

PARADISE CITY?

life after Guns ain't been Rose-y.
the decade since the phenomenal *Appetite For Destruction*,
But band alums Duff, Izzy, Slash, and Gilby know the show must go on.

BY KATHERINE TURMAN

It's been a dozen years since Guns N' Roses' incendiary brand of raucous, street-level rock and commensurate behavior first infiltrated the perky consciousness of a post-new wave generation. And it's been seven years since Nirvana put an end to the exalted (if eventually overblown) rock movement the Gunners unwittingly spawned.

Yet *Appetite for Destruction* (1987), the biggest-selling debut album of all time, still stands as a paean to the one-time greatness of Axl Rose, guitarists Slash and Izzy Stradlin, bassist Duff McKagan, and drummer Steven Adler, the classic lineup that lasted all of five years before the gradual erosion of its members. Now, all that remains is Axl, who has apparently assembled a musical cast of characters that includes former Replacements bassist Tommy Stinson and brilliant young drummer-for-hire Josh Freese, and who still has the temerity to call the band Guns N' Roses.

Meanwhile, w. Axl Rose's former compatriots have been forging ahead with solo careers, with—if not the 30-million-plus sales success of GNR—integrity to spare. The trip from "Welcome To The Jungle" to welcome to reality has been rife with lofty highs and equally bitter lows, but at the end, McKagan, Slash, Stradlin, and Stradlin's one-time replacement in Guns, Gilby Clarke, are succeeding on their own terms.

Duff McKagan

and fit—is the picture of health and contentment. And, as he plays back several tracks from his forthcoming second solo album for Geffen, *Beautiful Disease*,

it's clear the lanky musician is having fun. The LP, which features, on various cuts, GNR bandmates Slash and Izzy Stradlin, Faith No More/Ozzy drummer Mike Bordin, Seal drummer Abe Laborio, and Seattle-bred musicians Kurt and Al Bloch, also utilizes the guitar work of Michael Berrigan and his band, Plexi. "It's hard, but it's not Guns N' Roses-like music. There aren't a lot of guitar solos, more like slammin' parts," explains McKagan. "Michael uses an Echoplex, and guitars through a Moog, and screams in the pickups. It's really cool."

Beautiful Disease, produced by Mike Clink associate Noel Golden, isn't the only record McKagan will release in '98. The versatile bassist, who has played drums and guitar in various bands, including "supergroup" Neurotic Outsiders (of whom McKagan says, "if it happens again, it happens, and that's all it ever was"), also has a disc out on Sub Pop with his very first band, 10 Minute Warning.

"Jonathan Poneman [of Sub Pop] said he'd really love to have the real history of Seattle. Ten Minute Warning was two years prior to Green River, and before Sub Pop, and we toured with the Dead Kennedys and Black Flag. We were the biggest band in Seattle," explains McKagan, who was high school age (but not attending) when the band was together.

That legacy, albeit with a new singer, can be heard on the powerful 10 Minute Warning disc, but McKagan still has other projects he's concentrating on, bolstered, perhaps, by a recent enrollment in a community college business course. McKagan's home studio is getting its share of business as well, as he's producing records for the band formerly known as Butt Trumpet, Betty Blowtorch (an all-female lineup McKagan likens to the Stooges), as well as for a Seattle band called the Ya-Yas.

Finally, while McKagan says he's had "flattering" offers to join other bands, for the moment, his plate is full. "I plan on being pretty busy for the next year and a half," he laughs.

"As far as I'm concerned, until you do something that outshines what Guns N' Roses did, that's the way it is. Everybody wants to take a piece of that and to be a part of it in some way. But I don't have a problem with it. What are you gonna do? Life could be worse." —Gilby Clarke

Gilby Clarke

Ironically, Gilby Clarke met Izzy Stradlin years before he replaced him in Guns N' Roses. "We're talking like 1980," reminisces Clarke. "I knew him before I was in Candy. Back then, there were only five guys in town who wanted to be Johnny Thunders; it just happened to be me, Izzy, and a couple other guys. Pretty small world."

The L.A. music biz is a small world, and the Cleveland-born Clarke has been and continues to be involved in many aspects of it. Before winning the coveted slot as GNR's rhythm guitarist in 1991, the affable guitar player was signed to Mercury with seminal L.A. pop band Candy, whose album *Whatever Happened To Fun?* was recently reissued. After Candy came Kill For Thrills, who released *Dynamite From Nightmareland* on MCA and an EP, *Commercial Suicide*, before disbanding.

Then, after *Use Your Illusions*, Clarke replaced Stradlin for several years of touring and the recording of the punk covers album *The Spaghetti Incident?* Clarke, who will release a third solo

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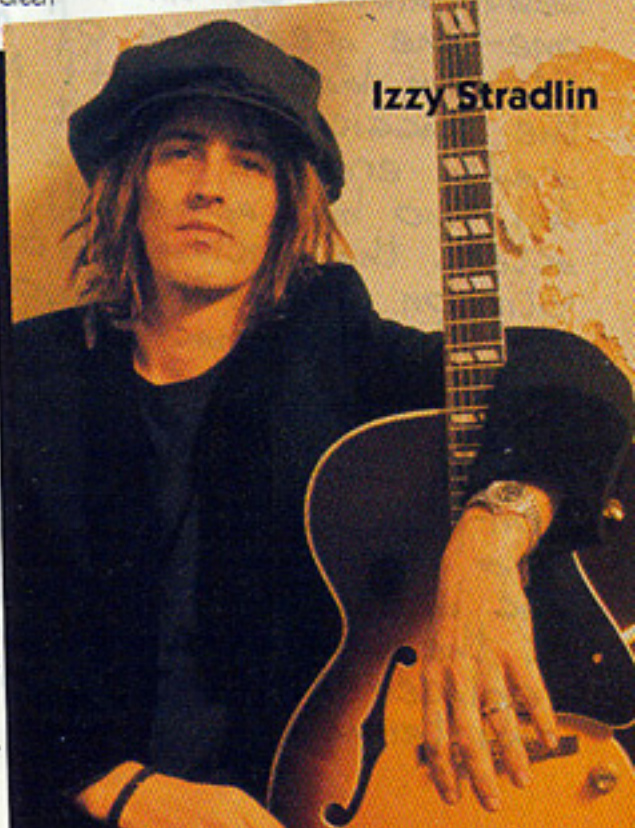
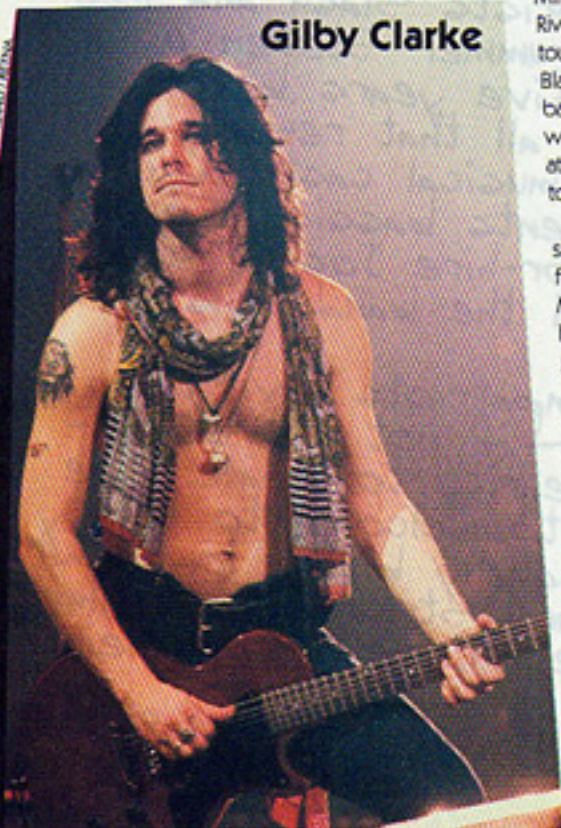
Duff McKagan

"I was in the band until I quit," grins Duff McKagan, the last original member of Guns N' Roses to depart the legendary lineup. While the bassist terms his parting with Axl Rose as amicable, he also confirms, "I was pretty miserable. I wasn't having fun."

Now, however, playing with his nine-month old daughter while ensconced at luxurious Conway Studios in Los Angeles, McKagan—sober

Gilby Clarke

Izzy Stradlin



GUNS N' ROSES

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album, *Rubber*, this September, says of his time in Guns: "What I did with the band was fun," though, now in his solo efforts, he admits, "I can't get away from it." As for being constantly billed as "ex-Guns N' Roses," Clarke is quiescent. "As far as I'm concerned, until you do something that outshines what Guns N' Roses did, that's the way it is. Everybody wants to take a piece of that and to be a part of it in some way," he observes. "But I don't have a problem with it. What are you gonna do? Life could be worse."

Things are indeed great for Clarke, a prolific writer, performer, and producer. Since his Virgin debut, 1994's *Pawnshop Guitars*, Clarke released *The Hangover* on Paradigm in late '97, and extols the virtues of having control over his music... not to mention a home studio.

"When I made my first solo record, I used to always joke, 'Someday I'm going to make a real

solo record.' Even though it had my name on it, I had no control over anything. I mean, I'm not a stupid person, I really tried. [Virgin] was very frank. It was, 'If you don't do this, we won't do that.'"

Now he makes his own records (with the help of musician friends such as drummer Eric Singer, bassists Phil Soussan and James Lomenzo, and ex-Guns' piano player Teddy Andreadis), and they're released worldwide via Paradigm and other outlets.

As for the rest of his Guns pals? "I talk to Matt every couple weeks. I see Slash, but never really hang out with him, and obviously, I haven't spoken to Axl in like four years. Occasionally I run into Duff—I saw him at a Prince concert, and we hung out for the rest of the night."

If Clarke doesn't quite have the many millions the other ex-Gunners have amassed, he's just as

happy and productive. "I gig all year 'round; there's always some place that wants a little rock. I'm pretty content now," he says. "I produced both of the Beat Angels records, and *Windigo* for Pavement. I have a family, and I make a really good living playing guitar and putting out records."

Izzy Stradlin

Izzy Stradlin is the most elusive former Gun. The soft-spoken guitarist's most recent Geffen LP, *117 Degrees*, is garnering critical acclaim for its bluesy roots-rock, as did its predecessor, 1992's *Izzy Stradlin And The Jukes*.

Yet, inexplicably, he did only two interviews to support his new record, bailing on all other promotional appearances. But Stradlin, the first member to leave the band he cofounded back in '91, had withdrawn from the limelight in many ways even before that.

The player born Jeff Isbelle migrated to Los Angeles in 1980, but moved back to his (and Axl's) home state of Indiana by 1988, during the height of GNR mania, and has been quoted as saying, "Once I quit drugs, I couldn't help looking around and asking myself, 'Is this all there is?' I was just tired of it; I needed to get out."

Out he did, and now, as Izzy stated by phone recently, his idea of success is "a day off to ride my motorcycle. That's as simple as it gets."

While his five-year stint as Guns' rhythm player made him famous, "I play drums more than guitar," he admits. Stradlin was also a late bloomer on guitar. "I started out on drums, and I goofed around with guitar, but I never got into it, it was just out of necessity," he recalls. "When I was living in L.A. I had a few drums ripped off, my car broke down, I was out of money, so I thought, 'Maybe I better learn to play bass.' Finally, I ended up getting myself a guitar, and that was it. I said, 'I'll do this.'"

The accidental guitarist, who guests on McKagan's new album (as the bassist does on Stradlin's), has a perfect guitar foil in the Georgia Satellites' (and Jukes Hound) Rick Richards, who is an integral part of *117 Degrees*.

Stradlin, who used his Gretsch and a Fender reissue amp ("They look old but they're not. It works for me") on his latest record, has high praise for Richards. "I never have to tell him anything. He plays what I would play if I could. It's like having an extra pair of hands."

Recorded in England, Trinidad, and Los Angeles with producer Bill Price and Eddie Ashworth, *117 Degrees* was a long time in the making. "We started it in like '93, '94," Stradlin recalls. After various lineups and writing stints, in 1997, the axeman turned in what he thought was a finished record. "There were no slow songs on it, it was all thrashers like [the instrumental] 'Grunt'; real hard rock, fast stuff. The label said no go. I said, 'Okay, fine.' They wanted some old, slow stuff from the earlier sessions, so it was a compromise, this record, to get everything out and on it, so... it worked out okay."

Wasn't he annoyed at that infringement on artistic freedom?

"Yeah, I was pissed," admits Stradlin. "Just for like five minutes. It's like... I don't know what to say about it. At the end of the day, it all worked out."

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"Actually, I'm really good friends with everybody [from Guns N' Roses] with the exception of one. You figure it out." —Slash

Slash

You'd think that having 17 pinball machines in your living room might preclude serious at-home work. But no, by 1 p.m. every day, Slash and his band—with a singer not quite confirmed at press time—are in an upstairs work room, perched on black leather sofas, working up tunes around a single microphone.

Slash's new L.A.-area home is clearly the abode of one who takes his fun—and his work—seriously. In fact, the selling point of the house was its then-unfinished basement.

"I thought, 'I can make a studio out of this,'" recalls the mop-topped guitarist. "I had visions of the whole thing, and it actually happened, and that's a crapshoot. The studio is probably the only thing in this house that is totally finished."

Indeed, Slash seems to thrive on chaos, but at the present, he's quite focused on a forthcoming Snakepit album, the follow-up to 1995's *It's Five O'Clock Somewhere*, which featured former Jellyfish member (and subsequent Imperial Drag singer) Eric Dover on vocals.

While there's no release date or album title, Slash has an agenda: "In the next few weeks I'll make a decision as to the vocalist, so I'd like to have a Christmas release and a pre-summer tour. But I'm going to do a small tour before I do the record, just to break the material in, let it sweat a little."

In Snakepit, which is also the name of his well-appointed home studio, Slash is working with former Alice Cooper/Dad's Pomo Mag guitarist Ryan Roxie, drummer Matt Laug, and bassist Johnny Griparik. "The band sounds great; I haven't been in a band like this since Guns started," enthuses Slash, who played on four songs on McKagan's album, and also uses former Guns keyboardist Teddy Andreadis for a few Snakepit songs.

No other Guns guests? "Actually, I'm really good friends with everybody with the exception of one," Slash says. He pauses and smiles. "You figure it out." Could it be the person he refers to as "the redheaded one?"

But Slash isn't dwelling on the past. Though in the last year he's performed with his blues-jam cover band, Blues Ball, and has recorded with Graham Bonnett, he's focusing on Snakepit, even turning down an offer to play with Puff Daddy. ("For one, I don't like him. I think he's flying on borrowed wings as it is.") That said, the guitarist cranks up a song he's just recorded with Roger Daltrey. "I did a cover song for an Alice Cooper tribute record [in my studio]—just my guitar stuff, though.

We did 'No More Mr. Nice Guy.' Roger sang at Bob Kulick's house. Bob is [ex-Kiss guitarist] Bruce's brother, and he is doing the whole thing."

Slash's own studio, though, will certainly get ample use in the coming months, as will his array of guitars, which are all over the house. But Slash has a philosophy that's evident in both his studio and choice of axes. "If it ain't broke, don't fix it. I experiment as much as the next guy, but I always end up going back to what's tried and true."

For his subsequent record, that means his Gibson flame-top, a handmade Les Paul replica, the one he coaxed his now-signature sound out of on *Appetite for Destruction*. "That's the guitar I got when Guns first started working in the studio," recalls Slash, cradling the instrument while sitting in a favorite chair he nabbed from the Record Plant.

While the process of finding a singer has been

a long one (after trying out about 100 vocalists, Slash found himself depressed about the general lack of talent), it looks as if he's found his man. "I'm just doing baby steps. It's tedious, and it can be really aggravating, but you have to be really tenacious and hang in there," he says. "It's like women, really, when it comes down to it. Like, 'Do you want to sleep with this person every single day of your life? Are there any really weird quirks that you're willing to put up with to go along with the talent?' I'm obviously one of the weirder ones anyway," chuckles Slash, "so I'm pretty flexible."

Katherine Turman is the associate producer for the syndicated radio shows *Rockline* and *Modern Rock Live*, and has written for numerous publications, including *Musician*, *Spin*, *Rip*, *Rolling Stone* and the *Los Angeles Times*.

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