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& HIS SIGNATURE SOUND**

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THE SURREAL THING

As they prepare to hit the road together for a summer tour, **JEFF BECK** and ZZ Top's **BILLY GIBBONS** wax philosophical on the rock and roll relationship between guitars, cars and everything in between.

IT'S A HOT, SUNNY CALIFORNIA DAY AS Jeff Beck and ZZ Top's Billy F. Gibbons stroll through the lush courtyard of Hollywood's swanky Sunset Marquis Hotel. Ripe for caricature, they are perhaps two of the most distinctive-looking performers in rock history. Beck, with his much-imitated rooster shag haircut, and Gibbons, dressed in full hipster Wild West regalia, look almost disconcertingly the same as they have for the past three or four decades. If we hadn't invited them ourselves on the eve of their first tour together, it would be easy to mistake them for a mirage from one of those surreal ZZ Top videos that dominated MTV in the Eighties.

Surreal is actually a word that pops up quite often in conversations with both musicians over the next few days. It's certainly a fitting adjective to describe aspects of their music. Since Beck's stunning 1965 debut with the Yardbirds, he has thrilled and confounded guitarists with his exciting and often avant-garde approach to the instrument. His playful and imaginative take on Willie Dixon's "Ain't Superstitious" from *Truth*, his 1968 album with

Rod Stewart on vocals and Ronnie Wood on bass, certainly rivaled anything Jimi Hendrix was creating at the time. And his consistently innovative work on tracks like "Going Down" (1972), "Blue Wind" (1976), "Where Were You" (1989) and "Hammerhead" (2010), which won a Grammy Award for Best Rock Instrumental Performance, continues to push the limits of what can be done on a Fender Stratocaster without getting arrested.

And anyone with even a passing knowledge of ZZ Top knows how strange they can be. Comprised of Gibbons, bassist Dusty Hill and drummer Frank Beard, the Little Ol' Band from Texas has defied any civilized notion of what traditional rock musicians should look and sound like. Yet, their wonderfully skewed take on the blues has helped them sell somewhere in the neighborhood of 50 million albums, and they continue to play the world's biggest concert halls.

Gibbons, in his inimitable deep Texas drawl, concurs that *surreal* is indeed the word of the day. "One of the highest compliments that ever came my way was sent from [guitarist] Jimmie



point where bravery stepped in with a willingness to experiment, moving the six-string expression far outside any previously proven lines. The visual impact of that beat-up war club is still meaningful and forceful to the extreme.

Jeff, what do you find cool about Billy and ZZ Top?

JEFF BECK Just think about how people went for Billy's sound and the band's image. ZZ Top went completely against the grain of all one would expect iconic rock to be. That's what I love about them—they are this wonderful quirky backfire. Billy's tone is great, and so are his songs. You wouldn't really expect these bearded guys to write all these great tunes about cars and girls.

Both you and Jeff introduced a surreal element into the blues. In Jeff's case, his versions of "I Ain't Superstitious" and "Going Down" wink at traditionalism. ZZ Top often references the blues, but they also have a little irreverent fun with the genre. How important is it for you to let your audience know that you are self-aware? You know: "I'm not from the Delta, but I still love this music and there's a way to modernize it."

BECK When you are taken with any music with inner gusto, you don't think too much about it—you just have to have it!

For example, I was playing in a blues band before I joined the Yardbirds, and I was really into Bo Diddley, who made the best use imaginable out of playing one chord. His outrageous jungle rhythms were so powerful and hypnotic, he didn't have to change keys. We basically took his idea of the one-chord vamp, and while the band played, I would just slack all my strings and then really pull on them to make the most ridiculous and surreal sounds with slap echo so that people would just look up.

It wasn't premeditated. I just wanted the audience to look at me and listen! I did all kinds of outrageous things like that at the time, like taking two guitars and have them feedback against each other, and it was that kind of attitude that eventually got me the job with the Yardbirds. They didn't want someone to play a beautiful slide guitar solo, or someone that sounded like Earl Hooker. They wanted someone that would hold an audience. I had something no one else had, and however crude or outrageous it was at the time, it worked. It wasn't all that calculated. It was just my way of saying, Here I am. Ultimately, I had to tone some of it down when I joined the Yardbirds, because we were going on television playing pop singles.

Vaughan," he says, chuckling. "He said, 'Oh yeah, Gibbons is out there.' But if there's actually an 'out there,' guess what? We'll go out there and find Jeff Beck!"

In this joint interview, we have a lot of ground to cover. Billy and Jeff have a shared history that spans many years, and Beck and ZZ Top are currently touring together. Each artist also has new music to share: ZZ Top have just released *Live at Montreux 2013* on DVD/Blu-ray and *The Baddest of ZZ Top*, a double-CD retrospective. Beck, for his part, is putting the finishing touches on a new live album.

But as you will see, much of the conversation will be focused on their obsessions with two great rock and roll subjects: guitars and cars. Like their music, Billy and Jeff's insights are entertaining, surprising and, yes, a little surreal.

Billy, what does Jeff Beck mean to you? What is his importance as an artist?

BILLY GIBBONS Before Jeff and ZZ Top embarked on this tour, I received a phone call from the production office asking about design preferences for our backstage passes. The reply was simple: "Well, there's a juicy guitar image fitting to go on the ZZ side of the pass, and there awaits a superb *gettar* view for Jeff's side as well."

On one side, we chose a view of the infamous, Pearly Gates, my fine '59 Les Paul 'Burst, and on the other side, we landed an image of Jeff's magnificently battle-scarred 1954 Fender Esquire used with the Yardbirds. When you're using the word *importance*, one can easily find it in the guitars that Jeff Beck and I pounded the sides off long ago. Jeff's guitar certainly stands as a pivotal piece, marking the

Billy, how important is it for you to add a little touch of the “untraditional” to your traditional blues?

GIBBONS This position was being prodded in a discussion in Memphis, Tennessee with a dear friend, Waltaire Baldwin. We came up together in Houston. Waltaire is a poet. Gave me a John Lee Hooker disc when we were 12 and then showed me how to draw blues harmonica.

Waltaire and I were in deep contemplation at 89 Union Street Saloon, sitting atop a table right near the corner window, overlooking the Mississippi. We both agreed that although we never picked cotton, didn't grow up on plantation, it did not necessarily prevent creating an honest attempt making the truth of the blues a backbone of interpretation. The one ZZ tune that really captures this thought is, “My Head's in Mississippi.” Although it ain't the Thirties, all that hard-rhythm shuffle boogie coupled with a surrealistic Howlin' Wolf's delivery creates a subdued assembly of visual pictures. The great Memphis guitarist and producer Jim Dickinson once remarked, “You guys are doing what I like. You've become a Salvador Dali—the Dali of the Delta.” Once you get that far along, the point's made!

BECK Yes, I think there's humor to be had, and it's an important element in music. Les Paul used to play humorously and with great spirit. He would play these fast, spritely runs that you never would believe were possible, but he would perform them in a lighthearted way. So humor plays a part, and so does melody. I miss that in metal. Metal players never play melodically; it's just all aggression and flash. I always look for the melody, because without that, you're always a little thin on creative direction.

GIBBONS I want to tiptoe back a bit when I was talking about what a distinct pleasure it is to describe and acknowledge Jeff Beck's remarkable accomplishment of taking these electric guitar excursions into the unknown with his gruff eloquence and masterful dexterity. Jeff's outing into that uncharted wilderness maintains an experience that is “in tune” and “in time.” We speak of wanting to quantify a few things. There's a few special elements we believe rock solid, and getting in tune and in time certainly ain't a bad start. [laughs]

What do you think motivates Jeff to keep pushing through those uncharted wilderness?

GIBBONS When the great jazz pianist Thelonious Monk was asked why he kept pushing the boundaries, he responded that after the compositions and outlook of he

and his peers had been stolen and made more popular by out-and-out thieves, he and his close company went way out and invented a playing style something the robbers couldn't steal. All I can say, it's hard to steal what Jeff Beck does.

BECK Billy doesn't have to steal. When ZZ is playing, you don't get bored. Billy's sound just seems to get better as the night goes on. It doesn't alter in texture all that much, but it is just as fat as a house, and his solos are always engaging.

“Metal players never play melodically; it's just all aggression and flash.”

—Jeff Beck

One of my all-time favorite songs is ZZ Top's “Rough Boy.” When it came out, it gave me a little tear. It was such a beautiful song, and I was going through a bad emotional time and it really got to me. I used to really look forward to hearing it when it came on MTV or the radio. The sound of Billy's guitar in the beginning is really great, and I also love the unexpected key change for the solo. I think it's A up to C#.

How long have you guys known each other?

GIBBONS For decades. Recently, I received a concert poster dated somewhere in the summer of '68 featuring the Jeff Beck Group headlining a show with the Moving Sidewalks, the outfit I played with prior to forming ZZ Top.

Do you remember anything about that moment in time?

GIBBONS Vividly. Jeff and his band had decided to rehearse at a nightclub in

Houston, Texas, called the Catacombs, where the Sidewalks regularly rehearsed. It was a dark and cavernous former shopping center—turned-nightclub, complete with four or five stages. Whoever owned it brought in a fiberglass expert to decorate it in an *Addams Family* motif. Somewhat spooky.

Jeff had an upcoming booking in Dallas, yet had no way to transport his gear. The Sidewalks had a little band van, and I offered to become the equipment driver with a buddy of mine. I said, “Hey, Jeff, I think we have room in the back. Pile it in.” He said, “Really?” I said, “Yeah, tell us where to be and we'll meet you up there.” He says, “We'll just follow along.” I said, “Okay that's fine.”

What gear was he using at that time?

GIBBONS Well, that's where the story gets interesting. Jeff was playing his sunburst Les Paul, and Ronnie Wood was playing a Fender Telecaster bass, and they were both plugging into a couple of 100-watt Marshall stacks. Their sound was so powerful, it was impossible to not become totally fascinated with the desirable effect of those two instruments together.

To this day, ZZ Top's sound is an outgrowth of that experience. When you think about it, Dusty Hill's sound is sort of like “low guitar” complementing my kinda bassy dark guitar. That was the sound created by the Jeff Beck Group.

BECK My memory isn't as good as Billy's but I remember turning him on to power chords, which was a new idea back then. I'm very proud he was there to witness us arriving with this gigantic stack of furniture we called amplifiers. [laughs]

GIBBONS Jeff knew we were mesmerized with the sound and instructed his roadie, Malcolm, to introduce us to Jim Marshall, which resulted in Marshall creating a 110-volt power supply for export to the U.S. ZZ Top were actually the first stateside players to take delivery of the imported Marshall stacks. We got two for \$700.

That's a pretty good deal! Wasn't Dusty also playing a Telecaster bass like Ronnie in the early days of ZZ Top?

GIBBONS Yes, and that was no coincidence—which once again underlines the considerable impact of seeing the Jeff Beck Group. I actually remember acquiring Dusty's bass in 1969. We were in Dallas and planning to drive to Houston. He didn't have a bass guitar to his name, and I said, “You know what? Before we make the freeway, there's a spot we should hit: Rocky's Pawn Shop.” Sure enough, we

walked in and what should be in the front window? A 1968 Telecaster bass. Dusty and I looked and said, “Okay, we got Marshalls, a ‘Burst, a Telecaster bass...boom!”

Seven hundred dollars for the Marshalls and 70 bucks for the bass—with a case, I may add! Gotta throw in a case. We were set.

How long did those last you?

GIBBONS We’ve still got ‘em.

No!

GIBBONS Yeah. Perfect shape. Well...

That’s what was great about Marshall amps back then. You could really abuse them. They were tough.

GIBBONS And they sounded great. Whatever it was that Marshall did and had under their belts—whether it was purposely designed or whether it was just some miraculous accident—the sound was dramatic, and from that point forward we gladly considered them to be the band’s benchmark. That setup became the cornerstone of the ZZ sound and really hasn’t changed.

It comes down to math. The waveform that is delivered by a Marshall amp has a resonance that instantaneously generates a very wide appeal. There are quite a few things our brains are hardwired to react to, and the sound of a Marshall is most definitely one of those things. It just has what it takes to ignite human interest, and the immediacy is really remarkable.

So do you think the sound of Marshall amps resonate in some sort of universal way?

GIBBONS Yes, indeed. On a recent flight back from London, the airline featured a fascinating documentary on the Aston Martin car. At one point, the film crew entered the design studio and spoke with the engineers who all seemed to make reference to this time-honored way of dividing things and then placing them in a particular order called the Golden Ratio. The concept goes back to somewhere around 1400 B.C. They were applying that concept to the car’s alluring design, making it undeniably and universally appealing.

There’s something so confounding and similarly fascinating about hard-wired humans being predisposed to certain spatial, audio and mathematical relationships. It just gets ya. Some curious science-minded scientists have even analyzed popular song compositions by observing the waveforms to discover they correlate to this Golden Ratio equation.



MAG NEAT-O

MAGNATONE AMPLIFIERS are back, and BILLY GIBBONS is rolling out the red carpet.

BY BRAD TOLINSKI

AFTER 40 YEARS OF DORMANCY, Magnatone amplifiers, one of the great names in guitar amplification has returned—and not in name only. While the front end and power sections of the new Magnatones have been modernized and vastly improved, the company’s engineers have faithfully recreated their legendary patented vibrato circuit from 1958, which is nothing short of heaven for true aficionados of classic guitar sounds.

Among those who are cheering the boutique company’s return is Billy Gibbons. “We’re pleasantly amazed that the mythic Magnatone has resurfaced in such a big way,” Gibbons says. “This is nothing short of a rockin’ resurrexion, and the sound is every bit as great as the look.”

Acknowledged as one of rock’s most discriminating tone freaks, the ZZ Top guitarist is currently using the company’s Super Fifty-Nine head in his live rig and in the studio.

“The Super Fifty-Nine specializes in delivering a very open sound,” he says. “It doesn’t require an array of pedals to get great sound, and the master volume feature is one of the best I’ve heard. It’s a lot of loud, and it’s the good loud!”

Magnatone president and CEO Ted Kornblum says his focus is on making high-end, American-made products that a musician will want to use for a lifetime. His entire line, he explains, is 100 percent tube powered, crafted using

point-to-point wiring and top-notch quality control. “I’m not interested in making thousands of amps,” he says. “I’m interested in making great amps.”

The product line is currently divided into three groups: the Traditional Collection, the Studio Collection and the Master Collection. The Traditional amps (Twilighter, Stereo Twilighter and Single V) are built in the style of the American combos of the Sixties and feature true pitch-shifting vibrato using silicon-carbide varistors, American-inspired 6V6 and 6L6 tube circuitry, a tube-driven spring reverb, custom-designed ceramic speakers made by Warehouse Guitar Speakers, and gold and brown aesthetics that are based on the original Magnatone amps.

The Studio Collection (Lyric and Varsity) models are built in the tradition of the smaller amps of the Fifties and Sixties and offers those vintage tones but with improved power for the modern player. Visually stunning, compact in size and offering tons of headroom, all of the amps in this line are offered in TV and Cathedral cabinet designs.

For those looking to make a bigger noise à la Mr. Gibbons, the Master Collection (Super Fifteen, Super Thirty and Super Fifty-Nine) features EL84 and EL34 British-inspired tube circuitry, master volume, custom British-style speakers made by Warehouse Guitar Speakers and the company’s patented pitch-shifting vibrato.

It begs the question, “Can art be reduced to math? Can a masterpiece be created by simply following an equation?” In this case of Aston Martin, the designers purposely embraced the notion there is such an aesthetic bull’s-eye just waiting to be hit. Will there be a point in time where this Golden Ratio can be quantified, measured or repeated in music, design and art? Maybe it can, yet more often it’s stumbled upon through sheer instinct. This could be the case with Marshall’s sound.

This is a big question, but how do you explain the cosmic connection between the appreciation of a fine automobile and a great guitar?

GIBBONS It’s a big question, but a good one! What’s really the wicked connection is that they can be loud and fast; yet, they can also be quite elegant. While I was in Spain visiting Nacho Baños, the noted authority on early Fifties blackguard Fenders, we spent more than a day and a night—make it days and nights—talking about automotive elegance and the connection with the unchanged beauty of that original Fender. Call it the Telecaster, the Esquire, the Broadcaster or call it the No-caster—it’s become one of those timeless things.

BECK Guitars and cars offer experiences that are both quite amazing. The other day I was thinking, Why are there so many people in cars? It’s because it’s such a pleasure to have that experience, regardless of where you are going. It’s almost habit forming. You want to control your movement, but at the same time your brain is going at an unnatural speed and you’re putting yourself in danger. There’s that element of excitement every time you turn the ignition. It’s not that you’re just driving from point A to B—you’re enjoying every second of being in control of your life...or avoiding death! Listening to great rock and roll music also gives you this exhilarating sense of awareness similar to what you have when you are driving.

There are other more obvious connections. Hot rods are cool looking and rock and roll is cool looking, and they both came of age at the same time in the Fifties. If America never created anything else, thank you very much for the hot rods and rock and roll!

How are cars and guitars different?

GIBBONS Jeff and I were out with our gals one night, making the rounds in London, when one of the most strident revelations came across as Jeff remarked, “We’re going to be better guitarists if we relax and throw caution to the wind. And should we make a mistake, ain’t no big deal. That’s the best part of the game. When you’re behind the wheel of a car, one has to remain extremely focused and concentration must remain

“Most of what I need is actually in my fingers. You know, let’s hear it for the fingers!”

—Jeff Beck

steady.” Jeff went on to say, “Keep stayed-on behind the wheel. And when behind the guitar, let it rip!”

That’s pretty interesting. So what you’re saying is part of the enjoyment of a car is that it’s defined, whereas music is often completely open-ended.

GIBBONS Compare it to a modern couch with squared definable corners as opposed to puffy round ones. The couch may be inviting, however, there’s no sharp definition if it’s so rounded. That’s the dilemma: the traveling minstrel’s world is often without definition. You don’t know what city you’re in. You don’t know which city you’re going to. You don’t even know what day or time it is. However, with something like a car, the engine and body parts are sized within thousands of an inch—a welcome relief to an existence with no definition.

BECK When it comes to music I have a cranky brain. I can’t really put what it means in words. I’m sure Billy would agree that the creative process is a bit unpredictable. I can’t just sit down and be a good boy and write a great song; I have to be prodded by my inner feelings. But I find while I’m working on one of my hot rods and I’m busting my knuckles and cursing, sometimes the music will come to me. Sometimes if I hear the clank of a wrench or the sound of a piece

of steel, it’ll trigger an idea, so it’s important for me to work on the cars for my music. And it’s important for me to play music to pay for the cars. [laughs] It’s a great symbiotic relationship. It keeps me occupied, because I’m a dangerous person when I’m not occupied!

A car represents freedom for a lot of people, too.

GIBBONS Yeah. The escapism factor runs high. Ain’t nothing wrong with that.

Which obsession came first for you? Was it the guitars or the cars?

GIBBONS My mom will argue my first three words were *Ford*, *Chevrolet* and *Cadillac*, but my interest in both came almost at the same time. Down the street were two brothers that had a band, and they had hot-rod cars. Not only that, brothers Bobby and Mickey were both guitarists. Mickey had a ’59 maple-neck Jazzmaster and Bobby had a ’61 Les Paul with that weird hydraulic-looking whammy of a vibrato, and both of their guitars were pinstriped. I was like, “Okay. This is it! They’ve got it all.”

What were the first serious guitars you owned?

GIBBONS On Christmas Day, when I was 13, I found a 1962 single-pickup, single-cut-away Gibson Melody Maker parked next to a Tweed Fender Champ amplifier right under the tree. I didn’t have to contend with one of those crazy, cheap guitars with a bow-and-arrow neck. It was straight to the fast lane, playing Jimmy Reed and Ray Charles by the end of the day.

What was your first serious car?

GIBBONS There was a guy from California named Art Grindle that opened up a Chrysler dealership in Houston. He was a stone character and sponsored something called *The Saturday Jungle Theater* on television. He had a fleet of junkers, and at an unannounced time during the two-hour show, he’d appear, saying, “The next 10 people to arrive at my dealership will get in on the Westheimer Special!” The special was a \$100 automobile, and the first 10 people to arrive were allowed to put a signed \$10 bill into a hat, and if your bill was drawn, you got a car for 10 bucks.

And after pulling these shenanigans, the success of Art’s car dealership went crazy. Well, my dad fell for it, and went down and bought a brand-new ’64 Dodge Dart, a spiffy two-door model complete with one luxury item: a heater. Believe it or not, I qualified and got a full driver’s license when I turned 13. At that time you could apply...

Gibbons and Beck performing at the 25th Anniversary of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame concert, October 30, 2009.



Wait, you had a driver's license at 13? Texas really is different from the rest of the world!

GIBBONS Oh yeah, man. For \$50, you could take a quick, behind-the-wheel course, and if you passed, then you were issued a driver's license. Anyway, the Dart was my first car, and like my Marshall, I still have it!

If you listen to the introduction to ZZ Top's "Manic Mechanic," you hear the irritating ignition sound of that singular Chrysler product [*mimics sound*]. With so much room in the backseat and the boot, the Dart served as band car for the longest time. We drove that car where Jeeps feared to tread. We tried to wreck it, but you couldn't. It had Chrysler's Slant-6 engine, which Chrysler quit making because you couldn't break 'em. It was just crazy. In fact, we had driven it through some stone-strewn field and ripped the exhaust system out from under the car. Very nasty sounding, yet it made for the perfect intro to "Manic Mechanic."

Regarding design, do you have a favorite car and guitar?

BECK I don't have a favorite guitar. They're all revolting and a bloody nuisance! They all just get in the way of what I'm trying to say musically. [*laughs*]

When it comes to cars, it changes constantly. They're fascinating. They're living things to me really. Driving a different car is a refreshing experience. You have to remember how this one twitches, and how the brakes are—if they pull or if they're great. It's an alert mechanism, and it's almost a fashion thing. You know: "I think I'll drive this one today and cruise through the village and frighten people!"

Jeff, I know you're totally hands on when it comes to building your hot rods, but do you like to modify your own guitars?

BECK Yes, I actually built my first guitar, and I know all the ins and outs of my Strat. I could wire or make a guitar, no worries, but since Fender have taken me under their wing and built me all these great guitars, there hasn't been any need. I can usually play them straight out of the box.

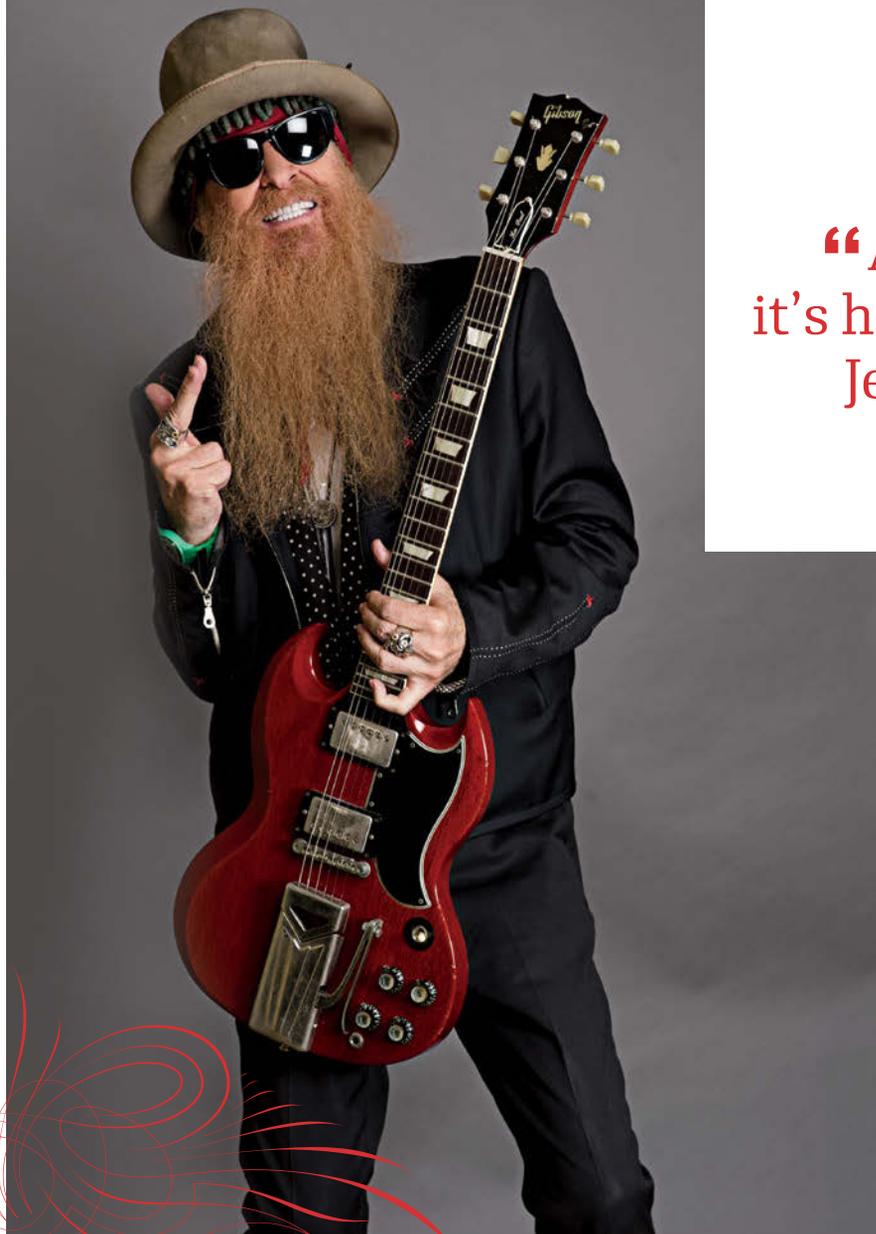
In a way, when it comes to guitars, I don't really give a damn about custom this and custom that. Most of what I need is actually in my fingers. You know, let's hear it for the fingers! I mean look at Hendrix. He used a couple of pedals, but most of the time it was just a guitar into an amp. You can't buy Jimi's sound; you have to learn how to make it.

I noticed you put Hendrix's "Little Wing" into your set. After all these years, has your estimation of him grown?

BECK I still marvel at his contribution. After withstanding the shock of him blowing us all away in 1967, he actually forced me to change my style. I couldn't do some of those more outlandish things I was mentioning before because people would think I was stealing from him.

I thought, Right! If I'm going to form a band, I'm not going to do a trio with feedback and all of that stuff. That's when I started the Jeff Beck Group with Rod Stewart, who put that attention back on the vocals. That band allowed us to do sort of Motown-style bass lines and get out of the way of Jimi. When you are doing that sort of experimental stuff and someone comes along and does it much better, you have to sort of go home and deal with that dilemma.

But to get back to your question, I've come to really appreciate how advanced he was. The way he was able to cram so much innovation into three or four years is quite remarkable, and his legend just seems to grow. I don't think he's ever been bigger! If he came back from the afterlife, he would definitely have no trouble selling out shows. [*laughs*]



“All I can say,
it’s hard to steal what
Jeff Beck does.”

—Billy Gibbons

Billy, when you actually had money and you were able to buy the first car of your dreams, what was that?

GIBBONS Speaking of Hendrix, one of my first big checks arrived after the Moving Sidewalks appeared with Jimi in '68. I immediately went down and got a black “Pony”...a GTO, 400-cubic-inch. And it was fast. Really fast. The pop versions then were either automatic tranny or four-speed. I took the rare, three-on-the-floor because the four-speed guy in the next lane could take you off the line, but by the time the second gear of three topped out—that smokin’ rubber quarter mile was nailed flat! Can’t beat the ‘goat’!

But since we’re addressing the BFG/JB car thing here: I said, “Jeff you got the Deuces, '32 Fords; I’ll take the '33.” So we’ve

got this gentleman’s handshake agreement: he’s the '32 guy, and I’ll take the '33.

What are the differences?

GIBBONS Not much. The '32 remains the definition of *hot rod*. However, the red ZZ Eliminator car that hit the airwaves through MTV is a chopped '33, so that’s my car by default. Collectively, those early Thirties Fords are really the mark of what we talk about when we try and make a comparison between rock and roll and loud, fast and crazy. Jeff’s got a '32 under construction right now. He’s wrenchin’ hell on it.

Jeff, when you recently played guitar and toured with Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys, it might’ve seemed like a head scratcher for some people. But Brian has

written some of the best songs about car culture ever. Was that the attraction?

BECK I loved things like the Beach Boys’ “Little Deuce Coupe” when it came out in the early Sixties, but it was the later albums like *Pet Sounds* and all the really “out” stuff like *Wild Honey* that really excited me. Being asked to play “Surf’s Up” when I toured with Brian was one of the crowning moments of the whole endeavor.

What about Chuck Berry? He’s another guy that wrote great songs about cars.

BECK I enjoyed him, but he wasn’t on the same planet as Elvis, Gene Vincent and those sort of people. I mean his solos were always rhythmically great, and I don’t want to sound negative, but his records weren’t something I wanted to rush out and buy. When it came to guitar playing, I was more interesting in the finer points of guys like Merle Travis and Chet Atkins—things that are still inimitable to this day. Most people can’t get near “Blue Smoke” by Merle. It’s some of the greatest speed picking of all time. I also loved Jimmy Bryant, Scotty Moore, Cliff Gallup...or Grady Martin, for cryin’ out loud. All of them picked, but none of them sounded alike, and they all had wildly different tones.

That’s because they were inventing it. There wasn’t much to copy.

BECK That’s right. That’s the secret to their success—they weren’t copying anybody.

Billy, is there a piece of guitar music or a song that epitomizes the excitement of the guitar and cars? What’s the one for you to put on the radio and blast when you’re racing down the highway?

GIBBONS Without question, it would be the guitar solo performed by Wayne Bennett in the middle of Bobby Bland’s version of “Stormy Monday Blues.” Slow, sultry, with an attitude that is thick as thieves! **GW**