

Death Cult to Def Cult

"A Thinking Person's Band"

Boogie!

From Southern Death Cult to Death Cult to the Cult: since their first single 'Fat Man' rose to top the independent charts, all spikey riffs and Red Indian rattle, six years have been spent streamlining their name and their sound.

The Cult's latest album is one *baaad* mutha. *Electric*, a shuddering collection of grooves plundered from rock's history, has headbangers and hairdressers sharing the dancefloor.

Ian Astbury doesn't bellow down the line in an American accent, but rather croaks softly through a chronic hangover. Waking the Cult's vocalist and main-man at 3pm (hey, rock 'n' roll!) mid-way through the band's Australian tour seemed like a hopeless situation, but he soon lived up to his quotable reputation. Introducing the Cultline ...

"Cool operator with a rattle-snake kiss,

Angelic poses that never miss."

The main advantage *Electric* has on its predecessors is its feel. Riffs rather than rhetoric, uncompromising, pure.

Why the shift from raising spirits to ... ahem, kickin' ass?

"We decided we wanted to do something that captured the character of the band, as opposed to making some grandiose epic, which is one of the ruts you get in, thinking you have to make a state of the art record to compete in the marketplace. We just decided, to hell with all that, to just make a record we'd be happy with. Why bother putting 10 guitars on it when two do the job, and why not just work hard at making them sound good and putting the energy into the performance rather than trying to come up with weird effects.

"I don't think the next record will be as raw as the last one. It'll be a combination of two things. Some

tracks will be rawer, more intense, more emphasis on the performance, blues/rock element and others, perhaps, will be working more with the state of the art. I think the combination is the best balance with the band, not like a one-dimensional, crass, slick rock 'n' roll outfit. There's room for both worlds, you've just got to know about them before you can use them."

Phew. The Cult's present tour is the first live outing of their new lineup, one which Astbury says is the "final and best." Astbury and guitarist Billy Duffy, the band's writers and driving force, are joined by Les Warner, the fifth drummer in a line that has included ex-Theatre of Hate's Nigel Preston, Mark Brzezicki of Big Country, and Kid Chaos, stolen from Zodiac Mindwarp.

"We couldn't find a guitarist that we wanted to bring into the band," says Astbury. "Jamie [Stewart, bass] was originally a guitar player anyhow, so we decided to move him over to rhythm guitar, and get the Kid in to play bass. It's given us a bigger sound and a lot more room for improvisation.

"We play some old covers for fun, we do 'Born to Be Wild' on the album, we just jammed it in the studio and recorded it for a laugh more than anything else, it wasn't a big statement or anything. I listen to anything that's decent, but

"Rick Rubin's just an average guy, 24, long hair and a beard. He's into AC/DC, not James Brown."

there's not much decent music happening in the 80s. I listen to quite a bit of Prince, the new Aerosmith and Guns 'n' Roses LPs, more rock-oriented things. I think contemporary pop has become pretty trite, there doesn't seem to be any characters in pop anymore. The English music scene stinks, there's a few cute things that happen, but that's all they are: "cute," sort of nice. The only thing I enjoy is Zodiac Mindwarp, at least it's fun. Death Cult to Def Cult."

Electric was produced by hip hop guru Rick Rubin, the young head of Def Jam Records, and the

man behind Run DMC, LL Cool J, Beastie Boys, etc. His influence has been, ah, amplified by journalists as an excuse for embracing ugly old uncool rock music.

Astbury: "It's funny, a lot of people in the States don't even know who Rick Rubin is, it's like only 'hip' people know who Rick Rubin is. He's just an average guy, 24, long hair and a beard. He's into AC/DC, not James Brown. In the States, people are less concerned with fashion, more with what's happening with the music, like, kids over there have got nothing to complain about. They just take it for what it is.

"I think a lot of people who like the Cult are together: it's a thinking person's band."



The Cult (Billy Duffy, 2nd from right)

"In the States, people are less concerned with fashion, more with the music. Kids over there have nothing to complain about."

I think that we're too much for them to handle.

"We have a successful resolve about us that's going to continue and develop. You always set new tasks for yourself after you've accomplished something. I mean, my idea of "making it" is to come up with the perfect song, and that's pretty much the reason I'm doing it."

Astbury was recently arrested in Canada ...

"I stopped some security guards beating up some kids and they alleged that I assaulted them. But it ended up being more than their jobs were worth to press charges."

Making the musical big time often makes bands dubious role models.

"One of the sad things about the punk rock scene was that you had a load of little dictators running around telling everybody how to run their lives. People have a brain in their heads, they can work out what to do. We aren't telling people to do things, we aren't one of those bands that say, 'This is the way to do things,' we just get on with it. I think a lot of people who like this band are together anyway, it's like a thinking person's band, and you get people from all different walks of life being into the band. Anyone who's looking for something else in music, it's there for them too."

The Cult's 'Brother's Grimm' was one of the hardest records of it's time, yet *Smash Hits* could file 'She Sells Sanctuary' next to their INXS 12", and, of course, they have. The band is presently recording new material with Tom Werman (Mötley Crüe, Jason and the Scorchers) — as much a key to mass America as Rubin was to media acceptance — and have a US Top 40 album and the No 8 single in little ole NZ.

The Cult's ability to provoke a reaction, good or bad, makes them a force to be reckoned with. The fact that the music is so good makes them essential.

Ian Plowman

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