ZZ Top - Texicali (2012)



01 – I Gotsta Get Paid 02 – Chartreuse 03 – Consumption 04 – Over You ZZ Top: Billy Gibbons (vocals and guitar), Dusty Hill (vocals, bass, and keyboards), Frank Beard (drums and percussion)

Dan Hicks nicely captured one of the rubs of making music with his song title “How Can I Miss You When You Won’t Go Away?” Decade-spanning hit makers are rare, and decades-spanning hit makers rarer still. So it is that ZZ Top has enjoyed a few years of renewed reverence largely due to laying low for a spell. The band hasn’t had a million-selling album in 18 years and hasn’t had a charting hit in 26. There hasn’t even been an album since “Mescalero” quietly stiffed nine years ago.

During the break since, ZZT was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, toured tirelessly to a now-cross-generational audience and teamed up with producer Rick Rubin to make a new album. Over the past 25 years, Rubin has — if you’ll allow a ZZ-apropos metaphor — transformed from a car designer to a mechanic who gets classics running again. A full ZZT album — produced by Rubin and singer/guitarist Billy F. Gibbons — is due later this year. Until then there’s the “Texicali” EP, the band’s first new set of songs since 2003.

Gibbons’ playing is tight and on point throughout. Little fragments from riffs and solos past seem faintly audible as though each song in the band’s catalog is a customized piece of origami folded from the same piece of paper. It’s a mesmerizing balance between familiar and new. Bassist Dusty Hill and drummer Frank Beard continue to drag heavy metal through their bluesy swamp. The effect of Gibbons’ pointed solos popping in and out of the rhythm section retains a visceral charge particularly on “Consumption.”,/

Lyrically, Gibbons growls out the sort of old-school blues nastiness the band has served for more than 40 years. “Chartreuse … that color just turns me loose,” he snarls on “Chartreuse” before offering up his services. “When you get the blues, baby, I got the juice.” The recasting of the local underground rap hit “25 Lighters” into “I Gotsta Get Paid” is a savvy crossover play that infuses ZZT’s body of work with an ageless feel: They effortlessly pooch from hip-hop thanks to a shared set of concerns (lighting things, getting paid, big speakers in the trunk of the car, etc.)

“Over You” is the sole song that doesn’t push relentlessly. It’s a rough-edged R&B ballad that provides gentle ballast to the four-song digital EP. Though it benefits over previous ZZT ballads for the lack of digitized adornment, Gibbons?? voice is allowed to crack and break with uncharacteristic clarity. It’s not likely to replicate the chart success of “Rough Boy”26 years ago, but then the “Afterburner” era is part of the past the band is looking to shake free from — a time when refining style began to swallow defining substance. “Texicali” seems a strong reclamation statement. Presumably the band is holding back some of its strongest new material for the upcoming album. Which makes it a more tantalizing taste. ---Andrew Dansby, 29-95.com

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