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11th Door Duo on Singing, Hippies, Protest -- 'Satisfy Yourself'

By ALICIA HELTON
Staff Writer

"These fellows sing just for the joy of it."

Thus spoke 11th Door manager Richard Gammon of singers Bill Moss and Townes Van Zandt, who appear together for the last time this weekend at his club.

Gammon, Moss and Van Zandt have common views on several subjects, including the image of young people, a sorely over-discussed topic these days.

"As you grow up," Gammon opined the other day at Moss's hilltop home beyond Mount Bonnell, "you learn that groups fall you. You have to satisfy yourself. It's not cynicism," said the son of an A&M University bacteriology professor; "that's the way it is."

"I'm not defying anyone or anything in the way I dress or live. It's mine — my way," he continued. Someone else pronounced: "We're not hippies."

Dick Roberts, a friend who is a free-lance photographer from Cambridge, Mass., said, "you have to have a lot of money to be a hippy." Roberts has traveled on both coasts and through Europe, and has stopped over with "hippy" bunches most of the way.

Consumers of LSD and STP are called druggies or freakies — because of their hang-ups, the group agreed, they are looked down upon.



Dick Roberts' TOWNES VAN ZANDT Last weekend here

"The militant groups are becoming increasingly obnoxious," Gammon said. "They miss the days of being martyrs for a cause, and are determined to be unpopular."

Of Moss and Van Zandt, Gammon said, "These fellows think it's more important to believe that people can be reached through their music than that the singers are right. There's no joy in protest singing."

The 37 songs Van Zandt has composed range from blues to country-Western to contemporary surreal folk. After his stint at the 11th Door, he returns to Houston to sign publishing and recording contracts with a large country music company, after which, said Lee Bryon, 11th Door handyman and former manager, "we can't afford him."

Dubbed a "Hank Williams type" by record company brass, Van Zandt said he started writing songs because when he was a neophyte professional competing for audience attention he needed fresh material that hadn't yet been perfected, and he needed

to demonstrate his aptitude to himself and the other musicians. Songwriting, at first a challenge, is now a compulsion — "I couldn't stop if I wanted to," he said.

Big Bill Moss, sometimes referred to as "the vulgar teddy bear," may be the antithesis of Van Zandt. He has a brash, sometimes crude, manner onstage that is memorable.

Equally skilled on the six-string guitar, banjo, harmonica, autoharp, kazoo, piano, organ and violin, Moss is also a gunsmith, hunter, auto mechanic, sound plumber, exterminator, guitar maker and cook who lives happily in a clutter of cameras, tape recorders,

guns, bull whips, bows and arrows, a dog and other animals who emerged from the hills and just stayed.

He sounds best with a 12-string guitar, which has a sound big enough to match his voice. Once, before an all-star audience at the Door, Moss had an opportunity to really let go with some blue numbers — instead he chose some sweet, smooth ballads that had the audience, to a man, eating from his hand.

His biographical data sheet contains some typical incongruities, to wit: A family part-Baptist and part-Jewish; an education that mixed piano study from mother and aunt with formal music study at college; and, best of all,

experience that includes serving with Smokey Joe (the "Santanned Hillbilly") and his Smokey Mountain Boys on Wheeling, W. Va., radio. The list continues: Naval combat veteran; co-owner of the White Raven of Bleeker Street coffeehouse in New York; game warden-conservationalist in Texas and Colorado; and singing hit in

clubs in St. Louis, Kansas City, Chicago and Houston. During the Bleeker Street period he was rated one of the nation's top 10 guitarists in a national music magazine poll. Now that he's "settled for a while" in Austin, secure with a "you're on any night" arrangement with the 11th Door, Moss seems to have found a temporary groove.



Dick Roberts' BILL MOSS AT HIS HILLTOP HOME Sportsman and guitarist extraordinaire

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