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REVIEWS

September 10, 2007

IAN CHRISTE : - "Van Halen: Everybody Wants Some"

Review by *Anthony Kuzminski*

*We came here to entertain you
 Leaving here we aggravate you
 -"I'm The One"*

William Shakespeare's plays could be put into three distinct categories; Histories, Comedies and Tragedies. If Bard were alive today I'm convinced without a doubt he would have written a play on the epic antics of **Van Halen**. Their story has all of elements of great storytelling that in truth even a fiction writer couldn't conceive in their wildest dreams. The question is what kind of play would it be? Shakespeare scholars would define it as a history play, but it would most definitely be heavy on elements of comedy and tragedy. Sadly Shakespeare isn't alive, but **Ian Christe** is. **Christe** previously detailed the meteoric history of heavy metal in his excellent 2003 book, '**The Sound of the Beast**' and this time around, on '**Everybody Wants Some**', he's tackled the most dysfunctional rock band on the planet with ardent zeal and has written a story that is epically Shakespearean.

The genesis of **Van Halen** is fascinating if for no other reason than they lost their driving charismatic force at what appeared to be their commercial peak but somehow managed to thrive and survive while conquering everything in their path without ever skipping a beat until they became their own worse enemy. The band has been and always will be led by a sprawling talent on the six-string who was gifted with staggering prowess and who created some of the greatest jet-engine riffs ever committed to tape. This guitar god partnered with a superbly unsubtle genius of a madman on vocals complimented by a frantic backbeat led by a happy go lucky bassist and a frenzied madman on the skins who together defined and influenced an entire generations of rock n' roll enthusiasts with six-albums in less than seven-years. The superb voracious singer was eventually replaced by a more at ease venerable musician who allowed the band to mature and develop while still commanding the audience's attention. Eventually egos and outside forces did what rap, grunge and continual changing musical tastes couldn't do; bring the band to their knees. Sammy Hagar, David Lee Roth, Michael Anthony, Alex and Eddie Van Halen (and later to a lesser extent Gary Cherone and Wolfgang Van Halen) defied all odds and became the biggest band in the land not just once, but twice and may possibly do it a third time. If you think you know the full story about the anarchic **Van Halen** family...you don't. '**Everybody Wants Some**' is endearing, euphoric and expansive history into what is most likely the most estranged band to ever emerge from the land of opportunity. **Ian Christe** is frank and unbiased as he chronicles the band's entire history with gritty details of their rise to the top, each break-up, the aftermath, submerged inner tension and meticulous details that even the casual fan will devour. **Van Halen's** rise, fall and resurrection are all here in mesmerizing detail and will have you asking yourself, "Who's Mitch Malloy?"

*I've been through hell and back again
 Shook hands with the devil
 Looked him in the eye
 Looked like a long lost friend
 -"Mine All Mine"*

The most staggering aspect of the book is that it's an unauthorized biography. As a general rule, I usually don't enjoy unauthorized biographies because they tend to be glorified tales written with a lot of assumptions and tall tales that even a casual fan would raise their eyes with suspicion. I never hoisted my eyebrow once as **Christe's** research is nothing short of astonishing; minute details are given ranging from specific recording sessions, family lineages, failed auditions for singers, the numerous attempted reunions with Roth and the most important aspect for guitar geeks-a detailed

outline of guitars used, created and played by Eddie Van Halen over his entire life. **Christe** knows this band, loves this band, pulls his hair out over their internal drama and as a result has written the definitive **Van Halen** story. Once you pick it up it you will need to unchain yourself from your chair because it's impossible to put down whether you are a **Van Halen** or Van Hagar fan.

Even if the band sat down one day to write their story, it would be biased with revisionism. No authorized biography would ever be this factual or truthful. If recent actions are any hint, it probably wouldn't even mention Michael Anthony. **Christe** puts the reader right in the emotional thick of the action from the 1920's in Europe to the present day reunion in 2007. **Christe** makes you feel like an insider with his fastidious quotes and personal insight. Don't get me wrong, **Christe** dishes dirt, but does so without judgment and makes sure he has the facts straight. People often tell me I should write a book, but after reading '**Everybody Wants Some**', I doubt if I could ever be as comprehensive and succinct as **Christe** who spent a colossal amount of time researching this book which is apparent right from page one. The book encompasses the **Van Halen's** journey from Holland to California, to their early high school bands, jamming to thousands of people in backyards, their encounters with Gene Simmons and their rise, fall, dissolution, internal destruction and eventual resurrection(s). David Lee Roth and Sammy Hagar's post **Van Halen** solo-tenure's are also detailed as are stories of what Eddie and Alex Van Halen have been doing for the better part of a decade proving they indeed have been very active but out of the spotlight. There are details of songs left off albums and jams recorded but have never seen the light of day. From late 1998 until early 2004, Eddie and Alex were invisible to the outside world. '**Everybody Wants Some**' puts this long pause into perspective.

When the **Van Halen** brothers disappeared into 5150 in 1999, they had alienated their most devoted fans and by early 2004, they had been away for so long that no one really cared anymore. The sad aspect of the Van Halen brothers disappearing act was it did diminish their legacy. There was a time where I went years without listening to any **Van Halen** albums, even though I loved them. They were so far removed from the spotlight and the lack of archive releases frustrated me and millions of fans. As discussed in this book, the amount of unreleased music stored in 5150 is staggering. There should have been dozens of live DVD's, box sets, remasters and other fan oriented packages in the last decade to quench the enormous thirst fans still have for this band but alas we had to settle for three new songs on the 2004 package, 'The Best of Both Worlds', two songs on 'The Best of: Volume 1' and an album with Gary Cherone. Then the abrupt reunion with Hagar in 2004 left fans sour once again, however, **Christe** puts all of these events into the proper perspective and while he details their fall from grace, he makes us almost forget all of the internal drama and elevates their legacy in ways I never thought possible. Despite the constant rotation of lead singers, unreleased songs, the Cherone album and failed reunions **Christe** manages to make me view **Van Halen** as something more than a soap opera, he reminds us why we loved them in the first place and as a result they will always be a vital and imperative band no matter what the future holds for them. With his poetic prose, **Christe** jogs your memory and proves that **Van Halen** will always be legends. As soon as I finished reading 'Everybody Wants Some' I gave every **Van Halen** album another spin and viewed each one from a fresh outlook including the comical 'Diver Down', the pulverizing 'Fair Warning' and the metallic and misunderstood 'Balance'. The band should give **Christe** a portion of future proceeds from record sales just for writing this book, because as a result of reading it, I am reevaluating records I had forgotten about years ago and it appears I underestimated them. '**Everybody Wants Some**' is the essential gift every **Van Halen** fan should have. Do yourself a favor and buy this book before you buy a t-shirt at the reunion concert. Christie has written a book that is stylish, succinct, breathtaking and as dazzling as an Eddie Van Halen guitar solo. If you ever stared in the mirror and attempted to imitate David Lee Roth with leaps and splits from the "Jump" video, then this book is for you.

*This is my chance to fly
- "Unchained"*

Anthony Kuzminski is a Chicago based writer for the [antiMusic Network](#), [Unrated Magazine](#), is a contributor to [Talking Metal](#) and can be found at [The Screen Door](#)

Chapter One of the book can be read in its entirety [here](#).

September 10, 2007

RAT SKATES - "Born in the Basement"

Kundrat Productions

If you have ever watched **Metallica's** **VH1 Behind the Music** and enjoyed the story of its earliest days and rise to fame, you will thoroughly enjoy **Born in the Basement**. The DVD tells the story of metal pioneers, **Overkill**, from its earliest inception to its rise to prominence in the east coast underground metal scene.

The man behind the story is **Rat Skates**, original drummer and co-founder of **Overkill**. **Skates** is candid and passionate about the role he played in the early thrash movement. What emerges is not just a musician, but an entrepreneur with keen business instincts determined to make his band a success no matter what the cost. What the band lacked in monetary resources, **Skates** made up for in imagination and creativity, using everyday items such as milk crates and Styrofoam paneling to create an arena-like stage set for the band's live shows.

As the story unfolds, the viewer gets a true sense of what it was like to be a part of thrash's heyday. **Skates** could have easily used today's technology to enhance the image of the thrash movement or his own. However, he eschews big production in favor of the same "do-it yourself" approach that characterized his earlier days in **Overkill**. The result is a documentary that faithfully preserves the spirit of the early thrash movement.

Review by Jerred Mathews



August 11, 2007

POISON: SACRIFICIAL, SURREAL, AND SEXUAL - Tinley Park, IL, July 17, 2007

Review by Anthony Kuzminski

Those who get paid to write about rock n' roll tend to focus on artists who are less established, because they always want to see the underdog come out on top (myself included). But what happens when you enjoy enormous success early in your career? You have nowhere to go but down. Once that commercial peak passes, you then become the underdog but writers usually choose to ignore you because they never felt you deserved success in the first place. This is why you see certain artists placed up on a pulpit by most of the mainstream rock press and why you'll never see **Rolling Stone** write an article on **Poison**. What they don't realize is that acts like **Poison** still feel like they have something to prove and this was devastatingly evident to me during their most recent Chicago performance. The excitement within the crowd was palpable and the second the lights went off, the darkness cued the crowd into hysteria. As the band segued into their opening intro, the screams and shrieks became more zealous. All eyes were focused front and center where from beneath the stage, **Poison** lead singer **Bret Michaels** rose from a veiled door in true rock star fashion; from this moment until the final crashing and surreal pyrotechnic blast nearly ninety-minutes later **Bret**, guitarist **C.C. Deville**, bassist **Bobby Dall** and drummer **Rikki Rocket** plowed through the show like hemi-powered drones on a highway. The band's core mantra has always been about having (ok shoot me, I'm going to use the ultimate cliché) "nothing but a good time". This is a band that relishes their place in the annals of rock n' roll and do not apologize for it. They still are the ultimate party animals, but this time around they delivered a show that was focused, intense, triumphant and that dripped, soaked and oozed with raw sexual energy. It was flat out the best I have ever seen **Poison** in concert.

Poison is riding a wave of creative revitalization led by singer **Bret Michaels'** new reality series, "**Rock of Love**". We all have our own opinions about reality television, but ironically, this recent media attention appears to have reinvigorated the band. Many who paid to see this show came for an evening of escapism and exuberance and left seeing so much more. **Poison** came, saw and rocked the crowd as if they were unleashing inner demons. **Poison** has toured the amphitheater circuit eight of the last nine years and somehow they appear to defy odds by continuing to fill seats year after year. People may mock them, but **Poison** takes themselves seriously, which is the key to their continued success.

The show opened with cries of glee, flashes of pyro and all out insanity as the band ripped through "Look What the Cat Dragged In", "I Want Action" and "Ride the Wind" each delivering sonic fireworks. While the performances featured largely faithful renditions, the band added little touches to some of them including a small guitar instrumental by **Bret** and **C.C.** before the seminal and sweet "I Won't Forget You" and some nice harp playing by **Bret** before "Your Mama Don't Dance". It was eerily similar to the more extended jams the current incarnation of **Guns N' Roses** are performing. These little moments speak volumes. They are usually unexpected and off the cuff, but it gives us a genuine thrill and is a testament to how scarily good this band can be when they apply themselves.

This tour finds them in support of a new covers album, 'Poison'd', the band's pledge of allegiance to those rockers they love and admire. Three of the songs were performed; "What I Like About You" (**The Romantics**), "Can't You See" (**Marshall Trucker**) and "I Need To Know" (**Tom Petty**). Surprisingly they work incredibly well within the context of the concert. My only quibble is that with an album full of covers; why not rotate different songs each night giving the show in each city its own unique imprint? These performances are by no means definitive, but what's imperative during a concert performance is that the spirit of the song is captured; **Poison** encapsulated not just the aura

but the essence of these songs as well. The only advice I'd give **Poison** is I firmly feel they should tour theaters behind this album this coming fall, without an opener showcasing the majority of the album. I'm sure many fans would love to see this band tear through a two-hour show which encompassed covers and rare songs alongside an extended greatest hits encore.

The 2007 model of **Poison** is lean, mean and dare I say it, in the preeminent musical shape of their careers. This isn't a tongue-in-cheek tease, but an earnest viewpoint of a band that has never been taken seriously by the mainstream press. Just because those who get paid to write about music choose to not write about them, doesn't mean that **Poison** doesn't make an impact. Over the years **Poison**'s concert have always fun, with a large emphasis on the word "fun". No one, including **Poison** themselves, would ever say they are the most technically proficient musicians. Despite their musical limitations, they have always hit the concert stage with an energy few acts can touch. On the nights when their playing was a mess musically, they managed to make it a glorious mess. However, this time around **Poison** is performing with pinpoint precision; something I never thought would be possible. It may be **C.C. Deville**'s sobriety, it may be the feeling they are relevant again and maybe they've just matured like a fine wine. Regardless, if you buy a ticket to see **Poison** this summer, you will see them at their zenith as they have never performed with more vitality or aptitude than they are right now. It does not matter that the show consists of the usual suspect mega-hits, ("Unskinny Bop", "Nothing But A Good Time", "Talk Dirty To Me", "Something To Believe In", "Every Rose Has It's Thorn", "Fallen Angel"), because each and every song performed showcased a drive and hunger I have never seen from this band before. The band was secure, confident and refined in their craft. Every minute of this show was divinely delicious and not in a guilty-pleasure fashion but in a sweaty sexual way, it's as if these songs become part of you and drop from your pores. The theatrics of this show are not to be outdone and is easily the band's most theatrical show since their 'Flesh & Blood' tour in 1990/91. I'd even dare say the theatrics are a hybrid of the best **KISS** and the **Rolling Stones** shows with video screens with teasing sexual images, a first rate light show, drum risers and more pyro than a Fourth of July festival (one pyrotechnic blast during "Your Mama Don't Dance" was so intense it nearly removed my eye brows). **Poison** were once hard rock titans and I'm happy to say that a band who was once lost has now been found and has turned their inner desperation and isolation into revelation through the sheer power of determination which ended in a crashing, surreally pyrotechnic rock n' roll finale. There was no inhibition or shame here, just four guys hoping to reclaim their spot in the fans hearts.

The end of the show was an orgy of rupturing fireworks, literally and figuratively. Rarely do you see what most people deem "guilty pleasures" enrapture a crowd so large and varied. There were slews of teenagers here and surprisingly, they sung along with every word. **Bret Michaels** had the crowd wrapped around his finger with his peek-aboo vibrancy that had most women in the crowd wishing they had tried out for "**Rock of Love**" and had the men wishing they were him. The last time I saw **Poison**, I felt they coasted on their past and lacked the knack to ever be a band that matters again. I'm happy to say that this show found the band implausibly fresh with a razzle dazzle attack of the crowd and their material. The cumulative effect of the evening could be felt by the joy of the physical and emotional release the crowd had to these sexual, soaking, secular and stirring songs. Am I really waxing poetically about **Poison**? You bet and as long as they deliver further performances with the same vigor and sincerity, I'll continue to do so.

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July 16, 2007

JOHN 5 - "The Devil Knows My Name"

John-5.com

After leaving **Marilyn Manson** in 2004, **John 5** released his first solo album, "**Vertigo**," a collection of original rock, country, and bluegrass instrumentals to wide acclaim. On his motivation to release a solo album at the time, **John** explained to **Mark Strigl** and **John Ostronomy** of **Talking Metal**, "I love this crazy shredding music, country, and crazy bluegrass stuff and I just love to play guitar....When I got out of **Manson**, I was like, "you know what? I'm just going to put out some of (this) guitar instrumental stuff just for fun..." For fans accustomed to his work with **Marilyn Manson**, "**Vertigo**" showed a completely different side to **John** and immediately established him as a guitar hero. **John** recalled the reaction, "it blew up so big. I would go to the magazine stand and there'd be covers and covers of my face on these guitar magazines...I was very surprised just how people really accepted it and liked it."

Building on the success of "**Vertigo**," **John** released "**Songs for Sanity**" in 2005, an amazing follow-up which showed **John** expanding artistically. "Gods and Monsters" and "Denouement" melded guitar heroism with nu-metal and industrial influences, genres usually thought to be incompatible

while the acoustic "2 Die 4" and country-influenced "Behind the Nut Love" showed new sides to **John's** playing. On the latter, **John** ingeniously reproduces the sound of pedal steel, an instrument commonly played in country music, on his electric guitar. John explained the origins of the song's sound, "I love pedal steel guitar and I tuned the whole guitar in an opening tuning like a lap steel. I bend the strings behind the nut so the other strings will ring out."

On **John's** most recent release, "**The Devil Knows My Name**," he raises the bar yet again. The songs are more epic and the guitar playing is even more over-the-top than previous efforts. On "27 Needles," **John** abandons the more traditional twang of country music in favor of heavy distortion. Although **John** is playing the guitar, his tone and technique closely matches a fiddle player (Check out at 3:02 - 3:37). "Black Widow of La Porte" is a tour de force of guitar heroism with **John** taking a wide array of influences (**Satriani**, **Vai**, and **Buckethead**) and blending them into his own style. At 2:57 - 3:02, **John** almost sounds possessed as he hits a legato run with blinding speed. Later, at 6:03 - 6:24, he pays homage to one of his favorite guitar players, **Buckethead**, before returning to the song's main theme. In a unique marriage of styles, "The Washing Away of Wrong" features the guest guitar playing of virtuoso **Eric Johnson**. **John** explained, "With **Eric Johnson**, he's more of a Texas blues-rock player who's incredible and I put him in such a different rhythm - I put him in a really heavy **Sabbath** rhythm". Perhaps, the most fascinating track is **John's** rendition of "Welcome to the Jungle" where he painstakingly preserves **Axl Rose's** voice on the guitar. From one artist to another, it's the highest compliment.

Stand Out Tracks: "Black Widow of La Porte", "Welcome to the Jungle", "Dead Art in Plainfield", "The Washing Away of Wrong"**3, 2007**

Review by Jerred Mathews

June 23, 2007

DEVIN TOWNSEND - "Ziltoid the Omniscient"

Inside Out Music

After taking a much deserved break to be with his family following last year's **Ozzfest**, **Devin Townsend** announced that he would retire **Strapping Young Lad** and the **Devin Townsend Band** and focus on solo projects. Ever the workaholic, **Devin** has come back with "**Ziltoid the Omniscient**," a concept album based on the adventures of a fourth dimensional alien.

The **Devin Townsend** storyline is both absurd and entertaining, but at the same time does not draw the listener's focus away from **Townsend's** extraordinary musical talents. "ZTO" strikes hard with precise heavy metal riffing, **Martian** melodies, **Zappa**-esque vocal harmonies, and laser sound effects. It's a powerful beginning to an amazing musical journey.

Musically, the album draws upon **Townsend's** earlier solo projects as well as **Strapping Young Lad**. "By Your Command" begins in heavy **Strapping Young Lad** territory, but later blends into musical landscapes reminiscent of his earlier solo work (3:42-5:57). "Solar Winds" is perhaps the most epic song on the album. After a brief narration, **Townsend** sings introspectively before the song gives way to majestic fanfare. 4:46 - 6:02 could be the heavy metal equivalent of "Kashmir" while 6:57-9:24 demonstrates **Townsend's** brilliant use of crescendo. **Townsend** dims the volume at 6:57, creating an illusion of distance between the listener and the song, but instead of fading out, the song gradually builds towards a grand finale. Just as the drums reach the pinnacle of intensity, the song gives way to "Hyperdrive," the album's most straightforward and accessible offering. "Color My World" contains the album's greatest peaks and valleys in terms of intensity. Similar to "By Your Command", the song begins with the relentless frenzy of **Strapping Young Lad** before morphing seamlessly into calmer pastures. It is amazing how one artist can bring such two extremes together so effortlessly.

Stand Out Tracks: "By Your Command", "Solar Winds", "Hyperdrive", "Color Your World", "The Greys".

Review by Jerred Mathews

December 11, 2006

GUNS N' ROSES - Allstate Arena, November 27, 2006

Review by **Anthony Kuzminski** of AntiMusic.com
Reprinted from [The Screen Door with Anthony Kuzminski](http://TheScreenDoor.com), December 7, 2006

I recently was sent at the last minute to review the **Guns N' Roses** show as it made a stop in Chicago. The review will be published on **Unrated Magazine** and antiMusic.com this coming Monday, but due to numerous requests, I am putting it up here on the blog early. I'd like to give a special thanks to **Mark** and **John** at **Talking Metal** for helping reinvigorate my interest in this band.
xTony

Allstate Arena November 27th, 2006

In the fifty-years since **Elvis** laid down his first vocal at Sun Studios in Memphis, TN rock n' roll has become more than escapism and so-called "devil's music", but also a driving life force. We have been blessed with some truly magical artists who have elevated our hearts, minds and bodies: **Buddy Holly**, **Jerry Lee Lewis**, **The Beatles**, the **Rolling Stones**, **The Beach Boys**, **The Who**, **Jimi Hendrix**, **Janis Joplin**, **The Doors**, **Led Zeppelin**, **Aerosmith**, the **Ramones**, **The Clash**, the **Sex Pistols**, **AC/DC**, **KISS**, **U2**, **REM**, **Nirvana**, **Pearl Jam**, **Metallica** and thousands upon thousand others. All of these acts mastered their craft and in their own way, changed the face of music. However, I'm not sure if there has ever been a group of artists in the annals of rock n' roll who were more mischievous, moody, maniacal, magical and miraculous than **Guns N' Roses**. With all that being said, they may also take the title as the most maddening group as well.

While I'm saddened by group dissolution and preventable deaths, I firmly believe that **Moon**, **Hendrix**, **Joplin**, **Bonham**, **Morrison**, **Presley** and **Cobain** all chose a path where there was no looking back. Whereas every member who has ever performed with **Guns N' Roses** is still alive (and for the most part well). When they unleashed their brand of rock upon the world it was met with universal acceptance and I'm not sure if I've ever seen a band be admired, loved and reach such a wide and diverse group of people since the **Beatles**. Males, females, metal heads, rockers, punks all heralded and cherished **GNR's** brand of vicious rock and still do nearly two-decades later. Sadly, the group has largely existed in name only for the last thirteen years, but 2006 has proven to be a year in which the name **Guns N' Roses** becomes more than a mere nostalgia trip.

Despite a brief interrupted tour in 2002, this is **Axl Rose's** first full year of touring since 1993. While I've heard reports of blazing nights and some solid bootlegs, I wasn't convinced I needed to see this incarnation of **GNR**. Here's my reason why; There was a time in the mid 1980's where **Keith Richards** and **Mick Jagger** did not see eye to eye. As a result, Jagger went solo on a tour to Australia and Japan, territories the **Stones** had never been to. Not only did this infuriate **Richards** as these were territories the **Stones** had never visited where large amounts of money could be made, but more importantly, his partner went there without him. These two men had built so much together and yet one was standing on the sidelines watching his partner claim all the glory. **Richards'** fill in was virtuoso guitarist **Joe Satriani**, who is a top flight guitarist, but he doesn't have the same history with **Mick**. Great musicians don't make great bands. Since then **Jagger** and **Richards** reconciled and have only played the classic **Stones** songs with each other enhancing their legacy and legend. My generations version of the **Stones**, **Guns N' Roses**, has spent the better part of the last thirteen-years out of the consciousness of the public, but never far from our hearts and minds.

I received a last minute phone call to review the **GNR** show and I wasn't entirely sure I wanted to go. I wasn't sure if I could reconcile these new musicians no matter how talented they may be. I overcame my reservations and headed out to the Allstate Arena where **Axl Rose** and seven supporting musicians, better known as **Guns N' Roses** hit the stage at 11:35pm. Before the band hit the show, I wasn't sure what to expect. They arrived on stage amidst an army of pyrotechnics and strobe light madness with an appetite for destruction. The crowd response was deafening which makes me wonder what reaction a full fledged reunion could bring. A reunion of this type could break all box office records. When **Axl Rose** screeched his way on stage, it was with an appetite that I would say is close to being unheralded in my lifetime.

The opening trio of songs were all from "Appetite For Destruction" ("Welcome To The Jungle", "It's So Easy", "Mr. Brownstone") and the in succession performances put the crowd in a maddening trance. It became very apparent it would be far too easy to label these musicians as a glorious cover band. This is far more than **Axl** and a bunch of arbitrary musicians. Each member was handpicked by **Axl** for not only being a masterful musician but also a spellbinding performer as well. A lot of discussion has been had on each of the band members and how they'll never compare to the original line up. I was one of those who had my doubts but can tell you that after seeing this eight-piece band shred through a two-hour plus show, these guys are no slouches. What you have here is not even an All Star team of musicians, but better, a group of guys who have chemistry and who are pulling off the impossible every night by winning each crowd over. Bassist **Tommy Stinson** roamed the stage like a veteran; while guitarists **Robin Finck** and **Richard Fortus** roamed the stage doing a damn good job on making most of the audience, even if it was briefly, forget about top hats and faceless guitarists.

Axl Rose is an artist whom I have followed since the band's inception and in truth, I'm not sure if I could ever put the artist's actions into context, but I do know this, he will not go on stage until he is ready to give 110% of himself to that crowd. He plays by his rules and no others, not because of ego, but because he's a perfectionist. I assisted journalist **Lonn Friend** with his recent memoir, "**Life on Planet Rock**" which allowed me into the inner workings and mind of **Axl Rose**. Aside from long time confidant **Del James** and former **GNR** manager **Doug Goldstein**, I'm not sure if anyone else really understood **Axl** as much. However, I must admit to proofing and assisting with the book and being mystified by the stories and thought process of the legendary front man, yet after seeing the drive and determination with which he put forth during these opening numbers, I can now say that I get it. **Axl** is a true rock n' roll renegade that will do things on his own time and his own way. How else could he pull off two national tours without a new record in stores? From a business perspective, it makes no sense to tour without a new album and this is the third time **Guns N' Roses** has done this ('91, '02 and '06) in their career.

The long awaited "Chinese Democracy" is still not on any release schedule, but it did not stop him from performing five songs from the album. "Chinese Democracy" and "IRS" are reminiscent of how one could imagine **GNR** in the 21st Century. "The Blues" and "Madagascar" were moody ballads, the latter of which bore images of political uprisings from the 60's on the screen behind **Axl** when performed. However, there is one new song that stood apart from the rest; "Better". A bootleg of this track leaked earlier this year and I will say that it is on par with anything **Axl Rose** has ever created. This triumphant composition is a cinematic poem filled with fuming guitars and perfectly textured harmonies. When one hears a song like "Better", you realize the potential that "Chinese Democracy" holds. But until it is released, we'll have to be content with the concert experience.

As **Robin** ended his solo and launched into "Sweet Child O' Mine", the crowd responded with a response so magnetic, one had to see it to believe it. I'm not sure if there is an album from the last twenty-five years that still continues to grow, develop and resonate more than "Appetite For Destruction". Not only do people know every word to the singles, but they know every word to all twelve compositions. Most shockingly, the new band performed these songs to perfection as if they have been performing them for decades. The seductive power with which they were delivered to the audience was hypnotic. Something I didn't expect to see, nor did I want to see, was a band who made this material their own and this current incarnation did just that. What the current band lacks in history they more than make up for in their resolve and willpower.

While these performers took these songs to soaring heights, **Axl Rose** covered every foot of the stage and sprinted across it as if it were 1988 not showing his age at all. There have been numerous articles over the years that feel that **Axl** mistreats his fans with constant delays, late start times, and cancellations...but after assisting **Lonn Friend** with his memoir and now witnessing this show, I don't believe that is the case. The truth is that **Axl Rose** hits that stage planning on giving the audience his all and draining every last ounce of sanity from himself in the process as well. He views the concert stage as his work desk and when people distract him with fights up front, unnecessary shoving and flashes going off, he sees these people as interrupting his job and wants them removed so he can continue to give the rest of the audience his complete and total focus. **Axl Rose** is attempting to accomplish the impossible and even though the task of rebuilding **GNR** is maybe the most daunting task ever done in the annals of rock, there is no mountain **Axl** will not climb to bring his vision to reality, no matter how long it takes.

As the evening continued, there were intermittent solos between suites of songs by assorted members of the band. Keyboardist **Dizzy Reed**, the only member to continually stand shoulder to shoulder with **Axl** over the last fifteen years, had the evening's most sublime moment with a piano led solo of "While My Guitar Gently Weeps". **Reed's** playing was so dead on and inspirational that photographer Rob Grabowski commented to me that it was the highlight of the show for him. Something people tend to forget and overlook is that **Dizzy Reed** joined the band during the recording of the "Use Your Illusion" albums. He is the only member left from that era who is still in the band and after seeing his solo, I'm glad he stood by **Axl's** side as he brings not only musical aptitude but history with him as well. Guitarist **Richard Fortus** performed "A Winter Shade of Pale" during his solo and the unbelievably gifted guitarist Bumblefoot performed the complete elegiac "Don't Cry" instrumental to roars of approval. Many have criticized these solos as being unnecessary and long, however, I see them as giving these unknown musicians a chance to shine. Besides, these are more than just instrumentals; they are extended jams that are virtually songs within themselves and are anything but meandering and without purpose. The eighteen-song set had a total of eight songs performed off "Appetite" (including a vicious "My Michelle" with a guest appearance with **Sebastian Bach**), one from "Lies" (a reliable "Patience"), four from the "Use Your Illusion" albums (including a soaring "November Rain") and five from the still unreleased "Chinese Democracy" (with the aforementioned future classic "Better").

I'll be the first to admit it was eerie seeing the non-classic line up of **Guns N' Roses** perform these songs, however, they were delivered to the Chicago audience with romantic sincerity as if the evening was an epic love poem delivered by an eight-piece band. What impressed was not the sentimental essence of these songs but the overall esoteric nature of the evening. The context with

which these songs were written and recorded will never be erased. Yet, these songs still speak volumes to the here and now and **Axl** is bringing them to the crowd not because of nostalgia, but because he has something to prove. When you want to see truly incendiary performances, there is nothing greater than seeing an artist who has something to prove. In the same building, once known as the Rosemont Horizon, I saw **Jon Bon Jovi** leave a pint of blood on this stage in 1993 and again in 2000 wanting to prove the naysayers wrong as he tore through two of the longest and wildest shows of his career. I've never forgotten those shows because he had something to prove. I'm not sure if I've seen another artist of **Bon Jovi's** stature fight as hard until now with **Axl**. The critics can go ahead and flame him if they want, they just don't get it. With few exceptions, I haven't seen a club act give this much of their body, mind and sanity. Will the new incarnation gauge the emotional weight of their predecessors? Only time will tell, but in the meantime, they out there rocking their hearts out with a vigor and resilience I doubt you will even see from the most driven club act. Getting used to this incarnation will come with time...and a little patience.

Review by Anthony Kuzminski of AntiMusic.com

November 24, 2006

KISS - "Alive! 1975-2000"

The Island Def Jam Music Group

KISS fans won't want to miss picking up **KISS "Alive! 1975-2000,"** the new 4-CD set from **The Island Def Jam Music Group**. In addition to featuring remastered versions of **KISS'** first three live albums, the box set includes "**The Millenium Concert**" on CD for the first time ever. Originally slated for release in 2001 as **KISS "Alive IV,"** this recording is the first full-length live album since 1977 to feature original **KISS** members **Paul Stanley, Gene Simmons, Ace Frehley, and Peter Criss.**

Summary: This reasonably priced package is a must for all hardcore **KISS** fans, and it is a great representation of **KISS'** live material for the casual fan of rock and metal.

Stand Out Tracks: "Deuce," "Into The Void," "Lick It Up"

Review by John Ostronomy

November 8, 2006

THE HAUNTED - "The Dead Eye"


Century Media

The Haunted are a five-piece band that hail from Sweden. Their latest release for **Century Media**, "**The Dead Eye**," is an amazing journey to the dark side of rock. I highly recommend you buy this album. "**The Dead Eye**" could be considered extreme metal with strong classic, thrash, gothic, and doom metal influences that ring strong in it's overall sound. I think these guys have an original thing going on. Vocalist, **Peter Dolving**, has a strong aggressive voice that attacks you without ever really going into the death metal growl that dominates so many of the extreme metal bands today. The album is a perfect listen all the way through with a constant musical thread that tends to complete it and makes it feel whole. This is a refreshing element in the day of single song iTunes downloads. Nowadays, most bands have forgotten the definition of an album, but **The Haunted** is not one of them. That is not to say you can't enjoy just one song on its own either. On "**The Dead Eye**," **The Haunted** prove their extreme power with well-crafted melodic songs that are miles ahead of their peers. Listen to this album, and hear the future of contemporary metal. Now, all they need is a couple of guitar solos. Whether you like **The Absence, Opeth, Mastodon, old school Metallica,** or Hell, even **Nine Inch Nails,** chances are that you are going to really dig **The Haunted's "The Dead Eye."**

Summary: Great pure metal darkness with no cheese.

Stand Out Tracks: "The Flood," "The Crowning," "The Reflection," "The Medusa," "The Guilt Trip," "The Prosecution"

Review by Mark Strigl



April 5, 2006

KILL CHEERLEADER - "All Hail"

Spinerazor Records/Corporate Punishment

Members: Ethan Deth (v/b), Tony's War (v/g), Chad MacKinnon (g) and Kriss Rites (d).
Produced by Jordon Zadoronzy and Kill Cheerleader

If you like old **GN'R**, the first **Motley** record, **Iggy Pop**, **Dead Boys**, **Motorhead**, and **Turbonegro**...these guys will be right up your alley...**Kill Cheerleader**. I would call them Punk Metal Sneeze Rock. The songs on this CD really blow me away!!! [Get it](#) now.

*Review by **Mark Strigl***

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