

► when the inevitable reunion was announced in 1989 with America firmly in the sights.

Someone a little harder to convince was John Mahler, the original drummer who skipped the Australasian tour due to business commitments, only to be replaced by Mike Joyce (ex-Smiths). Joyce, no slouch with the sticks, provided the highlight of the show when he played wave after wave of rolls around an enormous kit during 'Pulsebeat'. The only light on in the whole Powerstation was a blue strobe inside the kick drum, triggered to follow the drum pattern. It wasn't until he finished that I realised the others had packed up and gone home.

The very public mud-slinging match in the British rags between Shelley and singer / guitarist Steve Diggle — reminiscent of such other legendary love / hate relationships as Lennon-McCartney or Townshend-Daltry — has obviously been resolved. Shelley must have been sore when Diggle toured his new album under the moniker Buzzcocks FOC in the mid-80s.

"It's something that he has apologised for. It was a mix-up with the promoters, at least that's his story. He was in Germany playing a gig and the promoter advertised them as the Buzzcocks FOC."

With that matter well and truly behind them, the Buzzcocks reformed and commenced a world tour which doesn't seem to have ended. An EP, *Successful St*, was released through their own label and now it looks like a new studio album, under the guidance of Bill Laswell (Tackhead) is about to see the light of day.

"The album was recorded before Christmas and mixed in the New Year," says Shelley. "At the moment there's a lot of discussions with record companies, but so far there's nothing. It's still being shopped around, which is a bit of a disappointment because we want to get the songs out."

In keeping with the recent tradition of tribute albums it came as

no surprise that a band as influential as the Buzzcocks would sooner or later have their songbook plundered. *Something's Gone Wrong Again* is available on import from Real Groovy and has the usual grunge interpretations of better known Cocks classics. Shelley was hardly running wild at the mouth with accolades.

"When we played in Seattle somebody from C / Z Records, who released the album, gave us a cassette of it which we listened to on the tour bus. 'Why Can't I Touch It' (Porn Orchard), that's an interesting one. I like 'ESP' as well. But I mean, there are more tribute albums being put together by different people."

If you prefer visuals with your sounds, a couple of Buzzcocks videos have just become available on Sell-Thru. *Auf Wiedersehen* was filmed as the last concert before the split. The second live video, filmed for British television, was John Mahler's final performance from the 1989 reunion. There's also a really weird American teen sex film called *Party Animal* with a soundtrack provided by the Buzzcocks.

"Yeah, awful film isn't it? Again, it was out of our control. It seems to be that someone got a hold of our *Singles Going Steady* album, which is our least known in the States. So they used tracks from that and the first thing I knew about it was when it was on at the cinema and somebody said 'have you seen that film with those songs of yours on it?'"

I'm not expecting them to break any new ground at the Powerstation, but if you've ever had a Buzzcocks record you really deserve to see it rendered live. I can still recall standing mesmerized in 1990 in front of the stage with the Buzzcocks decked out in white suits. And I can still hear Steve Diggle barking out 'Mad Mad Judy' like there was a prizegiving after the show for whoever blew their pipes first. So if catchy pub sing-alongs in falsettos are your bag, I'll see you at the Powerstation. Promoters willing, that is.

STEVE SIMPSON



VIVA BILLY

So Billy, exactly how long has it been since you shaved?

"Well, I guess the clever answer to that would be, it's been a while and it will probably be another while yet. How's that?"

That's just fine, a suitably dry comeback from a man who's made a career out of music that is full of dry but dumb humour. As you should know, Billy's the very hirsute guitarist for ZZ Top, one of the finest trios of Texan boogie merchants to ever walk the face of the earth. The more sophisticated among you may well dismiss ZZ Top as some sort of petrolhead nightmare, but that's a highly unjust approach.

Take their new *Greatest Hits* compilation, it covers 1973 til 1990 and gives you a good idea of what's happening. Sure there's some duff plodders here, but whole chunks of it are downright brilliant. They take the beat and spirit of Muddy Waters and Jimmy Reed and the Midnighters and plenty of other fine R&B, toss in a some of Little Richard's general mindset, then play it really loudly with some classic white boy rock stylings for good measure. Plenty of bands have tried, but few

have been as successful as ZZ Top. What's the secret of your success Billy?

"Well, I was talking to both Frank and Billy just a couple of hours ago when we were gearing up for these interviews and they reminded me that they had performed together for a period before we formed as ZZ Top, so they've actually been hammering out this rhythm thing for some time. When someone asks 'What is the secret to staying together for so long?', aside from the love of music I have to say it's the solid backbeat and I have to credit Frank and Dusty for just being solid."

You guys were all involved in the late 60s in some serious Texan punk bands like the Moving Sidewalks weren't you?

"Yeah, we had bands, and oddly enough they were working in another part of the state and although we'd heard about each other, we never got the chance to

see each other perform until this year, when some guy did a couple of old videos on which the bands appeared. So I got to see their group and they got to see mine. It was pretty interesting."

Rhythm and Blues seems to have a strong part in your musical mix too. "Oh yeah, that's the cornerstone, that's what you first learn and it's stayed pretty much a part of what our music has been about, and we don't have any complaints on that, it kept us thrashing along."

And fair enough too, Bo Diddley has made a 40-year career out of a couple of riffs, so why not ZZ Top? Like Bo and other greats they realise the importance of presentation, you need a gimmick to work and you need to keep it fresh. ZZ Top have certainly taken that to heart, they still put on a show, from the high tech animated junkyard that accompanied them on the recent 'Recycler' tour and the instantly recognizable videos down to the soft shoe shuffle that the boys bust at all their shows, they've always been aware of entertainment.

You guys don't take things entirely seriously do you? "It's just us, you know? We took a brief fling at writing like Bob Dylan, but it didn't work for us. What he says fits him and what we say fits us, and that's the way it is."

I sure don't see Bob Dylan using a guitar that spins around like yours do.

"Yeah, we had a lot of fun with those, it's pretty crazy though, it makes them hard to play." ZZ Top's historical fascination is by no means parasitic. They've long been involved in the Delta Blues Museum in Mississippi and have included as a bonus deal on the *Greatest Hits* album, a cover version of Doc Pomus's 'Viva Las Vegas', a track already taken to great heights by Elvis Presley and later the Dead Kennedys and now elevated even further courtesy of Mr Dusty Hill's fondness for the King's more interesting moments.

Why 'Viva Las Vegas'? "It's a little weird, but it was a

dresser room warm-up song that made it onto the soundstage, then from there onto a demo and from there onto an album. It'll definitely be fun to watch where it takes us, that's for sure. I must say I'm pleased Dusty's performing, he's definitely quite a bit out there. Of course he stays out there, it's just now he's decided to join us as well."

Just in case it seems like ZZ Top are musical recidivists of the worst kind, lets get contemporary. Mr Gibbons is one aware guy, from legendary Memphis producer Jim Dickinson's latest combo Mudboy and the Neutrons to more eclectic items, he certainly knows his shit from Shinola.

Where's rock heading? "Well, it's showing up in the most unusual places, my buddy Al Jourgenson seems to be training a legion of followers to understand the roots, but not to let that hold them back from thrashing on. It's great, the underground stuff is like, sampling the old and mixing it with the new. Man, it's coming on strong."

You're into stuff like *Ministry*? "Oh yeah, 'Jesus Built My Hotrod', that new thing of theirs, if that's any indication of what's to come you better put on your seatbelt!"

Well, it does feature another of my favourite Texan psychos in there, Mr Gibby Haynes of the Butthole Surfers.

"Yeah, he's great. There's a band called Pigface as well, I caught 'em live and picked up a cassette of theirs, and man, that's pretty out there stuff, it's definitely attitudinal."

So there it is, the past and the present according to Billy Gibbons, guitarist, bearded man and general all-round cool guy. After all that I suppose the only way to end it all is with the future. So what's up?

"We're actually trying to figure that out, there will be some studio sessions coming up, but the interest with this *Greatest Hits* may mean we need a brief live tour happening. I hope so, we got to get down your way, we definitely got to do that soon."

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