



## MAGNUM FORCE

by Mark Mantho

Say what you will about Axl Rose and his big mouth; when he opens it to sing, something very unique and undeniably captivating comes out. The same can be said of the other members of Guns N' Roses about their respective instruments. To be sure, the band as a unit may sound like crap on any given night, but when they're good, they're very, very good. And last Friday at the Centrum, they proved that point, in spades.

It takes some serious balls to make a capacity crowd of restless fans wait more than an hour and a half between the end of the opening act's set (Squidgarden) and the beginning of their own, but that's exactly what the Gunners did, finally taking the stage at about 10:30pm. Out came Axl, dressed in trademark blazer and shorts, sporting a smirk and a few days growth of beard. Then on came the rest of the band, cranking up and charging into "Nightrain" (an ode to the simple pleasures of drinking and driving, from *Appetite For Destruction*). As the band made its way through two more early numbers—"Welcome To The Jungle" and "Mr. Brownstone"—it became apparent that Guns N' Roses had come to play, performing with both smooth professionalism and seemingly genuine enthusiasm. Rose in particular was in fine form, singing clearly and powerfully, leaving the distinct impression that he meant every word.

This was especially true in regard to the material from *Use Your Illusion I & II*. His leg perched upon a speaker, Our Hero leaned out into the crowd (though he did not, it should be noted, jump in and start a riot) and delivered his lyrical darts as though nothing else mattered, the venom fairly dripping from his tongue. Songs like "Double Talkin' Jive" with its bitter refrain ("double talkin' jive, get the money motherfucker 'cause I got no more...patience") actually seemed to energize him. Others, like the beautifully rendered "November Rain," which found continued on following page

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Axl hunched intently over an electric piano, illustrated both his ability to construct a conventional pop melody and his newly-stated desire to channel a more nakedly vulnerable side of himself into the music he writes for Guns N' Roses. A tip that both sides of the emotional spectrum can be successfully wed within the confines of the same group may have been the equally strong response to each approach; the cheers were never perfunctory.

Friday's show also showcased the not inconsiderable instrumental chops of the Guns N' Roses rhythm section, comprised these days of monster drum machine Matt Sorum, newly acquired rhythm guitarist Gilby Clarke (late of L.A.'s Kill For Thrills), and old hand Duff McKagen, on bass. Together they provided more than adequate support, keeping a tight reign on the beat and rarely making mistakes or losing their cool. No mean feat, considering they've had a relatively short time in which to gel as an ensemble, and the fact that this was only the second date on the second leg of their tour. The keyboard fills of Dizzy Reed added welcome (if unremarkable) texture to the overall sound, which was further expanded by the inclusion of a female horn section (1) and two back-up singers, both predictably clad in MTV leather-slut getups which, happily, did not detract much from the vocal punch they brought to the mix.

Unquestionably, one of the high points of the evening was observing the sonic pyrotechnics of hard rock's resident guitar hero in his natural habitat. The lead guitar work of Slash is neither technically perfect nor fabulously original. Rather, it convinces in its sheer emotional intensity, somehow plumbing inner depths that connect in a visceral, intuitive way. Throughout the show, he displayed a consistently deft hand with the rhythmic and melodic mechanics of each tune, integrating the meat of the songs' chordal structure and his solos into a seamless whole. Cigarette stuck permanently to his lips, "Cousin It" hair hiding his face, Slash hunkered down and concentrated on squeezing out as much raw emotion as one guitar would allow. His phrasing was, for the most part, impeccable, the sound flowing like multi-colored water on "Estranged" and, especially, "Civil War." He saved the mind-fuck solo for an extended interlude sans the rest of the band, and for the encore, "Paradise City." Nothin' fancy you see, just straight ahead, honest-to-God rock'n roll.

And that, more than anything else, is what Guns N' Roses are all about. Axl may run off at the mouth, and he may be an asshole, but he's real, as is the music of his band. The people in the audience in Worcester knew this, and they appreciated it. All you had to do was look around at the fists pumping resolutely in the air when the band kicked into "Don't Cry" or the flawlessly executed "You Could Be Mine" to get the message. For their part, Guns N' Roses seemed more than pleased to give their fans everything they had, and then some. No one would ever expect less; no one could ever ask more.