

**They
Brought
You
Sanctuary,
Now
Don't
Underestimate...**

The Power of The Cult

by *Thrust™ Magazine*
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With nearly 30 years of collaborative history, nine albums, and two EPs, the core of The Cult, lead singer Ian Astbury and guitarist Billy Duffy, have lived the highs and lows of the rock-n-roll experience and come out stronger and wiser for it. With a stable lineup in bassist Chris Wyse and drummer John Tempesta, they are looking to make 2012 the most significant year in their history and have the vehicle to make it happen.

Their new album, *Choice of Weapon*, is slated for release on May 22nd and was very much written for their loyal fan base, presenting their trademark guitar-oriented sound but with a deeper and more substantive message. This is a pretty significant feat because they have never been seen as a shallow bunch.

With producers Chris Goss (Queens of the Stone Age, U.N.K.L.E., Masters of Reality) and Bob Rock (Mötley Crüe, Bush), the album was recorded in New York, Los Angeles, the California High Desert, and the band's Witch Mountain studio between July and December of 2011. It explores the search for individual meaning in the context of today's throw-away culture. *Choice of Weapon* pushes against the problems caused by materialism, narcissism and disconnected lives they promote, while seeking to find a better solution for humanity.

Though there is definitely a more enlightened lyrical vision than is seen in many contemporary rock albums, don't come away thinking that this one isn't a rocker—it will definitely deliver to both The Cult's intensely loyal longtime fans and new listeners checking in for the first time.

Thrust™ Magazine had a chance to check in with guitarist Billy Duffy in early April and he provided us with one of the most thoughtful and sincere interviews we have ever conducted, something that press releases just can't deliver on. We proudly present it here:

THRUST MAGAZINE: Right now, you're sort of in the *calm before the storm*. *Choice of Weapon* is just a few weeks from being released and you will be kicking off a major tour to support it. How are you preparing for this very busy season?

BILLY DUFFY: Basically, it is kind

of like an interesting pattern you get into, there's a lot of activity with recording. Then there's the quiet period, then a pre-promotional kind of phase that has a lot of importance now when moving outward because back then there was like *Rolling Stone* where everyone got their information. Now with the Internet, there's like a million outlets where people get their information, so there's a lot of matters put on the band guys to service all of that, so that's another little thing. And then road ready. We did stop by the Southwest [by Southwest]; that was a nice little taste to see how things went down, which was kinda cool. We played five songs, four off the new album and one off *The Capsule*, which is relatively new to most people unless you're a hardcore The Cult fan. That went down really well. The band tours every year, so it's not like we're absent from the touring world for vast periods of time, but we're still going to tone up a little.

THRUST: It seems like the The Cult has entered an era of relative harmony, no personnel changes recently, no major public dramas, and a return to making albums after two EPs. Has the lack of distraction helped the creative process? Some bands seem to thrive on conflict.

DUFFY: I would say Ian and I have some differences of opinion, but we tend to not focus on those anymore, and the shift is to what we have in common. I would sound like more of a conservative guy, like the "typical rock dude." I tend to listen to classic rock. I'm a rock and roll guy, so I got the job I dreamt of when I was a kid and I'm pretty much living out the dream. Ian, is more of the singer/lyricist. He's real passionate about change, pushing boundaries, and social awareness. Having said all that, we still end up making guitar-oriented rock-n-roll records so you know, that's kind of our basic M.O. We tend to focus more on the similarities rather than differences. Well, we used to play around with that a lot in the old days because it was kinda fun. People didn't really think we liked each other all that much, which makes for some good rock-n-roll stories. It worked for the Stones, and it works for the Cult.

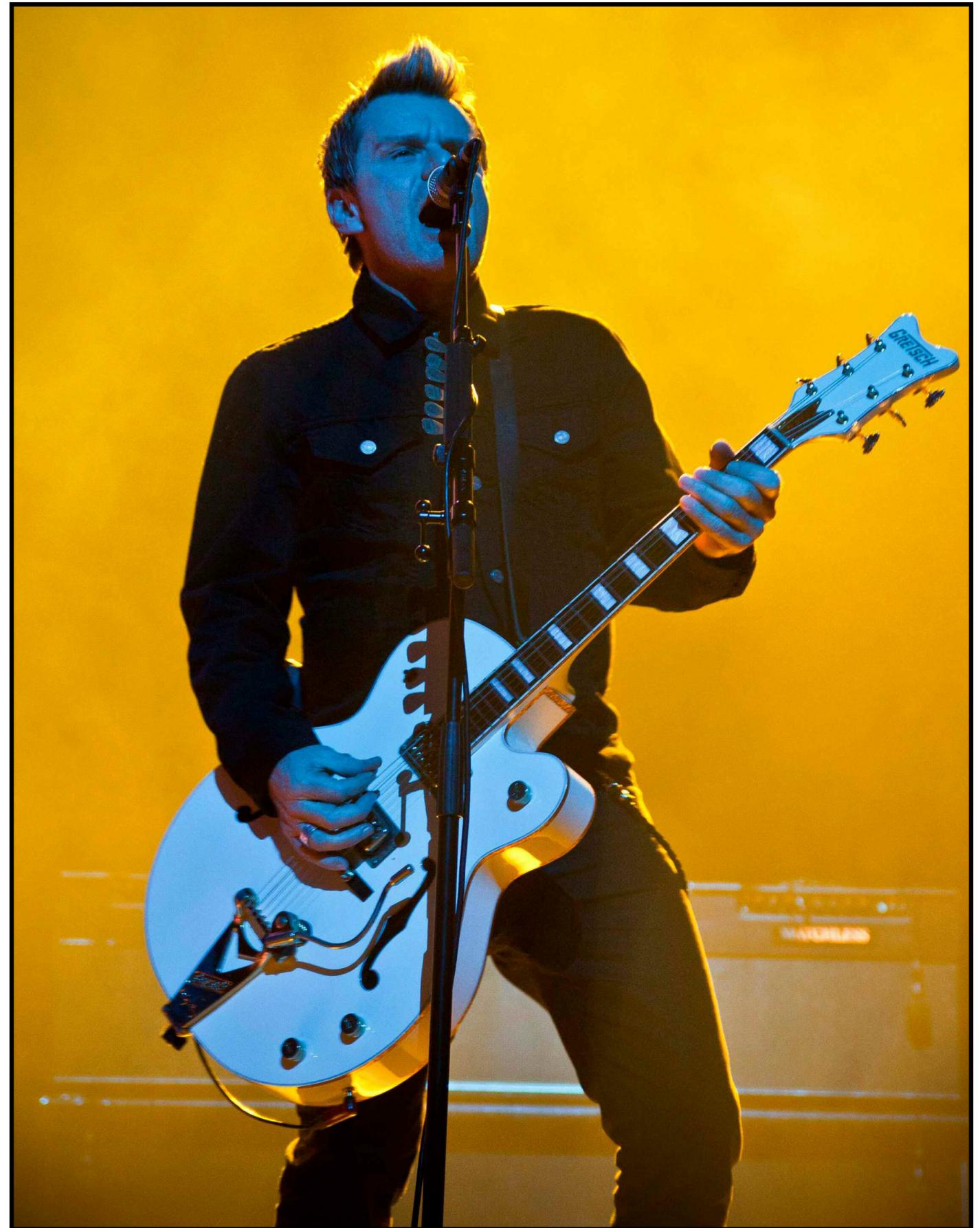
THRUST: It has been more than 30 years since you and lead singer Ian

Astbury joined forces. We sort of touched into the subject but how has your partnership grown over the years and where do you see *Choice of Weapon* taking it?

DUFFY: Good question. I partially already answered that, how we're sort of moving away from the negatives and embracing the positives. There's a little more tolerance and patience exercised as we are theoretically more mature human beings (laughs). As for where the record is taking us, it seems like a pretty rock-n-rollin' record. I think however we arrived at it; it's a record the people wanted us to make. We've had a pretty stable line-up so there's a general feeling of band unity and which is something we haven't had in a while, and that's good on every level. The fans like it, we like it, and so I think the fact we were all together really made it a lot easier to make a rock-n-roll record. We avoided all of the pitfalls and clichés of making a rock-n-roll record in this day and age. It's very much a guitar-rock album, but we try to keep it fresh and relevant. If we can strike that balance, that's what is going to propel us forward and gain momentum. When we played South by Southwest—it was to about 25,000 people—they reacted as strongly to some of the new songs as they did to some of the old, more classic songs. Even though I already knew we were well liked in Texas, and Austin particularly, and always have been, it was an interesting thing. I've been doing this a while now and I kind of know when new songs connect with people right away, and that was a very positive sign for the new music.

THRUST: While listening to *Choice of Weapon*, I could easily envision the entire album being played live, especially "Wilderness Now" and "Until the Light Takes Us." I could just see you guys on stage under the lights just jamming away. Was that live feel something that you were striving for?

DUFFY: Eh, well if a song has a cinematic quality we try to not in-pinge on that, like if me and Ian write something with a slightly more cinematic feel, then we enhanced it. We certainly don't crush it. If we feel a song has kind of a grand landscape, then we'll try to give it that. Sometimes the battle is trying to keep a small song



The album is about a 24- to 48-hour period in New York [City], so if I had to say anything about it lyrically, it is about urban shamanism, the general thrust of it. It's not wishy washy, it's about the real world we live in. There is sort of a yearning about it, which I think suits the band's music. We talk about some down and dirty stuff and that is a part of Ian's vision and has been for his entire adult life- a yearning for a better way, a more humane and friendly approach.—Billy Duffy

small. Like the last song on the album, to me it poses a question, really. It's one we left in very, very rough form. It wasn't something we wanted something to make big. You know, once we establish the song identity which is really just me and Ian getting together and work on it with the producer, or in this case the producers. Yeah but "Until the Light Takes Us" is great. The frustration is that I wanted all of the songs on the album, but we kept it to ten songs and leaving the capsules as they are. But maybe sometime down the line they might do a whole enhanced version. They were all written in the same timeframe. The Capsules were just the first ones written, which allowed us to get to writing the next lot of material. Ian was very passionate about doing The Capsules because he wanted new music out quickly. We found that was the easiest and quickest way to do it, rather than the laborious process of getting a record deal, writing eighteen songs, and then whittling down to your best twelve. That takes a long time, it does for us at this stage, so it was something that was kind of vital. But they were written in all the same time period.

THRUST: *Choice of Weapon* was recorded in multiple locations and with two producers. How did those factors help you achieve the desired results?

DUFFY: I think it was really just a question of necessity. A bunch of different factors came into play, financial and scheduling. There are many different reasons it was done the way it was, from both the band and producer standpoints. Ultimately a lot of the groundwork was done with Chris Goss and we just couldn't seem to finish it with Chris. Certainly no disrespect to him, but I think the band just kind of ran out of steam, and we really needed Bob to come finish it. At the risk of cliché overload, he kind of put "the icing on the cake" We had quite a lot of cake but it wasn't quite what we wanted. It's sort of a crass analogy but a very accurate one. We needed a lot of the top of the line stuff and that was what Bob could come along and help us with.

THRUST: That's very much what producing is, taking the various elements and packaging them into a cohesive work.

DUFFY: Chris really got us going

though. He did the EPs in their entirety. The Capsules are both Chris Goss, and the last song on the album is Chris Goss' work, Bob Rock didn't touch that. They're both friends of the band and kind of associate members of the band. They both play guitar and they both share the love of '70s rock, glam rock and the kind of punk rock me and Ian do. So they have the same kind of musical DNA and the same reference points that we can immediately kind of understand why they are very active in the music business today. Both guys work pretty much all the time, so that helped us avoid a nightmare where we dug up a producer who hadn't produced an album since 197-whatever. We're not living in the past, but we want to honor the past. That's what inspires us and is a healthy balance. So if we say, "Lighten the Bowie piano on 'blah-dee-blah,'" we don't have to get onto Youtube and explain to him how to do it (laughs). Bob came in and really helped us on the time pinch towards the end.

THRUST: The lyrical vision of this album has a certain maturity about it- there is nothing superficial about it. It sounds like there are a lot of life lessons learned and new questions raised from it. Tell us about the inspiration for it.

DUFFY: Well, I'm not the lyric guy. I write the music mostly but I can certainly give you my perspective on it. A lot of the album was actually written in New York with Ian, although some of the recording with Chris Goss took place in the desert, some in the mountains, some in Los Angeles. So it has a really interesting juxtaposition of a kind of yearning, at least to me, for the wilderness, yet it is very urban. Like you said, it is a very real album. Bob Rock placed the lead song, "Honey From a Knife," there to open the album. That's not normally the kind of song we would start with but he said, "You should punch people in the face with the first song." We went along with it- it was kind of funny because I thought there would be a big argument over it. That didn't happen. The album is about a 24-48 hour period in New York, so if I had to say anything about it lyrically, it is about urban shamanism, the general thrust of it. It's not wishy washy, it's about the real world we live in. There is sort of a yearning about it, which I think

suits the band's music. We talk about some down and dirty stuff and that is a part of Ian's vision and has been for his entire adult life- a yearning for a better way, a more humane and friendly approach.

THRUST: That is sort of the impression I got from it. It is most definitely a Cult album but not necessarily one you would have written in 1985.

DUFFY: Absolutely. There has been a lot more living and perhaps a few more scars and bruises. A lot more in the way of punches have been thrown since the '80s.

THRUST: We'd also like to do is to give the technical guys who read our magazine a little bit of a..

DUFFY: ...Are you talking about guitar porn? (laughs)

THRUST: That is exactly what we're looking for! (laughs) Tell us about your equipment and how you tune. A lot of our readers love that stuff.

DUFFY: Totally cool, man. Everybody is allowed to indulge their inner nerd once in a while! (laughs). I will start by saying that the only reason is that I picked up the guitar was because I thought you'd get the more interesting girlfriends if you were the guitarist. (laughs) Of course, I didn't have a great voice but I never wanted to be the singer, I wanted to be the guitar hero- I always thought they got the cool chicks. The obvious chicks would go for the lead singer- I would rather go for the cool chick any day- that's always what it's about.

In regards to the gear I used on the album, I used pretty much my usual setup. I have several Gibson Les Pauls and a couple of Gretsch White Falcons. Those are my main two main guitars that I used on the record, which is nice. I am telling everyone now that Gretsch is making a Billy Duffy signature White Falcon that is going to be available early next year. I am very excited about that. It is done to my specifications, so that is pretty cool.

I have a couple of Fenders and also used a Fender Squire that I had made by a guy called Bill Nash out of Seattle. That's about it, I didn't really use any mystical amps or stuff, I just used my regular combination of Marshall JCM 800s that I've had since the '80s when they were brand new—I had them modified back then.



I also used a Matchless DC-30 and a Bad Cat combo. I have always used a Roland JC-120 for that kind of signature '80s kind of thin sound. I just use any combination of those that I can. I didn't really have to beg, steal or borrow too much stuff, it was easy for me to deal with what I had to have. Then for effects pedals, I just used whatever I could find lying around, a lot of my live stuff—a lot of Vox pedals, Seymour Duncan wah wabs and crybabies that they made for me. It was very much like my live rig, there wasn't a lot of special equipment brought in. It was kinda cool, really. I can't give you a lot of, "Well, I rented this mystical hand-made amp built by this guy who lives in a cave in Montana and wired by fairies in some Irish dell." [The truth is] it's just fairly good, solid equipment that I've used for years.

I think it was more that we were calling upon the energy of the record rather than sounds, although Chris Goss, being a keyboard guy, did a lot of synth sounds on the album. There's a lot of weird, synthy textures and context, and Chris did a lot of that. Plus, our bass player, Chris Wyse, can get some really interesting bass tones. In fact, when playing live, he copies a lot of the synth sounds on his guitar because we don't use keyboards live, we just use the second guitar player. Our bass player is so good, he can simulate a lot of those sounds. To me, live is live and we make it sound as good as we can. We use keyboards on an album to create the kind of weight or gravity in a very sterile environment, whereas live you can get away with a lot of it by eliminating certain instruments. For example, when a song ends with piano in it, live I just play the piano part on the

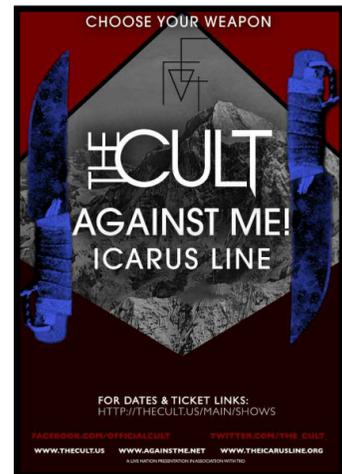
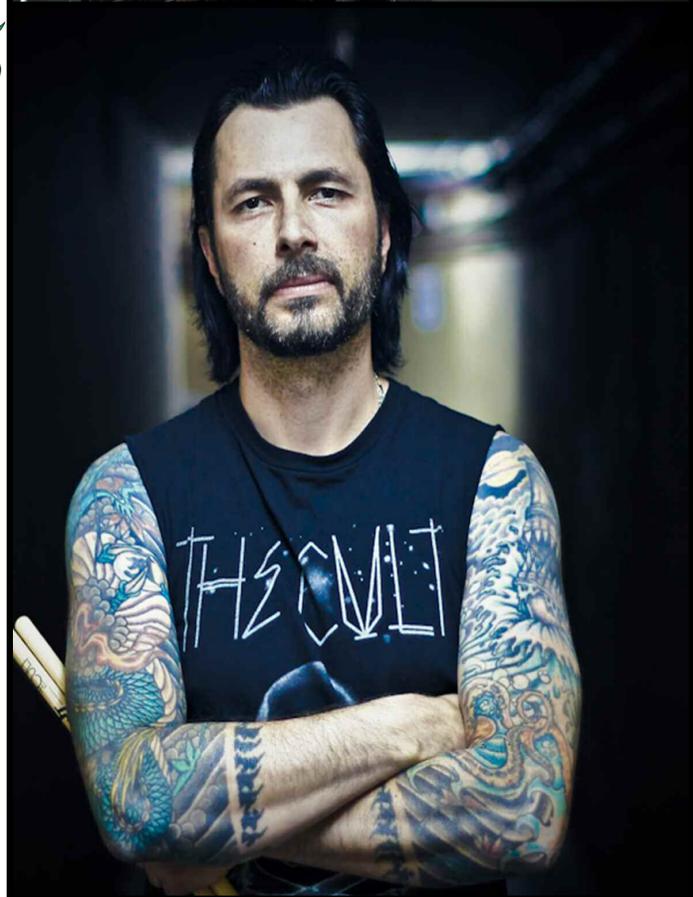
guitar. As long as the melody is there, people are okay with it. No one is saying, "That is a disgrace because there is no piano in it."

As a producer, Chris Goss creates some real sonic scapes and it's like making that cake I talked about earlier, he was there at the beginning, the original levels. We'd have half a song idea and Chris would try some crazy keyboards sounds that might not even make it to the record but he pushed us in a different direction. That is part of the alchemy of when a band has been around for a long time. I always use the example of U2 having several people involved in the making of an album. They need to get deeper into themselves to get the songs out because once you have written a lot of material, you really have to double down and dig deep to get the good stuff. If you're the type of person who want to just throw out rubbish and cruise out the rest of your career, that's something else altogether. If you really feel that you want to make a record that forces you to challenge yourself, that's one of the ways we do it and that is what a lot of the people who I respect still try to do. We need to be stimulated, we need to do a lot of process in order to even get simple songs out. U2 is legendary for that kind of work.

THRUST: We usually take a moment to let the artist talk about the topics they want to discuss. What other points would you like our readers to know about?

DUFFY: That's an interesting one. I'm a rock-n-roll guy, not a soapbox guy. My whole philosophy is try to be nice to one another. As a band, I think we need awareness out there. It's never been an issue about what The Cult does, it's getting people's attention, so spread the word!

THRUST: That's our job! Thank you so much, we appreciate it!



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The Cult

