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### ZZ TOP *La Futura*

Universal Republic 3714113 (CD). 2012. Rick Rubin, Billy F Gibbons, prods.; Ryan Castle, Cameron Barton, engs. DDD.? TT: 39:18

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
SONICS ★★★★★

Producer Rick Rubin has a genius for paring iconic music down to its essentials, thereby shedding new light on a sound people think they know everything about. What he does with ZZ Top on this recording is more fun but no less dramatic, pulling off the seemingly impossible task of returning Top to their roots in the Rio Grande Mud while making the group sound completely contemporary. Rubin did not accomplish this singlehandedly. Before these tracks could see the light of day he had to engage in a tug-of-war with another sonic mastermind, Billy Gibbons. Rubin and Gibbons apparently worked on this project like coordinators of different vectors of a NASA project, tweaking each other's data repeatedly until the damn thing hit its optimum trajectory. The collaboration is at its most diabolical in the album-opening "Gotsta Get Paid," a rewrite of "25 Lighters," a hip-hop track by the Houston DJ DMD and rappers Lil' Keke and Fat Pat. Rubin's stealthy hand is best revealed in the crisp, booming clarity of Butch Beard's drums, which will seduce even the most digitally inclined listeners. But Rubin's penchant for rediscovering a band's core identity is immediately apparent in "Chartreuse," a gnarly, crunching track that recalls the early Top classic "Tush." Where the young Top was all flying sparks and pedal to the metal, Gibbons has matured the band's sound over the years to replace the velocity with density, an aural taffy pull that reflects a much greater dynamic, and Rubin is a willing partner who understands that *La Futura* thus takes its place alongside ZZ Top's greatest achievements—quite a testimony to a remarkable career. —John Swenson

### JAZZ



### REZ ABBASI TRIO *Continuous Beat*

Rez Abbasi, guitars; John Hébert, bass; Satoshi Takeishi, drums  
Enja ENJ-9591 2 (CD). 2012. Rez Abbasi, prod.; Michael Brorby, eng. DDD.  
TT: 52:44

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
SONICS ★★★★★

Guitarist Rez Abbasi has led a wealth of varied ensembles. He's also done trio work with Rudresh Mahanthappa's Indo-Pak Coalition, an unorthodox venture of alto sax, guitar, and tabla. But *Continuous Beat* is Abbasi's first recording in the canonical guitar-bass-drums format. His rapport with double bassist John Hébert and drummer Satoshi Takeishi is fluid and deep, rooted in acoustic jazz but brimming with sonic invention. There's a tendency toward big, rich, amplified sound, with backwards effects and loops, fuzztone, and other variables punching up the music.

In the notes, Abbasi reveals that the great Paul Motian was slated to be the trio's drummer. Motian canceled a week before the first gig; the following month, he died. Abbasi moved ahead and enlisted Takeishi, who brings a distinctive rhythmic drive and openness to the session, recasting Thelonious Monk's "Off Minor" in a tumultuous rubato, and laying down spacious grooves in Abbasi originals such as "Rivalry" and "iTexture." The recording captures every percussive detail.

Abbasi is an admirer of Keith Jarrett—it comes through in his treatment of "The Cure," a bare-bones Jarrett vehicle, as well as Gary Peacock's "Major Major," from the bassist's 1977 date *Tales of Another* (the first recording to feature the Jarrett-Peacock-DeJohnette lineup). These are polytonal feasts, the latter built on shifting triads over a G pedal, the former setting up startling variations on Jarrett's harmonic hook of B major over C. That chord, dark and eerie from the start, leads Abbasi to an obsessive and harrowing place. —David R. Adler