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Britpop Veterans Suede Set to Headline Blastfest

By Alec Luhn

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Suede will play Sunday at Milk in what could be their last-ever concert.

When Suede plays Moscow this Sunday, it will be the legendary Britpop band's first show in Moscow, as well as its last concert ever. Again.

The group is finishing a string of shows following its reunion in 2010 by headlining the second-ever Blastfest music festival at Milk Moscow. Suede originally captured the hearts of British audiences in the early '90s with its combination of intricate guitar work and climbing vocal melodies, becoming a seminal group in the formation of Britpop.

"We're not going to do any new gigs," said bassist Mat Osman, who has also produced music for television and is the editor of the e-mail magazine Le Cool's London version. "We said we'd do the summer doing old songs, but we're not going to do it again."

In fact, Suede was supposed to already be done with its reunion. The band members had

promised themselves to not do any more gigs following its summer tour, but made an exception to play Moscow, where the band has never performed despite playing in all other large European capitals several times.

One reason they decided to break their rule was the enthusiastic reaction Osman and Suede vocalist Brett Anderson received during an Anderson solo set at the first Blastfest in 2008.

After the show, "I remember Brett sitting in the dressing room saying, 'We should have come here with Suede,'" Osman said.

Blastfest will see Suede performing for Russian and foreign fans — some of whom are coming from Britain for the final show — alongside two younger British bands and two Moscow groups. The music will continue without interruption, alternating between two stages.

The festival is more vital than ever after the recent Duma elections and the protests they sparked, said organizer Nash Tavkhelidze, whose band Blast will also perform. Musical events such as Blastfest can help Russia become more free and open, Tavkhelidze said.

"If you're listening to proper music, your brains are working right," he explained.

"In our country, it's strange. People are listening to [expletive]," Tavkhelidze added, referring to popular music on Russian television and radio.

The Blastfest organizers have scored a coup by booking the legendary British group. Tavkhelidze named Suede as one of the four main Britpop bands alongside Blur, Oasis and Pulp, calling it even more of a cult band than Blastfest 2008 headliner Supergrass.

Whereas foreign artists like Elton John have previously traveled to Russia to play for enormous fees, Osman said Suede isn't coming to Moscow for a fat paycheck, but rather because of its interest in playing a new destination for the band and "one of the world's great cities."

"It's nice to get paid, but if we wanted to, we could have spent the summer on a massive tour and made a lot of money" in places where organizing a concert is cheaper than in Moscow, Osman said.

For their part, the organizers had to add some of their own money to sponsor funding and hope the festival as a whole will break even, Tavkhelidze said.

The second-biggest band on Sunday's bill is Suede's fellow Londoners S.C.U.M., dreamy rockers with a sound swimming in synths and dance beats whose debut won mention in major music publications. Osman called the band "exactly the kind of thing Britain is doing really well right now," comparing them to another synth-happy British group to recently break, The Horrors.

Suede has also begun writing new music but won't release an album unless the writing process produces "amazing" results, Osman said.

"If we write and it's OK, we'll just stop," he said. "I'll be quite happy for Suede to finish where it's at right now."

"The last album wasn't very good, and if we would have had more guts and integrity at the time, we shouldn't have released it," he added.

But if the band does release a new record, it would likely tour behind it, Osman added, which would mark yet another return to the stage after calling it quits. The band ended its musical activities in 2003, and the 2010 reunion came about only after the band set several ground rules — including an end to touring after the summer and a refusal to play with an orchestra — to avoid common pitfalls.

"I never particularly liked it" when bands reunite, Osman explained.

"Unless you capture the danger of the original band, the passion and energy, then it doesn't really work for me," he said.

Listeners can judge whether Suede has recaptured its original danger when the band takes the stage around 9 p.m. Sunday.

"We're gonna be good," Osman said. "It's up to the audience to make it an amazing show."

Blastfest is on Sunday at 6 p.m. at Milk Moscow, 9 Ulitsa Sergeya Makeyeva. Metro Ulitsa 1905 Goda. Tel. 726-0998, milkclub.ru

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