

# Glam Bake

THE HEADY YEARS OF GLITTER ROCK ARE RE-CREATED IN TODD HAYNES'S 'VELVET GOLDMINE'

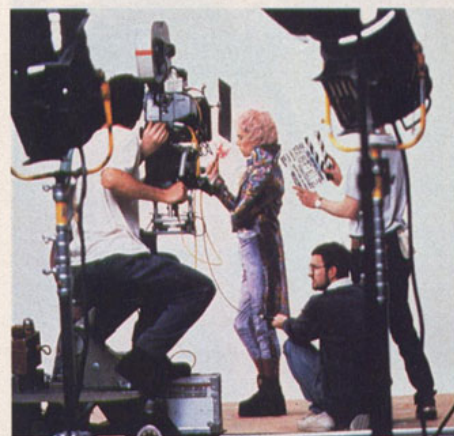
**E**WAN MCGREGOR HAS JUST DROPPED HIS BLACK LEATHER hip huggers, and he's not wearing any underwear. Although he's done it before—both *Trainspotting* and *The Pillow Book* feature full-frontal nude scenes—audiences have never seen anything quite like the frenzied display of bouncing private parts and energetic mooning that the Scottish star is summoning for his role as platinum-wigged glam-rocker Curt Wild, in *Velvet Goldmine*. Drenching his torso in oil and sprinkling himself with gold glitter, McGregor belts out the lyrics to "TV Eye" by Iggy and the Stooges. (Iggy Pop was one of the inspirations for Wild.) "I thought this would get me over the hump of wanting to be a rock star," the actor later says, laughing. "But it's just fueling my need."

"For all the actors, there's a spirit of going for it," says director Todd Haynes, who is making his own departure from the astringent world of his last film, 1995's *Safe*, a critically acclaimed study of one woman's growing inability to live

with the toxins of daily life. In *Velvet Goldmine* he has created a lush paean to a fleeting but revolutionary moment in '70s pop history, when a largely British group of musicians pushed back the cultural boundaries of sexual identity, freedom, and performance art. "Glam rock, from the very beginning, acknowledged its artifice," says the 37-year-old American director, who was peripherally aware of the movement as a youngster but didn't really respond to it until his late teens, when glam had given way to punk and disco. "It brazenly lied, and it maybe ended up being more honest than the more earnest, heartfelt movements that surrounded it."



**Major Tom Boys:** (from left) Todd Haynes, Jonathan Rhys Meyers, and Ewan McGregor



**Velvet Revolutionary:** Jonathan Rhys Meyers readies himself to rock the house.

"It's about freeing yourself from conventional morality," agrees Christian Bale (*Little Women*), whose character turns to glam's heroes to overcome his miserable adolescence. "And it wasn't just the sex. The whole era was about letting rip and releasing everything and having a fantastic time."

Told through a circuitous, *Citizen Kane*-like structure (a source of confusion for some who saw its first public screening, at this year's Cannes film festival), *Goldmine* traces the rise and fall of androgynous rock star Brian Slade (Jonathan Rhys Meyers) and his stage persona, Maxwell Demon. Ten years after Slade fakes his own assassination and then disappears, a journalist (Bale) is assigned to do an investigative feature on the singer. He seeks out three people who hold pieces of the puzzle: Slade's ex-manager, his embittered ex-wife (Toni Collette), and the self-destructive American rocker (McGregor) who had been Slade's inspiration and torment.

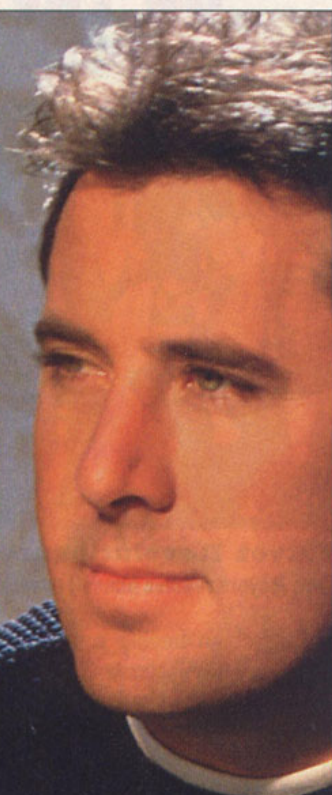
Along the way, *Goldmine* indulges in a *Caligula*-esque feast of decadent cinematic taboo, including orgies, pansexual couplings among the gorgeously superficial characters, and a cornucopia of drugs. The costumes alone (by Sandy Powell, an Oscar nominee for *Orlando* and *The Wings of the Dove*)—with their multihued satin flares, crushed velvets, feather boas, and platform heels—are worth the price of admission. "I would have paid to come to work dressed like this," says Collette (*Muriel's Wedding*), whose Mandy Slade has undergone a wig-to-toe makeover every time she appears onscreen.

Although the film's heady atmosphere has clearly been influenced by the look and tone of such movies as *Performance* and *A Clock-*

**BY MATT MUELLER**

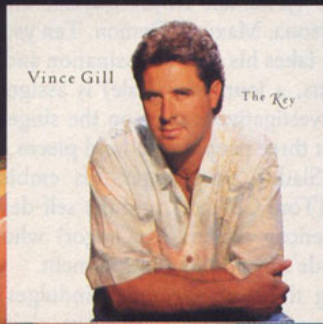


# Vince Gill

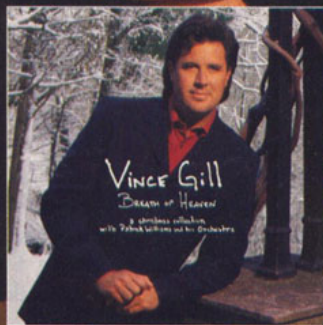


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"THE ERA LEFT LASTING MARKS ON AN ENTIRE GENERATION," SAYS MICHAEL STIPE. "A DOOR OPENED WITH GLAM ROCK, AND SHUT SHORTLY AFTER."

work *Orange*, much of *Goldmine's* plot, characters, and situations have been lifted directly from glam history. Iggy Pop and David Bowie are the film's two most obvious inspirations, but echoes of the Velvet Underground, Roxy Music's Bryan Ferry, and T. Rex's Marc Bolan abound (see below).

Finding the right actors to portray these flamboyant, preening creatures sent Haynes on search missions back and forth across the Atlantic. Nicole Kidman expressed interest in Mandy Slade, before becoming imprisoned on Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*. And several prominent American actors were after the role of Curt Wild, but Haynes didn't bite. "The new generation of American actors, they're all like Johnny Depp: brooding and internal," he says. "There's no live wire. I wanted someone who could fly off the stage and just be *afame*." After catching

a screening of *Trainspotting* prior to its U.S. release, he made his live-wire connection. McGregor would not accept the part, however, until he was assured he would be allowed to do his own singing in the film. "Then I came to do it, and I was just so fucking scared," says McGregor. "But in fact it's worked out really well. I've always sung, but I've never done stuff like this, screaming and shouting. But I find it all comes out in thrashing around the stage. It all makes sense—hopefully."

Rhys Meyers, who also sings in the film, had doubts about his role too. "Everybody would think that my apprehension would be about these sex scenes, that I have to snog Ewan," says the then-nineteen-year-old actor

## Golden Years

HOW MUCH OF 'VELVET GOLDMINE' REALLY HAPPENED?

**Z**iggy played guitar. So did Iggy. But Iggy never got onstage and jammed with Ziggy—and certainly not doing an *Eno* song with a guitar solo by Robert Fripp.

Rock 'n' roll trainspotters are going to have a field day picking out the points at which *Velvet Goldmine* converges with and diverges from the wild-and-woolly history of glam rock. *Goldmine's* Brian Slade (Jonathan Rhys Meyers) is an obvious stand-in for David Bowie (although his costumes are often more reminiscent of those worn by the failed—and dead—would-be American Bowie, Jobriath). Slade concocts an alter ego, Maxwell Demon, not unlike Bowie's own Ziggy Stardust, and finds inspiration in the unschooled but galvanizing figure of Curt Wild (Ewan McGregor), an American rocker with a lot of Iggy Pop in him; Wild, like Pop, has a trailer park in



**Tangerine Dreams:** Jonathan Rhys Meyers as Brian Slade in *Velvet Goldmine* (left); David Bowie at the height of Ziggymania

black fingernail polish will remind observant viewers of the similar '70s stylings of Lou Reed, another American rocker whose career got a boost from Bowie. Reed's songwriting with the Velvet Underground was a huge influence on the glam-rock movement; indeed, Reed had been singing about such decadent topics as receiving fellatio from a transvestite as far back as 1967.

Slade's wife in *Goldmine*, Mandy, seems a less bitter version of Bowie's wife Angie, who caused a stir by writing in her memoirs that she walked in on her husband in bed with Mick Jagger (whose analog is nowhere to be found

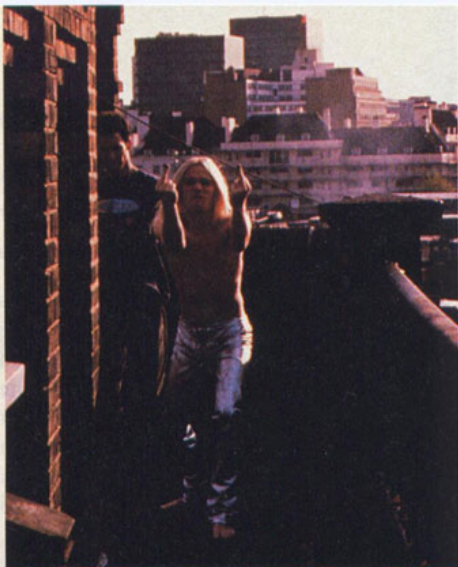
in *Goldmine*, though Mandy does catch her husband in bed with Wild). And though Mandy seems hopelessly devoted to Slade, Angie was less so to Bowie; as ex-Stooge Ron Asheton recalls in the book *Please Kill Me*, "While David Bowie was palling around with Iggy, I was fucking



**Pop Cats:** Ewan McGregor as *Goldmine's* Curt Wild (left); Iggy Pop

THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: NEAL FARRON/OUTLINE; THERESA SECRETAN/GAMMA; PETER MOON-TAIN (2); OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM RIGHT: LEE BLACK CHILDERS/VEPOL; PETER MOON-TAIN (2)





**Free Birds:** McGregor (on a London rooftop) had the irreverence of a rocker, on- and off-camera.

between takes. "That's the *last* thing I'm worried about. It's actually a perk—you know, he's a very good-looking boy. [But] it's a difficult thing to do—convince people that you're a rock star." His anxiety on the set is palpable: "I'm not happy with any of the stuff I've done up to now. I feel incredibly inse-



**Lady Stardust:** Toni Collette as *Goldmine*'s Mandy Slade (left); Angie Bowie

David's wife. He didn't mind, I didn't mind, we never felt weird about any of that."

Which raises the question: Did Bowie and Iggy, like Slade and Wild, sleep together? Seems unlikely, given that Iggy and his Stooges were Detroit spuds with a pronounced homophobic streak. Asheton has said of the Bowie-sponsored Stooges album, *Raw Power*: "We were all mad 'cause they'd made Iggy look like a faggot on the cover."

Ultimately, it matters not. Writer-director **Todd Haynes** works the material to suit his ideas, not history. The fact that he names one of Slade's albums *Lipstick Traces*, after an audacious book by **Greil Marcus**, should clue you in to the nature of his game. Haynes gives Slade a **Brian Epstein**-ish manager (of **Beatles** fame) to discard, and morphs **Bryan Ferry** and **Brian Eno** into a postmodern **Oscar Wilde** figure named **Jack Fairy**. Which Haynes has every right to do. But in a way it's a shame, since the Slade-Wild re-creation of the song "Baby's on Fire" is, in fact, utterly lame when compared to the Eno original. —CHAS TURNER

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### PRIMETIME HIGHLIGHTS

(All Times Eastern)

#### Monday, December 7

8:00 PM *Glorious Technicolor* (1998)  
9:00 PM *Ben Hur* (1926)  
12:00 AM *Glorious Technicolor* (1998)

#### Tuesday, December 8

8:00 PM *A Star is Born* (1937)  
10:00 PM *Glorious Technicolor* (1998)  
11:00 PM *Nothing Sacred* (1937)  
12:30 AM *The Adventures of Robin Hood*  
(1938)

#### Wednesday, December 9

8:00 PM *Rancho Notorious* (1952)  
10:00 PM *Dodge City* (1939)  
12:00 AM *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*  
(1949)

#### Thursday, December 10

8:00 PM *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944)  
10:00 PM *An American in Paris* (1951)  
12:00 AM *Romance on the High Seas* (1948)

#### Friday, December 11

8:00 PM *Northwest Passage* (1940)  
10:30 PM *King Solomon's Mines* (1950)  
12:30 AM *Blood and Sand* (1941)

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"THE LAST THING I'M WORRIED ABOUT [IS HAVING] TO SNOG EWAN," SAYS RHYS MEYERS. "IT'S ACTUALLY A PERK—YOU KNOW, HE'S A VERY GOOD-LOOKING BOY."

cure—I look in the mirror, and I've got blue hair and crazy makeup and crazy clothes and platforms." That the self-flagellating actor has become romantically involved with the ebullient Collette is one of the more interesting developments of the shoot.

The soundtrack—masterminded by R.E.M.'s Michael Stipe, who was also an executive producer on *Velvet Goldmine* ("Todd's my favorite American director," he says)—features a combination of original recordings and cover versions of tracks by Roxy Music, Brian Eno, Steve Harley, T. Rex, and Iggy and the Stooges, plus new material written and performed by Shudder to Think, Pulp, and Grant Lee Buffalo. For the mythical bands in the film, Stipe assembled then-and-now pairings, such as former Roxy Music sax-and-oboe player Andy McKay and Radiohead's Johnny Greenwood and Thom Yorke.

Conspicuous by his absence is David Bowie, the godfather of glam, whose Ziggy Stardust persona is an obvious model for Brian Slade's Maxwell Demon. His only (unintentional) contribution is the film's title, which Haynes took from an obscure track on the 1990 reissue of *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust*. "He didn't control the title, somehow," says Haynes. Bowie did, however, control the rights to his back

catalog, and rebuffed Haynes's and Stipe's requests to use six of his songs, including "All the Young Dudes," which Haynes had always envisioned as the pivotal track of the film. The reason that Bowie has given for the refusal is that he has plans for his own film based on Ziggy Stardust. Comments in recent interviews, in which he has labeled *Velvet Goldmine* a "competitive" project, also suggest that he wasn't entirely happy with the way Haynes appropriated a seminal chapter in his life. "I don't want to comment on that," Haynes demurs. "This film comes too much from the desire to pay tribute to him, and what he did at that time, to start getting into that."

"The era left lasting marks on an entire generation, including myself and Todd," says Stipe. "A door opened with glam rock, and shut shortly after, concerning sexuality and the idea of a very clear division between different types of desire. People just got very narrow-minded again."

"Glam is still kind of a shock," agrees Haynes. "More than punk is—the safety pin doesn't really do it anymore. But something about [glam's] androgyny and skinniness and the sort of death-mask quality of it all is still really powerful."

Matt Mueller is PREMIERE's London editor.



**Turn and Face the Strange:** "We did an orgy scene, which was hysterical," says McGregor (right) with Rhys Meyers. "It was hysterical being in a roomful of naked people drinking."