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BILLY DUFFY OF THE CULT

INTERVIEW BY BRAD ANGLE • PHOTOS BY TRAVIS SHINN



AS THE ONLY CONSTANT MEMBERS OF THE CULT, YOU AND [SINGER] IAN [ASTBURY] ARE THE HEART AND SOUL OF THE BAND. WHAT IS THAT PARTNERSHIP LIKE? HOW DOES IAN COMPLEMENT YOUR CREATIVITY?

—KELLY YOUNGBLOOD

We're both the same birth sign, and there are a lot of similarities between us. We provide each other with the creative tension we need to create better art than if we were working independently. We have a special creative nature that was revealed when we first got together in a small apartment in Brixton, London, in 1983. One example of how our relationship works is illustrated in how the song "The Wolf" came together. It was a particularly difficult song to bring together. I had the main riff even before the last Cult album, but Ian didn't want to work on it; he wouldn't even touch it, so I let it lie. But I brought it back, because I knew it was good. This time out, Ian and the rest of the guys were really patient with my obsession to work it out, and we were able to. I'm very happy with the results, possibly because of its difficult upbringing.

soundchecking at every Cult gig, trying to remove the frequencies that create that real deep, low-mid feedback. And finally, I've always put high-output, hot pickups in my Gretsches. My original pickups in the Seventies were so puny that you'd have to run the amp really loud, and it would create horrible feedback problems. I've used Seymour Duncan and TV Jones pickups, and they work really well. They keep the Gretsch tone and chime but prevent feedback from the amp.

Q: The transitions in your songs from chorus to verse are so seamless. Do you have to really focus and work these out, or do you simply write in a linear way? —Arnon Wiggond

It used to be very linear, out of necessity. Then Pro Tools came along, and it's changed how people construct songs. When Bob Rock came in to finish the production on the new album, he helped us with the arrangements. We laid everything down organically, and then changed and moved sections around with Pro Tools. So it can be a really useful tool, if you make sure to keep an organic feel to it.

Q: Reality TV shows like Gene Simmons Family Jewels and The Osbournes have been a way for rockers to show another side of themselves. In retrospect, do you think your participation in Married to Rock was a positive thing, or do you wish you had taken a pass?

—Jessie Chadwick

I'm happy that I participated in that show. I think I was comfortable

Q: I heard the single "Lucifer" from Choice of Weapon, and I love it! Judging from the album name and cover art, it seems like you're exploring some dark subject matter. What can you tell us about the album's themes?

—Francis Soyer

"Lucifer" is certainly about hedonism, but that song isn't indicative of the whole album. It's more of a teaser track than a single. But most of our records are kind of dark, and that's Ian's deal. If I could sum up *Choice of Weapon*, I'd say it's about urban shamanism. The album was written in New York and Los Angeles but also in the California desert. It's trying to

connect the dichotomy of living in urban areas but realizing that outside of those areas is where our food and water comes from. You can have all the technology you want, but if you don't have clean air to breathe, it's game over. That said, I'm a guitar player and not the lyricist, so I'm just talking about what I'm observing coming from the singer of our band. But those have always been recurring themes for the Cult: love and appreciation of nature but also appreciation of an urban society's vibe, violence and sexuality.

Q: I love the Gretsch White Falcon. Are you using

it or the Les Paul on the new record? And I'm also wondering what's your trick to prevent the Gretsch from feeding back in live situations?

—Dave Belknap

I've always used the Les Paul and Gretsch White Falcon, and they're both heavily featured on the new album. Regarding the second part, that's a very pragmatic question. One thing I've done with the White Falcon is put things in the body—little bits of T-shirts or whatever—to help stop some of the feedback. But don't overfill it or the guitar will sound dead. You also have to be conscious of where you're playing onstage. We spend a lot of time



with the legitimacy of the other band guys involved: Duff [McKagan] with Guns N' Roses, Perry [Farrell] with Jane's Addiction and Steve Stevens with Billy Idol. I didn't hear the sound of a barrel being scraped, if you know what I mean. The show was about the women, and some of the guys were in it more than others. For me, it was kind of interesting. I never want to be the kind of person that says no to everything. I wanted to participate in a contemporary experience like reality TV and see how it impacted me. It was also good because it got the Cult out there to an audience of millions during a time when the band didn't have an album out.

Q: In interviews over the years, you've mentioned you witnessed a lot of special gigs as a teenager in Manchester. Was there one that topped the list for you and made you say, "I wanna do this for a living"?

—Steve Wood

Yeah, there were two gigs: one that made me think, Yes, I wanna do this for a living, and another that made me realize, Yes, it's possible for me to do this for a living. The former was Queen. They were touring the *Sheer Heart Attack* album, and I was blown away. I will take to my grave the image of Queen opening before a 2,000-seat hall with "Now I'm Here." It was a black

stage, the guitar was chugging a D chord, which I've ripped off a million times, and Freddie Mercury appeared in some window with just his face visible. Then, when the song kicked in, every light on the stage lit up. The entire band was dressed in white, and Brian May had a cape. That experience, which is utterly indelibly printed in my mind, made me realize I wanted to do that for a living.

The gig that made me realize it was possible was the Sex Pistols. I saw their second show in Manchester in June 1976. There were, like, 300 people there. It was heavy, violent, and there was a fight, and a lot of people left. It was also the

Buzzcocks' debut show. That show blew my mind. At that point, the idea of playing music for a living changed from being a fantasy to a reality.

Q: Which of your songs ranks as your defining "guitar" moment?

—Filipe Dias

"She Sells Sanctuary." There's a guitar sound on that record [Love] that I've heard no one create before or since. It's a combination of feel and the music itself, which keeps it fresh even to this day. It was just in the Budweiser Super Bowl commercial with the Flo Rida mash-up, and it sounded great. The guitars still jump out of the speakers.

Q:

I SAW A YOUTUBE CLIP OF MATTHEW McCONAUGHEY PLAYING BONGOS WITH THE CULT DURING YOUR RECENT SOUTH BY SOUTHWEST PERFORMANCE. WHAT'S THE STORY BEHIND HIS GUEST APPEARANCE?

—RUSS ZISKEY

Matthew is a longtime Cult fan. You're more likely to find him in the pit banging it out with the fans than find him backstage. So we were going to South by Southwest to promote the new record, and Matthew wanted to come to one of the gigs. My manager actually pointed out that Matthew really likes to participate and had the idea of asking him to play congas on a couple songs, including the new one, "Lucifer," and an old one, "Spiritwalker." Matthew was into it, so he came out to the big gig and played with us in front of 25,000 people. It was a lot of fun, but it was also about raising awareness for the new record in this media-saturated world. So with Matthew McConaughey and the Cult, it was like "two plus two equals seven."



OSCAR AMOS (McCONAUGHEY)