

Hey, hey, Mr. Ju Ju Man



Where Izzy now? Back in Lafayette.

By DAVE BANGERT
Journal and Courier

Four years ago, when former Guns n' Roses guitarist Izzy Stradlin moved back to Lafayette, he pitched the tent of a virtual hometown show.

His historic two-story brick house, built in 1854 in Federal Revival style, became the sightseeing mecca of the season, directly connected to Guns n' Roses, the biggest rock 'n' roll carnival going at the time.

Everybody wanted a piece of the action.

"Actually, I figured I'd get a little peace out there," Stradlin says, kind of laughing now. "At first when I came back, it was really crazy. A lot of people going by the house, by my mom's house, knocking on the doors real late at night and all that stuff. I was like, 'this is no good.'

"I think the initial surprise of, 'Wow, he's back in town, kind of thing got people going. Now I think everybody's like, 'Ahh, it's that guy.' Everything's cool."

No small shakes for Lafayette, a town so recently so sensitive about its rock 'n' roll image, as taught in the Axl Rose lead singer school of hometown roots disavowal.

Even during the biggest rush on his garbage bags, Stradlin says his new digs east of town were sanctuary from Guns n' Roses' exploding popularity and image. Away from videos. Away from the big hype.

Away from everything that made him finally quit Guns n' Roses.

"Away from just the insanity of Los Angeles," Stradlin starts. "I'd been out there for six years

trying to get a band together that we could work and try to make a living off of. It's six years of living in your car, sleeping on couches, sleeping wherever you can, no money for food.

"By the time we left L.A., we were the least-likely-to-succeed band. We came back a year-and-a-half later and all of a sudden everybody loved us. I was like, screw this. I want to go back to Lafayette and get myself together and take a break and just look around."

Settling into a Lafayette homestead on County Road 200 North, he beat drugs and alcohol. He hung out with his German shepherd, Treader. He rode motorcycles with his brother and got together with old friends. He saw his family.

"These were guys I hadn't seen for years," he says. "We hooked up and it was just good to get back home, see people, see family. It wasn't quite as insane."

It was insanity that built up in the whole Guns n' Roses road show that Stradlin didn't figure on when he loaded his clothes, drum kit and record collection into his 1970 Chevy Impala the summer of 1980.

He left town shortly after graduating from Jefferson High School. A kid named Jeff Isbell from southern Lafayette, he grew up splitting his time skateboarding and riding dirt bikes on trails behind Mary Lou Donuts on Fourth Street and on land south of town now dedicated to housing developments like the Brick-N-Wood subdivision.

"I never really thought about coming back or not," says Stradlin,

a better drummer than guitarist in high school.

"You know, I'm 18 years old. I never thought too far ahead. I've got enough money for gas and I got all my stuff. I'm going to get in a band and maybe check out the beach and get some sun."

After knocking around the West Coast for about a year, he invited former classmate Bill Bailey to come out.

"We tried to put together a band back in Lafayette in the early days," Stradlin says, "and nothing came of it, unfortunately."

He picked up the name Izzy Stradlin. Bailey chose W. Axl Rose and became a most vocal mouthpiece for a band that would become a rock icon. Guns n' Roses' 1988 major debut, *Appetite for Destruction*, and a 1989 followup, *E.P. Lies*, sold more than 10 million copies.

Stradlin, while taking a sideman role as rhythm guitarist on stage, wrote a good chunk of the band's memorable material, including "Patience," "Mr. Brownstone" and "Double Talkin' Jive." That last song appeared, along with one on the *Use Your Illusion* twin discs, which came out in September 1991.

That, he says, is about the same time the boyhood friendship between Stradlin and Rose started to unravel.

"It was the last tour that was the beginning of the end for me," Stradlin says, referring to a tour that made a two-day stop at Deer Creek in Noblesville in May 1991.

"We were having a lot of trouble. And I was just growing tired of it. We'd finished up the tour. We'd done America and we'd done Europe and it was time to do videos."

Stradlin already steered clear of Guns n' Roses extracurriculars beyond recording and performing. He traveled in his own tour bus. He skipped a video shoot for "You Will Be Mine" for the *Terminator 2* soundtrack. And a sign that asked, "Where's Izzy?" appeared in the "Don't Cry" video.

"I'm just not into the big production videos," Stradlin says. "I like to keep it real simple, which it wasn't any more with Guns."

Stradlin says he started to chafe under Axl Rose's growing clout and lone gun leadership in the band as the *Use Your Illusion* discs were released. He says he was tired of the



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Photo illustration by James Jackson/Journal and Courier

Izzy Stradlin and the Ju Ju Hounds is (from left): Jimmy Ashhurst, Izzy Stradlin, Rick Richards and Charlie Quintana.

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band going on as much as three hours late for shows. He was tired of the junk falling out of the riotous show in St. Louis that summer. He was tired of being left out of band decisions.

Stradlin wanted less insanity.

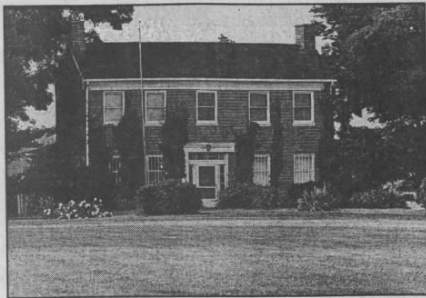
"It just got to the point that Axl, he was going to run the show. He was going to run Guns n' Roses. I just decided I wasn't going to be part of it, that I was going to go off and do whatever. I thought about coming back and planting some acreage," he adds, laughing.

"It was about that time that we had some long discussions. I went back out to L.A. and hooked up and had a rehearsal and talked to the guys. Things didn't feel right. I just decided I was going to say goodbye and wish them well."

A few days before Thanksgiving 1991, Axl Rose announced that Stradlin was out of the band. Gilby Clarke would be the new Guns n' Roses rhythm guitarist.

Stradlin claims there is no animosity in the deal.

"There still is none on my part," he says, adding that he



File photo

Rocker Izzy Stradlin has settled into this Lafayette home on County Road 200 North.

doesn't hear much from his former band mates. "For them, there might have been initially when I left. But I'm sure it's like anything else. Life goes on and you gotta carry on."

He came back to Lafayette to clear his head. He rode his dirt bikes over obstacle courses and his '88 Harley Davidson low rider on the highway. And he tried to figure out what you do after you drop out of a multi-

million-dollar operation like Guns n' Roses.

Stradlin invited Jimmy Ashhurst, a bass player friend from Los Angeles, to come to Lafayette and work with him on some new material. The two eventually recruited former Georgia Satellite guitarist Rick Richards and Bob Dylan's rock drummer, Charlie Quintana.

The four became Izzy Stradlin and the Ju Ju Hounds, a

FYI

Izzy Stradlin and the Ju Ju Hounds play 8:30 p.m. Tuesday at the Vogue, 6259 N. College Ave., Indianapolis. Tickets: \$18 in advance, \$20 the day of the show, available at TicketMaster outlets or by calling 743-5151.

strapping, straight-forward guitar band that puts equal emphasis on Rolling Stones savvy and Guns n' Roses overdrive.

Stradlin filled the band's impressive self-titled record, released in October, with references to hanging out along Lafayette's train tracks as a kid and moving along in general.

"The first gig we did was up in Chicago — our first actual one as the Ju Ju Hounds," he remembers back to a September club date intended as a warmup for an overseas tour. "The record was recorded and all the rest of it. Now's the real deal.

"As soon as we hit the stage, man, it was such a good response from the audience. They were so cool. I said then, man,



Before Izzy ... Jeff Isbell
As he appeared in 1978

we've got nothing to worry about."

The Ju Ju Hounds are back touring clubs. And for the first time since Guns n' Roses' early days in Los Angeles, Stradlin's out of the stadiums and back in the low-key setting he wanted all along.

"You can see the whites of their eyes again," he says. "I'm happy because it's a great band. No regrets at all. The more we play, the better it gets.

"Of course, it's not quite as insane any more."