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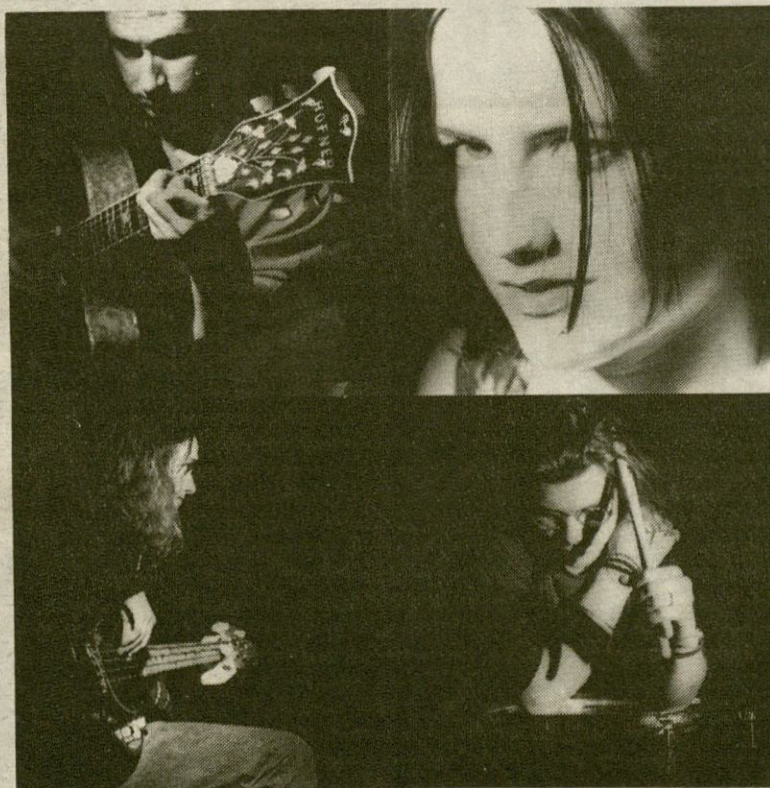
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GUN SHY

When he quit Guns N' Roses, most folks thought **IZZY STRADLIN** must have lost his marbles to turn his back on all that fame and fortune. But, he explains to **CAROL CLERK**, he needed the break to save his sanity and now he's healthy and happy with his Ju Ju Hounds. **Pics: PHIL NICHOLLS**

IZZY STRADLIN SITS BY THE window of a darkening hotel room, staring out over the Parisian graveyard where Jim Morrison rests in peace. He's motionless except for the regular, languorous hand-to-mouth movement of the chain-smoker.

"The first thing I spotted when I came here yesterday was somebody scoring drugs, just down the street," he remarks in a calm, gentle voice. "I'm the first one to notice things like that. I know the way the whole thing works."

Old habits die hard: to say that Izzy once liked his chemicals would be something like suggesting Oliver Reed, perhaps, might be fond of the odd Babycham.

Izzy, in his day, was "borderline-alive, borderline-not-alive". He was smacked out of his head. He had a cocaine-fashioned hole in his nose, wide enough to put a ring through.

And he had another problem, too. He was in Guns N' Roses. Today, Izzy Stradlin is a different man. He's clean as a whistle, teetotal with it, and his nose has healed.

An unassuming, almost scruffy, character with dreads, he has rejected the grandeur, the luxury and the attendant misery of his former superstardom to return to the road, the clubs, the run-of-the-mill hotels and the back-to-basics rock 'n' roll which first fired his imagination.

"It's not about being this or that, it's not about making a huge video, and it's not about selling records, although that would be nice," he declares.

"It's about being a band and just rocking out, playing music as good as you can, and maybe getting to travel around the world if you're lucky. If you're real lucky, people like it."

WHEN Izzy left Guns N' Roses around a year ago, he had no plans other than to enjoy the crisp October air and the glorious autumn colours of his homestate, Indiana. He spent seven or eight hours a day riding motorbikes over obstacle courses and competed in trials events at weekends. He didn't think of a guitar, never mind pick one up, until the winter came. "The grey clouds were

relentless," he recalls. "It was so cold. And one day I just pulled out my eight-track, a couple of guitars and a drum set, and started hammering out some songs." An album's worth later, he called up an old friend, bassist Jimmy Ashhurst, a well-known LA character and a founder member of the city's rock 'n' roll scene with Broken Homes, who'd scored a record deal before Guns N' Roses managed it.

'I knew that I couldn't afford to f*** up any more. I'd used up all my 'Get Out Of Jail Free' cards'

Finding Jimmy in-between bands, Izzy flew right over to Hollywood and, with the help of Ashhurst's legendary phone book, recruited two more people: guitarist Rick Richards, the former Georgia Satellite, and drummer Charlie Quintana, who'd drummed with the likes of Bob Dylan.

Enter vocalist/guitarist Izzy Stradlin and his new band, The Ju Ju Hounds, arriving in London this week to promote the release of the said, self-titled LP.

It's a most informal affair, this album. It's the sound of people making music for their own

entertainment rather than the satisfaction of audience, record company or critical expectation. It's the sound of people being fans, not figureheads. And it's the sound of Izzy Stradlin sticking one musical middle finger up the grand extravagances of his former colleagues.

THEY were called the most dangerous band in the world. In fact, they had become, and still are, a circus, a travelling freak show.

Back in October 1989, Guns N' Roses were out of control. On the morning of their first Los Angeles gig supporting their heroes, The Rolling Stones, Axl Rose decided to leave the band in a fit of what Izzy, with typical understatement, describes as "bad timing". Then immediately changing his

mind, Axl turned up for the gig and announced onstage that the group were splitting up because certain people were dancing with "Mr Brownstone" — an apparent reference to Slash's heroin habit.

"I don't think it helps by ridiculing somebody onstage in front of 50,000 people," reasons Izzy. "It would probably have been much more effective talking one to one."

Izzy himself had been hitting the headlines around the same time, getting banged up in a Phoenix jail after being arrested for his intamous piss in the aisle of an LA-bound plane — an episode which resulted in his third period on probation.

Shortly afterwards, he retreated to Indiana to withdraw from drugs.

"They were doing me in," he admits. "I felt like shit all the time. I went to somewhere I knew I couldn't score, I had some Codeine with me and a few Valium to take the edge off, and I basically sweated it out. I made it through the 72-hour period, but then I started drinking like a fish."

"I gave that up as well a couple of months later. I've been told that alcohol's no good for American-Indian blood, which I've got in me. Alcohol really does f*** me up. It makes me crazy. I become impossible to deal with."

"I knew that I couldn't afford to f*** up any more. I'd used up all my 'Get Out Of Jail Free' cards."

And so the drink-free, drug-free Izzy Stradlin reported back for active duty with the excess express which was Guns

N' Roses. He stuck it out, amazingly enough, for another couple of years. "I didn't miss using drugs," he insists. "I'd been used to living with them. But I'd gone through many problems in my life trying to stop, and when I started learning how to get along without them, I felt glad to be free of all the bullshit that went along with it — the scoring, the rip-offs, the bad drugs, the day-to-day hassle."

Was it not, nevertheless, isolating to be in the middle of a massively "unpredictable" touring operation like Guns N' Roses as a stone-cold-sober individual?

"No," says Izzy, lighting another duty-free. "I'd spend an hour at a soundcheck and two hours playing, and that still gave me 21 hours of my own where I didn't have to get caught up in it all. I created a life outside the arena, which was where I went to do my work. I would leave the arena right after a gig, stop somewhere, and get something to eat at a restaurant."

"We were usually all in the same hotel, but I'd wake up early and I'd go out and do something before the soundcheck, which normally I wouldn't have been doing. I had my dog, a German Shepherd, on tour with me in the States, and I took him out in the mornings. Then I'd be riding a motorcycle or a bike, skateboarding or walking round town, not to cop or score but just to look at the scenery."

And while he was looking at the scenery, Izzy took a long, hard stare at the band he was in, its irresponsibility and its remoteness from its own raison d'être.

"I knew deep inside that it didn't feel right. I didn't understand any more what was happening, or what direction it was taking."

After a final showdown in Los Angeles, he quit.

THE Izzy who comfortably lounges in front of me now cannot stress often enough how happy, relaxed and relieved he is to be out of the pantomime at last. He's convincingly at peace, genuinely excited to be back in the hurly-burly of the real world.

The album bears testament to this. It wears its heart very obviously on its sleeve, and in an endearingly haphazard way — the guest stars ranging from reggae's Mikey Dread to the ubiquitous session keyboard player Nicky Hopkins. However, Izzy pays his most generous tribute to the good-time raunch 'n' roll of the Stones and the Faces — re-presented, from one camp, by guest pianist Ian McLagan (Faces) and from both camps by Ronnie "funny-as-shit, absolutely-hilarious" Wood, who duets and plays guitar on a cover of one of his own songs, the honky-tonk "Take A Look At The Guy".

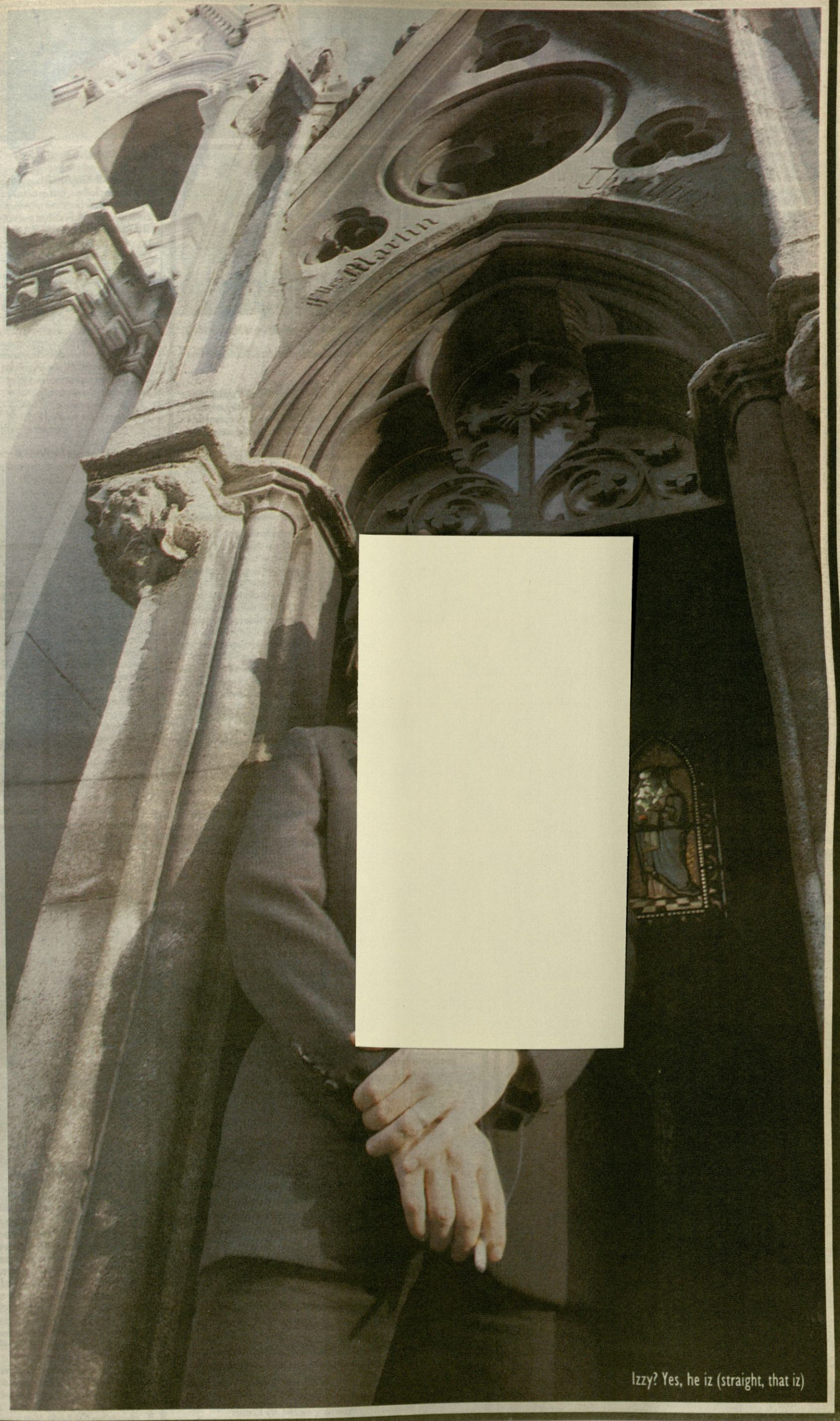
Elsewhere, there's a bitter-sweet ballad, "How Will It Go", the hell-for-metal "Bucket O' Trouble", and a most peculiar cover of Toots And The Maytals' "Pressure Drop" — the first UK release from Izzy's album and the title track of the current EP. This finds the Ju Ju Hounds belting out an unrecognisably heads-down version of the song, with a tiny portion of the original reggae treatment stitched on to the end.

"Coming out of a band like Guns N' Roses, a lot of people aren't going to have too much of an idea what we're going to sound like," concedes Izzy. "This LP has a big mix of styles and a lot of influences — older rock 'n' roll, punk, reggae and all the blues I listen to."

"At the same time, I think the songs fit together because the chord structures and melodies are all pretty basic, and we were able to have fun and keep everything as live as we could in the studio without messing it up trying to complicate it."

It speaks volumes for Izzy Stradlin's previous experiences that when you ask what would constitute success for him now, he offers one instant and absolutely earnest answer: "Just not being late for gigs."

Izzy Stradlin And The Ju Ju Hounds play the London Mean Fiddler on October 9. They release their album through Geffen three days later



Izzy? Yes, he iz (straight, that iz)