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He's Back!
...from Montreaux to
Mexico & all points in
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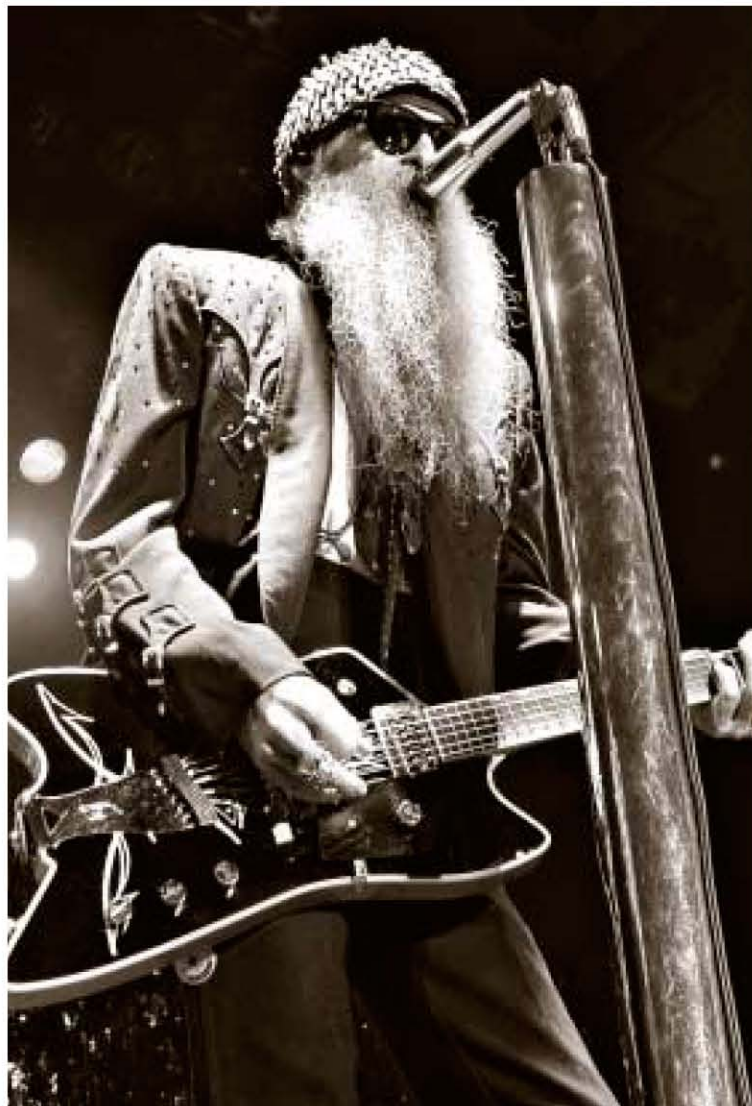
Resonant Vibrations
with Carlos Santana

the ToneQuest

The Player's Guide to Ultimate Tone Report™
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18 Watts of Whoop Ass

*"Somebody once said we never know what is enough
until we know what's more than enough."
-Billie Holiday*



After five years, we still receive more calls and e-mails about how to tame a +30 watt amp for home and club use without compromising tone, further reinforcing the notion that we may not always need as much volume as we think... This issue celebrates the resurrection of the mighty 18 watt amplifiers built by Jim Marshall that are now inspiring innovative designers to build their own unique variations on these rare and timeless classics. So just what is it about the 18 watt amps that makes them the dog's bollocks?

If your signature sound requires a seamless blend of overdriven and

clean tones at modest volume, nailing inspiring tone night to night in unfamiliar venues can be an exercise in compromise. Big amps may require an attenuator at higher volume settings, an over-

drive pedal at lower volumes (pedal tone!), and often too much work to make it all work. 'Plug and play' is good.

The tradeoff, of course, is a lower threshold for clean headroom at levels that can cut through the band, and if clean, clear, robust tone is your sound, there can be few compromises. We recommend "Destiny Road" by the Peter Green Splinter Group for an exceptional example of luscious humbucking tone with headroom. This record captures big guitar tones that will take root in your head, spawning fantasies of a Les Paul coupled with a blonde Showman, Twin Reverb, or perhaps the infamous "Freddie King festival rig" – a Gibson 355 and Fender Quad Reverb with four JBL D-120's.

But for most of us, a mere 18 watts can indeed deliver the goods when combined with a 2x12, 4x10 or 4x12 cabinet. Because such larger cabinet configurations were rarely offered with low-powered American production amps (remember the Silvertone 'Twin'?) we often incorrectly associate low-wattage with Weenie Tone. British-style 18 watt amps with larger cabinets are an entirely different story...

Now, by all means hold on to your vintage 100W Plexi, the Hiwatt and the Super... fondle them... ogle them... coddle them... Hell, create a temple devoted to them in yer music room (we know you do this) but it's time you discovered the magic of 18 watts in an amp you can actually play, playah...

Who better to kick off our celebration of the lusty 18W vibe than The Reverend Billy F Gibbons... Our favorite King Daddy of Grease & Grind is back in the woodshed after a couple of years of steady rocking on tour with that little old band from Texas, and one thing's for sure... They still Nationwide and over the globe, as we all know...

We were privileged to attend two ZZ Top extravaganzas in the past year, including the recent appearance at our very own Chastain Park in Atlanta – a truly magical outdoor amphitheater where folks bring their coolers and break out candles,



crystal (glasses), and throw down an authentically Southern, shabby-shiek-wang-dang-doodle... Trust us?

ZZ never sounded better...!!! All good things improve with time, the band and crew have all the tones nailed, and the energy is intense, mystifying, and...!?!?!?

Mr. Beard (the beardless one in the band) was locked tight, phat and steady as usual... Dusty remains wide-glide, completely on the money, and The Rev continues exploring and drafting the Mighty Big Tone as only he can. Seriously, people, these shows remain the events enjoyed for all time... We are blessed to have that Texas Rock and Blues outfit in our presence and in fine, fine, superfine form. Now let's get down to bidness...

TQR: Greetings, Amigo!

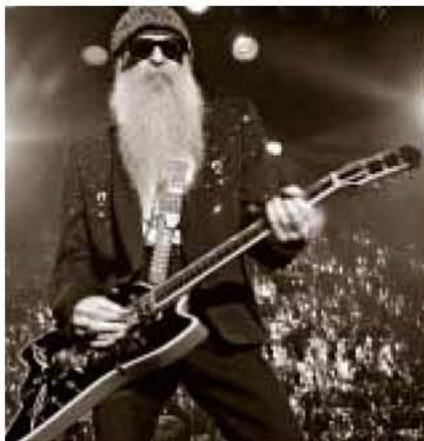
Si Señor...!!!

TQR: Cudos on the tours...!

! Gracias ! ...

TQR: The success of the ZZ release of "MESCALERO" is just generally living large, man. Now... can you tell us about the your upcoming Fender/Gretsch "BillyBo" guitar you perform with...? ... pickups, hardware... How is it wired up?

Yeah, man! As you may know, Fender/Gretsch is offering some fine playing instruments with their new production. This proposed "BillyBo" is a faithful recreation of the original design first seen in 1959. The unusual shape features two Filtertron hum-canceling pickups, a 4-knob arrangement in the traditional Gretsch fashion wired for two volumes, a tone, and a master volume control standard, one toggle pickup selector, the early Spacebar bridge, and the G tailpiece. The first issue will show off the original Red with Black back and sides with nickel hardware, as on the example from our collection. Mr. Mike Lewis, production head, is overseeing attention toward every detail, including the lightweight, chambered body, thumbnail position markers – even the original style open-back machine heads.



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And, of course, the famous Gretsch inlay on the headstock. A sure-fire bonus for all Gretsch freaks.

TQR: What plans can we await in building the "BillyBo" model as the production guitar?

I wanna think a presentation scheduling production to commence and arrive on the dealers' floor in Summer 2005 is probable... Exacting detailing is demanded for this superb 6-string.

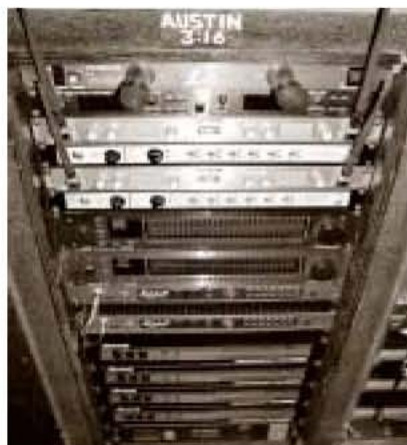
TQR: We spoke for a bit about your "Crate V-50" amps and how you scored with Louis Vitton and the special hyde coverings...



Our studio enjoys the presence among a legion within

the rap community and... one fine afternoon, the place became teaming with some ultra rides in the parking yard. The real eyecatcher, a slammed Chevy ragtop, sported the entire interior and top with the famous chocolate and gold insignia! The entire thing! The logical move allowed approaching Ted Kornblum to fabricate his fine "V-50" covered with the same fabric. Ted went so far as to appoint these specials with a solid Gold badge, as well. Crazy, yet just right.

TQR: So you're using the two Crate 2x12's for stage volume and presence, while your traditional standby Marshall 100W rackmount amp and iso cabs with hemp Tone Tubbies are feeding the house system...



Quite correct. Can't say enough about the killer-ness of the V-50. Tube-powered with that indescribable TONE... Nothin' need be added on the Marshall side either! Just the cornerstone, and again, great, indescribable TONE.

TQR: Pedals remain invisible on your stage... However, as you've mentioned, some FX are indeed cued up and available for Elwood's assistive ignition in the back side of the rack?



Yes, the usual array... Taking advantage of an onboard FX loop, the line-up features a delay, some form of Flanger, a very old ring modulator by Maestro, the '50s Rowe tremolo control from DeArmond, and now, Mr. Elwood's fave, the newly recreated foXX Tone machine. Wacky sound, that thing!

TQR: We were really glad to hear from you that you have ordered a Balls amp from Danny Gork, especially since we originally introduced them a year ago. What prompted your renewed interest in the 18W Marshalls?

The trip in St. Paul over to Solidbody Guitars (solidbodyguitars.com)... On their floor is an original, early '60s Marshall 18, complete with a pair of Silverroad 12" speakers. The thing is killer. One session with Les Paul in hand with a sound that 18 watt fanatics label as "Beano" and "Bluesbreaker." I was hooked. And, to add even more mystery to the tale, the 18 watt.com website showed up. There's a host of offerings for fabricating 18's, from parts and pieces, to complete turn-key outfits. Jeff Swanson, DST, GDS, Trinity, Mojo, Paul Ruby, Ceriatone, 65, Mojave, Aiken, Blockhead, Allesandro, Jenkins, and as you mentioned, Balls 18... The list is stunning. So is the sound. Yeah, there's more than meets the ear when experiencing the mysterious 18...

TQR: You mentioned plans for another record, recording to commence this year, 2005. What have you been designing in terms of the tones and textures to be explored with this new release? Have you acquired anything new that you'll be using in the studio?

Yeah, well, for starters, both of the house engineers, Mr. Joe Hardy and Mr. G.L. G-Mane Moon, have expressed their curiosity to light up the 18. Fortunately, we do have an original Marshall 18W 2x12 to lean on with a range of additional 18's to boot... That oughta spark it up to begin... And there's more lurking about for extending the horizon of special FX... How fuzzy can the frazz get...!?!?!?

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TQR: ZZ TOP travels the road extensively, especially over the recent couple of years, and you played a lot of dates in Europe. Were you energized and affected by the obvious passion the world still maintains for our music – perhaps our greatest export? Any memorable stories from Europe? – any notables to mention sitting in or hangin’ with you all?



Europe is a trip! The good news is we still place playing above all else and it's a passion, any place and anywhere... Seems the ZZ TOP experience is spreading and the Texas inspirations keep us totally satisfied.

It's what we are and what we do. And the many fans and friends we meet can definitely dig...! And now with Eric Clapton's Crossroads festivity available to the world, friends and fans can get up close and front-row with the heroes that make performing so enjoyable.

TQR: Touring the USA is one thing, but how do you handle the weighty considerations of nailing your tone abroad? What special challenges exist and how do you handle them?

Power. That's a challenge... There are conditioners which tame the voltage differences and cycle-converters to tame the 60/50 bit... that's the way. It's a matter of both voltage and cycles which one may address to keep the circuits buzzin'... And, most sound services are equipped with huge, monstrous power machines to travel just about anywhere.

TQR: One final question... ZZ Top was recently inducted into the R&R Hall of Fame, and the band has never sounded better now, over three decades following the release of ZZ TOP's "First Album." That's a high watermark that few can claim. Upon reflection, what has enabled you to maintain such an obvious passion for and unbridled joy in the music that chose you so many years ago? You don't have to tour anymore, and platinum is your middle name... What inspires you to continue writing,

singing and playing at such a high level, and are there any personal lessons you've learned along the way that you'd care to pass along to your fellow guitarists?

Well, let me think about that... Keith Richards probably says it best... "Muddy Waters said, 'You don't have to be the



'best one,' just be a good one."

'Nuff said! ! Gracias ! **To**

www.zztop.com
www.ballsamps.com