

[Roland U.S.](#)

[Home](#) » [Community](#) » Roland Users Group Insider



Welcome to Roland's Insider, where you can read, watch, listen, and learn about Roland gear. Click the **Artists** tab for interviews with the world's finest musicians, producers, remixers, and more. Look for behind-the-scenes photos, videos, and audio clips sprinkled throughout. Click **Hands-On** for valuable tips, tricks, and techniques from Roland product specialists. **In The News** is where you'll find info on the latest Roland-related events and happenings. **From The Editor** is your place to hear from (and respond to) the Roland editorial team. And, last but not least, the **Archive** tab is your source for "vintage" features and how-to articles. Enjoy!

Billy Duffy of the Cult

Rockin' with Roland & BOSS

By Johnny DeMarco



The Place: *Mate's rehearsal studio in North Hollywood, California*

The Guitar Star: *Billy Duffy of the legendary British rock band The Cult*

Roland met up with Duffy just as he was preparing to return to the road with The Cult. Here's what he had to say about his career, past and present, and his trusty companions, a Roland JC-120 amp and pedalboard filled with BOSS.

• • • • •

You've been playing Roland and BOSS gear for years. Let's just go back to the beginning. Tell us about your first bands such as The Nosebleeds and Theater of Hate. How old were you when you started playing guitar?

I started when I was 15. I did the usual thing, playing in high-school bands, and then "punk" happened in England when I was about 16. Punk made it possible to make a record, because prior to that, it was a bit of a fantasy to even get out in your local town to do a gig. I liked a lot of bands, though, like Thin Lizzy, Led Zeppelin, and Queen. I also liked The Stooges, David Bowie, The New York Dolls, The NC Five, and some of the more slightly left-field ones, like the guys who ended up being in the Clash and the Pistols, The Damned, Generation X ... not so polished, and that's my background. That was the beginning.

This is a well-known story. Because of my interest in the New York Dolls, I became friends with Morrissey. He was called Stephen in those days, and we just fell into a band called The Nosebleeds; it was a bit of an accident. It was 1978, and I really just wanted to be the guitar roadie for Nose Bleed.

Then the singer and the guitar player left, and the rhythm section of the band asked me to join, because they knew I could play a little bit. So I got the job on guitar, and they said, “Right, well, do you know any singers?” I knew Morrissey, and that was kind of our story.

When I left Manchester , I went to London and played in another band. A few years later, Morrissey ended up in The Smiths with my old pal Johnny Marr, who I knew from schoolboy days, and that’s kinda how that whole thing happened.

How and when did you join The Cult?

I played in a couple of bands in London and released a couple of vinyl singles. I did a few gigs around the country, and I ended up in a band called Theater of Hate. It’s a funny story. . . . In London , I was a friend of Boy George. He was a DJ in the London scene. I used to go out to clubs and hang out, and he told me about a band looking for a guitar player. The band was Theater of Hate, so I joined and played with them for a year. In that year, one of our opening acts was called The Certain Death Cult, and Ian Astbury was the singer. That’s how I met Ian. Basically, to cut a long story short, after a couple of years, I no longer was in Theater of Hate. Ian had left Certain Death Cult, and he came down to London from where he was living in the north of England and found me. He said, “Do you want to do a band? I always liked the way you played guitar.” I said, “Yeah, sure,” and that was how The Cult was born in 1983. We started writing songs, put together a band, and, basically put our first record out on the same label that Certain Death Cult were on.

Has the songwriting process always been collaborative?

Everything is a collaboration. I mean, generally, I write the music and Ian writes the lyrics, and that’s pretty much how it’s been.

You mentioned a few bands that influenced you. How about guitarists?

AC/DC — Angus and Malcolm Young, obviously. I kinda try to avoid the more obvious guitar players. To me, Jimi Hendrix was a genius. Obviously Jimmie Page was very good, but guys who were too good, virtuoso guitar players, almost bored me a little bit. I kinda like working-class, meat and potatoes guitar players. You know, the ones who spent less time on the guitar and more time chasing women!

Tell us about the latest release and the big tour coming up. Where’s it going?

Well, we last did an album in 2001, a copy on *Good and Evil*. We toured fairly extensively in America and Canada , we did a few things in Japan and England . Now we’ve just kind of gotten together with no record. At some point we’ll probably write some new songs and maybe do a new album, but we’re not really set. I mean it’s more like honoring the live thing at the moment.

Any cover tunes in the set list?

Not with The Cult. I mean, me and Jerry Cantrell from Alice and Chains had a covers band called The Cardboard Umpires, and we did some shows. In those shows we played two or three AC/DC songs, Thin Lizzy, whatever we fancied. That was when The Cult was not working those last few years.

You’ve used the Roland [JC-120](#) guitar amp since the beginning, right?

Yeah, I used it from early on, absolutely.

What do you like about it?

It's the chorus. The chorus is unbeatable. I've always used it for that clean sound, and it's definitely a big part of sound of The Cult up until the *Electric* album. I mean, I use other amps as well. If I look back at pictures of me from '83 on, I'd always use a valve amp and a [JC-120](#) in combination, always. Y'know, you just mix them together — blend the two sounds together. And, to an extent, that's what I do now. The JC-120 has found its way on every Cult record, probably with the exception of *Electric*. But, the JC has been around, knockin' around, and I've used it a lot. Basically has an amazing clean tone — a great chorus sound. It's unbeatable. It's become kind of a signature. You can definitely hear it on *Dream Time* and *Love* a lot. If you listen to *Sonic Temple*, it's featured there as one of the layers of the sound.

Another big part of your tone is your pedalboard. Lots of BOSS pedals in there.

Yeah, I've always used BOSS pedals. They're part of the signature sound on "She Sells Sanctuary," which was all BOSS pedals. If I had to pick only one brand of footpedal, I'd have to use all BOSS pedals. Y'know, they pretty much make everything. I like the delays — I use the old analog delays.

You use the DM-2 Analog Delay, right?

Yeah, and I like the [DD-3](#) also. It's a good one — y'know, if it ain't broke, don't fix it! I use the flanger [[BF-3](#)] a little bit, and I've been using the Super Overdrive [[SD-1](#)], the yellow one. In fact, the first one was given to me by Jamie, the Cult's bass player, when he joined the band. Originally was a guitar player in another band, and when he joined the Cult, he switched to bass and gave me the pedal. He said, "Well, I won't be needing this," so he gave me that pedal. I just plugged it in and thought, "That's sounds pretty cool." BOSS pedals are very reliable, they're very true, they're very honest, and they have always delivered. They're just a good design. I've used them for 20 years. As you can see, I've got bunches of them. The majority of my pedals are BOSS.



You use the BOSS [TU-2](#) tuner pedal as well.

Yeah, [TU-2](#) tuner works great, especially when I'm doing a flying gig, You grab one of those, and you're all set.

What's the story of your effects sound on "She Sells Sanctuary"?



People used to bribe the producer to tell them what pedals and effects I used to get the guitar sound in the beginning of the song, that whole kind of mystical Easterny sound. The story that goes along with that is, it was a whole BOSS pedal board. I definitely had two delays in it, 'cause there are two delays working against each other — long and short delays. It's 400 and 800 milliseconds, approximately, at the beginning of the song. Also, it's the way I pick — the attack of the pick and where I pick it on the neck. It sounds like a silly old story, but we were recording "She Sells Sanctuary" in a studio in London called Olympic, where Zeppelin and Free used to record. It subsequently was bought by Virgin and has become a more modern studio, but back in the day it

was an orchestral studio where they'd record film scores. I was in there during "She Sells Sanctuary," and I found a violin bow, and I started to play the guitar with the bow like Jimmie Page. I did it to amuse Atsbury, who was in the control room, and in order to make it sound weirder, I just hit every pedal I had on the pedal board. Then once I stopped banging the strings and doing all that, I played the middle section of the song, which was kind of a pick thing with all the BOSS pedals on, and that sound just leaped out. The producer went, "Hold it, hold it, that's great!" And we decided to start the song with that mystical sound. If I hadn't found that violin bow laying around, we wouldn't have gone there.

What's in store after this tour?

I would imagine we would be writing some new songs, and we're just gonna keep on the road on and off for a while. We probably should do, if we've got any sense, 'cause we still have a hardcore fan base, and there's a demand there. I don't think we're ever going to be pop stars again, y'know, we're now in our 40s, and the band's been around for a long time. But there's something we've got that's kinda timeless, so therefore, there's a demand.

Might there be a solo project on the horizon?

I doubt I'd do a solo project. I've always been a band guy. Having said that, I have a side band with a couple of friends called Circus Diablo. We did an album last year, and Matt Sorum is drumming on it. Another guy — Billy Morrison, who played bass in The Cult a few years ago — is singing, and we got a few friends together and we made this album for fun. It's gonna come out this year at some point on the internet. I don't know, we might do a couple of gigs.

• • • • •

Keep tabs on Billy's activities online at Cult sites such as www.beggars.com/artists/catalogue/cult and www.the-cult.com.