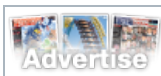


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Veterans matter: ZZ Top bassist Dusty Hill says fun is what keeps ZZ Top motoring

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In an interview with *Toledo Free Press Star*, Dusty Hill, the bassist and co-vocalist for ZZ Top, didn't bring up the fame or fortune associated with being a rock star. Instead, he wanted to talk about a cause close to him: Veterans Matter.

The Toledo-based nonprofit provides rent deposits for veterans who are screened and aided by the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Department of Veterans Affairs Supported Housing program (HUD-VASH). Many unhoused veterans don't have the means to pay the deposit or first month's rent upon moving into new homes, something required for HUD-VASH housing programs.

"As a citizen of the United States, I just think that it's a shame that men and women in the service are having a hard time getting housing when there's definitely something that we can do about it," Hill said.

He recently made a video to support Veterans Matter's "60,000 Soldiers Housed" campaign.

"They told me the best thing I could do is to use my face a little bit or whatever, so I'm more than happy to do that," he said.

Along with bandmates Billy Gibbons and Frank Beard, Hill has been rocking out (and rocking a long beard) for quite some time. ZZ Top has sold 25 million discs since 1970, according to the Recording Industry Association of America.

Hits include "Sharp Dressed Man," "Legs," "La Grange," "Got Me Under Pressure" and "Gimme All Your Lovin'."

The band will play an 8 p.m. show Nov. 1 at Stranahan Theater. Tickets are \$48-\$68.

Hill, a Dallas native who resides in Houston, said the Texas attitude has influenced the group's music.

"It's hard to say how Texas has influenced our music, because how could it not?" he said.

Hill said he, Gibbons and Beard listened to the same radio stations coming out of Mexico while growing up. When they met, they learned about their common pasts.

"We had a lot of the same exact influences. It's kinda like when you hear those weird stories about twins who grew up separate and when they met they went, 'Wow,'" Hill said.

What keeps the group together is its sense of fun, Hill said, adding that he hopes that feeling extends to the audiences.

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ZZ Top

“This sounds clichéd, but we really enjoy playing music together, the three of us,” Hill said. “I hope that feeling is contagious. I mean, we’re having fun. I hope that allows people in the audience to have fun.”

“Our audience is actually pretty mixed in age. [There are] people my age (63), but I see people in their early to mid teens out there,” he said, adding, with a chuckle, “We do have a new record out, but I don’t know how many people have heard it.”

Modesty aside, the September-released “La Futura” debuted at No. 6 on the Billboard 200. The album has some new influences — the single “I Gotsta Get Paid” is based on the rap song “25 Lighters” by DJ DMD with Lil’ Keke and Fat Pat.

“The original form, if you heard it, you wouldn’t think ZZ Top would get a hold of that, but there was something about it,” Hill said. “We made it our own.”

Rick Rubin, a record producer who has worked with everyone from Johnny Cash to Sheryl Crow, lent his talents to the album too, Hill said.

However, Hill noted that the album does not signify a career revival.

“I don’t like this resuscitate-career-type talk. There’s nothing wrong with our career because we’ve always worked,” he said.

Hill also said he may bring a program similar to Veterans Matter to Houston.

“I’ll talk to the people [while in Toledo] and try to get something going on where I live. You do what you can,” he said simply.

Veterans Matter started in February after a conversation between Ken Leslie, founder of homeless advocacy group 1Matters, and Shawn Dowling, the coordinator of Healthcare for Homeless Veterans of the Ann Arbor VA Health System. They were discussing what was missing from housing programs: rent deposits. Leslie approached ProMedica for support and was granted \$26,250 from the health care system’s Advocacy Fund. Just 11 days after the project’s conception, a couple was able to move out of a shelter and into a home.

Hill said he appreciates the program’s straightforward approach.

“Money’s taken, money’s given and money’s paid and people are housed,” he said. “If I were in their place and I were coming home, it would be nice to have a place to go right away.”

Toledo also holds memories for ZZ Top.

“We played a lot of places. Toledo early on was just something that ... felt comfortable,” Hill said. “It was always good to us. It’s always been fun playing Toledo.”

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