

## Guns N' Roses - Use Your Illusion II (1991)

Written by bluesever

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## Guns N' Roses - Use Your Illusion II (1991)



1. "Civil War" (Axl Rose, Slash, Duff McKagan)
2. "14 Years" (Rose, Izzy Stradlin)
3. "Yesterdays" (Rose, West Arkeen, Del James, Billy McCloud)
4. "Knockin' on Heaven's Door" (Bob Dylan) [play](#)
5. "Get in the Ring" (Rose, Slash, McKagan)
6. "Shotgun Blues" (Rose)
7. "Breakdown" (Rose)
8. "Pretty Tied Up" (Stradlin)
9. "Locomotive" (Rose, Slash)
10. "So Fine" (McKagan) [play](#)
11. "Estranged" (Rose)
12. "You Could Be Mine" (Rose, Stradlin)
13. "Don't Cry (Alternate Lyrics)" (Rose, Stradlin)
14. "My World" (Rose)

### Personnel:

Axl Rose - lead vocals, piano

Slash - lead guitar

Izzy Stradlin - rhythm guitar, backing vocals, lead vocals (track 2)

Duff McKagan - bass, backing vocals, lead vocals (track 10)

Matt Sorum - drums, percussion

Dizzy Reed - piano, organ, keyboards, backing vocals

Steven Adler - drums, percussion (track 1)

Howard Teman - piano (track 10)

Shannon Hoon - vocals (track 13)

Johann Langlie - keyboards, drums and sound effects (all in track 14)

Josh Richman - speech (track 4)

The Waters - backing vocals (track 4)

When Guns n' Roses recorded their major-label debut in 1987, after a few years of slogging in L.A. clubs, they titled it *Appetite for Destruction*. It was a proclamation that they would rail against and knock down anything that stood in their way; it would become a banner adopted by millions who wanted to turn their dead-end street into a freeway. Four years later, when the band is closer to its destination than its members ever had any right to expect, Guns n' Roses release two follow-up albums: *Use Your Illusion I* and *II*. The title is a confession; now that the physical barriers are gone and nothing stands in their way except maybe their own myth, they've got to set their sights on something less tangible. "Old at heart," Axl Rose sings on "Estranged," from *II*, "but I'm only twenty-eight." Like Aerosmith in the classic "Dream On," they realize that to go on, you've got to have faith. During the fifty-three and a half minutes of *Appetite*, the guitars antagonized, the drums slammed, and Axl howled about their savage lifestyle, the perils of drugs, the glory of booze, dreaming of Eden, wide-eyed romantic love, their oppressors and sex. Old-fashioned rock & roll stuff, it proved they were hard; it proved they were bad; it proved that metal could rise again; it sold 14 million copies and remained on the charts for three years. During the seventy-five and a half minutes of *Use Your Illusion II*, the guitars antagonize, though now with more dexterity, varying in tempo and mood; the drums slam, though now at the hands of new band member Matt Sorum; and Axl of course howls, but he also whispers, croons, talk-sings and plays piano like he did back in Indiana, up in his room, idolizing Elton John. In the four years that have passed since Guns n' Roses first combined opposing symbols and upset the apple cart with willful disregard for rock & roll legend, interest in the band hasn't waned: 18,000 people will actually wait for them to come out onstage two hours late; the single "You Could Be Mine," off *II* and featured in *Terminator 2*, has sold nearly 2 million copies; and the band's slightest misstep becomes controversy and turns established magazines and newspapers into veritable Guns n' Roses fanzines. No wonder they take themselves so seriously.

With *Use Your Illusion II*, the band rewards the loyal legions – with fourteen songs, which range from ballad to battle, pretty to vulgar, worldly to incredibly naive. The seven-minute power ballad "Civil War," which opens the album (and which previously appeared on the Romanian orphan-relief album *Nobody's Child*), begins with fingers studiously squeaking on acoustic-guitar strings and a few lines of dialogue from Cool Hand Luke, then drops the band's characteristic patriotism for amplified rage and a sober look at political deceit: "So I never fell for Vietnam/We got the wall of D.C. to remind us all/That you can't trust freedom when it's not in your hands." Because the band is reaching beyond its own experience on this song, Axl's question "What's so civil 'bout war, anyway?" – backed by thunderclaps and rainfall – is almost excusable. The outstanding cover of Bob Dylan's "Knockin' on Heaven's Door" is epic, beautiful and heartfelt, with little flourishes like guns cocking behind the obvious verse ("Mama put my guns in the ground/I can't shoot them anymore") and Axl wailing as only Axl does, through his discolored teeth, turning vowels into primitive cries of pain or resolve. Quite a few songs mine the territory of love gone awry: the spiteful "14 Years," the disillusioned "Locomotive," the lonely (and very long) "Estranged" and the bittersweet "Don't Cry" (a different version from the one that appears on *I*), which is chapter 2 of "Sweet Child o' Mine," the song that, at least in the summer

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of '88, bridged the distance between rural route and urban drawing room. The clunkers on II are "Shotgun Blues," a sonic assault with surprisingly little impact, and "Get in the Ring," which challenges the band's detractors by name but basically hits below the belt. On Appetite it was "Feel my serpentine"; on Illusion II it's "Suck my fuckin' dick" – meant in a different spirit, yes, but it's beneath them just the same. Axl Rose has stopped teasing his hair, taken a few of the chains off his cowboy boots, left the pink lipstick to Skid Row's Sebastian Bach and gotten a bit of perspective. So he shouldn't be bothered by his critics, because even with years of practice, no one has come close to that snaky dance of his, that dance that whips victimization, menace and struggle into one fluid, triumphant motion. --Rolling Stone Reviews

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