



CALIFORNIA KING
Slash in L.A., 1990

Slash Comes Clean

With Guns' career in turmoil, the guitarist sat down for an intimate conversation about drugs, family and Axl Rose

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Excerpted from RS 596, January 24th, 1991

DDOUBLE JACK DANIEL'S AND COKE, EASY ON THE ice, with finger sandwiches. Five-fifteen Saturday afternoon at Le Chardonnay, the Los Angeles restaurant modeled on a Parisian art-nouveau bistro, and there sits Slash, lead guitarist for Guns N' Roses, calmly talking in an ornate side room. ¶ "Try these, they're good," he says as a waiter brings over a plate of pastries. He nibbles the little tarts and slowly nurses his drink while speaking quite lucidly and soberly, in contrast to his infamous reputation as a Dionysian waste case. But Slash, who recently turned 25, remains an outsider in this upper-crust environment. Despite his new found millions and

sterling position in L.A.'s rock hierarchy, he still can't get a last-minute dinner reservation at this ritzy restaurant after the interview session is over. No big deal. He and his steady girlfriend eat somewhere else that night, then stop by a decadent sex shop called the Pleasure Chest to pick up some Christmas presents, including a straitjacket for the band's singer, Axl Rose.

Slash, whose real name is Saul Hudson, has been a resident of Los Angeles since his parents moved to America from England in the early Seventies. Raised in the neo-hippie environs of Laurel Canyon – which he still calls home – young Saul's own creative instincts were nurtured early on. He was an enthusiastic artist and even contributed a series of animal illustrations to *The Bestiary*, an unpublished book of verse written by Joni Mitchell, who was a neighbor.

"He was drawing from the time he could pick up a pencil," says Ola Hudson, who adds that he was weaned on her Led Zeppelin albums and raised in a very loving household. "I've been shocked at a lot of things I've read where it sounds like I left him on somebody's doorstep in a basket. They make it seem as if he never had a family and grew up on the streets like an urchin, but that's not true. It's just part of his image. He's not all leather and tattoos."

“I've been in jail for drugs. You think things like that would make you stop. But they don't.”

When his folks split up in the mid-Seventies, Slash had to get used to an unusual father figure – David Bowie. "My mom dated Bowie right after my parents broke up," he says. "I hung out with him and his wife and their son, Zowie, when I was real young. I really didn't like him that much, because he was the new guy in the house. I was really resentful." These days, Slash has reconciled with Bowie and often spends time with him when their schedules permit.

Before Guns N' Roses, Slash gigged with several bar bands and served a short stint in an all-black funk ensemble. After the enormous success of Guns N' Roses' debut album, *Appetite for Destruction*, and the controversial follow-up EP, *Lies*, the group found itself facing serious trouble. Several members, including Slash, developed drug problems. The group began to slowly splinter, and it became difficult to organize sessions for a new album.

Eventually the band carried on. The group laid down instrumental tracks for its new album last fall; all that remained at press time were the completion of Axl's vocals and the mixing chores.

The interview with Slash took course over several different sessions, some held early in 1990 and the most recent ones conducted last month at Le Chardonnay and at his home, which is nestled in Laurel Canyon. Throughout every meeting, the guitarist was jovial, unassuming and – above all – focused. Although he didn't mind opening up about his personal life or his feelings about the other band members, he was clearly obsessed with finishing the new album. "All you have to do is listen to it," he says of the album. "If you like it, you like it, and if you don't, we did it and that's it."

SLASH: First of all, I refuse to talk about drugs, Axl or any other bands. Period. [*He smiles.*]

Well, OK, then let's talk about the new album. Why is it called "Use Your Illusion"?

It's the title of a painting by some controversial artist. I don't know who. I've never heard of him. I don't keep up with art circles. But that's the name of this painting that Axl bought, and he said, "Let's make this the cover of the album." Like the last album cover, we just said, "Fine," no discussion.

How do the songs reflect the changes that the band has gone through over the past few years?

The way our lives turned around, the repercussions of our success and the general shit that we do from day to day gets brought up a lot. There are a lot of semihumorous drug tunes and a few songs about love going in whichever direction. Regardless of whether it sounds like the blues or not, basically that's what it is. It's a strange thing. I never thought we were a naive band; I always thought we were pretty hip to what's going on. But when we used to just hang out on the street, it was more fun than when we had lots of money and became part of society and were forced to deal with responsibilities. I think money is like the central nerve of it all, too. It's, like,

I think Jimi Hendrix said – "The more money you make, the more blues you can sing."

Will there be any radical musical departures on the new album?

There'll be a lot of different instruments. I've got guitars doing all different kinds of sounds and things. There are horns on "Live and Let Die." We didn't get into sampling, but right now, as we speak, Axl is in the studio with a rack of synthesizers, so we don't have to bring in an orchestra for a couple of songs. There might even be a bunch of kids singing on "November Rain," because it's that kind of song. It's very angelic. We'll do whatever it takes to make the songs as powerful as possible.

In terms of the original material you've recorded, is there any specific theme or unifying message?

I'd have to say no. I will say it leans more to the darker side. There's not a ton of really happy material on it, you know? Most of it is pretty fucking pissed off. It's very pissed off, and it's very heavy, and then there's also a subtlety to it as far as us really trying to play.

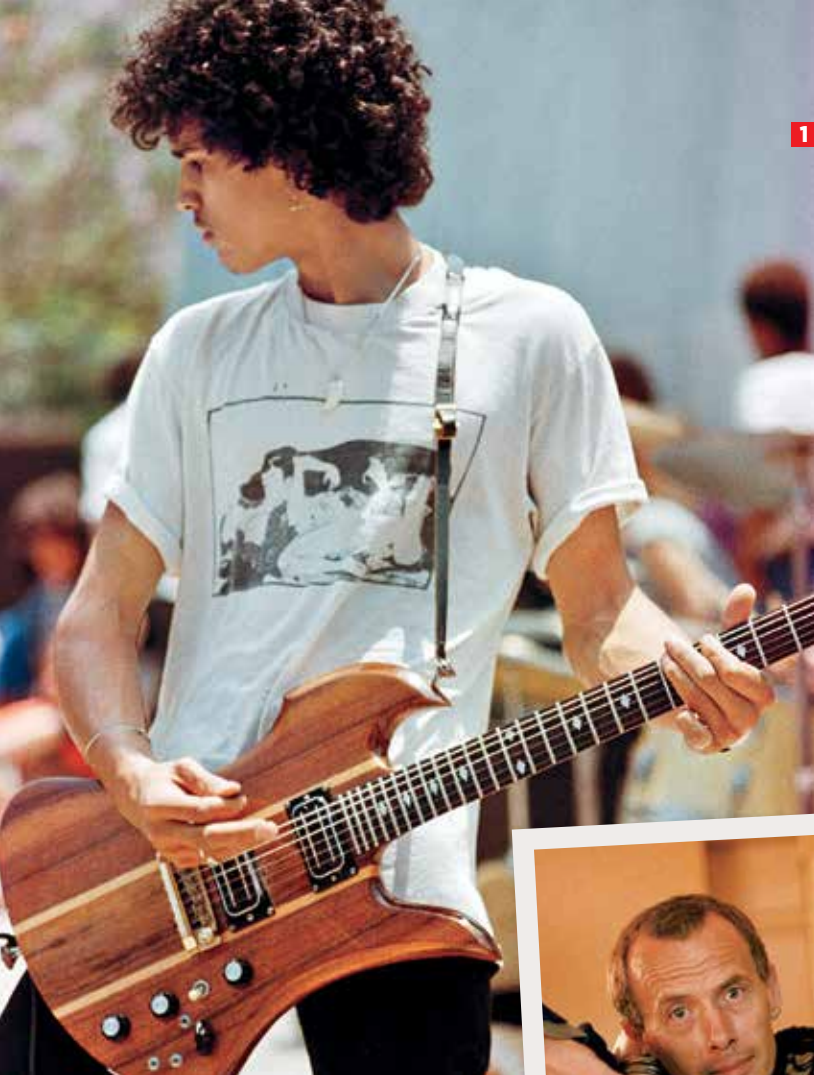
Any thoughts for a single at this stage?

I don't think there are any singles on this record. I don't mean to rock the boat or anything, but I think there's a swear word of some sort on every song. Every potential single it's, like, whoops, oh, well, not that one. But there's some great songs, and I don't care if they say "fucking" in it or if they say "shit" or if they're talking about girls in the way we're not supposed to.

Let's go back to this time last year and the American Music Awards. You gained nation-

GUITAR HERO
Showing off his versatility onstage, 1991





1 2



Growing Up Slash

(1) Playing at Fairfax High School in Los Angeles, 1982. (2) On the set of the "Don't Cry" music video, 1991. (3) With his father, Tony Hudson, 1985: "I come from a very loving and supportive family, thank God," says Slash. "I could be a lot worse than I am now." (4) Guns N' Roses, 1985.



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al headlines when you nonchalantly said "fuck" on live television. What exactly happened that night?

The fucking music awards... What happened was I got this phone call the day of the show asking if I wanted to go. We were nominated for two awards, and someone from the band needed to accept if we won. So me and Duff and our girlfriends all got drunk and flipped on down there after a stop at Carl Jrs. When we arrived, it was mass confusion, the whole paparazzi thing. I really didn't give a shit; I just wanted to hang out and have a good time. Anyway, we had third-row seats, and the show was real cheesy and boring. We were smoking and drinking wine, and all of a sudden we won this award. We weren't ready for it. I don't know what I said onstage, but it was short and sweet. I don't think there were too many "fucks" in it. Then we went backstage. I met Lenny Kravitz, which was cool, but Prince blew us off. He and his entourage just ignored us when we walked by. He didn't say anything, and he probably didn't know who we were. I don't think we're what he'd call good company, and I really didn't care. Afterward, we went back to our seats, and when the second award came, it was totally unexpected. I got up to the microphone and started to thank the people who helped us out over the years. I said "fucking" again, and I knew it was live television, so I said, "Oops." But it just slipped out again and again and again. Once I started, that was it. It was just like using an adjective.

A few months before the AMAs, there was another fiasco when the band opened up for the Rolling Stones in Los Angeles and nearly broke up in the process. What led to those shows?

At that time I was at the tail end of a really, really serious heroin problem. I felt the band had to do the Stones gigs to bring us back together. We were all living in our separate houses, no one saw anybody, I was doing my thing, and only three of us were going to rehearsals on a regular basis. So I said, "Yeah, let's do the gig," even though our management was against it. I made an agreement with the band that after the Stones shows were over, I'd clean up. That was agreed upon and understood.

The night of the first Stones date, Axl went onstage and alluded that drugs were destroying the group. How did you feel when you heard that?

I was about to walk off. I was pissed. We finished the show, and it was one of those nights where everybody had their little part of the stage and just stayed there. The show sucked, it was lousy, and then Axl announced he was going to quit.

But he returned the next night, and things seemed to improve after you gave a little speech about dope. Were you pressured into making those remarks?

Axl said he wouldn't perform unless I agreed to go up and do what he called apologize, which I refused to do. I said what I said, and he came out, and it was very warm because what I said was totally honest. It wasn't an apology; it was sort of an explanation. No, not even that - I just opened up and said what I felt about heroin and what it does to people, who it's killed and how wrong it is. Because that's how I felt. But I was a junkie at the same time.

When did you first use heroin?

I started sometime during the very beginnings of the band. I got turned on to it, and that was the beginning of the end, I guess. The first time I did it, I smoked it, and then I snorted it once. But the first time I really got high, I shot. I was that kind of junkie. It's one of those drugs where it's a great high and you love being on it, and it really fucks your life up. It's unfortunate that something as fucking menial as a little pile of powder can do that, but it does happen.

What do you think was the lowest you ever sank?

The lowest I went was a little fucking episode in Phoenix, where I flipped out on coke, destroyed a hotel room and was all bloody, running around the hotel naked and shit. Some people tried to press charges, and the cops and paramedics came, but fortunately I lied my way out of it.

Have you ever overdosed?

I've OD'd so many times. I've woken up in the hospital so many fucking times. I don't like to get into it, but I've been through some shit. I've been in jail over drugs. You'd think things like that would make you stop, but they don't.

What finally caused you to quit?

Because the one thing I care about the most in my life - the band - was blowing apart. That was the major incentive. Otherwise, I was perfectly comfortable just relaxing on a high, hanging out with my snakes and stuff.

It's been about a year or so since you've stopped shooting dope. Any temptations to use hard drugs again?

The closest I've had to anything like that is I've dreamed about it a couple of times. Nightmares. Some pretty bad ones. But that's about it.

Were you ever in a detox clinic?

They tried to put me into rehab, but I left in three days. I was real pissed off and came back home, got loaded, then went to Hawaii and cleaned up. I've been clean ever since.

What was withdrawal like that last time?

I had a pretty bad habit, so kicking was always rough. The physical part of it is bad enough, but the anxiety part is the worst. But I don't see why the subject of kicking dope is such a big deal. It's personal, really. It's like asking how I go to the bathroom or what do I wash first when I take a shower. As far as I'm concerned, I don't think it's anybody's business. I don't want to be another Keith Richards. His whole history with drugs has been so heavily publicized, and he's spoken so candidly about it when he was fucked up because he thought it was cool, I guess. What happens is those stories never go away... It's a very sensitive subject. But it's a subject that you don't try and put across to how many millions of people who read this magazine who don't do it or haven't been through it. It's like one of probably the most disastrous things that a human being can go through. It's like sitting on your deathbed all the time.

You've also had severe alcohol problems. How bad did your drinking get?

I seriously used to go through one and two bottles of Jack Daniel's a night. Easy. Sometimes a half gallon. I used to get up in the morning and I'd just be drunk all the time. I passed out on the floor of a guitar store in England - really stupid shit. It was all a growing experience. I think I've learned a lot, and I think I've grown up a lot since then. I don't know if it's made me any better or worse as a person, but I'm very hip to any drugs and alcohol now. I know what they're all about.

How's your drinking these days?

I haven't been drinking that hard if I can help it. I still get overly drunk sometimes and have a good time, and it doesn't bother me. But I still have my little quirks and insecurities where I go to a bottle rather than just being sober and dealing with it. I still have those little problems, which are part of a pattern, I guess. But then I haven't been as depressed as I was. Usually if I'm drinking too much, it's for a reason. Boredom is my worst enemy, and I get bored really easily. In the history of this band, as long as we were out playing, I never had a problem of any kind. When we're rehearsing or recording or on-



stage, there's not really that much drinking going on, nor am I concerned about it.

Last year, Guns N' Roses replaced longtime drummer Steven Adler because of his substance abuse. How do you feel when people say he was kicked out of the group unfairly?

I felt really bad for Steven. He's saying stuff like, "How could they do this to me?" But it wasn't a matter of how could we do this to him. It was how could he do this to us. He was taken care of by this band. Anybody who thinks we just kicked him out is just somebody who doesn't know what the fuck they're talking about. We waited for him for a fucking year. How long is a band supposed to wait around? We all wanted to get out and play, and he wanted to play too. He was just too loaded to do it. So I just said, "Fuck it, that's it, I can't deal with it anymore, we have to get a new drummer."

While most members of the band have had difficulties handling booze and drugs, Axl has had the toughest time just dealing with people. How has that affected the group and the recording of the album?

Well, they're a pain in the ass, and they keep things from getting done. I'm the most uptight about all of this. It's just

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my nature – Axl thinks I'm this sort of sick-minded workaholic. And it's true – in some ways, I do get uptight. I can get very negative about it. But there are moments when it [Axl's troubles] really gets in the way of what I think is productive, and we end up spending a lot of money. Sometimes I think Axl has no idea, or has a very slight idea, of what the financial reality is. I mean, to me \$400,000 or whatever to make a record is ludicrous. Of course, if I was to say that to Axl outright, he'd say I don't know what he's going through, and there'd be a fight right there. That's the way we've always been – there's something I can't relate to or vice versa, and that's where we butt heads. So I just sit there with my head between my knees, freaking out... But Axl's craziness drives me crazier than it does Axl, unbeknownst to him. And that's the truth.

Why do you think he gets into so much trouble?

Axl is like a magnet for problems. I've never met anybody like him. He's the kind of guy that would get a toothbrush stuck down his throat because that particular toothbrush happened to be defective. I mean, shit goes on with that guy, and if you talked to him, he'd tell you the same thing.

The bond between you two often seems volatile.

I don't want to talk about Axl, because everybody is constantly trying to pit us against each other. You know, they're trying to put two fucking Japanese fighting fish in the same bowl. We've always been

BALANCING ACT
In 1988: "Boredom is my worst enemy, and I get bored easily."

the same. We have our ups and downs, and we butt heads. As long as I've known Axl, we've had so many differences that have been like the end of the line as far as we were concerned. I think that happens with most singers and guitar players, or whatever that cliché is. It might look a little intense on the outside, but it makes for a tension that's – in a morbid kind of way – really conducive to the music we collaborate on. But as far as Axl goes, he is the best singer-lyricist around.

You've made a number of appearances on other people's albums last year. You played on Bob Dylan's "Under the Red Sky." What was the Dylan session like?

He must have said two words while I was there. One was "Hi" and the other was "Play it like Django Reinhardt." With all due respect to Django, that would have been a great concept had it fit the song. The whole thing was just a drag. Nothing against Dylan, because my dad liked him. I mean, I grew up on Bob Dylan; he was the guy my family listened to. And I never disliked him until the last five or six albums. I did get to meet George Harrison while I was there, though, and that was great. He was doing some fucking awesome slide playing.

Didn't you have another unfortunate recording experience, with Michael Jackson?

Michael Jackson was somebody I have a lot of respect for. But when it came down to it, the sessions were so unorganized. I like to keep a schedule and be punctual, but those dates just sat there for months and months until I kept thinking they didn't want to use me anymore. I got a call three months later to do it at such and such a date, but when that date came, it wouldn't happen. I finally went down and recorded some rhythm stuff for a couple of songs. Then the producer said he was going to another country for a while, and I told him to give me a call when he got back. But all I did was end up talking to his wife or his kid trying to find out what the fuck was going on, and to this day I still don't know what's happening.

Anybody else been after you for session work?

I got a call from Kim Basinger to play on her record. That was, like, no, OK?

Despite your rowdy rock image, your romantic relationship seems stable, and you're also very close to your family. Did anyone else in your family influence you?

My grandmother bought me my first guitar. I used to fuck up around the house, and my grandmother would chase me around the couch. She'd freak out when I'd play "Black Dog" really loud. I wasn't ready for her death at all. I think of her a lot, and she's with me all the time, I guess.

Despite your relationship with your family, you once said you make it a point not to get close to people. Why not?

For the most part, it's because I don't trust anybody. I've got a few close friends I trust implicitly. But when you're dealing with people on this level, most of them are out to get you. I've had a lot of friends turn on me, so I'm a little jaded. I'd like to trust everybody, but sometimes you've been so totally taken advantage of that you feel like a piece of meat.

Do you think your feelings have anything to do with the way you were raised?

That's a good point. A lot of musicians are very rebellious because they come from a really repressed, sometimes damaging family life. I was really fortunate. I come from a very loving and supportive family, thank God. I could be a lot worse than I am now.