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MUSIC



PHOTOS BY SCOTT VARLEY — STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

The Cult is revisiting its 1989 breakthrough album, "Sonic Temple," on its current tour, including eight or so songs in its set list. At left is Billy Duffy, with singer Ian Astbury.

MUSIC, HISTORY, SOCIAL ISSUES: AN AFTERNOON WITH THE CULT

By Kelli Skye Fadroski
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Ian Astbury and Billy Duffy of British rock band The Cult don't get up early and play acoustic songs on the radio for just anybody. However, when the duo was asked to appear on Sex Pistols guitarist Steve Jones' "Jonesy's Jukebox" program on KLOS 95.5/FM in Los Angeles recently, the pair happily obliged.

"We do get asked to do stuff like this all of the time and we're not essentially an acoustic band so we say, 'No, no, no,'" Astbury said as we settled in for Indian food at a small eatery in Culver City just after the guys wrapped on the radio. "We make exception for Steve, of course. He has done it so often and he's a musician, too, so he plays along. It absolutely sweetens the deal with Steve playing, too. We've known each other for about 30 years now."

The Cult was in the midst of "A Sonic Temple Tour," a jaunt to mark the 30th anniversary of its mainstream breakthrough and fourth album, "Sonic Temple," when it took a break to return to its current home of Los Angeles to do "Jonesy's Jukebox," and a writer was invited to tag along for the day. They treated radio listeners to two songs, "Edie (Ciao Baby)" off of "Sonic Temple" and "Wild Flower" off of the band's third album, 1987's "Electric."

The tour picks up in L.A. on Saturday at the Greek Theatre. The outing will also feature San Diego electronic rock and cholo goth duo Prayers, singer-songwriter Zola Jesus and Australian electronic duo Vowwows. As much as the tour was created around "Sonic Temple," Astbury said he wanted to diversify the lineup as a little bit of a throw-

back to his and legendary concert promoter Bill Graham's 1990 A Gathering of the Tribes Festival.

After an afternoon with the Cult, one thing that stood out was the band's modesty.

"We can't talk about ourselves; it's not polite," Duffy said with a shy smile during the radio show as Jones was getting them to talk about the tour and "Sonic Temple." The trio watched the Manchester City soccer match during commercial breaks on Duffy's cellphone and talked about the music of others as Jones asked them what they wanted to hear. They selected songs by artists such as Johnny Thunders and Idles, and Astbury requested "Looking for Water" by David Bowie.

"That's from the 'Reality' album and that's the last tour he did and I saw that tour," he said while sipping on his chai tea. "You always have to have some Bowie in the mix."

Astbury said he didn't really believe in celebrating the anniversaries of albums and that he's never truly aware of them until others bring it up.

"I just don't think about it much and I'm always kind of looking at what's next," he said.

In all, the Cult has included eight songs from "Sonic Temple" in its set list and has resisted the usual anniversary celebration of

THE CULT

With: Prayers, Zola Jesus, Vowwows

When: 6:30 p.m. Saturday

Where: Greek Theatre, 2700 N. Vermont Ave., Los Angeles

Tickets: \$27.50-\$99.50 at 800-745-3000 or Ticketmaster.com

performing the album in its entirety. The rest of the set list, Astbury said, showcases how the Cult has evolved, from its formation in 1983 to its most recent album, 2016's "Hidden City."

In 1989, when "Sonic Temple" was released, it was a tumultuous time for Astbury. Suddenly the band was thrust into the mainstream with videos on MTV and VH1, and Astbury wasn't thrilled about how television and radio were creating an "us versus them" mentality by segregating music so specifically by genre. There was also an editorial in Spin magazine at the time by Bob Guccione Jr. that Astbury remembered declaring that "rock 'n' roll had lost its teeth."

"That was a huge red flag to me," he said. "While 'Sonic Temple' was such a huge commercial success, it left me feeling deflated.

It was like we'd been accepted and in some ways it kind of misconstrued things for me and it pushed me back on the outside track looking in. I came from a post-punk, very earnest place and all of a sudden we're on MTV and things were completely different."

While on tour with Metallica in 1989 at a stop in North Dakota, Astbury took a walk to help clear his head. He said he met a Native American man on the road who was fixing his truck and who asked for Astbury's help. He did, and to thank him, the man offered him some lunch back at his home on the reservation.

"We sat and we discussed everything from politics to music to cultural situations and at one point his daughter came in and there was an ice cream truck outside and she asked her dad for 25 cents and he didn't have it," he said as he looked away, seemingly reliving the moment. "He didn't have 25 cents, yet he offered me the last bits of his food he had in his home. That stuck with me and it still does."

The man told Astbury he was studying environmental management so he could do something about purifying the water for his tribe. That's when the idea hit for Astbury to actually use his newfound celebrity for good, and he partnered with Graham for A

Gathering of the Tribes, a two-day event that played out at Shoreline Amphitheatre in Mountain View and Pacific Amphitheatre in Costa Mesa in October 1990.

A Gathering of the Tribes featured an eclectic lineup, with sets by Soundgarden, Ice-T, Iggy Pop, the Cramps, Joan Baez and more. It raised money for Native American causes and there were performances by the American Indian Dance Theatre that preceded the festival each day. It was also a place where fans could get information on a variety of topics, as it included tents for Amnesty International, Greenpeace, Rock the Vote, numerous animal rights organizations and other political and social causes.

The festival proved to be a bit too much of an undertaking, and after a small tour in 1991, Astbury and Graham put it to bed indefinitely. Astbury has been approached over the years to bring it back as possibly a one-off event, and given the current political climate, it seems it could go over well. However, Astbury insists if he's to be involved again it would have to be the right fit with the right partners, and most certainly not purely an altruistic endeavor.

That said, if he were to resurrect A Gathering of the Tribes, he does have a bit of a dream lineup already in mind.

"I mean, where do you start," he said. "Kendrick Lamar would be at the top of my list. Kamasi Washington, Travis Scott, Idles... Pink Floyd. It could happen. They almost reformed for a festival a few years ago. Beck, Daft Punk, some international artists and DJs and I'd like to see an opera singer up there as well. There are so many possibilities... I could be here with you all day."