

All Back to Vinyl with Guns N' Roses

Guns N' Roses Use Your Illusion I and II.

The anticipation ahead of Guns N' Roses double release of Use Your Illusion I and II in September 1991 shouldn't be underestimated. The band had built an early following in Britain when they visited to play the Marquee in June 1987.

Released in late July their debut Appetite For Destruction found an audience early through word of mouth around the U.K.'s rock and punk scene. I was ten when my uncle first put the record on the turntable of this then-new band he'd read about in Hit Parader magazine. Their look referenced the likes of New York Dolls and Hanoi Rocks but they had a style and sensibility all of their own.

A few months later Terry set off to see the band in Newcastle City Hall. Fast forward a few years and I was on my way to see that band and stay at my Uncle T's in north London. In four years Guns N' Roses had gone from the Marquee to selling out Wembley Stadium. Appetite For Destruction, now regarded as a classic album was back then an authentic snap-shot of LA street life telling the story of five 'live-fast-die-young rock n' rollers' who would become known as the most dangerous band in the world.

It's often been suggested that the Use Your Illusion albums should have been a single long-player. Yes, it could have been leaner but there's much to feast on this new vinyl release. Vinyl in the early 90s was of poor quality and so a 2LP 180-gram pressing of each album is a welcome improvement. Each

release is also housed in an impressive gatefold sleeve.

The creative alchemy that was a boon to the band's early years produced an abundance of definitive songs. Not all of them could fit on Appetite, so with bigger production values, some appeared here. Civil War, a song that feels even more relevant in the aftermath of President Trump, was the only track to feature original drummer Steven Adler and with his departure Guns N' Roses became a different band. Matt Sorum filled a similar role to Alan White in Oasis after Tony McCarroll's exit but as Tony pointed out, 'change the drummer, change the band'.

The Illusion albums were also an important last gasp for founder member and guitarist Izzy Stradlin, in many ways the heartbeat of G N' R. 14 Years, co-written with Axl Rose was said to be about the pair's working relationship. The likes of this and Dust N' Bones were Stradlin at his Keef N' Ronnie best bringing the original ideas of these songs to the band and performing lead vocals. There's a version of Dust N' Bones on the CD version from Wembley in 1991 which is a standout. A Lenny Kravitz appearance with GN'R for a version of his track Always On The Run is also worth looking out for, his chemistry with Slash is undeniable. We're all familiar with the big hits from the albums such as November Rain and a cover of Live And Let Die, the former has the addition of a 'real orchestra' but for my money Guns N' Roses shine brightest on the likes of Don't Damn Me with Axl doing a bit of a Van Morrison having a pop at the press.

Strangely it's the only song throughout the two albums not to have been played live by the band. The killer high-speed riff and Stones-sounding bridge are GN'R at their best and it stands up well more than three decades on with a memorable solo from Slash. Duff's, So Fine from Illusion II nods to Johnny Thunders, Rose and McKagan's voices sound fantastic together on the track. Duff fronting on The Misfits Attitude is another thrash-punk workout on the extras. The albums still

come with a warning Parental Advisory sticker, reminding us that Guns N' Roses were not for the faint-hearted or thin-skinned. The album has no shortage of epics perhaps the finest is Rose's Coma.

The best work is where G N'R get into a groove on the likes of Locomotive and You Could Be Mine, the later soundtracking Terminator 2. Both tracks provide some evidence that Illusion 2 is the stronger collection. While we hear a lot about Britpop and Grunge, the 90s began with these two albums dominating the culture. Guns N Roses return to London for a show at Hyde Park, and it is hoped they will honour their Scottish fans with a rescheduled date in Glasgow for a concert they have been waiting on for years.

Use Your Illusion I and II are out now



