

and **HORROR**

Indiana native Dj Ashba is a creative genius. There's no doubt about it. He is the lead guitarist for two of the world's biggest rock bands, *Sixx:A.M.*, who are getting ready to head out on their first headlining tour with Apocalyptica and legendary hard rock band *Guns N Roses*, who are working on material for their next album and preparing for another tour.

Dj's dream began in Fairbury , Illinois. He started off playing piano at age 3, taught by his mother, a classically trained pianist. After trial and error experiences with the piano, saxophone and drums, he picked up the guitar at 8 years old and never looked back. Fueled by his dreams and years of practice, he packed up and moved to Los Angeles at 18 to take his shot at making it in the rock world.

His extensive career includes production, songwriting and musicianship work with *Guns N Roses*, *Motley Crue*, *Bulletboys* and *Beautiful Creatures*, James Durbin, *Drowning Pool*, Neil Diamond and Aimee Allen. He formed *Sixx:A.M* in 2007 with Nikki Sixx (of *Motley Crue* fame) and James Micheal. The band has released 3 studio albums and 3 EPs , with the most recent album being Modern Vintage, which shot to #1 on the US rock charts.

Ashba joined *Guns N Roses* in early 2009, replacing Robin Finck and touring with the band on their *Appetite for Democracy*, *Chinese Democracy* and *Up Close and Personal* tours. The band, which is currently comprised of Axl Rose, Richard Fortus, Bumblefoot, Tommy Stinson, Dizzy Reed, Chris Pitman & Frank Ferrer, is currently writing tracks for their next record. It will be the first since the long awaited release of Chinese Democracy, and the first *GNR* record that Dj will have a part in.

His passions don't end with his career music. In 2003, Dj started his own graphic design agency, *Ashba Media* which offers a variety of design elements, including banners, signs and 3D props. He launched his own clothing company, *Ashba Clothing* (based in Las Vegas, where he currently resides) in 2008, which specializes in edgy and unique pieces including, bandannas, beanies, shirts, jewelry and hoodies.

Dj recently took the time from his busy schedule to talk to us about everything from *Ashba Clothing* and his Signature Les Paul, to his craziest fan stories, advice for aspiring musicians and what's next for *Guns N Roses* and *Sixx:A.M.*.

Jessica: How are you?

Dj: I'm good haha busy busy busy. Always working.

Jessica: Yeah. I just saw on Facebook a few minutes ago that you got as a gift from Axl in the mail. (a certified gold record award for Chinese Democracy)

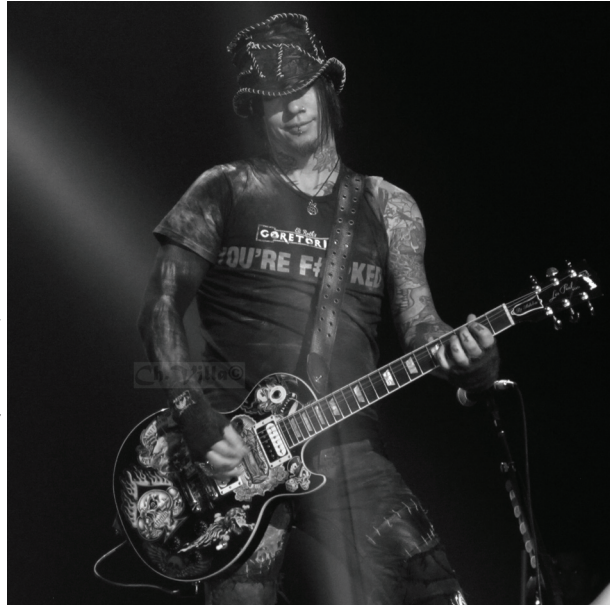
Dj: Yeah it's really cool. We just spoke on the phone and it was cool because I didn't expect it.

Jessica: How did you get involved with *Guns N Roses* in the first place?

Dj: I got a call from Katie McNeil almost 5 and a half, 6 years ago and *Guns* was looking for a guitar player on the down low and they wanted to know if I would be interested and I said yeah. I went down there and I didn't know , but evidently Axl called when I was coming down and called management and said "if he shows up in the room, he has the gig". It was kinda like that. It wasn't really a tough process, but I was coming off of *Cruefest* with the number one hit song with "Life Is Beautiful" with *Sixx:A.M.* so it was a little different situation at that point.

Jessica: What are some of your favorite Guns songs to play live?

Dj: I love playing the solo in "This I Love". I change the solo up a little bit from what's on the album. I love "Shackler's Revenge"



DJ onstage (photo by Ch Villa)

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, you know? Of course all the old stuff. It's a blast to play. There really isn't a song I don't enjoy playing just because it's so high energy. The crowd is what makes it just over the top. It's a lot of fun out there.

Jessica: I saw you guys at *Rock On The Range* last year and you put on an awesome show. Do you prefer playing larger festivals or smaller, more intimate shows?

Dj: For me, it doesn't really matter. I do like the intimacy of a smaller venue, but there's nothing like the energy of a massive stadium or something. I prefer playing in front of more people than less people just because it's the energy that comes with more people.

Jessica: What has been the best venue you've played and why?

Dj: Oh God. Probably I would say *Rock In Rio*. I don't remember how many hundreds of thousands of people were in the crowd, but it was just electrifying. It was so intense. The whole entire crowd was jumping and there were bomb fires going off and it was insane. The energy was so intense. That would probably be one of them. *Tokyo Dome*, *The O2 Arena*. There's so many great, great places that we've had the opportunity to play, so it's hard to kinda narrow it down I guess.

Jessica: You guys have also done Vegas residencies and things like that. Do you prefer residencies rather than just going out on tour?

Dj: I actually do to be honest, because what's cool about that is you get to kind of set up shop and it's home for me, but we are all in the hotels and get to party with the fans and hang out with them a lot more, instead of play the show, get on the bus and go, you know? I enjoy it big time.

Jessica: Do you have a craziest fan story?

Dj: I got a lot of crazy fan stories.*laughs*: I don't know. I mean I guess. I've had a lot of people leave things at my hotel room doors and things like that. They would somehow make it up on our floors and figure out where my room was and leave like baskets of sex toys and stuff outside my door. That's just when you put the double lock on the door. It gets crazy. There are countries we go to where we have to have four or five armed police officers in the vans and the vans are rocking. I remember we showed up to one airport and there were 5 or 6 hundred kids outside and they had a barricade and police everywhere . It was crazy.

Jessica: What's been your worst onstage experience?

Dj: One of the worst experiences I guess would probably be always falling off the stage when I get too drunk. That's never fun. I remember going to the hospital after a *Sixx:A.M.* show because I spun the guitar around and the guitar hit me in the ear and my in ears , the monitors they put in your ears cut my ear really deep inside. So I had blood rushing really bad out of my ear and *Sixx* saw me and he was like freaking out and he's like "We gotta get you to the hospital now." I got there and I couldn't hear anything cause I actually finished the show and there was so much blood in that ear and I thought I actually punctured my eardrum, but I was fine. It happened to be the one and only show my mom has ever showed up to, so I didn't get to hang out with her very much.

Jessica: Wow.

Dj: I left on a stretcher.

Jessica: How did you, James and Nikki get connected and form *Sixx:A.M.*?

Dj: Well I met Nikki at a funeral. James I had worked with before. I never even knew James could sing, you know? He was the producer I knew and he was a great producer. He would always call me when he was working on different albums and needed a guitar player to come in and throw down some lead or throw down some guitar and he would always call me and I would go play on a bunch of people's records on the down low. We became really good friends that way and years later I was about to sign a record deal with a band called *Operator* with a guy named Paul Phillips from *Puddle of Mudd* and I was at the car wash and Nikki called me and he was like "Hey , why don't you come up to my house?" and I was like "Sure". I went up there and that's when he goes basically, let's start *Funny Farm* together and produce and write for other artists. At that point there was never any talks of being in a band together or anything so we kinda teamed up as songwriting/producing partners and started producing people and writing for people like *Drowning Pool* and he would go out on tour and I would just sit in the studio and write and write and write and record and record and he'd come back in town and we'd write a shit - ton together and we literally probably wrote 50-60 songs together, 40 of them have still never been released still. You know, the cool part is, those songs were a good chunk of those

songs that ended up being on the Heroin Diaries, but we had no idea, you know? He brought in some diaries one day and we thought it would be kinda cool to take the diaries and create some kind of musical journey and use the diaries as an inspiration and that's kind of what we did but we never still intended on doing a band. We were writing this record and trying to figure out who was going to sing and we were going to reach out to Steven Tyler, Chester from *Linkin Park* and Manson. We were gonna just have a different singer on every song originally and James sent over a song called "Dead Man's Ballet" and that was the first time I'd ever heard him sing and then he goes "Man, I'd love to take a crack at these songs." and as soon as I heard "Dead Man's Ballet", Nikki and I looked at each other and were like fuck everybody else, he's gonna sing on all these songs. It just kinda worked and still after he sang on them, we were still not a band. You know? It was just a project we did. It was just one album for fun, then the song came out and went #1 and the label called and said "You guys are now a band." We still don't have a drummer to this day. I think we all like feeling like it's not a band, because, you know, that's where the magic happens. When you're trying to shove a band down the public's throat, you feel like you're selling something and we're not out trying to sell *Sixx:A.M.*, obviously. We'd be out touring nonstop. It's turned into a really cool, unique band and we're all really proud of it.

Jessica: You guys released Modern Vintage back in August. What was the writing process like for that record?

Dj: The same as any of them. All 3 of us just get in a room and write all the songs together and literally order a pizza and sit on the floor with some notepads and acoustic guitars and you know, whether it's in a hotel room or wherever we end up, all 3 together. We find it's really important that we're all together in the writing process, because none of us can really explain it, but when we're all together, it's almost like the perfect marriage. Literally, the songs fall out of us. We don't have to try. It's just one of those things where everybody kinda brings a certain something to the table and all the puzzle pieces kinda lock in and it sounds like *Sixx:A.M.*

Jessica: So speaking of starting a new project or forming a new band, what do you think are some of the biggest roadblocks facing artists today?

Dj: It's a lot tougher. Well, I would say it's not tougher, but different. The old ways of playing every club in town and flyering every pole and post is always good and that's a very organic way to build your band. Nowadays, record labels just aren't spending money. They don't have the budgets they used to. It's a whole different ballgame. Before you had to be the best of the best to get a record deal and once you had a record deal, the label would basically just smother you in money and things and get your band out there and hopefully it would catch on or you'd get dropped. Nowadays it's completely different, but thank god for the internet. There's a lot more people becoming famous or rich or known because of Youtube and just online social media. So basically instead of hiring a publicist, nowadays you can be your own publicist. You can go out there and promote your own thing to your own fans, the people who really want to hear from you and put interest in what you do. So you're targeting your audience. You know, it's just different. If you use the internet properly in the right way, you can definitely launch a brand new band without a label and become very successful.

Jessica: Who are some of your favorite artists today?

Dj: Elvis Presley *laughs* I know he's not alive, but he is in my head. There's a lot of great bands. We're taking out *Apocalyptica*. They're cool. I dig *Avenged Sevenfold*. I love *Muse*. There's just a lot of great bands out there. I don't listen to tons of new music, to be honest. It's funny because I play rock and roll for a living, so when I don't have a guitar in my hands, a lot of times, the last thing I want to hear is rock, to be honest, so I like to listen to a lot of orchestra music. So Danny Alsmich, John Williams. I love country and I love like Bing Crosby. I love Christmas songs. I don't know why, but I do. I like to just listen to music and I'm not a rock head, so to speak. I love playing rock and I love writing rock, but there's so much more to music than just rock and roll. I love blues. I love jazz. I love Latin music. It's awesome. Yeah, just tons of stuff.

Jessica: What made you want to pick up the guitar and start learning in the first place?

Dj: I started out on piano when I was like 3 and my mom was a classical piano teacher and she made me practice every morning to the point where I hated playing it because nobody wants to do what their mom thinks they should do and guitar was something that I knew was kinda rebellious and she would never tell me to practice it. It was kinda my thing, so when I first saw Eddie Van Halen play, I was like "Wow". It's powerful. I don't know. It just

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intrigued me. I played drums for awhile. I tried saxophone and that lasted about a day. As soon as I picked up the guitar, I just knew this was what I was born to do.

Jessica: Who were some of your guitar idols when you started playing?

Dj: I loved Chet Adkins and Eddie Van Halen and Steve Vai and all of the extremely talented players out there. I loved people like Stevie Ray Vaughn and *Lynyrd Skynyrd* and *ZZ Top*. One of my favorite guitar players is Scotty Moore from Elvis' band. There's just so many great players. I grew up on bands like *Motley Crue* and *Guns N Roses* and pretty much all of the bands I was fortunate enough to work with. It's been a really, really good ride.

Jessica: Do you have a favorite guitar that you own and what's your set up like onstage?

Dj: My favorite guitar is my new signature model and not because I'm trying to promote it. I was given the opportunity to take all the years of knowledge that I've learned about guitars touring the world. I think I've been around the world 7 times or so and you learn a lot. You learn a lot about what you like about a guitar and really get a chance to use the guitars and if you've ever seen me play, I'm really hard on my guitars. I can play really hard on them, so I really put them through the wringer so to speak. I've broken a lot of things on guitars over the years and figured out what works and what doesn't, and so when I sat down to design my own guitar, I kind of took everything and put it into one guitar, little things like how Les Pauls always spread out on the G string. We created a compound radius neck for it so that that would never be an issue. Because of that, you can get the action really low. I have the 3-way switch which was weird for me personally because I was used to the *Ernie Ball Axis* guitars and so I like the 3-way down there and its the only Les Paul, I think with one volume knob. To me that's all you'd ever need on a guitar, an on and off. So yeah, to me that's absolutely my favorite guitar.

Jessica: What's your set up like onstage? Guitar pedals? Effects?

Dj: My tech runs all my pedals. You'd probably have to ask him. I haven't seen my pedal board in a long time. I use very minimal stuff. I don't like any cabinets. I have zero speakers onstage. I go through a *Fractal* and it pretty much has every effect in the world in it. So I run through that piece of gear. I think I have a couple little pedals. I use an envelope filter for some *Sixx:A.M.* songs. I use a whammy pedal, my *Digitech*. I use *Crybaby Wah Wahs*. I think I use a *POG 2*. Other than that, I think it's pretty much straight into wirelesses and right out to the front of the house.

Jessica: Now I want to talk *Ashba Clothing*. What made you want to start your own clothing line and what are some of your favorite pieces?

Dj: I started a clothing line in 2008. It was a passion of mine. Since I was little, I would draw on everything like napkins, paper plates. I was an artist. Art and music have always been my true passions and I've found a way with *Ashba Clothing* instead of drawing on napkins and paper, I basically drew on fabric. I don't look at myself or consider myself a clothing designer, nor do I ever want to be. That was never my goal. It's just basically an open canvas for me to be creative. Other than that, I look at my clothing more like pieces of art. With *Ashba Clothing*, it was one of those things where I launched the store and it started doing really well. At one point, I think we had over 400 items in the store and lately we've changed the name to *Ashba Clothing*, so if you go to www.ashbaclimbing.com but we are focusing on only 5 items now and we felt over the many years of doing clothing, these are the 5 items that the fans from the amount of sales and numbers, that they truly love about *Ashba Clothing*. I was like, well let's really clean the clutter and focus on what the fans really want and let's do that really fucking good. So let's do t shirts, beanies, bandannas, jewelry and hoodies and let's do it the best that we can do it. So that's kinda what we did when we changed it to *Ashba Clothing*. We re - focused the whole brand into really handing the fans what we believe that they really love about the clothing.

Jessica: You have another album out, Songs For The Demented Mind, Which I love.

Dj: Thank you.

Jessica: You're welcome. Where did the inspiration for the album come from and if you could have done the soundtrack for any horror movie, what one would you have picked?

Dj: I was always a big fan of Eli Roth and horror movies in general. Eli had a really good grasp on what the young generation likes as far as what they need to see out of a horror movie and he captures that extremely well. They wanted to make me a partner and a part owner of the *Goreto-rium*, which is a haunted house they put on the Las Vegas Strip and I immediately jumped at it because I'm a horror fan and blah blah blah. So the inspiration just came from the story they told

me about *the Delmont Hotel* and what they were trying to do with the haunted house. I just got inspired by the whole thing. Of course, I've always wanted to score movies and I thought this would be a great way, more as just something for Eli to hear and go "wow, this is cool" and kind of takes the story and turns it into kind of like what we did with the Heroin Diaries with the book, so I thought, let's do this with a haunted house. So I took this story of *the Delmont Hotel* and wrote the entire dialogue. My inspiration came from, I don't know how old you are, but when I was a kid we would drive around in the car with mom and dad and they'd always play the radio and they would have the audio stories where you could hear the wind blowing and they would tell the stories with the dialogue and that's kinda what I remember from driving around with my parents. It would paint such a vivid picture in your head, just listening, and I thought that was really cool, so I thought, let's try and capture some of the spirit of that. I literally wrote and recorded the entire record in two weeks, which was from morning to night, morning to night, morning to night for two solid weeks. It was the funnest album I have ever done. I had so much fun because I could be as creative as I wanted and it wasn't about being a guitar player. It was about writing a good album from beginning to end. I was mic'ing everything in my house from pouring puddles out in the yard and mic'ing them and running through them, to mic'ing doors squeaking to slamming doors and beating on shit. For "Ghost in the Machine", I actually went out to the garage and got a bunch of tools like saws and drills and I wanted to create a song out of power tools. It was just different. It was a lot of fun and we only printed up so many copies. I didn't want it on *iTunes*. I didn't want it to be a big release type thing. I wanted it to be this special kind of thing that I did in my life where if you got it, if you liked it, cool, if not, it's not a big deal to me. I wrote it more for me. It was just a fun art project more than anything and if I could score any movie in the world, God, any horror movie, it would have to be probably some of the Saw movies they would have been a lot of fun to score. Some of those types of movies would have been a lot of fun for me.

Jessica: Awesome. What would you say are the 5 albums you can't live without ?

Dj: The 5 albums I couldn't live without would be Bing Crosby. I'll just name artists. Definitely *Guns N Roses*. I love *ZZ Top*. I love, obviously, Elvis Presley, Elton John, David Bowie. There's so many. *T Rex*. There's so many great, great albums out there. Queen would be one. There's so many, too many to list actually. Van Halen, obviously. I think that's way more than 5. You know what's a great album? David Lee Roth's Eat Em' And Smile. I just remember when it came out and the way Steve Vai talked on the guitar with "Yankee Rose" and Billy Sheehan. The musicianship on that record still to this day completely blows my mind. It's unbelievable what they did on that.

Jessica: If you could work with any artist, dead or alive , who would it be?

Dj: Dead or alive? Obviously Elvis. There ya go. You got both and Michael Jackson. I love Michael. *laughs*.

Jessica: That would be awesome! What is next for *Guns N Roses* and *Sixx:A.M.*?

Dj: *Sixx:A.M.*. We are leaving on tour. We have our first headlining tour in April. *Guns*. We are in the middle of doing a lot of things. We were talking about doing another huge tour. Our main focus right now is obviously putting together the next *Guns* record and we've got tons of material. It's just a matter of sitting down and sifting through the pieces. That's kind of where that's sitting, you know? It looks like we're going to be doing a lot more touring.

Jessica: Sweet. So I have one last question for you. What advice do you have for musicians or bands starting out that are looking to make it in the music industry.

Dj: I would just say learn from everybody in front of you. Watch your favorite bands. Learn from their stories and their mistakes and don't ever give up. Don't ever let anyone tell you you can't make it. I don't feel it's hard necessarily to make it in the industry. You just have to have an incredible amount of patience and focus. It's something that you gotta work at every single day of your life you know? You've got to dedicate your entire life to. I feel that no dream is too big to conquer as long as you are willing to put in as much hard work as it takes to get there. If you're willing to do that , you will be successful.

Jessica: That sounds like great advice. Thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us.

Dj: Yeah, for sure. Thank you. Great interview!