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**A SERIOUSLY SYNERGISTIC
GIVEAWAY!**

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Bob Balch

Scott Hill

Fu Manchu

BY DARRIN FOX

"I'M STILL PLAYING MUSIC today for the very same reason I started," says Fu Manchu founder, singer, and guitarist Scott Hill. "It's all about getting people together in a room and playing. I love the sound of a loud band."

For more than 17 years, Hill has been at the helm of a rock machine.

With ten-plus albums, a butt load of singles, and a reputation for kicking ass and taking names live, Fu Manchu is an honest-to-goodness, hard-working, heavy band with sonic DNA traceable

directly to Hill's guitar style and tone. From the debut full-length, *No One Rides For Free*, to what is arguably the group's finest slab of riffy Social fuzscore, *King of the Road*, Hill's playing rules mightily with max-riff delivery à la Kiss, cool-era Nugent, and ZZ Top at their

groovin' nastiest. But it's the infusion of early L.A. hardcore that gives Hill's style its danger.

"Black Flag is my favorite band—ever," he proclaims. "I finally got to see them live in '83, and they were the heaviest, gnarliest, loudest thing I'd ever heard. The tone Greg Ginn gets on *Damaged* is still my favorite sound by any

guitarist."

On Fu Manchu's new album, *We Must Obey* [Century Media], Hill and co-guitarist Bob Balch—who joined the band ten years ago for *The Action Is Go*—seem to have found the sweet spot between the slightly slicker sound of their previous two albums, *California Crossing* and *Start the Machine*, and the copulent, big-booty fuzz grooves of their earlier records.

The guitar sounds on your previous two records were heavy as hell, but much tighter and more streamlined. *We Must Obey* is a return to the fuzzier, huge low-end tones you were

getting on *The Action Is Go* and *King of the Road*.

Balch: Yeah. For the *California Crossing* sessions, I showed up with an old Marshall and a Big Muff, ready to track, but there were a lot of cooks in the kitchen during



Fu Manchu guitarists Bob Balch (left) and Scott Hill.

the recording of that record. When it's Matt Hyde [producer

of Slayer and Monster Magnet] and Nick Raskulinecz [engineer for the Foo Fighters and Rush] telling me what to plug into,

however, I'm not going to debate them. Those guys had us using a ton of different amps—Orange, Laney, Marshall, etc. But for *We*

Must Obey, we went back to what we thought Fu Manchu should sound like, and mostly used old Marshalls and fuzz pedals.

Hill: For the most part, we produced the new album ourselves. But Andrew Alekel, the engineer at Grandmaster

Recording in L.A. where we tracked, helped us dial in the tones, and he also had some input on the tunes. *We Must Obey* is the first record we've done without a main producer.

What did you track with?

Hill: I wanted to get back to some of the dirtier sounds we had gotten in the past. I considered busting out my old Crown

fuzz pedal again, but it sounds too overblown, making it hard to play faster-picked rhythms. So, I settled on an old Superfuzz

pedal that I ran into an old Peavey PA. head and a Marshall 4x12 cab. Then, I ran the regular Marshall TSL setup—without the fuzz—

through another Marshall 4x12. When that rig is stacked and cranked, it shakes.

Balch: For most of the album, I used a '72 Marshall Super Bass 100-watt head through a Marshall 1960 4x12 cab. My main fuzz was an Arbiter Fuzz Face,

but I also used a BBE Free Fuzz and a Vintage Tone Project Classic 60's Fuzz. Live, I'd like to use older Marshalls, but they are unreliable, so I'm using a Mar-

shall DSL 2000 full stack with the Vintage Tone Project fuzz in front of it. I just dial the amp in semi-dirty. My other live effects are a Dunlop CryBaby, an MXR

Phase 100, and a Boss DD-3 Digital Delay.

There's also more chewiness and slight dissonances with the guitars on the new album. Balch: There is such a difference between how Scott hits a note and how I hit a note. I grew up taking lessons and being very formal with my technique, whereas

RIFFS Metal

Scott comes straight from an '80s punk background, and he hits the guitar really hard. So, a lot of times, I'm barely bending the strings sharp to get in tune with Scott, and those slight intonation differences are a huge part of Fu Manchu's sound. If you listen to the real early albums such as *Daredevil* and *No One Rides for Free*, that stuff is way out of tune, but it sounds big and cool.

Scott, you retired your Fender Jaguars a couple of records back in favor of the Dan Armstrong

Hill: Oh yeah, I've wanted an Armstrong Plexi reissue guitars. Are you still playing them? I put Seymour Duncan Hot Rails pickups in the bridge position. We tune the whole guitar down a step to D, and, occasionally, we go down to C. I use an Ernie Ball .011 set, and a heavy-gauge Dunlop Tortex pick.

Balch: I did all the basics on *We Must Obey*

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using a '79 Gibson SG with a Seymour Duncan Screaming Demon in the bridge position. Live, I use a Hot Rails-equipped Armstrong along with my SG. I use Ernie Ball .011s, I dig Planet Waves cables, and I'll use any pick as long as it's heavy.

There are also touches of the spacey echo textures you used on *The Action Is Go*, such as on the beginning of "Sensei vs. Sensei!"

Balch: I'm a fan of hidden little noises on records. Pink Floyd's *Animals*, for example, is an album where every time I listen to it, I hear a cool effect or guitar part lurking that I didn't hear before. I'm also a big fan of dub music, and I love the way they use echo on that stuff. What you're hearing on "Sensei vs. Sensei" is a Fulltone Tube Echo. I'm tuned to open Gm, and I'm using a slide for those washes. We used the Fulltone a lot on this record. You can hear it on the intro of "Lesson"—which is my small tribute to Eddie Hazel's playing on Funkadelic's "Maggot Brain"—and also on the solo to "Knew It All Along."

Bob, your solos are more harmonically adventurous on *We Must Obey* than on past records.

Balch: I wanted to move away from always using minor pentatonic licks, but that's not easy, because lead guitar in Fu Manchu is all about minor pentatonics. Over the years, however, I've learned there are certain notes outside of the pentatonic realm that won't bum out Fu Manchu fans or the other members of the band. For example, I can throw in a major 6th, and nobody says anything, but if I play a minor 6th, I'll definitely hear, "What the hell is that?" But a tune like "Shake It Loose" has a weird, F, Bb, B chord progression, and minor pentatonic didn't work at all, so I played a trippy Phrygian-type figure instead.

How have you guys stayed so dedicated to your sound this long? Has a producer or label ever tried to change you?

Hill: Out of the four guys in the band, I'm the most narrow-minded musically. I pretty much only listen to old hardcore punk or '70s rock. That's it. So, I just play what I want to hear. Thankfully, the guys in the band want to play the same stuff. I'm not going to write a ska song or some pop-punk thing because I'm not interested.

Balch: There was an A&R guy from our old label, Mammoth, who sat in our rehearsal room during preproduction when we were working on the tune "Separate Kingdom." After we were done, he actually said, "I'm hearing a great remix of that tune with a disco beat." We just pretended he wasn't there.