

Jim Ratz's REV-O-LECTIONS

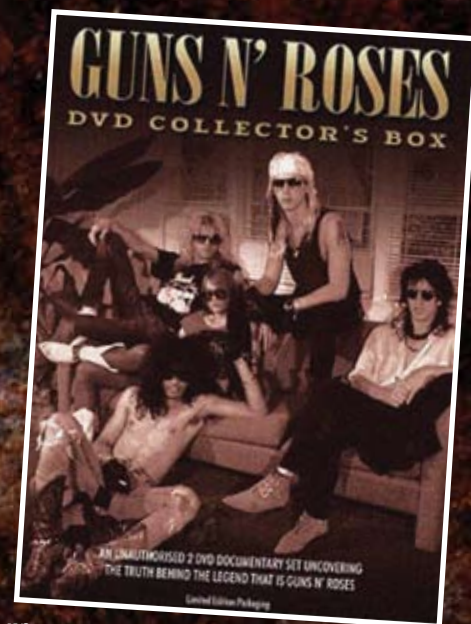
ALL THAT METAL IS... AND WAS

Recently, a slew of glam-related reissues and retrospectives have come my way so I thought it was high time I delved into it a bit. As a younger teenager and graduate of both metal and punk fandom, I eventually got into this scene and have to say that I had more fun back then than virtually any other time of my life. When it was in full swing everything was bigger-than-life: the shows, the scene, the hair, (not to mention the fascination from the outside world, and, certain parts of the female anatomy). The clubs played host to a bizarre and colorful cast of freaks and there was never any need to tone it down—the more outrageous you were, the better. Eventually, when I got my own band and started playing the clubs, each gig we did was a major social event, where the girls dressed to kill and the guys jockeyed to keep pace with their own flashy duds. But, the best part of it for me was always the music, and much of what I'm going to talk about here played a defining role in making those times so great.



There was definitely more to the second wave of glam rock during the 1980s than meets the eye. Like most other subgenres, the second-generation glam bands were far from cohesive. Take Guns N' Roses for instance. The band may have seemed like butch bad-asses, but make no mistake, when GN'R first hit the Hollywood scene in the mid '80s, they had definite glam-rock affectations, but not quite in the way you might expect. Guns N' Roses came from a seedier school of glam, as opposed their nemesis's like Poison and Warrant who basically

played a prettier version of Van Halen's party rock, and would be generally referred to as "hair metal." Guns' music had a distinct element of danger and the band was far more likely to be seen doing drugs in the back of a bondage boutique on Melrose Avenue than cruising the Sunset Strip while cranking Bon Jovi through the speakers. The band also had a punk aspect to its style that further alienated it from the squeaky-clean poodle heads that frequented the Strip. Soon, other bands closer in style to the street-glam sound and look of GN'R started popping



up, and suddenly there were two glammish scenes going on simultaneously in Hollywood: the bright and colorful party rock scene devouring the Strip, and the more deviant and trashy one—perfected by GN'R—that also touched on the punk, goth and alternative scenes. While the former emulated pop-metal bands like Ratt, Dokken and Def Leppard, the latter stretched to include influences ranging from The New York Dolls, Iggy Pop, The Ramones, Lords of the New Church and others. While the party-rock bands had state-of-the-art equipment and coiffed hair, the seedier types borrowed amps from each other and makeup from their death rock girlfriends...you get the picture. But by the time the mainstream got a hold of the scenes, they all got lobbed into one category, making it easier for labels to market and consumers to digest. But there were distinct differences, and no matter how big they got, GN'R should never be considered a hair metal band. They were more traditionalist, and far too unsavory.

The band's iconic debut *Appetite For Destruction* also heralded a cultural shift in rock music and style. For example, after Guns got big many of the more colorful party rock bands shed their spandex in favor of leather and cowboy boots, wearing less makeup and getting tattoos in attempts to be more "street." Many stopped playing those fancy, pointy guitars in favor of Slash's signature Les Paul. And his bluesy style trumped the guitar-hero histrionics of the earlier pop metal era. The use of Harley Davidson bikes in rock videos was all the rage.

Prior to the shift in style seen with the arrival of Nirvana and grunge, GN'R was one of the most revolutionary bands to come along since punk.

With all the fanfare surrounding the original band, I was pretty disappointed with this recent DVD release of the *Guns N' Roses DVD Collector's Box* (Chrome Dreams/MVD). These 2-DVD set features two previously released documentary titles, *Sex n' Drugs n' Rock n' Roll* and *Axl Rose: The Prettiest Star*, in a sharp box-set package. But the first title is a complete letdown. While neither of these titles claim to be "authorized," you'd at least expect to get some interesting info, but unfortunately, there's not much here. First off, this DVD contains no GN'R music and just one interview snippet with Slash, Duff and Izzy that looks like it's been culled from a damaged VHS tape. What we do get are interview segments with mostly third-rate hanger-on's who seem to know little to nothing about the band. Even the narrator refers to drummer Steven Adler as "Steven Alder!"

Sheesh. Then there's a segment with some old studio engineer where he proclaims that GN'R visited him dressed in Bermuda shorts, and were just "valley guys." Huh?

There are also segments with a frumpy woman who went to some clubs—why this qualifies her as an expert on the band I'm not sure. She goes on to talk about how "Slash would jam on stage with Warrant," which

is suspect at best. On top of the mostly poor interview subjects, there's loads of bad reality-show-style music and ultra-cheesy multimedia effects that look like something a junior-high student came up with on his iMac. And the filmmakers frequently flash the same few black-and-white photos of club-goers, one of which features Poison's CC Deville! Yep, this is a cheap-ass affair.

Axl Rose: The Prettiest Star fares much better. Although far from definitive, at least this DVD has some decent interview subjects, like GN'R's early manager Vicki Hamilton, respected journalists Malcolm Dome and Bernard Baur,



and the band's photographer Robert John, all of which talk about the band's early days and their impact on the scene. There are also bits on Axl's more recent activities and his shameless plundering of the band's name. Like the first DVD, there is no GN'R music and there are lots of lame multimedia graphics, but overall, this DVD has at least some substance, and may offer some insight to the hardcore fan. For more info on the set, go to MusicVideoDistributors.com.

was a bit of an oddball when it released its two albums for Jet Records at the dawn of the decade. You may not have heard of this band, but a couple of its alumni have gone on to bigger things, like Def Leppard for one. Phil Collen left Girl to join the Leps right at the start of their rise to world domination. Girl vocalist Phil Lewis also joined Hollywood street-glamsters LA Guns right at the rise of that scene. Girl's music was sleazy British hard rock with subtle touches of the avant-garde à la early new wave pretties like Roxy Music and Japan. It may sound bizarre, but Girl made it work, infusing their hard rock with airy bits of art rock and androgyny. Girl guitarist Gerry Laffy recently released *Girl: The Rare DVD Collection* on his Die



Laughing label, and it's a treat. This release has all the band's promo videos from its two studio releases *Sheer Greed* and *Wasted Youth*, plus some demo videos, including the band's great "My Number," plus vids from Laffy's later music projects. While the quality varies a bit, it's still nice to see this ultra-obscure content see the



light of day. Overall, it's an essential document from one of the great-unsung second-wave glam bands, and early New Wave of British Heavy Metal icons.

Check out the DVD closer at: Myspace.com/GirlSheerGreedOfficial.

Fallen Angels were a brief side project of vocalist Knox of UK punk pioneers The Vibrators and members of Finnish glam fiends Hanoi Rocks. Hanoi Rocks were a huge influence on the street side of the second wave of glam, especially Guns N'Roses. Fusing punk influences with the bluesy raunch of heroin-era Stones and a healthy dose of the New York Dolls, the band achieved cult status in the US and were thought to be the next big thing in 1984, when tragically, their drummer Razzle was killed in a drunk driving accident involving Motley Crue's Vince Neil in the driver's seat. After that, the band—stripped of its morale—fragmented and eventually broke up. But before all the trouble started, they released a few great records and revived traditional glam-rock fundamentals in the process. Knox and Hanoi shared the same management and in 1983 it was suggested that he team up with members of the band to record some of his solo material. The official album line-up included Knox on vocals and guitar, and Hanoi Rocks members Nasty Suicide (guitar), Sam Yaffa (bass) and Razzle (drums), plus guest appearances by the remainder of Hanoi Rocks—Michael Monroe and Andy McCoy. The Fallen Angels' self-titled debut album has been recently reissued by Jungle Records, and falls somewhere between punk and hard rock, with a slew of dirty, drug-infused numbers that for the most part, rock hard and fast. Standout cuts are "Amphetamine Blue," "Inner Planet love" and "Houston Tower." While it's by no means a great record, for fans of Hanoi Rocks it's a nice distraction, and a prime example of glam's seedier UK side. Jungle-Records.com.

The New York Dolls are one of the few bands with a breadth of influence that spans across the entire spectrum of metal, hard rock, punk and alternative music. Punks idolized the band's



reckless approach, alternative folks appreciated the avant-garde vibe and a substantial section of rockers dug the androgynous imagery. Although the band may have only had a direct musical influence on the seedier street side of '80s glam, its influence on the imagery of the pop metal side is beyond doubt, even if the Sunset Strip bands only scratched the surface of the Dolls' deviancy. *From Here To Eternity: The Live Bootleg Box* (Sanctuary) has three discs of early live shows that epitomize the band at its hungriest. Sure it's sloppy and full of technical problems, but the shows presented here solidify what the band was musically all about, and it wasn't pretty...but that's the beauty of it. This slick little box comes with three discs each housed in glossy mini-LP-replica sleeves, plus a booklet. Warning: the sound quality is quite muffled and shoddy on the whole, but nevertheless, the reckless spirit remains. Particularly cool is the false-start version of "It's Too late." Check it out at SanctuaryRecords.com.

One of the more high-profile aspects of glam is shock rock, which was typified by the likes of KISS and Alice Cooper. Whereas KISS has relied heavily upon its gargantuan marketing machine and has made some decent albums along the way, Alice Cooper has always seemed more about the music. From early classics like "I'm Eighteen" and "Under My Wheels" to his experimental phase with "Clones" and even his late '80s comeback, Alice's work has always yielded at least a few gems, even when he's veered off course a bit. The *Live at Montreux 2005* DVD (Eagle Vision) has a revitalized Alice struttin' his stuff

live in France, with a fairly stripped-down show and a kick-ass young band. All of the classics are here, plus a handful of newer numbers from his excellent *The Eyes of Alice Cooper* album from a couple years back, and his latest album the decent *Dirty Diamonds*. There are also some funny theatrical bits with Alice performing in a straight-jacket for "The Ballad of Dwight Frye," and of course he gets the guillotine during a medley of "Killer" and "I Love the Dead." Out of the clutch of old school rockers currently hitting the scene, Alice Cooper is one of the only ones still making viable music, and this show is proof of that. Check it out the DVD at EagleRockEnt.com. Another recent release is *The Nightmare Returns* DVD (Universal). Filmed during his 1986/87 tour, as he was promoting his *Constrictor* album—his first in three years—Alice does his best to keep up with the metal scene



of the day (even taking Megadeth on the road as main support). On here are many of the same songs as the last DVD, but the difference is the band. His mid '80s band featured mammoth guitar hero Kane Roberts, a buffed-out military fanatic who looked like Sylvester Stallone in *Rambo*. The band also included future members of the often-maligned hair-metal mavens Winger, including Kip Winger on bass. Featuring many Cooper classics, the sound is bold and heavy, more along pop-metal lines than the stripped-down straight-up rock of the *Montreux* DVD. In contrasting the two releases, it's interesting to see how adept Alice has been at adapting to changing times, and both are worth having for that reason.

Glam rock has had several identity crises and facelifts over the years, and although it's been far from a united front, the various camps have shared a couple common themes: the love of spectacle and addiction to attention. And its influence can still be felt all across the spectrum today. For questions, comments or something you want to see in the future, drop me a note at Retrohead77@yahoo.com. Until next time, don't be afraid to be in touch with your feminine side, a little smeared eyeliner never hurt anyone. ☞