

MUSICIAN



Robert John Photography

SLASH

He's back with a few new friends—and one very special old one

By Chris Neal

AS RECORDING PROGRESSED ON GUNS N' Roses' first album in 1986, the up-and-coming hard-rock band's lead guitarist was getting anxious. He was OK recording basic tracks with the three guitars he had on hand—a BC Rich and two Jacksons, for the record—but he didn't feel confident using any of them to lay down his leads. He couldn't afford to buy a new guitar, and wasn't sure what to buy if he could. Then, he says, "The hand of fate stepped in." The band's then-manager, Alan Niven, gave him a brand-new Gibson Les Paul. Slash rented a few Marshall amps and hit the studio with his new guitar. "That was it," he says. "The right Marshall with that guitar sounded awesome." He loved the sound so much, in fact, that he has hardly ever played another guitar in the studio to this day. Slash and his Les Paul remained an unbeatable team even as he split from Guns N' Roses in the mid-1990s and re-established himself as a rock hitmaker with Velvet Revolver in the 2000s.

Now the soft-spoken California native born Saul Hudson and his prized guitar are back together again on *Slash*, his first full-fledged solo album. (Namesake side band Slash's Snakepit released two albums, in 1995 and 2000.) It's an all-star affair that finds Slash joined by guest vocalists ranging from Ozzy Osbourne, Kid Rock and Alter Bridge's Myles Kennedy to Fergie, Wolfmother's Andrew Stockdale and Maroon 5's Adam Levine. For a guy who has dealt with two of rock's most notoriously mercurial singers—Guns' Axl Rose and Velvet Revolver's Scott Weiland—it was a refreshing change of pace. "It changed my whole attitude about singers in general," he says with a chuckle, "and how something so complicated can be so simple."

Slash is gearing up for a solo tour (with Kennedy on board as vocalist), which will continue throughout the year. We caught up with him at home in Los Angeles to discuss his new friends, his new direction and, of course, his favorite guitar.



'I've realized that I only need one guitar and one amp.'

How did you enjoy the experience of making a solo album?

The whole journey was a lot of fun. After being in bands for so long, I welcomed the chance to be my own boss for a minute. It was a great learning experience. It reinvigorated my faith in music and working with different people, especially singers.

You do have an interesting history with singers.

Yeah. Without getting into the finer details of it, I've worked with some of the best singers in the world, especially for rock 'n' roll—the most volatile, the most real. The kind of things you hear coming out of their mouths is an honest interpretation of who they are, which is great. But it's not been easy.

How did you decide which guests you wanted on the record?

I spent a year hanging around, writing stuff. When I finally got a piece of music that I could stand back and get a perspective on, I would try to think about who would sound good singing it. That's where it started.

Did you intend to make it diverse, or did that happen naturally?

It came naturally, because the music was diverse. The making of this record was an opportunity for me to write whatever and not feel the pressure or the insecurity of it being overly judged by the other guys in the band—or completely rejected, for that matter. *(laughs)* Or just being confined to a one-dimensional musical direction, which a band sometimes does. That led me to writing whatever I felt like.

Had you been writing things all along that didn't fit into a band context?

I think I morphed from one writing style into another. Normally I'd be writing in terms of Velvet Revolver, so in the back of my mind that was the end destination for whatever I was working on. At the end of the last Velvet Revolver tour I was writing in the back of the bus or in the dressing room. I had all these different kinds of music and I didn't really think about where it was going. When I finally came to the decision that I was going to do a solo record, all that stuff funneled into a different direction and had a whole different meaning.

When you're writing, do you make demos?

For years and years I made demos in my head. If it was a good idea I'd probably retain it, and if it wasn't, all the better anyway. I'm not very good at making decent demos,

usually because I hate the recording gear there is to work with and what it sounds like. I had this little Zoom recorder on the last Velvet tour, and I started recording unplugged electric into that to get ideas down. It came in handy. After the tour was over, I had this Boss 16-track digital recorder and I began to focus on recording stuff to get a better idea what I was doing. Finally, after I'd compiled 20-some different ideas I went to my friend's little garage Pro Tools studio and actually started making proper demos.

At what point would you bring in the singer?

The Pro Tools demos, which are me playing guitar and bass over a drum machine, made a cohesive song structure. Sometimes it'd be a three-minute song, sometimes it'd be a minute-and-a-half idea, whatever. Once I had that, I'd send it to a singer and say, "Deal with this." *(laughs)* It was a nerve-racking experience. I wouldn't know what their response was going to be, and I can't say it was the best quality sounding stuff I was sending them. I was fortunate that they were open-minded enough to go along with me on this.

Logistically, how difficult was it to get the guests into the studio?

It was really pretty easy. Once I'd sent them the demo and they'd signed on, it was just a matter of, "OK, can you come down on such-and-such day?" And that was basically it. A lot of times I would get together with the artist to work out the arrangement. Some people had a lot of input. A good example is Kid Rock: We wrote that song in his studio in Michigan, I came back to L.A. and recorded it with my band, we sent it to him and he did the vocals in his studio. That was an isolated incident. Most of the time we'd get together and work on the song, then they'd just come down to the studio and record it.

You stuck mostly with your classic Les Paul for recording.

Instead of pulling out different guitars for different sounds, I just used this one guitar and made it sound different. *(laughs)* I had one Marshall, a JCM 800 that I had in storage that probably hails back from the '80s, and that was my primary setup.

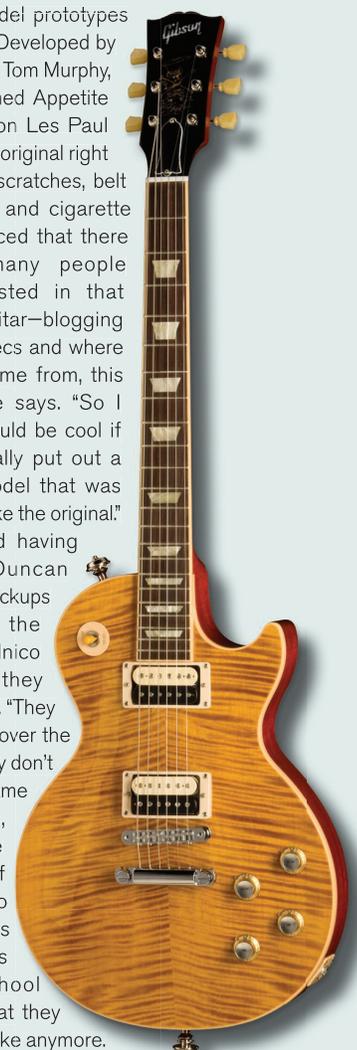
What keeps drawing you back to that guitar?

It works! *(laughs)* It's something I've been using for a long time, I feel comfortable with it and it always sounds good. That guitar has its own unique thing to it. I don't like

APPETITE FOR RECONSTRUCTION

The new Slash signature model Les Paul is a replica of the guitar he first played on Guns N' Roses' classic *Appetite for Destruction*—itself a Les Paul Standard replica built by luthier Chris Derrig in the late 1950s, and Slash's primary recording guitar to this day. (He typically uses signature model prototypes on the road.) Developed by Gibson luthier Tom Murphy, the aptly named Appetite for Destruction Les Paul replicates the original right down to the scratches, belt buckle nicks and cigarette burns. "I noticed that there were so many people super-interested in that particular guitar—blogging about the specs and where the guitar came from, this and that," he says. "So I thought it would be cool if Gibson actually put out a signature model that was built exactly like the original." That involved having Seymour Duncan wire up new pickups made like the company's Alnico II Pros as they were in 1986. "They have evolved over the years, and they don't have all the same components, the same amount of wraps and so on," explains Slash. "It's got old-school capacitors that they don't even make anymore. We focused on getting all that stuff right, to try to get as close to the tonal quality of that guitar as possible." (Seymour Duncan's Signature Series Alnico II Pro Slash humbucking pickups are also available separately.) Visually, the guitar sports an "Unburst" finish, traditional trapezoid inlays on the fingerboard and a headstock featuring Slash's signature. A less expensive version of the Gibson Custom Shop's Appetite for Destruction model will be available in August from Gibson subsidiary Epiphone.

-CN



MUSICIAN

Slash with Fergie at the 52nd Annual Grammy Awards Salute to Icons in January

Larry Busacca/Getty Images



'I've worked with some of the best singers in the world, especially for rock 'n' roll.'

experimenting with a lot of different stuff if it's not necessary. That just doesn't fascinate me.

How did the lack of a tremolo bar on the Les Paul affect your style early on?

It didn't really shape the way I played, because I didn't come from that Eddie Van Halen school of rock. As much as I appreciated Eddie, in the early '80s everybody who could throw together a Strat with a tremolo bar was copying that sound. I went the opposite direction, which was more old-school, because I thought everybody sounded like they were trying to rip him off. Taking away the tremolo bar was sort of like taking away the second bass drum. But I can use a tremolo bar if it calls for it. I definitely have pulled out guitars to do a specific tremolo-bar thing.

That guitar definitely made you stand out from the crowd in 1987.

There was definitely a point there around '91 where I was getting recognized for bringing back the Les Paul, which I had no idea I was doing. *(laughs)*

What advice would you give a young player trying to find the right guitar?

I remember back when I was 15 years old, just starting. Looking at all the professional guitar players in your favorite band and out there touring the circuit around your neighborhood, and then all the legions of guitar magazines and stuff—it was pretty overwhelming. You end up spending a fortune in trial and error until you get to the point where I'm at now, realizing you only need one guitar and one amp. If I'd known that 30 years ago I could have saved a lot of money. *(laughs)* You just have to go through it. You have to listen to and read whatever information there is about the guys you think sound good, and go in that direction. Try to find what it is about their gear that makes them sound the way they sound. Eventually you'll get your own style together. That just takes time.

How do you hope to evolve as a player in the future?

That's a never-ending thing. That'll be going on until I'm pushing up daisies.

REVOLVING DOOR

After an acrimonious final tour, lead singer Scott Weiland parted ways with Velvet Revolver in April 2008 and returned to his previous band, Stone Temple Pilots. The group began searching for a new frontman, a quest that has been set aside for the moment as its members focus on other projects. "We've been listening to singers and going through that process in a very low-key way," Slash says. "That'll continue to go on." Fans can expect to hear a few Velvet Revolver songs during Slash's upcoming solo tour, which will find him accompanied by singer Myles Kennedy of Alter Bridge, rhythm guitarist Bobby Schneck, bass player Dave Henning and drummer Brent Fitz. Slash promises the set lists will also include Guns N' Roses and Slash's Snakepit songs in addition to material from his new solo album.

-CN

