

# Cover: 'As close to real thing as possible'



DAVID BEBEE, RECORD STAFF  
André Clouthier, lead singer of Steely Dan cover band Stealing Dan, belts out a tune during a performance at the Starlight in Waterloo.

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"Stealing Dan is an appropriate name," Clouthier said. "Steely Dan did all the work, and we're just stealing it."  
Which suits fan Andy Clements fine. "I think they're just awesome," he yells over the band's first song. "Almost as good as the real thing."

Vegas Axl has been singing cover tunes since before he was Vegas Axl. But that's the name he goes by now, and that's the persona he exudes — or imitates — as front man of Gunz N'FN' Rosez, a tribute to '80s metal giants Guns N' Roses, or GNR.

"The biggest compliment anyone can pay me is to say I look and sound just like Axl Rose," he said before a Saturday show at the Fiddler's Green. "We want to get as close to the real thing as possible."

Vegas Axl (who was given the moniker by Howard Stern during an appearance on the shock-jock's show a few years ago) started singing classic rock covers when he was in Grade 8.

He went on to form a Deep Purple clone act called Perfect Strangers, before discovering that he could do something most singer's couldn't — imitate the gravelly, squealing vocals that made hits of GNR songs like Welcome to the Jungle and Sweet Child of Mine.

For the past seven years, he and GNF'NR have been touring clubs as far away as the Middle East.

The band is now rounded out by guitarist (and Slash clone) Lenny Gee, bassist Nick Cazz and Drummer Jay Fleming, but Vegas Axl is the only remaining member of the 1999 line-up.

For years, while the real Guns N' Roses was on extended hiatus, GNF'NR provided the only way to hear the songs live. Recently, however, Axl Rose has launched a new incarnation of the band and set out on an arena tour.

"It's good that they're getting the name out there again," Vegas Axl says.

The real band even contacted the cover band — a letter from GNR's lawyers insisted the tribute act remove a song from its website.

Vegas Axl sees the bright side: "At least they know about us."

Tribute acts are sometimes derided — often by the original bands themselves — for merely mimicking someone else's songs for a quick buck.

Vegas Axl balks at the notion. The singer says his band, like all good tribute acts, is just playing songs that audiences want to hear.

"If it's done right, it shouldn't matter if it's the original band or a tribute," he says. "If it's live and it's good, there's a real connection with the people, and nothing compares to that."  
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