

ZZ Top

ZZ TOP: Texas blues, boogie, and rock band. Formed in Houston, Texas, under the direction of manager Bill Hamm in 1970, the trio consists of Billy Gibbons (b. December 16, 1949, Houston, Texas) on lead guitar, Dusty Hill (b. Joe Hill, May 19, 1947, Dallas, Texas) on bass guitar, and Frank Beard (b. June 11, 1949, Houston, Texas) on drums. Gibbons replaced the original members of his band, Moving Sidewalks, with Hill and Beard from rival band The American Blues. The group began touring with other southern boogie bands in the 1970s and built a strong following in the process. *ZZ Top's First Album* debuted in 1970 and featured the raw blues-boogie sound of tracks such as "Brown Sugar." *ZZ Top's First Album* established the band's credibility and success in the South, but it was their second album, *Rio Grande Mud* which had a broader range and a fuller sound. It also gave the trio its first hit "Francine," which ranked at Number 69 on the Billboard charts. The group followed up the success of its first two albums with *Tres Hombres* in 1973. *Tres Hombres* combined the trio's love of Texas blues with their reverence for Memphis soul to firmly establish what would become ZZ Top's trademark sound. The album's best-known song, "La Grange," was heavily influenced by John Lee Hooker's "Boogie Chillen."

The group toured continuously throughout the 1970s. In 1974, it hosted the "Texas-size Rompin' Stompin' Barndance and Barbeque" at the University of Texas at Austin. Some of the 80,000 fans who came out to see the trio managed to destroy sections of Memorial Stadium's new AstroTurf in the process. ZZ Top's next album, *Fandango!* (1975), gave the group its first Top 40 single, "Tush." The follow-up *Tejas*, released in 1977, reached Number 17 on the charts. Following the release of *Fandango!* in 1975, Gibbons and Hill developed an entirely new look. In an attempt to distinguish themselves from other southern rock bands, Gibbons and Hill donned rhinestone-studded Nudie suits, sunglasses, and long beards. Their new look quickly caught on, and the long beards became one of the band's trademarks. The success of *Fandango!* and the "Barndance" inspired the trio to embark on a "World-Wide Texas Tour," which lasted from 1976 to 1977. As part of this tour, the band performed on a Texas-shaped stage in the company of a Longhorn steer, a buffalo, and other "Texas" animals. Exhausted from the road however, they took a three-year hiatus following the tour's conclusion. During the interval, they left London Records and signed with Warner Brothers.

In 1979, the trio came out swinging with *Deguello*, a hard-core blues album that combined their love of women, cars, and offbeat humor with such tracks as "Cheap Sunglasses"



and “Fool for Your Stockings.” Following the success of *Deguello*, the group produced *El Loco* in 1981, which continued in much the same vein. Songs such as “Pearl Necklace,” with its sexual innuendos, demonstrated the group’s irreverent flair.

In the 1980s, the trio further changed its sound. *Eliminator* (1983) featured a new synthesizer-laden sound that propelled the band to national attention and won praise from the MTV generation. *Eliminator* produced such hits as “Gimme All Your Lovin,” “Legs,” and “Sharp Dressed Man.” “Legs” remains the group’s biggest single. The synthesizer remained an integral part of their sound on the next two albums, *Afterburner* (1985) and *Recycler* (1990). Though not as popular as *Eliminator*, these albums did feature the memorable tracks “Sleeping Bag” and “Velcro Fly,” which helped to cement the trio as a fixture of synth-blues-boogie.

The band signed a new recording contract with BMG Records in 1992 and released a new album, *Antenna*, in 1994. Although synthesizers remained a key part of the music, *Antenna* had more of a traditional blues feel. Gibbons’s guitar work harkened back to the days of *Tres Hombres*, with tracks such as “Fuzzbox Voodoo” and “Cover Your Rig.” *Rythmeen* followed *Antenna* in 1996 with a full-fledged return to guitar-driven blues-boogie. *XXX*, released in 1999, and *Mescalero*, released in 2003, continued this more back-to-basics pattern.

The hard-driving sound of ZZ Top has made the band a fixture of the modern blues-boogie music scene, but their performances have made them legendary. Whether touring with live animals during the “World-Wide Texas Tour” in the 1970s, performing on a futuristic stage to promote their album *Afterburner*, or making a cameo appearance in the movie *Back to the Future III* (1990), the trio has attracted audiences worldwide with their unique brand of blues and stage presence. In recognition of their contribution to popular music, the group was inducted into Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2004.

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