

ZAC BROWN IS . . .

HEATIN' THINGS UP

STORY BY KIP KIRBY

The Zac Brown Band is burning up the charts, and Zac is cookin' for his fans—literally!

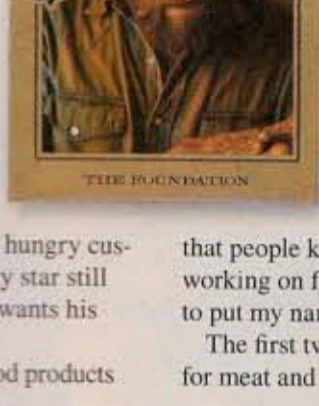
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The band (from left): Clay Cook/organ, Coy Bowles/guitar, Chris Fryar/drums, Jimmy De Martini/violin, Zac Brown/vocals and guitar, John Hopkins/bass

Zac Brown believes the way to fans' hearts is through their stomachs, and he's getting ready to prove it. "My brown sauce is so good, you can pour it on old shoe leather and eat it! I use it as a base when I'm grilling. It caramelizes on the outside while it's cooking, and then you pour the remaining sauce on after you take the meat off the grill and let it rest. I've been working on this recipe for a long time. I first began making it when I owned my restaurant, but now I've learned to make it organically and vegan, so it has a shelf life."

That's why the singer is launching a line of food products



designed to bring some of his favorite recipes to your table—and his concerts.

"The cooking part of my life has been happening just as long as my music," he explains, emphasizing he's no nouveau chef to the culinary world. "All my family is pretty serious in the kitchen. I started out in the kitchen with my parents when I was just a little bitty kid. This isn't something that I came up with and decided to sell now working on for a long, long time, and that I'm really proud to put my name on."

The first two items in Zac's line will be a liquid sauce for meat and a dry seasoning rub. "They're so good, they'll

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ZAC BROWN BAND CONTINUED

make your eyes roll back in your head," he promises proudly. "My brown sauce is so good, you can pour it on old shoe leather and eat it! I use it as a base when I'm grilling. It caramelizes on the outside while it's cooking, and then you pour the remaining sauce on after you take the meat off the grill and let it rest. I've been working on this recipe for a long time. I first began making it when I owned my restaurant, but now I've learned to make it organically and vegan, so it has a shelf life."

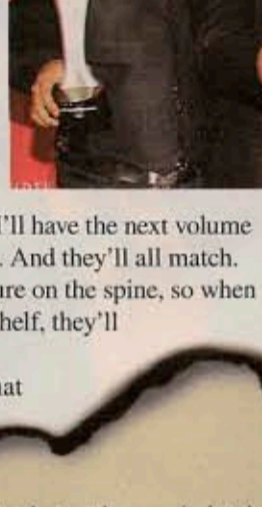
As for the rub, Zac likens it to a Georgia red clay rub—"but don't worry, it doesn't have any red clay in it." The singer likes to use it on steak filets, packing it on like a snowball and then grilling the meat on as high a temperature as possible. "I usually melt the paint off a new grill in the first couple of uses," he laughs. "High heat helps sear the filet, and the rub keeps the juices in."

Also in the works: Zac's first-ever cookbook, which he's writing on the road. "Each book will have stories and photos, guest chefs, Southern tales and a lot of recipes that I've personally worked on and reinvented," he says. "By the time people buy the first cookbook

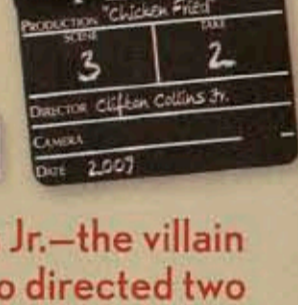
"THEY'RE SO GOOD, THEY'LL MAKE YOUR EYES ROLL BACK IN YOUR HEAD."

and try out all the recipes, hopefully I'll have the next volume ready to go—I'd like to do one a year. And they'll all match. Each book will have a piece of a picture on the spine, so when you line them up side by side on the shelf, they'll complete a whole picture."

Even more exciting, though, is what Zac is planning for fans



Good Direction



Acclaimed actor Clifton Collins Jr.—the villain in the latest *Star Trek* movie—also directed two Zac Brown Band videos. STORY BY BOB PAXMAN

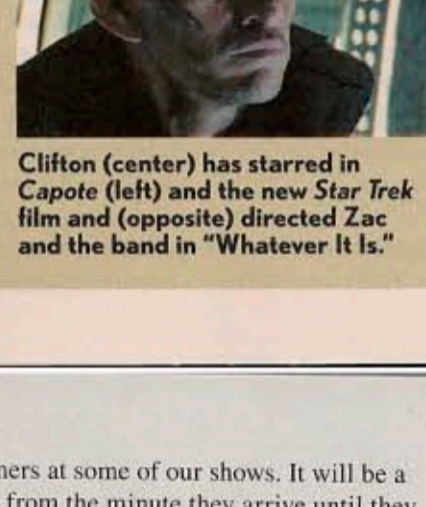
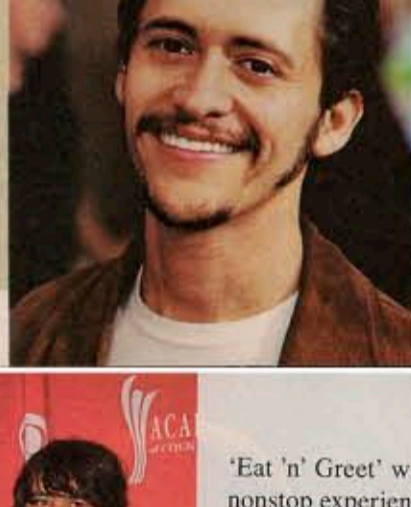
Clifton Collins Jr. is among the most chameleon-like of present-day actors. He can take on the chilling character of the murderous Perry Smith in *Capote*; then adroitly shift gears to become

films like *Sunshine Cleaning* and the upcoming *Extract*, written and directed by the eccentric creator of *King of the Hill*, Mike Judge. But as the band

creative hat as the man behind the lens of the Zac Brown Band's videos for "Chicken Fried" and "Whatever It Is." "Chicken Fried" was recently honored as the USA Weekend Breakthrough Video of the Year at the 2009 CMT Music Awards.

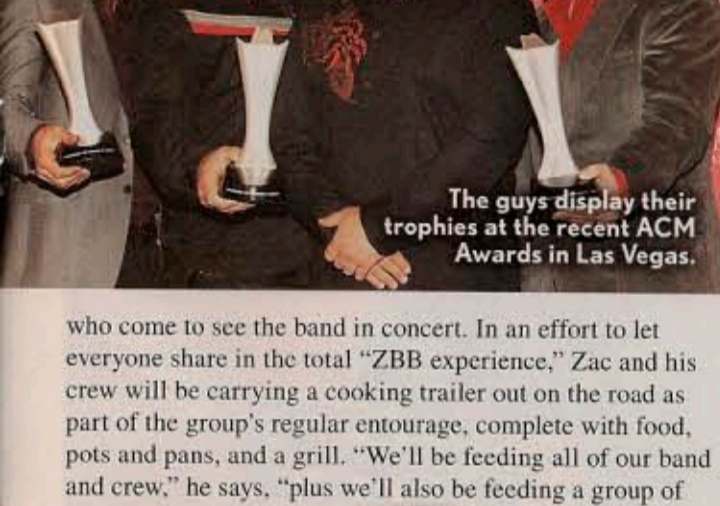
Clifton is a friend of the band and a particular admirer of the group's bearded guru, Zac. "For such a young guy, he's a completely well-rounded artist," declares Clifton, who also appears in the most recent edition of the *Star Trek* movie series. "He has paid his dues like any good artist and musician."

And Clifton can actually thank Mike Judge for giving him the extra push to direct "Chicken Fried." Clifton recalls, "I was filming *Extract* and Zac had asked me about doing the video. I looked at my



Clifton (center) has starred in *Capote* (left) and the new *Star Trek* film and (opposite) directed Zac and the band in "Whatever It Is."

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The guys display their trophies at the recent ACM Awards in Las Vegas.

"Eat 'n' Greet" winners at some of our shows. It will be a nonstop experience from the minute they arrive until they leave hours later. I want to give our fans an unforgettable musical experience while we're feeding them high-quality food that's prepared in a very green way."

Individual "Eat 'n' Greet" winners will be chosen through local radio stations in selected markets, as well as through drawings and contests announced on the show. Lucky fans will be brought backstage to share a home-cooked meal (using Zac's products, of course!), and visit with the band before the show.

If you're starting to get the impression that Zac Brown doesn't sleep much, or that his mind constantly races a mile a minute coming up with new ideas, you're right. But after 12 years of struggling to succeed in music, he is committed to using his newfound fame to make a difference. "No matter how great an experience we create for our fans, I'm always going to be trying to figure out how to make it better. Searching for that next level of quality and respect is a lifelong thing, and I try to pursue it with everything I do. I believe in karma, and I believe you get what you give. I just had that tattooed on



shooting schedule and I had five days off coming up. I told Mike about the video and he said [imitating Judge's low-key, deadpan voice], 'Wow, Zac Brown! I think that's great and I think you should do it.' Later on," adds Clifton with an engaging smile, "I got to introduce Zac to Mike. They're two amazing artists who are fans of each other."

Clifton has acting and film in his bloodline. His grandfather, Pedro Gonzalez-Gonzales, was an in-demand contract player and character actor, often appearing opposite John Wayne in films like *Rio Bravo* and *The High and the Mighty*. "He was a real trouper and the consummate performer," raves Clifton about his famous granddad. "He literally

performed a show about a month before he died [in 2006]."

And oddly enough, Clifton had been studying the works of classic Western filmmakers John Ford and Howard Hawks when Zac gave him another call for directing duty. "He wanted me to do 'Whatever It Is,' and he was looking for a very artistic treatment," Clifton recalls. "And that's a big jump, because 'Chicken Fried' was very basic. But that's Zac! He's a very out-of-the-box artist—he's fearless. And that's what I like. No original creativity comes out of conformity, and he doesn't want to blend in with everybody else."

As it turned out, the budget for "Whatever It Is" was actually less than

the "Chicken Fried" budget. "That was OK, though," Clifton says with enthusiasm. "It was a great lesson for me, because we had to make do. I also was the director of photography for the video, so I also learned that part of the process."

Though he's been successful in his efforts with Zac and the boys, Clifton's not about to lean on that stereotypical actor's bromide—"what I really want to do is direct." Acting is still tops on the list, and he only wants to helm videos for acts that he believes in and respects.

"I don't want to be a gun for hire," he maintains. "I want to be real selective about the songs I pick, and, if my heart's not in it, it doesn't matter what the budget is."

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In the meantime, as the Zac Brown Band prepares to kick off its new fall tour in late September with noticeably ramped-up lights, sound and stage production, Zac's attention remains firmly rooted on his fans—and their dietary needs. "Once we get this 'Eat 'n' Greet' thing going," he declares happily, "you won't have to worry about eating before you come to a Zac Brown concert. We'll take care of that for you." **CW**

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Zac takes the stage at the 2009 CMA Music Festival in Nashville.

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mind. Zac says he never expected the first single, "Chicken Fried," to hit No. 1 on the country charts or win Breakthrough Video of the Year at this year's CMT Music Awards. He's still not used to seeing his name mentioned in *Rolling Stone* or hanging out on Willie Nelson's bus or getting a cellphone call from Kenny Chesney or finding himself playing high-profile gigs like the CMA Music Festival one day and the multigenre Bonnaroo fest the next.

play, and I think people identify with that. Being country artists and being welcomed into country the way we have is very important to us. We go about our music in a very blue-collar way. "I've played as many hours as somebody possibly can who's my age. It's not that everything I do is perfect, but I put our heart and soul into everything I do, and it's the striving that makes the difference for me. We've made so much progress in a year that it seems unbelievable."

For more on Zac Brown Band, go to countryweekly.com

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