



Episode 58 Transcript

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Metal guitarist Nita Strauss on the Highway to Health

Nick Collias: Welcome to *The Bodybuilding.com Podcast*. I'm Nick Collias, your host. To my right, as always, is Heather Eastman. We're snowed in today. Come help us, please. Send dogs, so we can eat them.

Nita Strauss: It would be really funny if this aired in the middle of summer.

Heather Eastman: Send coffee.

Nick: Send coffee. On this frigid winter day, our guest is the fantastic guitarist, Nita Strauss, who braved the elements to come visit with us.

Nita Strauss: It was seriously raving, because I'm from LA, so we don't have anything like this, even-

Nick: She told me the tour bus got stuck this morning.

Heather: No way!

Nita Strauss: Yeah, we got stuck in the snow. We were supposed to arrive around 6:00. I mean, we're asleep. It's not like I'm driving it or anything, but we were supposed to arrive around 6:00, and we got in literally as our Uber was pulling up to pick us up to bring us here.

Nick: Nice.

Heather: Wow.

Nita Strauss: Like, the Uber pulled in behind the bus.

Heather: All right...

Nick: Now, I know what you're thinking, people, guitarist on the podcast, but stick with us.

Heather: Just bear with us.

Nick: The point will be clear quickly here, but Nita has shredded in the service of a whole bunch of bands. For the last few years, you've been the lead guitarist for Alice Cooper.

Nita Strauss: That's right.

Nick: She's also been in [The Iron Maidens](#), which is an all-women's Iron Maiden tribute band, which is just as bad-ass as it sounds. There's some serious guitars flailing in that one. You also may have seen her on her own more recently. She played at, what? WWE Wrestlemania, right?

Nita Strauss: Wrestlemania, that's right.

Nick: The last couple of them, playing out [Shinsuke Nakamura](#), and you also just released your first solo album, the absolutely epic *Controlled Chaos*, which I listened to while I was having dinner the other day.

Nita Strauss: Oh, that's the first time I've heard someone listening to it as dinner music. Did it work?

Nick: You know...

Nita Strauss: It's more like workout music.

Nick: We may have paused it in the middle and then finished it up later, but I listened to the whole thing.

Nita Strauss: I am not offended at all by that. Because I don't know how good conversation would be over music like that.

Nick: All a question of volume.

Nita Strauss: You're absolutely right. You couldn't be more right.

Nick: Now, now that's all preamble of course, because Nita is also the subject of profile article on Bodybuilding.com, called "[Meet Music's Most Shredded Ax Player](#)." I may or may not have written that headline, I don't really remember.

Nita Strauss: I like that headline.

Nick: But she's a fitness and lifting die-hard and also someone who's representing health and self-control, self-mastery in a culture where sometimes those things can be a bit hard to find.

Nita Strauss: Yeah you're definitely right. It's funny because now in 2018 in the music industry, there's this huge shift happening where partying is not really the norm anymore. You know, everyone has this idea of musicians like, "Ah, it's just crazy. Drugs, and booze, and you know, women, and crazy lifestyle."

Most of the people that I know in the music industry now are on this fitness kick. You know, we're all sitting on the tour bus talking about who takes what pre-workout, who drinks what green juice, and where the nearest Whole Foods is, and where the nearest gym is.

On this tour—I'm on the Guitar Collective tour with two other guitar players—and we're literally, we wake up in the morning, we get on the group texts, say, "Hey guys, there's a 24-Hour Fitness. It's a half-mile away. You guys want to Uber or walk?" That's the routine.

Nick: Nice.

Heather: Yeah.

Nick: And I also just, I know that I have a lot of friends who are musicians and after a while, on the road, just inevitably they get hurt. They start to break down, and they get reminded of their physical mortality, perhaps more than other people because there's a life span for a body carrying heavy shit around going from tour to tour.

Nita Strauss: Oh yeah, a thousand percent. And also you're so physical. Being a performer is a really physical job. It might not seem like it but it really is especially if you're active on stage. I'm a very active performer. So you're running around, you know ... I do sprints to get ready for tour. I prepare for tour just like an athlete would prepare for a competition.

Nick: Like an off-season and an in-season.

Nita Strauss: Oh, absolutely, When I'm getting ready for tour, you know I diet differently, I train differently. I'll do interval sprints, I'll do less lifting and more cardio to be ready for a 90-minute marathon on stage. It's definitely different.

Heather: That was what was so interesting in the profiles, it talked about how you're using fitness to enhance your performance and like you just said, you're almost prepping for it like you are an athlete.

Nita Strauss: Oh, absolutely.

Heather: And you said it almost has nothing to do with appearance, now the appearance part is a pleasant side effect.

Nita Strauss: Huge side effect.

Heather: Yeah, totally. So what ... because I know that in profile, it also talked about you had this massive transformation. So, what really prompted you to just say I need to get in shape, I need to

get healthy?

Nita Strauss: You know, it's funny because a lot of people's transformation starts when they're in this huge downward spiral, this low point in their life. For me ... that moment happened when I was on this super high. We were on this huge arena tour opening up for Mötley Crüe. We were playing to ... I played to over a million audience members that year, traveled all over the world and all this stuff. But mentally, I was breaking down, I was so unhappy. I was drinking every single day, and it's just sort of a routine you fall into on tour, you know.

There's the two sides of touring. There's the kind that we do now, and there's the kind where you just get accustomed to ... you don't think you're drinking a lot, but you have ... you have a beer or two to loosen up before the show or during the show. After the show you have a drink or two with friends or fans, you go out and meet the people, and then you get on the bus, you have a glass of wine or a cocktail, and the next day you have a day off.

And what is there to do, on a day off. You don't know. I don't know anyone in Boise, let's say. What is there to do? You go to the bar. And before you realized it, you're drinking seven days a week. You don't know how to fall asleep without it, you don't have a normal conversation without it, and nobody can function like that forever, except Keith Richards, and Joe Perry.

Nick: There are people, like you think of Joe Perry, and people like that, they just live out there ...

Nita Strauss: Super highly functioning.

Nick: Yeah, exactly.

Nita Strauss: But ... but I was so unhappy and mentally, so not ready. So, in September of 2015, I got sober and literally at that point in my life it was as if God opened the door and said, "Like, okay, are you ready now? Are you ready to shape up?" And I replaced all of that addiction of going out with going to the gym.

I was like, well it was kind of an aesthetic thing at first, if I'm going to give this up I want it to be worth it. I want to look bad-ass while I'm doing it. I want to look great.

And then I sort of traded one addition for the other, because especially, I learned the term "newbie gains" back then. But seeing that happen and seeing your body transform so much in the first few months of working out. I got so addicted to that feeling and then I started wanting to push my body even further and further.

I was an athlete growing up. I did gymnastics growing up, and so my body knows how to push itself. My body knows how to overcome adversity and say, like, "Hey, you're tired, you have two sets left, take a breath and power through."

So, reconnecting with that part of myself was a huge, huge change, and now I love it.

Nick: So I guess I didn't realize that you have been that athletic growing up. Because I read about you that you started playing when you were about 13, playing guitar, right?

Nita Strauss: That's right.

Nick: And have been touring since you were 15. You were a very devoted guitarist. Check it out. It's no bullshit, it's like Steve Vai-style playing.

Nita Strauss: Oh, my God, thank you. He's my favorite guitar player.

Nick: That's what it reminds me of. Just acrobatic, really, you know every capability of your instrument.

Nita Strauss: Acrobatic is a good description. I like that.

Nick: How did you ... how do I, I'm wondering what to ask you, but ... You started doing that, how did you get that serious about that, and how did you get on that path?

Nita Strauss: So, my mom is a dance teacher and my dad is a musician. So my sister and I grew up doing ballet from the time we could walk. We were always in sports, and from ballet we went to rhythmic gymnastics, we were both competitive rhythmic gymnastics.

And so literally when you're in competitive sports as a kid, it teaches you that discipline, it teaches you, even as a 7 or 8-year-old, you want to win. You go and see other kids getting medal and you're not getting a medal, it makes you work harder. So, I always had that in the back of my head.

I always had that visualization of this is what I want to do. Even back then, it's so funny I could remember visualizing my routines, before obviously reading "The Secret" or knowing anything about manifesting what you want. I can remember being a 7 or 8-year-old and laying in bed, before going to a gymnastics competition and visualizing my routine. And going through all the steps, going through everything I was going to do. From walking onto the floor, how I was going to salute to the judges, what my coach was going to look like, how she was going to correct me after the thing, how I'd step on the podium, I win the gold, how it would look, how it would sound. Every nuance.

And when I started playing guitar, I fell in love with it immediately and all my focus shifted to that, and I would lay in bed and imagine doing what I'm doing now, imagine playing on stage in front of people and ... moving people with what I love to do, playing music. And I was so single-mindedly focused on playing guitar, I didn't want to do anything else.

I was the kid that would sit alone on the bleachers and play guitar at recess at school. If you had a 15-minute break between classes, I would take my guitar out and sit on the bench and play guitar. And I just fell so in love with it, I fell so in love with this way of expressing yourself.

I had a band, we were playing Battles of the Bands in LA, and we would play any Battle of Bands that we could. We would play Battle of the Bands of high schools that we didn't even go to.

And we did this series of Battle of the Bands that led up to [Vans Warped Tour](#). And that was my first major tour when I was 15. From that point forward, I'm 31 now so I've actually been touring longer of my life than not touring. I've been touring 16 years. So, it's now just a part of who I am.

Nick: And at what point did the culture that accompanies that start to bring itself into your mindset, as well, I mean, listening to the way that you play, there's obviously many, many hours spent on your own practicing there. It's not necessarily, yeah, alcohol and hanging out on tour buses, and stuff like

that. When did you start to realize, "Oh, okay, this is what a rock star is supposed to do as well"?

Nita Strauss: It was really early on. And it was because, I don't want to say like back then, because it's still kind of different to be a female in the rock industry. It's much more common now, but back in my day, when I was a teenager, playing shows in the early 2000s, it wasn't normal. There were no girls doing it, there were no girls in the metal scene.

And there was nobody my age doing it either, so the only way I knew how to fit in was to talk tough, drink with the guys, smoke cigarettes with the guys. I never ... the weed and stuff was not something I ever got into myself, but ... I was always just putting on this tough face, because I felt that if I didn't hang, if I didn't, you know, say, "Oh yeah, you want another beer? I'll have another beer, too."

You have to put on this tough face and put that out to the world, and that was something that terrified me about quitting drinking. Because I was so scared, even in my late 20s of, like, if I don't drink with people will I still be respected? Will I still, will I have anyone to hang out with? Will I have anything to do? Am I gonna be by myself all the time?

Nick: Will I still be good at playing the guitar!

Nita Strauss: I cried. I cried before my first sober show and after. But I broke down in tears because I had not played a show without having a drink first in 15 years. It was just my routine, you have a beer, a vodka, whatever, to loosen up, and that's what gives you that little extra liquid confidence.

And I got off stage my first show and I just broke down. I burst into tears. I was like, I don't think I can do this, I've built my entire life around this identity of being this hard-hitting, hard-partying, hang with the best of them tough chick, and now I don't know who I am anymore, and everybody knew ... I was uncomfortable on stage and everybody noticed, and then I got off stage and I went to the tour bus, and there were all these fans by the tour buses. And I am stopping and talking to people, and everybody said, you were so great! Your performance was so great, and I was thinking wait, so no one noticed?

Nick: You couldn't see me?

Nita Strauss: It wasn't a thing. I wasn't cowering or cringing and I watched the video back and I was like, "Oh, it was totally normal." Maybe I ran around a little less than usual, and then the second show was easier and the third show was easier, and now I'm... I don't even think about it at all. It's been three years, I don't even think about even a little bit.

Nick: Wow.

Heather: So that kind of 'hang with the guys' mentality, did that also translate over when you stepped into the gym for the first time? Because I know that's another thing that women especially when they walk in the gym-

Nita Strauss: It's so intimidating.

Heather: Yeah!

Nita Strauss: It's so intimidating. I used to work out at Powerhouse in LA where so many

competitors work out, and a girlfriend of mine and I decided that we were going to get in shape together. The first time I really decided I wanted to start working out again, serious, was about six years ago, maybe.

And a girlfriend of mine and I signed up for Powerhouse, and we walked in and we were so intimidated. We didn't know how anything worked, we had in that Instant Fitness app on the phone and we were looking up the exercises and how to do them. We ventured ... it took a week or two for us to even venture into the weights, where the free weights were, we were just like, "Oh, we're just going to stay on the machines."

Nick: Pretty normal, I think.

Nita Strauss: Yeah, I'm sure. And then she signed up for [Team Edge](#), which is [Ingrid Romero](#) and her husband's coaching company. And she's like, let's just ... do my work out with me, follow along with me. Do it together. That's the first time that we ventured into the big weights.

I can still remember how mortifying this was. We don't know what any of this is, you know. What is a hammer curl? What is a preacher curl? What is a Smith machine? You don't know!

Nick: And you think that shit's so important. Oh, my God, if I don't know this I'm missing out on something.

Heather: Everyone's going to know that I don't know.

Nita Strauss: We want to follow the instructions exactly.

Nick: Don't you know what a hammer curl is? Get out of here!

Nita Strauss: So, there we are on our phones. Okay ... hammer curl, proper way to do a hammer curl, and this big jacked guy walked past, and goes, you ladies going to stay on your phone all day, or you going to work out? And we were so mortified we were like, we're looking up how to do ...

Nick: You can't do anything right!

Heather: "We don't know what we're doing!"

Nita Strauss: It took so long. It took so long for me to get comfortable, and because you think, again you have that feeling that all eyes are on you, and there's no right way, and you're still doing stuff, and still to this day...

My boyfriend Josh and I worked out downstairs at the gym here, and he's like, you know you have to keep your arms, you have to extend your arm more on a preacher curl. You have to extend your arm more, you're not extending your arm enough and this part of my bicep is weak, so still to this day, I'm learning.

But it took years to get comfortable, and the thing that was the biggest turning point was actually signing up for Team Edge, myself. And it was October of 2017 that I first contacted Ingrid, and I was like, "Hey, send some progress pictures, like here's where I'm at. Here's where I want to be. This is my schedule, because I work out in hotel gyms every day. I don't have a normal gym I can work out

in. Sundays, I can only do body weight. Can you work with me?"

Nick: What was your goal at that point? What did you tell them?

Nita Strauss: At that point, I felt I had progressed as much as I could without having some guidance. Especially, if I could be in my gym, a home... a gym that has a full set of equipment every day and work out, I feel like I could do a lot. But I'm on the road 10 months out of the year, and it's so everything that I do, I have to have an option to do in a hotel room with just a band, or with different things. Having Ingrid, and also having someone train you.

I didn't know for instance, I'm very quad dominant. I didn't know that. So when I would train legs, my legs would get big. They would ... because probably from gymnastics, from all my years of doing gymnastics, that's how it is. So when I started doing the Edge workouts they really focused less on compound movements and more on isolated hamstrings, glutes, and lower back.

They're like, "Okay, so this is what you like, this is the aesthetic that you like, this is what functionality that you need," because I need to strengthen my legs and my arms and be able to perform well, and so they tailor my workout every two weeks, based on what I can improve on. So, they're saying, I get the email every two weeks, this is great. Your glutes are coming along really well, this is what you still need to focus on, this is what we're going to isolate with this, I want you to take ... your BCAAs before and after our workout today or whatever it is. And they'll just really dial it in to the point where I can follow it, like a template, and as long as I'm willing to color within the lines, it'll work.

Nick: See, it's worth noting you're not doing this to do a bikini show or something like that. You're doing this just to be a functional human being, but it's your job. I think that's so valuable and people miss that sometimes-

Nita Strauss: Absolutely.

Nick: ... when they think about, "Oh, should I hire a coach, should I not hire a coach?" Just once, it can be so beneficial to have somebody who knows their shit, look at you objectively and say, "Your lifestyle up to this point as a gymnast, as a performing musician, it's done this to your body. Let's bring up your weak area before you just coming crashing into a wall."

Nita Strauss: Absolutely.

Heather: It does, yeah. It takes that outside perspective.

Nita Strauss: Outside perspective. And you don't know. I follow the pages, the Instagram pages, and I go, "Okay, this works for them, but it doesn't necessarily work for every body." And another thing that I started doing when I started working with Edge, was I started treating the shows like a workout, so I'll actually put on my [Sweet Sweat](#) before I go on stage-

Nick: What's Sweet Sweat? I don't know what that is.

Nita Strauss: Sweet Sweat, really?

Nick: No.

Nita Strauss: Are we at Bodybuilding.com?

Nick: Do you know what that is?

Heather: I have no idea what that is.

Nita Strauss: Really? It's this stuff that you put on your body and it makes you sweat. It brings up your body temperature so it makes you sweat and you lose water, and-

Heather: I'm gonna take notes. Sweet Sweat.

Nita Strauss: I don't think they sell it as a fat burner but it does help you lose a lot of that stubborn body fat in the areas that you put it on.

Nick: Just by raising temperature. Interesting. No, I've never heard of this.

Nita Strauss: It raises your temperature and-

Nick: We probably sell it.

Heather: I feel like when I was a competitor, I put something like that on areas of my body that I wanted to expose.

Nick: You probably just put a lot of weird stuff...

Heather: Yeah.

Nita Strauss: I put that on and I put a waist trainer over it, not for the fact of getting smaller, but because it helps retain that heat. And I'll put that on-

Nick: That sounds pretty sweaty.

Nita Strauss: Yeah, it is. And I put it on and this is actually ... my watch here, is a Misfit Command. It's a step tracker so I can track my steps for the show. I try to hit my 10,000 by the end of the show so if I don't hit it, if you guys see me running back and forth a little more. If I'm checking my watch, I'm not bored. Okay, I'm at 995... Okay, I can relax.

Nick: One more solo. Come on, one more time guys.

Nita Strauss: Exactly. But really, I'll take L-Carnitine before a show. I'll take a BCAA after the show. I actually do [intermittent fasting](#) now so I don't this these days. I love it.

Heather: Yeah.

Nita Strauss: You do it, too?

Heather: Oh, yeah. It's the best.

Nita Strauss: I'm obsessed with it.

Heather: I tell people, it's like the perfect marriage of easy to do, best results.

Nita Strauss: Yes.

Heather: Because there are easier things to do that you won't get results, and there are better results that are not nearly as easy. It's like-

Nita Strauss: Absolutely.

Heather: ... right with those two.

Nita Strauss: It makes all the difference in the world, I find. And it's hard because for me, if I do a 16-to-8, try to eat between noon and 8pm, my thing is, I usually go onstage around 8pm, so I can't eat my final meal at 7:30, because then I'll go onstage full. What I end up doing on tour is usually doing more of a four-hour eating window. I'll eat between noon and 4:00 or 5:00. I'll have a nice, big, late lunch, and then that will be my final meal until after.

But what I would do if I wasn't intermittent fasting is, make a protein shake, banana and chocolate soymilk and protein and all kinds of good stuff, and have half before the show and half after the show, just as you would for a heavy workout. And treating the show as a workout has made a big difference in my physique, it really has.

Nick: Have you found that there are other people you cross paths with in the music industry and in metal who have that same mentality, where it's like all of a sudden you can geek out on that sort of thing-

Nita Strauss: Definitely.

Nick: ... and they understand that feeling of, all right, this is not just a performance, it's a physical feat.

Nita Strauss: It's a physical thing, yeah, absolutely. I don't know if I know anyone ... it's really just my boyfriend, Josh and I, who do the actual workout routine, as in taking your [BCAAs](#), taking a fat burner, putting on your Sweet Sweat and what not. But there are ... even the two guitar players on tour with me right now, Angel Vivaldi and Jacky Vincent, they're total gym rats. They have gym stuff, we've got pads and gloves to do boxing-

Nick: Oh, sweet.

Nita Strauss: We've got all kinds of stuff with us, and the other guys in the bands I know too, it's the same thing. And the girls, even the females in the music industry, are super into fitness. Everyone's bringing [PowerBlocks](#) and [bands](#) and [ankle weights](#) and whatever we can out on the road to do what you can with what you have.

Heather: Nice.

Nick: And it's so easy to think of a lead guitarist in particular as their body's part of the presentation.

Nita Strauss: It is.

Nick: Joe Perry or somebody like that, no sleeves, maybe no shirt-

Nita Strauss: Sure.

Nick: And you don't think about the physicality of it. It's a physical act, playing guitar. So how has this all changed, your idea of what your body is and what its purpose is?

Nita Strauss: For a long time, I was just zeroed in on the mental and then the performance aspect, and I wasn't thinking about being the total package. In 2018, to be a success at just about anything that you do, you have to be the complete package, I think. You have to have a good look, be professional, be great at what you do. Be on time. Dress appropriately for what it is that you want to do. Do your social media, do your marketing. You have to be a one-person entrepreneur if you want to succeed in doing something great with your life.

And the aesthetic part of it was something that I hadn't really put that much thought into. It's hard as a woman in the music industry, because there's this balance between being sexy and being taken seriously. And I have just gone all over the place on that scale.

Heather: Right.

Nita Strauss: I remember when I first started touring, people were telling me like, "You're a pretty girl, you need to show that to the world." I wasn't wearing nipple tape or anything, but I would dress less conservatively; I'd show more skin, or wear shorts, or a skirt or whatever. And I realized pretty quickly, that's not the kind of attention you want to get in the music industry.

From there, I went the polar opposite way.

Nick: Parka.

Nita Strauss: Basically. Essentially, I would wear a men's size large shirt and baggy pants, like cargo pants. Adidas shoes.

Nick: What is this, 1991?

Nita Strauss: Yeah, basically. A dude in 1991. Much less make-up. I did my hair so dark it was almost brown. I didn't want to be, the girl. I wanted to just be respected as a guitar player. And then I realized I just wasn't really all that happy trying to hide. I was trying to hide from the world and I didn't like that either. It wasn't until I just started saying, "You know what? I am who I am. I love what I do. I want to look the way I want to look, and if people don't like it, it's not my problem." And as soon as I just embraced that, everybody came onboard, and no one was judging me, no one was saying, "Oh, you shouldn't ... A girl that looks like that shouldn't play guitar like that, or whatever." So, it's all about embracing who you are and embracing your own journey.

Heather: Well, and you're hitting on a problem a lot of women in the fitness industry encounter, too-

Nita Strauss: I can only imagine.

Heather: ... where it's like, it's a skin industry.

Nick: A skin-dustry.

Nita Strauss: A-ha. The dad jokes have started.

Nick: Geez. You call them dad Jokes, too. That's all anybody says about me all day long is I make dad jokes. Thanks a lot. Yes, I deserve that.

Heather: We totally tease him about it, him and his terrible puns.

No, but I mean fitness women, they're encouraged to pose almost naked, really show off their six-pack and their arms and everything else in between. And so, finding that balance between being able to be proud of your body and show off your body, but then also maintain that professionalism and integrity-

Nita Strauss: I can only imagine.

Heather: Yeah, so it seems like you've really hit something there. And also, I think that a lot of women that start down that fitness journey, discover that if they prove themselves in the gym as well, and own that, that really helps secure that identity. That it doesn't have to just be about what you look like in front of a camera.

Nita Strauss: What you look like when you're bending over and showing your butt.

Heather: Right, right.

Nita Strauss: I see, especially in following my coach, Ingrid, I see this all the time. And she's really upfront and open and she's a mother of twins, an entrepreneur. She has four businesses and yeah, there's a bunch of pictures of her in competition, wearing a tiny little thong, with her butt out. But she talks a lot about that. How there's a difference between being proud of who you are and sexualizing yourself. And it's hard to find that balance. I can only imagine how much more difficult it would be in the fitness industry.

Nick: Now, your job is a little different though, also, because there's this profound mental and creative component, on a nightly basis, too, right? You're up there making snap stylistic decisions and also just practicing something in your mind that you've been practicing for 20 years. Do you feel like getting fitter has actually made you a better guitar player in any way?

Heather: I'm so glad that you asked that, because I wanted to ask that.

Nita Strauss: Yeah.

Nick: I mean, not just at ... All right, I have energy to last the show, but-

Nita Strauss: No, it has, it has a thousand percent, and I'll tell you why, discipline. Discipline is a muscle just like anything else, and the more you train it, the more you have it. Whether you're intermittent fasting, whether you're dieting, whether you're working out, whether you're practicing the guitar, whether you're learning a new language, whatever it is, the more you exercise your discipline

muscle, the stronger it will get.

And also, removing temptations and stuff like that is a huge thing. One total game changer for me was having my food delivered on tour. Stuff like that, made a huge, huge difference. I have Trifecta Nutrition Meals sent out every week on tour. They deliver every Friday, wherever I am, in the United States. And that helps me stay on that track, as well. So any little edge you can give yourself to stay on-track, I think, is a worthy thing to do.

Nick: And I also wonder how, now that you're outside of the lifestyle that you used to lead, when you look back at that lifestyle, how does it look to you now?

Nita Strauss: It's so funny that you ask that, because I think about that all the time, and I never really want to talk too much about it, because I don't look-

Nick: You don't judge people, sure.

Nita Strauss: ... down on anybody. Everybody's on their own path. There's no part of me that would ever tell anybody, "You need to stop drinking because I stopped drinking." But I look back at old pictures of myself ... I think back on those days and some of it pops up in your Facebook memories or whatever, and I'm like, how did I ever think that I was happy like that? There are people that can function very, very happily, but I was more than 50 pounds heavier than I am now. I was constantly fighting with my wonderful boyfriend. My parents were always worried about me. I just wasn't happy. I wasn't happy with myself. And I didn't realize how unhappy I was until I removed that element from my life.

And now it's funny, I'll go out to concerts, or go out to a restaurant or whatever, and you run into people that are hammered and sloppy and I look, and I go, I was totally that guy.

How many times have I run into people and been super sloppy, and I thought it was hilarious at the time. And I've been on stage back when I was playing with The Iron Maidens, the other guitar player, Courtney, who's actually sober and on her own fitness journey now, as well. We used to get so hammered on-stage and then we would make huge mistakes and we would think it was so funny. Because we're like, "Oh, we're so drunk." And now you look back at that and you go, "Fuck, what were we thinking?" What an unprofessional mentality to have.

Nick: Yeah, it's a message. You send a lot of messages when you're on-stage.

Nita Strauss: Absolutely, you do. And if there was ever a sign that it was supposed to stop, that it was supposed happen. I mean when I stopped, you can ask whatever it is you believe in for a sign, like, am I on the right path? And I've gotten so many signs. I'm the first female to have a [signature guitar](#) with Ibanez, which is the company that Vai plays and Satriani and all my heroes play. I have my signature pick-ups. I was on the cover of the two biggest guitar magazines in the world this year. I dropped 50 pounds. I can fit into all the clothes I want now. I can wear a bikini and be happy, reasonably happy. Can you ever be totally happy?

But there's so many things. My relationship improved. My relationship with my family improved. Everything has gotten ... skyrocketed. My album came out. I'm on my first solo tour ever. And if that's not proof saying, yeah, you're on the right path, I don't know what more proof I can ask for.

Nick: Now you've toured with Alice Cooper a lot who famously in the 70s was just all-access.

Nita Strauss: Oh, yeah.

Nick: There was the new journalism book about him in 1974 that you can't find anymore called, I think, "Billion Dollar Baby," that I read. It's the story of the dysfunctional Alice Cooper years, basically. And then, now, people associate Alice Cooper with clean-living, playing golf every day. I had the opportunity to interview him 12 years ago when he stopped in town-

Nita Strauss: Oh, nice.

Nick: ... and he's so thoughtful and protective of his rituals.

Nita Strauss: Oh, yes.

Nick: And I wonder, what is it like being on tour with that guy, as opposed to being on tour with other people, and what have you taken from him?

Nita Strauss: Alice is the consummate professional. He's always on point. He's always ... The exact guy you interviewed, he's that person all the time. Clean living, gets up early, plays golf, goes to church on Sundays. Sober 40 years and change. And the funny thing about Alice being sober, I remember he said a couple years ago he was on the golf course and golfers are all big drinkers, for the most part.

Nick: Right.

Nita Strauss: And somebody had spiked their own Diet Coke. They weren't trying to mess with him, but they had put some rum or something in their own Diet Coke. Alice took a sip of it by accident. And he was like, "Oh, my God, is this going to be-

Nick: There's the feeling.

Nita Strauss: ... the trigger?" And it wasn't. After this long of sobriety, he's like, nope, it was nothing. He didn't even feel it anymore. And the level that he functions at, touring as much as we do-

Nick: At his age.

Nita Strauss: I'm 31, he's 70. He is 70. He turned 70 in February. He's going to be 71 in a couple months. He's 40 years older than me. And to still be functioning at this high of a level. I think everybody should learn a little thing or two about what he does and try to emulate that.

Nick: Yeah, but he's part of that rock star mentality ... that mythology that, you got to keep going. You've got to tour as long as the world wants to listen to you.

Nita Strauss: Oh, yeah. I don't think he'll stop.

Heather: I was going to say, does he push you?

Nita Strauss: Oh, absolutely. It pushes me all the time. It inspires me all the time. Anytime that I feel

tired. Anytime that I feel like I don't feel like giving 100% on stage today, if a guy that's 70-years-old, that has been touring for 50 years, 5-0, can do this, I certainly don't have any excuse.

Nick: Yeah, but that lifestyle though, it's a different kind of lifestyle. And I know that there's always going to be an appeal there. One of my favorite punk rock musicians, he's probably 50 or 55-years-old now, and he tours 300 days-a-year sometimes. And that's the norm for a lot of people.

Nita Strauss: Oh, yeah.

Nick: That sort of "die on-stage" mentality.

Nita Strauss: That's what we do.

Nick: Does that still call to you as much as it did when you were younger? Is that the lifestyle that you still feel like, I've got to keep doing this forever?

Nita Strauss: I will say, now that I've been doing it for 16 years, it's lost a little bit of the appeal. I mean, I love touring, I love playing music, but I love going home now, too. And a lot of that has to do with being in a really good place in my life. When I was partying, I wasn't in a happy place in my relationship, whatever else, I would stay on the road all the time. Why not? I get paid to go out and party. But now, I'm in such a great place in my relationship. Such a great place in my life. I've got our two dogs at home and a beautiful house and a nice life there, so I look forward to going home now. I really do. And so it's more of a balance now, then, I've got to get back out on the road, I've got to get back out there. Now it's like, I love to go out and tour and play for people, but I also do love to go home.

Nick: Sure. I was fortunate recently to interview this great old jazz musician, Sonny Rollins, who's, he's 88 now. And in 1958, he was at that moment that you were at a few years ago where he was like, "Boy, I'm not happy. I'm successful, but I'm not happy." And he stepped away from performing at the height of his powers for three years. A three-year sabbatical-

Nita Strauss: Wow.

Nick: ... where he just focused on working out, practicing, and getting ready to come back.

Nita Strauss: That's a risk as a musician.

Nick: Exactly. I was wondering, yeah, when you really started to change the way you lead your life, did you feel like, "I wonder if this is even compatible with being a rock musician?" Like that?

Nita Strauss: Of course.

Nick: Can I do this?

Nita Strauss: Of course. Absolutely, and I was really lucky to be on tour at the time with Mötley Crüe and have Nikki Sixx out on tour with us. And, while I wouldn't say, "Oh, we're super good friends." We did become friends, and I was able to go to somebody who's been to hell and back, kind of hat in hand and say, "What do I do? Like, what do I do now?" He gave me some book suggestions to read, meditation, and all these different things and now there's so many people that

were known for being these crazy hard partiers that have just adopted this lifestyle. I've got all the guys doing the [DDP yoga](#) now, on the tour bus. We'll wake and we'll put on the DDPY app and we'll do a DDP yoga workout. Those are the kind of things that, if you fall into a routine and, you know, we've got the trifecta food, we've got the yoga, we've got a gym, we've got the stuff that we need to function at this level, it becomes easy. It's only when you don't set yourself up for success that it's difficult.

Nick: Yeah.

Heather: It gets tricky.

Nita Strauss: If I fly out somewhere and I'm like, "Oh, I didn't prepare anything. I didn't bring gym shoes. I didn't bring stuff." Then I'll fall off track but, as long as you plan ahead for success, you go, "Okay, I'm gonna get there, I'm gonna work out, I'm gonna do this." As long as you plan ahead, it's like meal prepping but for your whole life, essentially.

Nick: Yeah, and that's one thing I wanted to ask you, as well. How much of this is just building rituals? It sounds like you must have, even on the road, which can be a pretty chaotic place, fairly ritualized lifestyle.

Nita Strauss: I do, yeah. I really do. It's a little more difficult on the solo tour. On the Alice Cooper tour it's a lot less work, it's a lot less responsibility. The solo tour, this is my name on the marquee. They're coming there to see me or not, and that's it. So there's a lot more to do. It's a lot less luxurious. Less gym access. We're not in hotels every day. We don't have hotel gyms and stuff but, as long as you set that mentality up, you know, you set an alarm, you get up, you do what you can. A lot of times we depend on working out in the parking lot outside the bus. If you guys can see, if you could only see what the parking lot here at [Bodybuilding.com](#) looks like, you'd see that that hasn't happened that much on this tour.

You just fit in what you can and also not beat yourself up if you don't. It's easy to just shut down and go, "I didn't work out today, so my day's shot anyway so I might as well just not." But I like the analogy of, if you drop your phone and the screen cracks, you don't just keep slamming your phone on the table until it breaks. If you have a donut, that doesn't ruin your whole day and you just eat whatever the hell you want the rest of the day. If you don't work out, that doesn't mean you just, the whole day goes to hell.

Heather: Yeah, you just didn't work out that day.

Nita Strauss: Just keep going.

Heather: Well, it's interesting because I feel like, to a certain extent, in the performance industry, drugs were used to enhance performance, to get you ready, to get you, you know. Alcohol is to loosen you up and now it kind of sounds like this new wave of rock star is using fitness as their new drug.

Nita Strauss: A thousand percent. You couldn't be more right. When we were on that Mötley Crüe tour, and we talked about this in the earlier piece, too, Nikki Sixx used to come into our dressing room and go, "Hey, you guys got that stuff?" And it was this green drink. It was this green, you know, like this powder.

Nick: Green drank.

Nita Strauss: Green drank. But that's a green cup, that doesn't count.

Heather: This is more red.

Nick: This is as dank as anything Nikki was drinking on tour.

Nita Strauss: I'm sure. This was called "Rocky Wellness," I think. Something like that, but it was like spirulina, kale, like an organic greens-type of a powder that you put in your water.

Nick: Keep you regular out there on the road.

Nita Strauss: Just awful! Oh, the most disgusting taste but, it's just so funny because we called it the highway to health instead of "Highway to Hell." Highway to health.

Heather: Ha! See, she's got dad jokes, too.

Nita Strauss: All the dad jokes. I blame truck driving ...

Nick: We may call this podcast, "Highway to Health with Nita Strauss."

Nita Strauss: Highway to health, I'm so on board with that.

Heather: And then her fitness routine will be called "*Iron Maidens*."

Nick: Exactly.

Nita Strauss: I love that.

Nick: You must be an aficionado of the elastic band then, as well, right?

Nita Strauss: Yeah. The bands, we're huge proponents of the bands.

Nick: So, what's the key for making those work? I always tell people, you gotta have a [doorway anchor](#). Doorway anchor's a game changer.

Nita Strauss: I could see that.

Nick: What do you tell, or ... what's your favorite way to make bands work?

Nita Strauss: So, I like the loop bands more than the handle bands. Josh warms up with the handle ones on the door, every single day before we go on stage. He's always with the bands tied around the door. For me, I like to do burnout sets. I'll do a lot of leg stuff with them. If we don't have a heavy, a gym with any weights or anything, I'll just do burnout sets with the band. I find that having the band around your upper thigh or whatever, or, I'm sorry, lower thigh above the knee, keeps you in such better form. You know, keeps your knees from buckling in.

Nick: Oh, for squats and things? It's amazing, yeah. Totally a game changer.

Nita Strauss: Buckling in. It's been a total game changer, exactly.

Heather: Works dat booty.

Nick: Are you into BFR bands?

Nita Strauss: I don't know about BFR bands.

Heather: [Gasps.]

Nick: [Blood Flow Restriction](#).

Heather: Blood Flow Restriction.

Nita Strauss: Is this like my Sweet Sweat?

Heather: This is the Sweet Sweat. We get to have redemption now.

Nita Strauss: Tell me about this.

Heather: It's insane, it's absolutely bonkers.

Nick: Well, I would but we end up talking about blood flow restriction training on like every other podcast.

Nita Strauss: Tell me when we're done.

Nick: No, no, no. Blood flow restriction training.

Heather: It's exactly what it sounds like. You tourniquet your arms.

Nick: You restrict either your upper arm or the upper thigh, so that blood gather in that limb while your training and it allows you to get a really unpleasant pump with a very light weight. But actually there's been research that says it can lead to pretty profound strength increases, muscle increases, and for legs and arms, with a resistance, a light resistance band, it's pretty incredible.

Nita Strauss: Okay. It must be amazing for circulation, too.

Nick: Oh, yeah. Yeah, it's all about how tight you make it. People can go too tight, but your body lets you know when you go too tight because you go, "I can't walk. Oh, my arm is laying there, I can't feel it."

Heather: "I'm paralyzed forever."

Nick: Some BFR band curls, BFR squats, this is something you need to have on tour because it's going to take up this amount of space in your bag.

Nita Strauss: Can you write that down?

Heather: We might know a website that has a couple articles about that.

Nick: That and the doorway anchor. Now, I also know that you're a follower of Stoic philosophy, right?

Nita Strauss: Yes.

Nick: This is something I read about you and I love this because Stoicism, as a way of life, has really been gathering a lot of momentum in the last few years. I was a philosophy major in college and I remember thinking, "Oh, Stoics are just one in the..."

Nita Strauss: Right, right.

Nick: But it's fascinating how Stoicism has blossomed. So, for people who don't know, what would you say are some of the defining characteristics of Stoicism?

Nita Strauss: I first found out about Stoicism by reading "[The Obstacle is the Way](#)" and I know that a lot of real Stoic scholars, philosophy majors, and people go, "Aw, that's not real Stoicism." I find that it is. It's just kind of, it's like reading, if you're reading a more modern day text of the Bible versus reading the original text. It's just broken down into ways that you can understand. You know, it's got sports quotes and analogies that work with modern day life and, essentially, just the philosophy that, what stands in the way, becomes the way.

The impediment to action advances action. And embracing the challenges, embracing the difficulties in life, and finding new ways to look at them was, it literally changed my entire life and I remember reading "The Obstacle is the Way" on the stair machine at the gym, and, before I knew it, I had been on the stair machine for an hour and I was like, "This book is amazing." And also "[Ego is the Enemy](#)" by Ryan Holiday, also. Those are the two I always recommend people start with.

Nick: Your shirt says, "Ego kills talent."

Heather: Yeah, ego kills talent.

Nita Strauss: Exactly. This is my favorite reminder ever. It's from a company called [Beverly Kills](#) and they have my two favorite shirts ever which are, "Ego kills talent" and "Stay humble or be humbled." Both of which kind of work with Stoicism, although the company's not Stoic at all.

And this company, I wear these shirts on stage all the time because it's a great reminder to myself and to the audience like, "Hey. Keep yourself in check." The whole brand is basically about how people lose themselves, they lose their morals, and they lose their integrity in pursuit of their dreams, in pursuit of what they really want.

Nick: And in pursuit of things they can't control.

Nita Strauss: Exactly. Exactly, so having a little reminder like "Stay humble or be humbled," if you're not humble, the world will make you humble. And that's something I like to put out there and represent.

Nick: Yeah. One of the great historical stories about Stoicism is that, at the moment of a general or an emperor's great triumph, somebody would whisper in his ear, "Remember, you're gonna die!"

Heather: That's Marcus Aurelius, isn't it?

Nita Strauss: Remember you're mortal. [Memento mori](#). I have the [coin](#).

Heather: Remember you're mortal.

Nick: Oh, you have one of those [coins](#)? Those things are cool.

But it's also just, it seems like it's a great way of life through a fitness lens, as well, because it's all about inspecting your actions, controlling what you can, looking for things that you *can* do, getting rid of things you can't do. Yeah, how did you find that? You mentioned this one book, but how did you get that serious about it?

Nita Strauss: It was that book. I mean, it really was, and I actually had the opportunity to tell the author, Ryan Holiday, that—he's actually a big metal fan. Which is awesome. He loves Iron Maiden and Alice Cooper and stuff, so that's the coolest that like, and I've actually, I've done some interviews with him for [The Daily Stoic](#) and stuff which is very, very cool to be a part of.

Nick: How do you work that into your life?

Nita Strauss: It's really about embracing the teachings, I find. Like the fundamentals. *Memento mori* is a great example of what you just talked about. How the general will come back from winning battle and there will be a slave whispering in his ear, "Remember, you'll die someday. Remember that you're mortal."

And I go on stage in front of, sometimes, 100,000 people at a time, and it's this huge high. Like this huge rush, and if you're not careful, you can get swept away on that wave. And that's how people fall into this path of drugs, and cheating, and alcohol, and all this stuff because you're like, "I am," can I cuss?

Heather: Yeah.

Nita Strauss: "I am fucking invincible!"

Nick: Right, because you feel that way.

Nita Strauss: No, because you get on stage and you do what you love in front of that many people and you're on this gigantic high, and then you get off stage, you meet fans, you take pictures, you know, you're the hero of the day. You're the rock star. Then you get on the tour bus and then you climb into this tiny little cocoon alone, and then you lay there. And it's dark, and it's silent, and it's bumpy, and uncomfortable, and you're like, "Oh, my God. I was just there and now I'm in here." And if you don't have something to put that kind of thing in perspective, it could really mess with your head.

And that is why I spent so long kind of numbing all of that by drinking and doing drugs and whatever

else, because it's a very strange dynamic. And having something like that, having the Stoic philosophy to kind of ground me and say, "Everything happens for a reason. Everything happens the way it's supposed to." You have to compartmentalize your life. Just like your lifts. Just like your fitness routine, or your cardio, or whatever it is, you have to compartmentalize it into single-component, doable steps. Whatever your goal is, whatever it is that you're doing, and that has saved me tremendous amount of anxiety and headache.

Nick: Yeah, Epictetus is one of the great Stoic philosophers. He was always my favorite. Just so readable.

Nita Strauss: Yeah. So *epic*...

Nick: Exactly, but also just like, when I learned that you were in... I was like, "Alright. It's been so long since I read that stuff." And I got some of it out the other day and I was reading it again, and he had so many great quotes that just bring it all into perspective, and one of them is, you treat everything in your life, all of your good things, all of the bad things, they're all just basically visitations. You don't own any of it. Your wife, your kids, your success, your guitar, it comes to you, and when it leaves, it just being returned basically.

Nita Strauss: I love that.

Nick: Yeah, yeah. With fitness that can be valuable because you can think it's so important, every little thing is so important, but you're just kind of taking what you can.

Nita Strauss: You're borrowing it. Sure.

Heather: Well, yeah, fitness especially because, as you age, you're not going to be able to maintain that same level.

Nick: But you can still do so much, you know.

Heather: You can still do so much.

Nita Strauss: What about that lady that's like 80-years-old and competing in fitness? I love her. I see that circulate around.

Nick: Oh, I didn't know which one you're thinking of. We know a bunch of those people.

Heather: I was going to say, which one? [We know of a couple](#), yeah.

Nita Strauss: Okay. There's one that I keep seeing circulate, one viral video I keep seeing circulating.

Nick: Oh, is it that African-American lady?

Nita Strauss: African-American woman, yeah.

Nick: She's incredible. She's like 88.

Nita Strauss: I love her. She's 88?

Nick: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Nita Strauss: That's amazing.

Nick: Yeah, yeah.

Nita Strauss: Every time I don't feel like going to the gym, I think about her.

Nick: I feel like once a year we have another person right in that age group where it's like, "Hey, I'm 93. I'm doing a show." And they come to the site.

Nita Strauss: That's incredible. You know Alice's wife, Sheryl, Alice Cooper's wife, Sheryl Cooper, has been the ballet dancer in Alice's show since "[Welcome to My Nightmare](#)" in the seventies. She is still the ballerina in our show now, and if you look at her, she's in a full face of makeup, you know this crazy clown nurse makeup, you would never think that underneath that makeup is a woman who's old enough to have been in a show for 42 years but she has been. You take somebody like that, she's so flexible. She puts her leg straight up in a full arabesque over her head and it's like, if she can do that, everybody can have that discipline.

Nick: She hasn't broken down. I feel like, 'cause you hear about ballerinas and people who move their hips in that way. That was one thing I heard about Prince was that was one reason he was on pain pills was because, doing the splits on stage for years and years had done that to him. I guess a ballerina has control of those ranges of motion like nobody else though, right?

Nita Strauss: True, and Prince, he would just fall into that split. It's not like a split where you're stretching, like you're doing yoga or something. He would just slam into that split. Every time I see that I go, "Oh. I'm not gonna try."

Nick: And I claim no knowledge. I just read that about Prince. If that's wrong, I'm sorry to Prince.

Nita Strauss: It seems legit.

Nick: Yeah. You could imagine it. Well, we really appreciate you coming and talking with us. "Controlled Chaos" is out now on all the streaming services.

Nita Strauss: Yep. It's on [iTunes](#), [Amazon Music](#), [Google Play](#), [Spotify](#), Pandora-

Nick: You can also buy it, though.

Nita Strauss: You can buy it on my website, [NitaStrauss.com](#). And that's also the best place to find all my tour dates, all that fun stuff.

Nick: She may or may not be in your town people.

Nita Strauss: I will be here in Boise, tonight, actually. We've got another three weeks left of [The Guitar Collective](#) tour, which is myself, Angel Vivaldi, and Jacky Vincent. So if you guys like guitar playing, there's going to be so much guitar playing going on. There are no singers on this tour. It's all

shredding.

Nick: Instrumental rock.

Nita Strauss: All shredding, all the time.

Nick: See that's, yeah, instrumental rock gets a bad rap, you know?

Nita Strauss: Yeah. It does, and it's fun. It's really fun. Like this is not your parents' instrumental rock.

Nick: So, this is something you've obviously been fantasizing about.

Nita Strauss: Forever.

Nick: If you're a fan of Joe Satriani and Steve Vai, and people like that.

Nita Strauss: Yeah, this is a dream. To have my label come out on [Sumerian Records](#). Sumerian is the company that's like, right on the cutting edge of all this new instrumental stuff and then to go on tour with Angel and Jacky, like two of the most accomplished shred guitar players. We're playing fun music. It's not just like, oh we're going up there, playing a ton of notes and it's exhausting. We have a super high-energy show. A big light show. It's a rock show. It's a lot of notes but it's also a rock show.

So, if you guys are in town and like instrumental guitar music, if you go to [TheGuitarCollective.net](#) or any of my social media, I'm hurricanenita on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#). I'm Nita Strauss on [Facebook](#). You can find all the tour dates.

Nick: Cool, and you have your own signature [Ibanez](#) guitar now, too, which you can go buy.

Nita Strauss: That's right. Most definitely, yeah.

Nick: Your own ax.

Heather: I'm gonna put that on my Christmas list.

Nita Strauss: My own ax. My weapon of choice.

Nick Collias: Go buy that ax people. Nita Strauss, thanks for coming and talking with us.

Heather Eastman: Yes, thank you.

Nita Strauss: Thank you guys so much for having me on.



[MEET MUSIC'S MOST SHREDDED AX PLAYER](#)

Metal goddess Nita Strauss and her sculpted physique destroy stereotypes. Now, as lead guitarist for Hall of Fame rocker Alice Cooper, she's creating her own legend.