

Stevie & Double Trouble (L-R): Tommy Shannon, Stevie, Chris Layton, Reese Wynans.



The Blues Had a Baby ... and called it Stevie Ray

His calling card reads, "Have Guitar, Will Travel" ... and Stevie Ray Vaughan's Stratocaster has had no rest since his meteoric rise to fame. In a little over three years, Vaughan has gone from playing small roadhouses in the south of the United

This month Vaughan barnstorms his way around New Zealand for a second visit. But this time, he is joined by his elder brother Jimmy, whose group the Fabulous Thunderbirds are double billed with Stevie Ray and Double Trouble. The Fabulous Thunderbirds are almost legendary in their home state of Texas, where they are regarded as the kings of rocking blues. In Europe, they're cult heroes, and they recently got Dave Edmunds to produce their new album *Tuff Enuff*.

Stevie Ray is also touring to promote an album — his third, called *Soul to Soul*. He's in demand for other projects as well; recently he produced an album for some



Jimmy Vaughan

of his old blues heroes, he played on James Brown's tune for *Rocky IV*, 'Living in America', and now Madonna's hubby Sean Penn is after his talents for a movie soundtrack.

Just before their arrival in New Zealand, the Vaughan brothers talked to *RIU* from their Howard Johnson's motel somewhere in Illinois.

Although pushed for time to talk, Stevie Ray seems to be handling the stresses of stardom. "There's always pressure in this business," he says in a weary Texan drawl. "Especially when things start moving. But the music's the most important thang, it's just the money that brings the pressure."

Being the heir to Jimi Hendrix is another burden that has been imposed on Stevie Ray. As a child he was introduced to the guitar legend by his older brother Jimmy. "One day he brought

States to appearing at huge stadiums around the world. He has been called Jimi Hendrix's true heir; ironically, he first heard his greatest influence after his brother rescued an early Hendrix single from a record store rubbish tin.

home this amazing find — Hendrix's first single, before it came out. It had been thrown in the trash can behind our local music store."

Many stories have Stevie Ray beginning his musical career on the saxophone. "Oh, I don't know where that came from," he says. "I started on the trombone and by playing drums on pizza pans and shoe boxes. There were several musicians among my parent's friends who gave me some pointers when I got started, but it was mainly Jimmy's ear for music, and his knack for finding great records, that really got me going."

But as Jimmy's guitar playing improved, Stevie was left to look after himself. "Jimmy moved real quickly, and once he started playing in bands, he just got better and moved on through the ropes. Then he went on the road, so he wasn't at home a lot. But by that time I'd got started. So I knew I had something there — the need to play."

The Hendrix influence on Stevie has been over-stated; many musicians have had their effect on his playing, particularly old blues guitarists such as B.B. King, Albert Collins and Albert King (who calls Stevie his "godson"). He is soon to produce a record for King, having already worked on albums by blues greats Lonnie Mack and Johnny Copeland. What's it like, working with your childhood idols? "A pleasure," says Stevie. "To finally get them in a natural setting, and to be able to help them achieve what they want in the studio. Cos the music's the most important thang."

After the guitar pyrotechnics of *Texas Flood* and *Couldn't Stand the Weather*, a mellower Stevie Ray is revealed on *Soul to Soul*. He cautiously agrees: "Well, it's more relaxed, certainly. But playing the music was just as exciting." Naturally, Vaughan's guitar skills are still upfront, on numbers such as 'Say What!', an easy-swinging blues vamp which features one of the few special effects on the album: the wah-wah pedal

Hendrix used to record 'Up From the Skies'.

Towards the end of his life, Hendrix was experimenting with more avant-garde forms of music. Does Stevie Ray feel the same desire to explore? "Yeah, you need to be free to grow. But you'll never really be free of the blues. There ain't nobody who gets outta these blues alive." It's a corny maxim — but I didn't hear him laugh.

Perhaps because he's been playing around the traps for years, all over North America and Europe, Jimmy Vaughan sounds a more easy-going character. That experience and attitude is reflected in the Fabulous Thunderbirds' music — they're a hard rockin', hoot'nanyin', roadwise *bar-band*. Among their number are musos who have played with such respected bands as Roomful of Blues and Asleep at the Wheel. Last year's party favourites Los Lobos make an appearance as guest vocalists on one track of *Tuff Enuff*.

Why is the authentic

sound of country-tinged R&B currently so popular? "Ah don't know why it's coming back," says Jimmy. "People have always loved it, and most do — if they've heard it. Ah'm not bragging, but ah've been playing this music for 12 years. It's not a trend, or a fad. If nobody likes it, we'll just keep doin' it anyway. We're not trendy."

God forbid. But the Fabulous Thunderbirds are pretty hot in Europe at the moment — what do they see in the Texas sound? "They like it cos it's real. They can hear it. It's got a regional sound to it, which they don't have." Vaughan says its the diverse range of ethnic groups that give Texas music its distinctive sound. "They all blend in together to give it a particular flavour. Ah don't know why we've got so many guitar players in Texas. We've got more guitar players than Reagan's got gum."

Tuff Enuff was produced by Dave Edmunds — it's interesting that you got a Welshman to get the authentic sound of American

rock and roll. "We met those guys when they were in Rockpile when our first album came out years ago," says Jimmy. "They called us up and asked us to tour England with them. Those guys know more about American rock and roll than most Americans. That's the simple answer to that!" He chuckles. "We picked Edmunds because his records, his music, is so tough."

What got you into the blues and R&B? "Well, it's a long story. When you grew up in Texas it was on the radio all the time. When ah first heard the sound ah just couldn't believe it. There were a lot of black stations on the radio, so it was all around us. But ah was also listening to the Ventures, Elvis, and everythang else."

You started on the guitar first ... "What happened was, ah got a guitar and started playing first for about two years. When ah put it down to leave the room, ah'd say to my brother, 'Don't mess with my guitar, now' ... but ah was just kinda messin'

with him, y'know. As soon as ah left the room he'd pick up the guitar and pick out what ah was trying to learn before ah left the room. Ah'm only three-and-a-half years older, so he was probably just six years old when I started the guitar. He could play — by the time he was eight he was a real hot guitar player."

Jimmy Vaughan's obviously tickled with the achievements of his younger brother: "Ah'm so proud, ah tell you, ah jest couldn't believe it. When ah think of it, ah jest get goose bumps. Ah saw him on the TV the other day, and ah was so proud."

But you'll be giving Stevie a run for his money when you're on stage together: "You betcha ... always. That's one of the fun things about being on tour with him. We come out smoking, and he's worried. Nah ... it's a lot of fun."

Stevie Ray and Double Trouble are known to be hot stuff, but don't overlook the Fabulous Thunderbirds — those guys are tough. **Chris Bourke**

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