more positive outlook.

You're older and wiser?

I don't know - I've always been 'take it as it comes'. Though with the experiences I've had I should probably expect the worst. Don't tell anybody, but I really obsess over all that band stuff. That feeling of not knowing what the fuck is going to happen can actually be very invigorating, though. This tour reminds me of

touring the UK with Guns back in the day. There was so much going on so fast.

But recent VR madness must be as nothing compared to what you experienced in Guns circa 1988: that February the band sacked Axl only to reinstate him three days later; August saw two fans die in a crowd crush at Castle Donington; September saw Sweet Child O' Mine reach Number 1 in the US...

Those fans dying at Donington has stayed with me, for sure. We were so excited to be playing there, but of course the phrase 'bittersweet' is way too light to cover it. We'd come off stage on a total high, feeling complete elation at the reception we'd got, and then we went to some pub near the venue, some hotel, and our manager Alan Niven told us what had happened and it was numbing. It just erased everything. I still think about it to this day. Two kids who'd got up that morning to go to a rock concert...

It was unfortunate that Axl had left the stage that day with the comment, "Have a good fucking day and don't kill yourselves."

It was. But he didn't know what had happened. None of us did.

Despite Sweet Child O' Mine going to Number 1, Guns' debut album Appetite For Destruction had a lukewarm reception when it was released in August 1987.

Lukewarm would be an exaggeration. It was pretty uneventful. Alan and Tom Zutaut, the Geffen A&R guy, were working hard to get the band in the right spot to do its thing, because they knew it was going to be the biggest band in the world. I never thought that - Axl probably did. When all that shit you mentioned - the hits, the awards, whatever - was going on, nothing on the street felt any different for me. It was never like it is now, where people recognise

you everywhere. Back then it was all a void until the show. But our 45-minute support slot on Aerosmith's Permanent Vacation tour was priceless. The other accolades and recognition left me with this hollow, empty feeling, hence the heroin and the bottles of Jack [Daniel's].

Was it partly because you'd achieved so much so quickly?

Probably. I definitely enjoyed the struggle and the rise more than actually getting there. I have no complaints about getting there, but let's face it: the toil and chipping the stone away is where a lot of the real music comes from. When we did our first three dates at the Marquee - wow!

"There's a tight connection between Axl and I that no amount of mud slinging can erase."

In your book, you talk about your feelings at the height of the groupie madness in Guns N'Roses. It coincided with the rise of Aids.

The concept of safe sex didn't exist before then. I was running around dick wet from one pussy going into another, and then suddenly there were all these articles about Aids and Freddie Mercury and John Holmes in People and Time magazine. I thought, "That's it, the party's over."

You also say of Aids: "We figured nobody needed to worry until David Lee Roth got it." A joke, but you must have been concerned.

I've been tested for Aids a few times. But honestly, the first time I was tested I didn't care about the result in terms of my own mortality. I was more concerned about the fact that, if it was positive, I wouldn't be able to get laid for however long it took for me to kick the bucket.

You'd have stopped shagging around had you tested positive?

Definitely. Morally, I'm actually pretty sound. I'm one of the few rock musicians I know who is. My mom and dad instilled a certain code of ethics in me and it's stayed with me.

Whatever the ups and downs of the business, some bands manage to stay friends. But you weren't so lucky with Axl...

I don't know if it's luck. You just need to be a regular guy and for the guys around you to be the same. It's a grass roots, 'all for one and one for all' thing as a member of a gang. But the extremes of the relationship between Axl and myself were something else again. There was a point where I - or I should say we - found his behaviour completely incomprehensible. From the Use Your Illusion tour on [May 1991-July 1993] it was a matter of just getting through it somehow.

What was so incomprehensible?

I can live with most shit, but it was the fucking up the gigs that got me. You've got four other musicians and 80 people working their ass off to set up this stadium show up every night, and you've got 30,000 to 180,000 fans turning up to see it. Everybody is dependent on it all synchronising, so when you start sabotaging that for no good reason, it's the most unbelievably selfish thing. I just couldn't live with it. I tried to keep it together even after Izzy split [Izzy Stradlin, guitarist who left Guns after Rose walked off stage in Mannheim, Germany in 1991], but after touring Use Your Illusion I and ➤

A life in PICTURES

The making of Stoke's primo guitar hero!

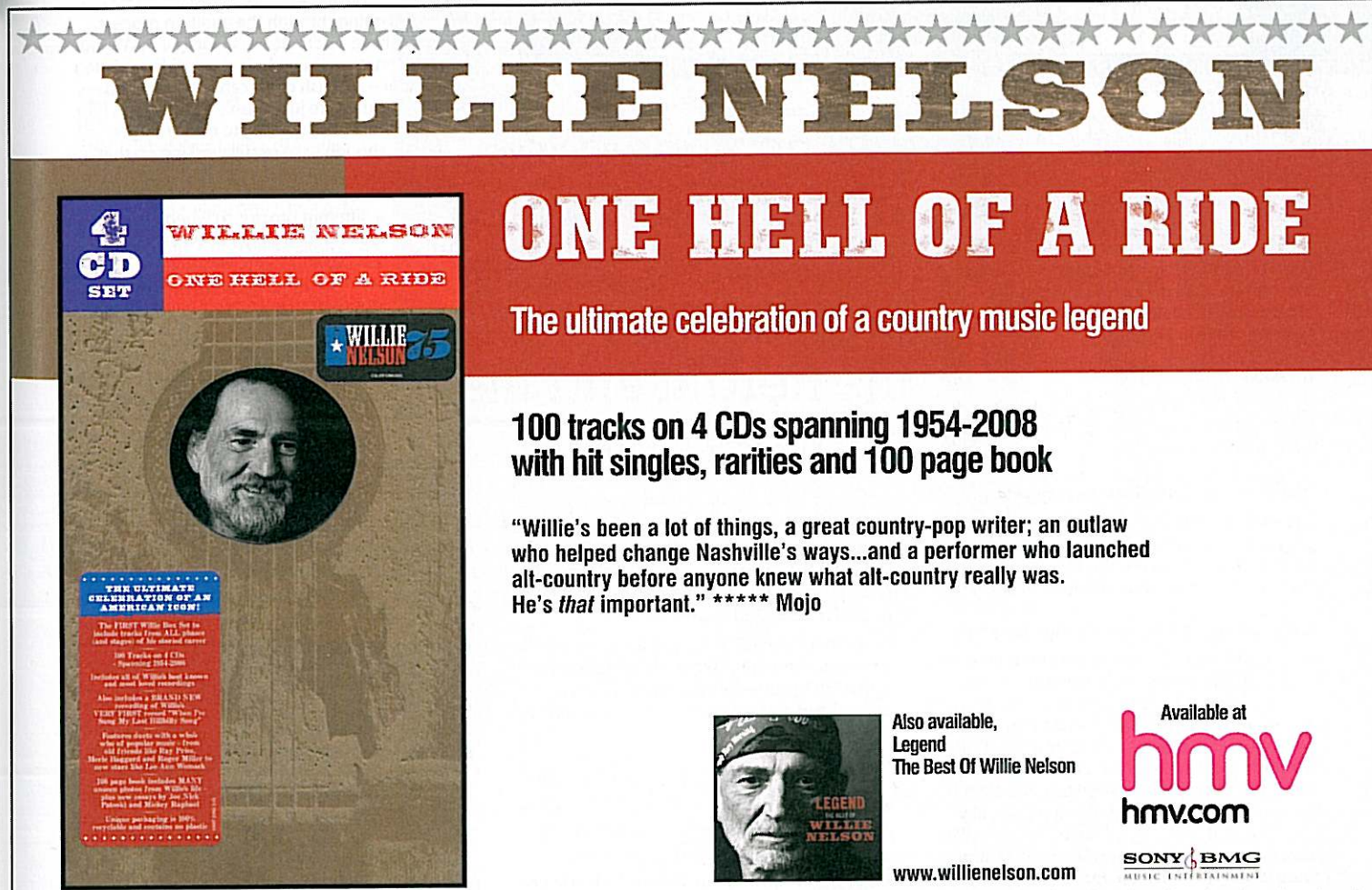
- 1 The teenage Saul Hudson perfects his pout in pre-Guns combo Tidus Sloan.
- 2 The official face of Guitar Hero II computer game.
- 3 With brother Ash with who Slash hopes to make an animated movie this year.
- 4 Slash on the cover of Mad, 1994. "I felt that I'd arrived!"

- 5 With guitar pioneer Les Paul, 93, the man behind Slash's trademark six-string.
- 6 On the road with GN'R, circa 1988. "We got away with murder."
- 7 With Mick Jagger and Ron Wood, supporting the Stones in the late '80s.
- 8 On-stage with Axl Rose, circa '91. "I wasn't sure about the white ensemble!"



Velvet Revolver in happier times: (from left) Dave Kushner, Duff McKagan, Scott Weiland, Slash and Matt Sorum.

Ross Halfin/Adols



Slash at the height of his GN'R excess in 1990: "I was always a spokesperson for abusing yourself to the fucking limit!"



< I didn't. Not even the reunion show, which pissed me off. So yeah, I can relate to that. And I would like those kids to see a decent version of Guns. If it was the original line-up it could be great. But I won't do it if it's going to be Axl and his merry men going on-stage three hours late. Straighten that one out and then call me. No cancelled dates. No sitting in one airport in one city when you're supposed to be on-stage in another.

No kilts?

(Laughing). No, the kilt can stay. I always liked the kilt. I wasn't so sure about the white leather ensemble...

Heard any of Chinese Democracy yet?

Not a thing. I want to hear it, but not until I can physically buy it in a record store. I don't want to be listening to some file-sharing download that may or not be the actual album.

Will listening to it will be strange for you?

I don't know about strange, but one way or another it'll be great, because Axl in his own right is a genius. I'm intrigued, because the saga and all the procrastination behind him making that record has a lot to do with why he's there in his world and I'm here in mine. I'll be interested to hear what Axl has to say these days. Music is the purest form of communication after all.

You'll have heard about this 'motivational' promotion whereby the manufacturers of Dr

"The accolades and recognition left me with this hollow, empty feeling, hence the heroin and the bottles of Jack."

Pepper have vowed to give everyone in the US a free can of the drink if Chinese Democracy is released this year. Everyone, that is, apart from you and Buckethead [Guns N'Roses lead guitarist 2000-2004]...

Yeah, someone sent me a text about that at 3am last night. I thought, "What kind of left-field shit is that?" It's pretty funny, actually. I guess Buckethead and I will just have to make do with Coca-Cola.

When MOJO next speaks with Slash it's about machinations *chez* Velvet Revolver, not Axl's *Chinese Democracy*. It's a week since he and his bandmates sacked singer Scott Weiland on April 1, but Weiland, clearly no

fool, has already helmed a press conference with his regrouped Stone Temple Pilots.

Whether the singer's choice of venue – the former Hollywood Hills estate of Harry Houdini – has import isn't clear, but assembled journos hear that there will now be a new STP album as well as a reunion tour. Of splitting with Velvet, Weiland says: "It's kind of like going through your closet and thinking, I don't need this outfit any more."

Now cut to Slash talking from behind the wheel of what MOJO likes to think may be his 1967, Black Lincoln: "You're calling to grill me about what happened, right?" Well, yes, we are rather curious. The guitarist seems chipper, and his wife Perla can be heard singing in the passenger seat...

How do you feel about Scott and everything that has happened now?

Everything's good, everybody is very relieved. We've gone through a lot with that guy. I always make it seem OK in the press, because that's how one does it, but the truth is this has been a long, hard road. The Australia thing was the final nail in the coffin. We just wanted to get through the UK tour, and then when that thing happened in Glasgow we didn't even feel bad about what was going to happen any more.

So, is it a case of, 'Thanks for coming, Scott, we wish you well'?

Yeah. Whatever. Scott has run off to Stone Temple Pilots, and it seems there was an underlying plan we didn't know about – the new album part of it at least. I talked to Scott about everything, but the STP album didn't come up. He has these visions of grandeur. Like STP's going to be easy and smooth and they're going to be huge rock stars again. We'll see.

Who is the new singer of Velvet Revolver?

We're still going through the audition process. We don't have a definite person in mind. We did audition another singer before we did the UK leg of the tour – a British guy, I can't tell you who – but there just wasn't time to work him in. He's not going to be *the* singer, though – we're still working on that. Obviously since I got back from Europe I've had a lot of e-mails, but it's a different process to when we were looking for a singer a few years back. People know who we are now, so we're auditioning high-end people as opposed to everybody and their dog.

Have recent events made you take stock of your life?

I have every intention of following through with Velvet, but I've got other things on my mind, too. I've been signed up to write the score for this low-budget movie. It's very cutting-edge, very artistic, and a little bit trippy. And it's all guitars, so I have to write and record that sometime through May to August. This isn't common knowledge. I'm venting to you since you got me thinking about my calendar. I want to do a solo record, too. I need that outlet pretty bad. Depending on how things stand with the next Velvet Revolver album, I'll do that either before or after.

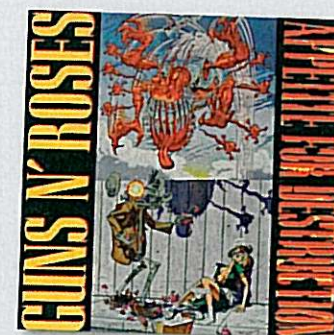
What's the movie called?

It's called *This Is Not A Movie*. It's by this independent Mexican director, Olallo Rubio. It's dark, and jagged and a bit surreal, in and out of reality, you know? I've read the script, but I don't want to say too much about the plot. But I've always liked mixing music and visuals, and I listen to soundtracks all the time. I have to

Robert John/Dolls, AFP/Getty/Imagines

Riffs, solos & "fucking around!"

From Guns N'Roses to Michael Jackson – Slash's 10 greatest recorded moments. By Paul Elliott.



Guns N'Roses Welcome To The Jungle

The first few seconds of Guns N'Roses' debut album are electrifying: two echoing blasts from Slash, a clarion call from The Most Dangerous Band In The World. Four minutes later, the tousled twanger has nailed three virulently violent solos to complete Axl Rose's brutal, paranoid vision of Los Angeles.

Available on: *Appetite For Destruction*, GEFEN, 1987

Guns N'Roses Sweet Child O' Mine

Slash's most famous signature riff was a happy accident. At rehearsals he was "fucking around with this stupid little riff" when Axl declared it perfect for his love song for future wife Erin Everly, daughter of Don. An unlikely birth to a transatlantic Number 1.

Available on: *Appetite For Destruction*, GEFEN, 1987

Guns N'Roses It's So Easy

GN'R's debut single was a defiantly radio-unfriendly blast of punk rock aggro powered by a nasty, Pistols-inspired riff. Exuding casual misogyny, a sneering Axl spits, "Why don't you just... fuck off!" – the cue for Slash's *coup de grace*, a short-fuse solo that stings like a punch in the face.

Available on: *Appetite For Destruction*, GEFEN, 1987

Guns N'Roses Mr Brownstone

A song about heroin addiction (a subject Slash knew inside out, as did the whole strung-out band, bar Axl), it recalls the sleazy hard rock of junkie-period Aerosmith. The scratchy riff is a nod to Walk This Way, and the solos have a suitably mind-bending quality.

Available on: *Appetite For Destruction*, GEFEN, 1987

Guns N'Roses Patience

The four acoustic tracks on the *GN'R Lies* mini-album carried echoes of The Rolling Stones circa '71, with *Patience*, written by Keef-obsessed rhythm guitarist Izzy Stradlin, a weary ballad styled on the Stones' *Wild Horses*. Slash's lead work – deftly incorporating a little country pickin' – is as tasteful as Mick Taylor's.

Available on: *GN'R Lies* GEFEN, 1988

Guns N'Roses November Rain

Axl Rose threatened to quit the music biz if this, his nine-minute, heavily orchestrated magnum opus, didn't turn out right. Befitting the grandeur of *November Rain*, Slash contributed two heroically overblown solos. The video, with a windswept Slash soloing beside a desert chapel, was memorably lampooned by French & Saunders.

Available on: *Use Your Illusion I* GEFEN, 1991

Guns N'Roses Civil War

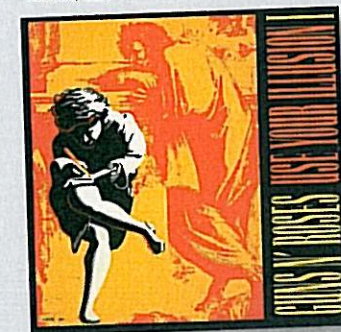
As a protest song, it falls some way short of Bob Dylan's evocative *Masters Of War* ("What's so civil about war, anyway?" muses a ham-fisted Axl). But it's a great rock song: epic in scale, with Slash leaning back and just throttling that Les Paul to deliver a gut-wrenching emotional charge.

Available on: *Use Your Illusion II* GEFEN, 1991

Guns N'Roses Estranged

Axl wrote *Estranged* alone, but in the album's CD booklet he offered this telling dedication: "Slash, thanks for the killer guitar melodies". The beauty and sadness in those melodies matched perfectly with the darkly introspective lyrics. Arguably, it's the best playing of Slash's entire career.

Available on: *Use Your Illusion II* GEFEN, 1991



Velvet Revolver Fall To Pieces

Velvet Revolver are no Guns N'Roses; Scott Weiland's poor man's Bowie pretensions saw to that. But over two albums they did muster a handful of fine songs, notably *Fall To Pieces*, essentially an old-fashioned power ballad, with Slash's pretty lead refrain harking back to *Sweet Child O' Mine*.

Available on: *Contraband* RCA, 2004

Michael Jackson Black Or White

Having employed Eddie Van Halen to solo on *Beat It* for the record-breaking *Thriller*, the King of Pop turned to Slash – the most iconic guitar hero since Eddie – to add a little extra rock'n'roll sizzle and buzz to *Black Or White*. Slash has also played cameos for Ray Charles, Rod Stewart and Iggy Pop, adding to his reputation as the defining guitarist of his generation.

Available on: *Dangerous* EPIC, 1991



On-stage with Michael Jackson at the King of Pop's 30th Anniversary Celebration, The Solo Years shows, New York's Madison Square Garden

➤ go down to Mexico for a meeting, and I'll re-read the script and start thinking about the soundtrack scene-by-scene.

The solo album you mentioned – will it be under your own name?

Yeah. It's not going to be a Snakepit thing. The last thing I want to do after everything I've been through lately is put together another band. That pattern, where you call up some guys, put the group together and the music becomes a product of that group is not attractive to me right now. It's hard to control where that goes. When we [Velvet Revolver] did the *Libertad* album, I wrote some great heavy shit, but the album just wasn't going to go there. I'll probably have more control on the next Velvet record. I don't care if people like what I do or if they don't like it, but I do like them to know what I meant.

Who will sing on your solo record?

I want to do different kinds of music and work with different singers, people I've worked with in the past, and people I've admired for a long time. Quite a lot of people have signed up already, but I can't say who they are – I don't want to jinx it. I can tell you that I'd love to get Stevie Wonder down. We've talked about hooking up, but we haven't managed it so far. That's the thing about the brothers, man: we're all talk and no action! Very LA...

What else is afoot?

I'm working on a cartoon, an animation called *The Misadventures Of Grundy*. It's about a high-school rock band, and Grundy – that was my

nickname when I was 14 and I used to race BMX [bikes] – is a guitarist who looks like me. His band is eternally auditioning for singers – sound familiar? There's also this girl, the band's manager, who has a crush on Grundy. They find her really annoying because she's the only one who comes up with good ideas. I've had the characters since I was at high school, and the drawings are all mine, but it was my brother Ash [Ash Hudson, founder of hip hop/street wear graffiti company Conart] who encouraged me to resurrect the whole idea. He's a really great artist, so we might draw some of the backgrounds together.

You had a heart defibrillator fitted seven years ago. How does that affect your everyday life?

These days it's a back-up measure rather than something keeping me alive. It's like having a hard-drive for all your music in case of wipeout. I've teased that thing a few times just for the hell of it. Before I cleaned up properly I had a false start where I got back on the booze and the drugs and my defibrillator didn't like that. It has different registers, and when you do certain drugs it kicks in with this low thudding noise. One night it was doing that and I nearly died.

So how have you survived? Good genes?

Yeah, I think so. Plus I'm pretty resilient and pretty tolerant. I can go through a lot and I can put up with a lot. I can forgive anybody for their failings. God knows I've got enough. But at this point I'm like the Energizer bunny. Which is strange, because for a long time I was totally cool with the idea of 'live fast, die young'. I had

no ties to anybody that I was concerned about missing me if I passed away, so I ran the gauntlet. But as close to death as I've come more times than I care to count, I'm still here. I've resigned myself to the idea that I'm not going anywhere and I might as well make the best of it down here.

So when you look at it now, away from VR, how's life panning out?

It's an interesting time. I saw some of my relatives before the show in Brighton the other week. My aunt Christine, my dad's brother's wife, well her daughter – if you're following this – contacted me by e-mail through my fan site. She said, "My name's Sarah Hudson, I'm a relative..." and I was like, "Wow!" Anyway, she brought me my family tree, all the Hudsons on the English side of my family, going back to about 1790.

So, are you descended from royalty?

Nah, they were all mill workers and shit. Hardcore working-class people that never left Stoke. It got me thinking about my place in life, about who came before me and who will come after me. Sarah put all these old photographs of Stoke in there, too. It's awesome.

So you're happy right now?

Yeah. My whole thing right now is Perla and my kids. Part of me loves it, and part of me thinks, "How did I get here?" The guys in the band try to get me into my old bad habits... you know how it is. My only real fear in life is to be that guy who ends up driving the fucking mail truck. I saw Robert Plant when I was in the UK and he's a good example of how to avoid that, because he always keeps moving with his music. Had I still been in Guns and been sitting around all this time waiting to make a record I'd have gone crazy. I need projects. Even the cigarettes are to keep my hands busy when I don't have a guitar.

Your 20-foot-high likeness currently adorns London buses in an ad for PlayStation's Guitar Hero II game. Do you worry you're becoming a caricature?

I've always been a caricature (laughs). I love cartoons, so I don't have a problem with it. In fact the magazine cover that has meant the most to me was probably when I appeared in *Mad* magazine as a caricature of [the comic's jug-eared schoolboy mascot] Alfred E. Neuman. That was when I felt that I'd arrived.

Do you think Guitar Hero is a good thing for the next generation of axe-slingers?

Good question. I was first exposed to it on a Gibson fund-raiser tour bus in California. I was like, "Guitar Hero? What's this shit?" (laughs). But then I got sucked in because the material on it is so great. Sony sent one to my house and I locked myself away in my office for a week and got completely addicted. Eventually I thought, "Enough", and put the fucking thing in the closet. It's like drugs – it has to be out of sight to be out of mind. Later, when I got the call asking if I wanted to be involved in the new *Legends Of Rock* version, I was beside myself with joy, giddy about it in fact. I think kids are turning on to real guitar through playing the game, plus it exposes them to a lot of great rock music that they might not hear otherwise. But the skills you need to play it are very different to playing a real guitar. You've still got to pay your dues.

Will you ever hang up the top hat?

No, it's too much a part of me. I've been hiding behind that thing for years!

MORE MOJO FOR THE LATEST ON VELVET REVOLVER'S SEARCH FOR A SINGER, GO TO WWW.MOJO4MUSIC.COM

Ross Halfin, Eyewire/ADS



Axl Rose: "If you're really into waiting, try holding your breath for Jesus!" he declared 11 years into the wait for GN'R's new album.

Appetite for Distraction?

Guns N'Roses' *Chinese Democracy*, the most expensive album in the history of the music business, may be upon us sooner than you think. Paul Elliott provides a sneak preview.

ON SEPTEMBER 17, 1991, Guns N'Roses released not one but two new double albums: *Use Your Illusion I* and *Use Your Illusion II*. In doing so, they made history. The albums debuted on the *Billboard* chart at Numbers 2 and 1 respectively, a feat no other rock band has achieved before or since.

Seventeen years later, Guns N'Roses are making history of a different kind. *Chinese Democracy*, GN'R's first original studio album since the *Illusion* sets, has been described by the *New York Times* as "the most expensive album ever made", its recording budget estimated at \$13m. Singer Axl Rose – the only remaining original band member – has been working on this album since 1994, when Bill Clinton was just one year into his presidency, the Channel Tunnel opened, and *Time* magazine ran a story investigating "The Strange New World Of The Internet". In that time, Rose has employed a staggering array of musicians (eight guitarists at the last count) and producers including Bob Ezrin (Pink Floyd, Kiss), Roy Thomas Baker (Queen), Youth and Moby. Release dates have come and gone: according to GN'R's label Geffen (now part of Universal), the last was 'officially' scheduled for March 6, 2007. But now, it seems, the wait

may soon be over, with stories circulating on April 15 that Axl Rose had handed over the final mixes of the album to the label.

Rose joked in a 2002 press release: "If you're really into waiting, try holding your breath for Jesus, 'cos I hear the pay-off may be that much greater." But in recent weeks, Rose's personal manager Elizabeth 'Beta' Lebeis stated that *Chinese Democracy* was "finished" by Christmas 2007. And with Irving Azoff, manager of The Eagles, now handling Rose's business affairs, the singer has declared: "We hope our relationship proves beneficial for everyone, especially the fans." The implication is that Rose may at last be ready to deliver *Chinese Democracy*.

In a sense, the genie is already out of the bottle. Since February 2006, a total of six tracks from the album have been leaked via the internet: I.R.S., Better, There Was A Time, The Blues, Madagascar, and the title track. It is of course possible that some of these songs may not feature on the finished album. According to Tom Zutaut, the A&R executive who signed Guns N'Roses to the Geffen label back in 1986 and resumed working with Axl on

Chinese Democracy between 2001 and 2003, approximately "50 or 60 songs" have been recorded. But those who have heard the leaked tracks sense that Axl has the makings of a modern classic.

This 21st century version of Guns N'Roses retains the stadium rock values of the *Use Your Illusion* era. The Blues – in essence, the new November Rain – is a piano-led

production number sampling a speech by Martin Luther King. Most impressive of all is Rose's voice. He still hits those scrotum-tightening high notes, and on I.R.S. he sounds like the perennially pissed-off Axl of old, but his voice and lyrics, now carry the weight of his 46 years.

Ultimately, any new Guns N'Roses album will be judged against *Appetite For Destruction*, their legendary 1987 debut. *Chinese Democracy* will in all probability come up short, as has just about every rock record of the past 20 years. But if the burden of history and expectation has troubled Axl Rose, at least he has retained his sense of humour. In March 2008, soft drink giant Dr Pepper pledged to give a free can of its soda to every person in America if

Chinese Democracy is released this year. Everyone, that is, apart from Slash and Buckethead. Axl's response: "We are very happy to have the support of Dr Pepper with our album *Chinese Democracy*. And as some of Buckethead's performances are on our album, I'll share my Dr Pepper with him." By mid-April, Amazon had also announced a release date of August 25 for the album, suggesting Axl may indeed have to share a can with his former guitar player.

"There is a sense that Axl has the makings of a modern classic."

ballad in the style of two of Axl's biggest influences, Queen and Elton John. There Was A Time – featuring a dazzling solo from now-departed guitarist Brian 'Buckethead' Carroll – is a Kashmir-sized epic. But there is a more experimental and contemporary edge to the other songs. The title track has the industrial-rock punch of Nine Inch Nails (ex-NIN guitarist Robin Finck plays the staccato riff), and Madagascar is a brilliantly arranged, cutting-edge big



Slash today, shot exclusively for MOJO, Dubai, April 2008.