

I wanna ROCK

'80s bands give Pryor crowd just what it wants

By **Matt Elliott**
World Scene Writer

PRYOR — Twenty years ago, many of Rocklahoma's bands were filling stadiums. Their videos were on MTV. Their songs were on the radio.

Now, their songs are heard on classic radio stations and even if they've got any new material, you'd have to look to find it. Many of them, with the exception of Poison, are lucky if they sell out a 3,000-capacity club.

But at Rocklahoma, organizers were expecting about 30,000 people a day to show up, and by Saturday night, the outdoor venue was packed wall to wall with fans. The shredding guitar solos blasted across the grounds. The thudding bass lines shook the earth.

The festival, which concluded Sunday with Twisted Sister's performance, brought a preening horde of Los Angeles glitz to Pryor that sometimes wasn't what it used to be.

Thursday's shows included the raucous American debut of the English rock act, the Gypsy Pistoleros, while also featuring cover bands Hollywood Roses and KISS Army. A celebrity jam session with Tracii Guns, of L.A. Guns, and former Guns N' Roses drummer Steven Adler entertained the crowd but featured few surprises.

The group played the same GNR hits the crowd heard hours before from the cover band, Hollywood Roses, and Guns played a couple of ho-hum versions of the same Jimi Hendrix songs everyone does, including "Red House," "Purple Haze" and "Little Wing."

But Friday came and the lineup took off with the Greg Leon Invasion, a deft performance by White Lion, Y & T and Slaughter. The rains that marred the start of the festival had subsided, leaving in their stead a blistering heat and some festering mud holes out in the grassy general admission area.

As the sun went down, one-hit-wonder Quiet Riot took over, clearing the way for one of the more anticipated shows of the night, Ratt, with original vocalist Stephen Pearcy and guitarist Warren DeMartini.

Roadies milled about on stage, moving gear here and there. The crowd cheered as a huge "RATT"

banner rose up from behind the stacks of amplifiers and the drum riser to suspend from the massive stage's ceiling.

Ratt's skewed sexuality and vibrant sound came through strong. DeMartini showed the audience why he was one of the best of his era, shredding out a dazzling array of solos that drove home "Back for More" and "You Think You're Tough."

The only weak spot during Ratt's set was a significant one. Pearcy's vocals sounded like he suffered from a bad cough. And with this kind of music, that doesn't go well with the band's slick sound and harmonies carrying its catchy choruses.

Pearcy's voice Friday killed what would've otherwise been strong cuts from the band's 1984 platinum debut, "Out Of the Cellar," including "Wanted Man."

Poison, which took the stage around midnight, showed its members may be a little worse for wear but can still at least put on a show. The band, minus the neon pinks and greens from 20 years ago, bounded out on stage for its first number, "Look What the Cat Dragged In," after film-style credits shone out from the huge projection screen, a fitting advance for the coming performance.

The show was exactly what you'd expect from Poison. It exuded the sex and excess that typifies the band's music. It was a low-brow performance (what would you expect from the authors of "I Want Action Tonight?"), from the songs to the topless women shaking their breasts on the massive projection screen.

Deafening jets of flame shot up from behind the stage as the band's frontman, Bret Michaels, rose up from under the stage. Michaels wiggled his hips with his left hand hooked into his pants waist as he sang, while guitarist C.C. DeVille, bassist Bobby Dall and drummer Ricki Rockett flailed away.

It seemed to be exactly what the fans wanted to see. They crowded into the aisles in front of the stage to snap pictures of the band, clasp hands briefly with frontman Michaels or just be as close as they could.

ery song, and laughed at every joke, but whenever Guthrie began to play, the crowd immediately fell into a reverent hush.

Even during Guthrie's most virtuosic moments — like in his newest original, "In Times Like These," when he played a solo on his six-string while simultaneously finger picking the accompaniment — the crowd didn't cheer.

Everyone remained silent, straining to hear every note.

Although Guthrie was only armed with an acoustic guitar — he switched between a six-string and a twelve-string all night — and a harmonica, his arrangements were anything but sparse.

Backing musicians would have only impaired the performance, taking away from Guthrie's intricate guitar playing and distinctive vocal delivery.

Since he was playing solo, Guthrie also had the freedom to play any song he wanted.

At times, he seemed to be simply playing songs off the top of his head, evoking the informal nature of the hootenannies at which his father once played.

A giant banner bearing Woody



STEPHEN HOLMAN / Tulsa World

The Tulsa band Down for Five is the second band to perform Saturday at Rocklahoma in Pryor.

DeVille, who left the band in early 1991 because of substance abuse problems, showed that despite those hard times, the man can still solo with the best of the guitarists assembled for the four-day festival.

Michaels drew an immediate connection with the fans, thanking them for sticking around to the wee hours of the morn. He called up a couple of Army guys in fatigues and some Marines who danced on stage with the band on the ballad, "Something to Believe In." Michaels, an acoustic guitar over his shoulder, strummed a few chords and dedicated the song to "all of our men and women in the armed forces kickin' a-- overseas."

"This is what we're fighting for right here," Michaels told the crowd.

Michaels didn't take the spotlight forever. After DeVille's extended guitar solo, he led the band through "I Hate Every Bone in Your Body but Mine," which showed the band's bright punk rock influence as well as its blue humor.

Poison didn't leave the stage until nearly 2 a.m. Saturday, until they played several songs off their new album of covers, "Poison'd," and trotted out the '80s rock staple ballad, "Every Rose Has Its Thorn," as well as "Talk Dirty to Me."

Saturday's list of performers had a tough act to follow. Oklahoma City's 36 Inches had the misfortune of taking the stage first, dressed like they'd watched too many Motley Crue videos, but proceeded to rock the nearly empty house despite sound problems.

Tulsa's Down for Five killed it after 36 Inches, and a few more fans had shaken off the last night's revelries to make it to their seats.

By the time Vince Neil came on around midnight, Firehouse, Warrant, Skid Row (minus Sebastian Bach), Bang Tango, BulletBoys, Enuff Z'Nuff, Winger and Dokken had given the audience a relentless drubbing of arena rock.

Dokken was one of the strongest performances of the night, cranking up the cheese factor with its songs such as "Dream Warriors" (from the film soundtrack to "Nightmare on Elm Street 3") and "Breaking the Chains." But somehow, it was hard not to like them when those now



JOY LEWIS / Tulsa World

Poison frontman Bret Michaels gestures to the crowd during Poison's late-night set Friday at Rocklahoma.

age-old clichés (ballads, big guitar solos, rock star singers) came from that stage.

Green lasers shot out from the stage and into the sky as Don Dokken lumbered lackadaisically across the stage in a white, long-sleeved shirt halfway unbuttoned but his band seemed more energetic.

The sound problems that came and went throughout Vince Neil's set later didn't seem to trouble Dokken and even though the band was without its virtuoso guitarist, George Lynch, they still rocked.

Neil, Motley Crue's frontman appearing as a solo artist, took the stage past midnight and the packed crowd stuck around to see what he had to offer. Neil, wearing a black tank top and tatted up like a biker, raced around the stage like a man possessed, but battled sound problems that troubled part of his set, at one point cursing a bizarre humming noise that could be heard when the band wasn't playing.

Neil struggled admirably through the sound problems, and like Poi-

son, played past 1 a.m., culling his material from Motley Crue's heyday. "Piece of Your Action," "Don't Go Away Mad (Just Go Away)," and "Same Ol' Situation" woke the crowd up.

But, Neil's performance of Motley Crue's gems from the albums "Too Fast for Love" and "Dr. Feelgood" had me wishing it was the Crue on stage. "Kickstart My Heart," the blistering track from "Feelgood" that symbolized the band's drive and excesses had me wishing that Nikki Sixx, Tommy Lee and Mick Mars were on stage instead.

Despite that, Rocklahoma's result has been that these bands can get back into a big venue and play before massive crowds as if their halcyon days never ended. And it usually sounded great. The festival reminded this reviewer and the audience that sometimes, music can be about the show and still be entertaining.

Matt Elliott 581-8366
matt.elliott@tulsa-world.com

Guthrie's intimate songs evoke reverence from fans

By **Max Porter**
World Staff Writer

OKEMAH — Arlo Guthrie hasn't toured solo in more than 40 years, but after his performance at the Woody Guthrie Folk Festival on Saturday night, it's hard to imagine why he would ever need a band.

"I'm starting this tour of just me. All my old friends, like David Crosby, were having reunion tours with their bands and I was feeling bad because I didn't ever have one," Guthrie joked from the stage.

Guthrie's appearance at the Okemah festival was the first date of his upcoming Solo Reunion Tour.

Guthrie played a stellar set of stripped-down acoustic folk songs, more than half of which he wrote, that was as intimate as the man is acclaimed.

Before every song, Guthrie would tune his guitar, crack jokes and tell stories.

He discussed his newest album, his father, the Iraq war, and the stories behind his songs (did you know that Arlo wrote "Highway In The Wind" after using hallucinogenic substances with legendary folk singer Ramblin' Jack Elliott?).

The audience applauded after ev-



JIM DIRDEN / For Tulsa World

Arlo Guthrie kicks off his Solo Reunion Tour at the Woody Guthrie Folk Festival in Okemah on Saturday. His tour will last through May 2008 with dates scheduled across Canada and the United States.

Guthrie's likeness hung on the outdoor 'Pastures of Plenty' stage behind Arlo, reminding everyone that Arlo was there to honor his father.

Guthrie even played two of his father's songs — the classic "I Ain't

Got No Home" and "My Peace," a song that Woody wrote while in the hospital and to which Arlo later added music.

"That song might've been written a long time ago, but it sure sounds

like it could've been written more recently," Guthrie said after performing "I Ain't Got No Home."

As it went on, Guthrie's performance began to feel more and more like a celebration, not just of Woody Guthrie's timeless songs, or of folk music, but of America's musical tradition and the power of music in general.

This culminated in an encore performance of Elvis Presley's "I Can't Help Falling in Love With You," which Guthrie preceded with a touching story about playing the song at a festival in Eastern Europe soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union while thousands sang along.

"I felt proud to come from a country where our songs are known and loved all over the world," Guthrie said.

So did everyone in the audience.

During a year when bands like The Police are putting on slick reunion tours, it's refreshing to see a "reunion tour" by a renowned musician whose performances are casual, but not treated lightly, and who plays music that is simple, but not simplistic.

Woody would be proud.