

participation in the soundtrack recording *O Brother, Where Art Thou*, which sold more than seven million copies – earned him three Grammys, including the Best Country Male Vocalist award. He holds a fourth Grammy for his recordings with artist Jim Lauderdale.

ZZ TOP SETS SMALL-VENUE TOUR DATES

ZZ Top has announced plans to play a series of small-venue concerts the band's publicist says will "bring them even closer, literally, to their legions of fans." Kicking off in Wichita, Kansas, on September 26, the ZZ Top In Your Face Tour will continue for six weeks and close at the Amarillo Civic Center in Texas on November 1.

"Earlier this year, because of a routing quirk, we accepted a fill-in date at a little old theater in Knoxville," guitarist Billy F Gibbons explained. "That experience reminded us of our roots, both in terms of a stripped-down, gut-bucket musical approach and the direct connection with the people who came to see us. So we said, 'Why not do this on a more extended basis and have some real fun?'"

The band recently returned from playing festivals in eight European countries. Earlier this year, its *Live From Texas* DVD debuted at #1 on *Billboard's* music DVD chart the week it was released.

The band will also this month celebrate the 25th anniversary of the release of its breakthrough album, *Eliminator*, with the release of a Collectors Edition of the RIAA-certified Diamond album (over 10 million units) by Warner Bros. through Rhino Entertainment. A tour itinerary is posted at ZZtop.com.

OOPS! DEPT.

Our review of the Fender '57 Amp in the September issue referred to its Alnico Blue speaker as being made by Jensen. That speaker, of course, made by Celestion. *VG* apologizes for any confusion created by the error.

To stay up-to-the-minute on happenings and events relating to the artists and companies you read about in VG, be sure to check out the VG Newswire, on the home page at VintageGuitar.com.



Mike Zito Chance Encounters

MIKE ZITO HAS ALWAYS made records with the intent of releasing them himself. And his new disc, *Today*, was no different. But going into it, he wasn't counting on getting help from folks like David Z and Tony Braunagel as producers, or guest musicians like Benmont Tench and Hutch Hutchinson. All that, he says, was "fate."

It all started when he was signed by Electro Groove records. "It was great," he said. "Tony was brought in to work on it. He called and said 'You've got some really good songs here. Wouldn't you rather re-do this record, and do it right?'"

"So he lobbied the label, then David Z got involved. I'd given him my record a year before, and played in front of him in Nashville. He didn't remember that (laughs)! But the label sent him my CD and he wanted to do it. When they told me, I thought 'That's great! He must have really liked my record when I gave it to him.' Well, he didn't even remember it.

"Now that I've gotten to know him, I know why—he can't walk out of his house without people handing him a tape. Plus, he lives in Los Angeles and he's friends with Benmont and Hutch. So, it's really just fate!"

Today is a blend of rock, blues, and soul. But Zito doesn't see it as a matter of styles, more a matter of what a particular piece of music needs.

As a singer and a guitarist, he has always been drawn to different and distinct voices. "I've always liked guys like Mick Jagger as opposed to say Robert Plant. I know Plant could probably sing circles around Jagger, but I just like the sound of Jagger's voice. I guess if something sounds real, those are the people I'm drawn to."

One unusual influence on Zito's

career is a small music shop near his home in St. Louis. Drawn to guitars hanging there, he eventually got one. As he learned to play, his tastes were shaped by family and friends. "I had a buddy who always had the new sounds. He had the first Van Halen, so I got it and was playing it like crazy. My older brother saw me listening to it, and gave me Hendrix and Cream records. I was pretty young and had to kind of grow into Hendrix. I started playing guitar for real in high school and got into some bands."

Fresh out of high school, Tower Grove Music would again play a big role in Zito's life. "I got a job and worked there for 10 years," he said. "That was the best education in the world. Everybody who worked there was older than me and played music for a living, and all the players around town came in – a lot of working musicians."

Some of the store's product helped develop his picking style. "We had an Albert Lee video – it was the best thing ever because it taught me hybrid picking, Travis picking, banjo rolls, and lots of other things. Watching that tape and learning its techniques was all I did for two years. I've never actually played in a country band, but it gave me a way to pick and bend. But I just love guitar players – Danny Gatton, Clapton, Robben Ford..."

As you might expect with someone who worked in a guitar store, Zito has owned about 200 guitars. These days, he relies on Fender Stratocasters. "I especially like the vintage reissues. They just work best for what we do live because they cover pretty much everything." His main guitars are both reissues, his latest being a 1960 Relic three-color sunburst.

Given his two-year study of the Albert Lee video, it's no surprise which player is Zito's favorite. "I played a Telecaster for a long time. I really like

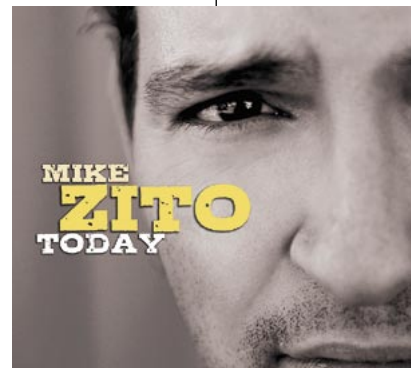
Teles, especially if it's 'Hey, we're gonna play guitar.' I've also got a Guild Bluesbird with a gold top. I love playing that guitar in the bridge position for straight-up blues."

A Fender Twin and Deluxe guy for a long time, Zito

now is a fan of Category 5 amplifiers. "I play a hand-made 2x12 with two inputs. One's like a tweed Fender, and the other like a silverface. It's not like two channels, it's like two amps!"

Zito says his plans for the immediate future are pretty basic and straightforward. "I'm just going to keep doin' it. The label is really good and supportive, so I'll just keep writing and playing."

– **John Heidt**



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