

One of the band's earliest photo sessions from 1981. L-R: Mick, Nikki, Vince, Tommy



IT WAS THE SPRING of 1981, another hot night in Los Angeles, and I was heading home on Santa Monica Boulevard. Five minutes up the road from the notorious Tropicana Motel where I'd just been interviewing a visiting punk band by the side of the black-painted pool was a cool club called the Starwood, a small rock venue where a bunch of bands had played in their early days, including Van Halen. Now the club mainly booked punk bands and indie or unsigned acts. I was the LA correspondent for British music paper *Sounds* and *Kerrang!* magazine, so the Starwood was one of my regular haunts – or it was until the authorities closed it down later that same year after too many complaints about under-age drinkers and noise. I had no plans to go to the Starwood that night, mind. But I was intrigued by a cluster of people I saw standing outside. They were pale – something that took serious commitment in sunny California – and androgynously dressed, with black Spandex pants and big shaggy hair. The way they looked made me think of a monochrome version of the New York Dolls, the raw rock and proto-glam punk band that had formed 10 years earlier on the other side of America.

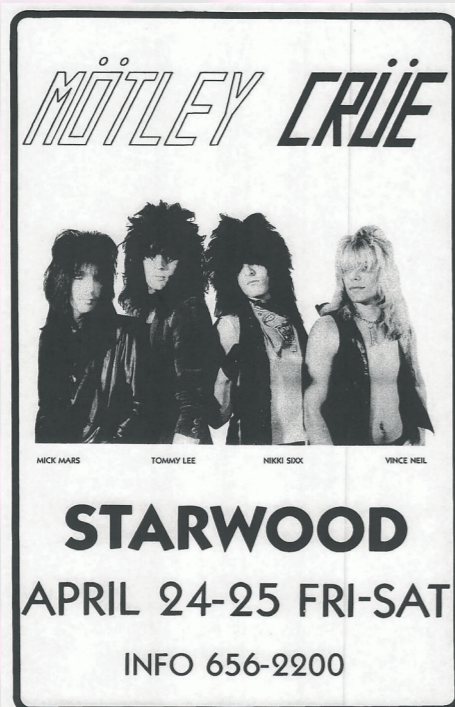
Inside the club, the stage was decorated with stacks of what looked like giant cardboard Cornflakes boxes painted black and white. The drum platform was impressive for a small band, and so was the row of lights – quite a big set-up for a venue smaller than London's

Marquee. At that time there weren't many rock bands that paid a lot of attention to the visuals; you tended only to see that with some of the punk and new wave bands. As it turned out, before too much longer and after MTV

came along, the visual aspect would be a big component in this particular band's huge success. But for now, here they were, strutting onstage in black Spandex, high heels, and enormous hair, three of them dyed black and the fourth bleached blond. All but one, the guitar player, looked like they were in their late teens or early 20s. Their music sounded like someone had chopped up Sweet, Kiss, Alice Cooper, and the Godz and put them all in a blender. The songs were catchy, and the guitar solos were extravagant. They came across as deadly serious but at the same time trashy and a lot of fun.

This was Mötley Crüe – with umlauts, like Motörhead. They were a brand-new band. They didn't have a record deal. Are you kidding? No new band playing proper heavy metal in LA in early 1981 had a record deal. If you turned on an FM radio station in the States back then, what you got was '70s arena rockers like Styx or

Toto or REO Speedwagon whingeing about the singer's wife's marital infidelities. Great bands, no question, but kind of old. There were some young metal bands playing on LA's small club circuit, but there was no equivalent of the New Wave Of British Heavy Metal movement that had sprung up in the UK at the end of the '70s. In America,



indie labels were signing punk bands and the major record companies were signing nice power pop and new wave acts. Mötley Crüe weren't new wave, and Mötley Crüe weren't nice. Mötley Crüe were delinquent and proud of it.

But I could see that this band had something. The next time I saw them – at the Whisky A Go Go on Sunset Boulevard – it was an even better show with even more kids outside. I went backstage after the gig and asked to do an interview. Nikki Sixx was the man in charge. It's not often that the bass player is the band leader, but Nikki was the one who arranged for us all to get together. It was the first rock mag interview the band had ever done, and would be the first of so many interviews I did with Mötley over the years that I've lost count.

FORTY-TWO YEARS later, digging the yellowed transcript of our first interview out of the filing cabinet, the first thing that jumped off the page was something Nikki told me. "In five years," he said, "maybe every band will look like us." He couldn't have imagined how accurate that was. Or that his group – which a local weekly newspaper would dub the worst band in LA – would spearhead an entire musical movement: glam metal, aka hair metal, the over-the-top, tarty, party scene that dominated a decade of US rock.

The apartment where I met Mötley Crüe for that first interview was surprisingly swanky. The local indie bands I'd been interviewing tended to live in varying degrees of squalor. Nikki opened the door and led me to a room where the others were sitting on a long, expensive sofa. There was drummer Tommy Lee, guitarist Mick Mars, vocalist Vince Neil, and... There was an older man sitting next to Mick who didn't look like a musician. He looked like a businessman, and this looked like a businessman's apartment. He only spoke once or twice during the interview, saying business-like things like, "A permanent organisation structure has been our concept from the very beginning." This was Allan Coffman, Mötley's manager. I think this was the first time I'd interviewed an unsigned band that had an official manager. Mick would tell me later that Coffman was the brother-in-law of one of Mick's friends. He had nothing to do with heavy metal. He worked in the construction business but had decided to invest in a rock band.

In the beginning Coffman was a big help, providing funds when the band needed them. That was most of the time, since most of the members were scraping by

with odd jobs here and there – at one point Nikki was the Starwood's janitor – and with the help more often than not of generous girlfriends. But only two years later the band would immortalise Coffman in a song called 'Bastard' on their second album, 'Shout At The Devil', more of which later. Nikki's lyrics: "Out go the lights/ In goes my knife/ Pull out his life/... Consider that bastard dead/ Won't get screwed again."

BUT BACK on that fancy sofa in 1981 everyone was getting along. Nikki was doing most of the talking, but that would almost always be the case. Mick, the oldest and by far the most taciturn member of the band, would make the occasional comment. Vince and Tommy, the youngest, listened intently to what Nikki was saying and

said almost nothing unless I asked them something directly. They all seemed to genuinely like each other, though it would be strange if they *didn't*, given how recently they'd formed. Nikki and Tommy gave the impression of being the closest friends. That made sense. Frank Ferrana and Thomas Bass, to use their original names, had known each other for some time on the LA scene, playing in various short-lived bands. The two formed a group they called Xmas. While leafing through *The Recycler* – a local classified-ads magazine where you could find everything from second-hand mattresses to musicians – they saw a small ad that simply said. "Loud, rude, and aggressive guitarist available." They called the phone number and the man who answered was Bob Deal, who'd played in a number of LA blues and covers bands. The pair asked him over. "We opened the door," recounted Nikki. "We looked at each other and it was like 'Hey! What kind of hair dye do you use?' You rarely saw people with blue-black hair and that particularly outrageous



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Deal clearly looked older, but he looked cool, and he had the chops. On the spot Nikki and Tommy invited him to join their new band. Deal gave the group a new name. "One of my bass player friends from the band I was in back in 1977... we were all sitting around, and he goes, 'This is a motley looking crew.'" Mick recounted. "I said, 'I'm having that for a band name.'" Deal gave himself a new name too, Mick Mars.

SO MÖTLEY Crüe – Nikki, Tommy, Mick, and O'Dean – were ready to rock. O'Dean? O'Dean Peterson, to give him his full name, was Mötley's original singer and

Photos: Don Adkins; Mark 'Weisguy' Weiss