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# Acoustic

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## Dave Matthews & Tim Reynolds

ON THE ROAD WITH ROCK'S HOTTEST DUO

THE RETURN OF XTC

Plus

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NIRVANA Where Did You Sleep Last Night  
PLUS! ESSENTIAL CLASSIC Romanza  
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# THE DAVE MATTHEWS TRUTH

by BEN VAN HOUTEN

photography by ALLEN CLARK

**DAVE MATTHEWS IS PISSED OFF.** THE USUALLY LAID-BACK leader of the multimillion-selling, genre-busting Dave Matthews Band is calling from a tour stop in Indiana, just hours before taking the stage at another sold-out theater with Tim Reynolds, Matthews' long-time friend and OMB's part-time guitarist. The duo have undertaken a tour in support of *Live at Luther College* (Same Rags/RCA), the acoustic album they released last January. The three-month tour has been underway for only a few weeks, but Matthews has already begun to realize the downside of being massively popular, not to mention the difficulty of performing intimate, stripped-down concerts for a primarily beer-addled first audience.

"I get so tired of yelling at people to sit down," says Matthews. "I want to say, 'Come in early so we can start on time, damn it! I don't want to stand here anymore waiting for you, you drunk meatheads.'"

On most nights of the duo's tour, says Matthews, there are at least a few interruptions during the most quiet, intense musical passages. "It's like there's always a couple of guys who either have whooping cough or too much beer," he laughs. "I have to put them in their place. I've really had a problem with swearing at people on this tour. It only takes 10 drunk boys to make a crowd seem like a boat of angry sailors."

It's all new territory for Matthews. Surely he's not used to hearing shouted song requests and heckling from the audience. In fact, it's kind of hard to hear anything but the music when you're rocking a stadium full of people, as he does regularly with the Dave Matthews Band.

These frustrations aside, Matthews doesn't forget why he's taken a break from his five-piece jam band. "There are some great moments every night," he says of his gigs with Reynolds. "There are some real special times when the audience is really psyched about the music and it gets real quiet. My body sort of leaves itself, and Tim and I

just sort of soak it all in. It reminds me why we're out here doing this."

Playing acoustic arrangements of his songs for small audiences is a bold move for Matthews. As DMB fans know, Matthews' percussive acoustic strumming and strange vocal technique have made him and his band one of the most popular guitar-based acts, both live and on the charts, in recent years. The numbers are staggering: *Under the Table and Dreaming*, the group's 1994 debut, has sold 5 million copies to date; its successor, *Crash*, has shipped 4 million; and the group's latest release, *Before These Crowded Streets*, debuted at Number 1 on the *Billboard* charts and sold almost half a million in its first week. Add to that a Grammy award and a stadium tour that sold one million tickets last summer (New York's Giants Stadium sold out in 90 minutes), and it's understandable why Matthews and his posse are major players in the late-Nineties rock wars.

But just who is Tim Reynolds? Well, for starters, he delivers the exotic lead-guitar work heard on the Dave Matthews Band's albums and in many of their live performances. Although solos by DMB saxophonist Leroi Moore and violinist Boyd Tinsley are most prominently featured in the group's funky, jazzy worldbeat-rock, it is Reynolds who fills the normally vacant job of lead guitarist.

Reynolds is also the man whom Matthews reverently refers to as "my main influence." The two men first met in Reynolds' hometown of Charlottesville, Virginia, when Matthews was tending bar at a club where Reynolds played a weekly solo set. Although Reynolds says he enjoys his role with DMB, he's happy not being committed to the group's intense touring schedule. "I've always had my own band, and I like to keep changing and playing in different styles," he says. "I've been lucky to be able to do my own thing, without touring constantly. I like having a lot of time to just listen to music."

No doubt Reynolds needs a lot of time just to pursue his many musical muses. In addition to performing with DMB, he's released two solo albums of acoustic music—*Gossip of the Neurons* and *Sanctuary*—and he recently issued *Light Up Ahead*, a record that showcases his heavy electric playing with his band, TR3.

Reynolds and Matthews did a few small tours as an acoustic duo in the winters of both 1996 and 1997, and it's a recording from one of the '96 shows that appears on *Live at Luther College*. Like everything else



"Tim and I **COMPLEMENT** each other, and in a way that I've never really experienced with any other musician. There's some sort of **CHEMISTRY** there."

—Dave Matthews

Matthews touches these days, the low-key disc sold a heap of copies in its first week of release—186,000, to be almost exact—debuting at #2 on the *Billboard* 200 chart. Not bad for a 23-song, two-CD release of a small show recorded in Decorah, Iowa.

*Live at Luther College* is a showcase for Reynolds' diverse acoustic talents, which include fancy and fast rock-style flatpicking as well as delicate fingerpicking and jazzy rhythm work. It also highlights Matthews' visceral, soulful vocals and interesting acoustic guitar attack. But most importantly for the two, it brings their collaboration to the masses and shines a spotlight on a very unique partnership.

"Dave and I don't really arrange the songs we do live," explains Reynolds. "I try to play things that complement what he plays, and we both know them well enough to improvise. It's really spontaneous."

As the album makes plain, Matthews and Reynolds have an uncommon affinity as guitarists. "Tim and I complement each other, and in a way that I've never really

experienced with any other musician," says Matthews. "There's some sort of chemistry there. Ever since we became friends, 12 or 13 years ago, we've had this sort of playfulness about us. There's a deep communication in the way we play."

**GUITAR WORLD ACOUSTIC:** Why did you guys decide to hit the road together?

**DAVE MATTHEWS:** Our playing together came about out of having fun. It's not something that grew out of my band. In fact, I formed a band largely because Tim suggested the idea to me—he planted the seed. But I feel so free when we play, and it's something I long for when I'm not doing it.

**GWA:** How do the two of you explain your unique chemistry?

**TIM REYNOLDS:** It's like this: we may wear clothes when we play, but it's as if we're naked to each other. [laughs]

**MATTHEWS:** That's actually true, and that's a good way to put it. It's as if there's a lack of rules between us. It's almost like we don't have to think about each other—except for



the fact that we're both naked. [laughs] When I play with the Dave Matthews Band, it's very overwhelming onstage. I don't feel like I'm in a comfortable nest, as I do when I play with Tim.

**GWA:** Do you have to psyche yourself up differently to play for a theater of 1,500 college kids versus playing to 80,000 people in Giants Stadium?

**MATTHEWS:** In some ways, the two experiences are actually more similar than you'd think. Wherever we play, I go onstage with the same things: my guitar and my voice. But other than that, I suppose you really can't compare them. It's a totally different dynamic.

**REYNOLDS:** All gigs consist of this space onstage, and you bring your thing with which you make music. With the band format, there's more energy coming from the stage, and at the bigger gigs, the audience has a distinct energy. But you don't have a rapport with them like you do in a small theater or club, because you can't even see them!

**GWA:** The Dave Matthews Band has established a Grateful Dead-like reputation for never playing the same show twice. Is that true with you two as well?

**MATTHEWS:** Definitely, even more so. With us, I think there's more variety because with two people you can make more impromptu decisions. The possibilities are a bit greater when it's just Tim and I. With the band, there's seven of us onstage, but with Tim, if I take a left turn by mistake, it's not gonna be a train wreck. I can make mistakes every five seconds with Tim without screwing things up. In fact, it almost seems like a good idea for me to make mistakes, because we tend to turn them into something other than mistakes.

**GWA:** Do you rehearse a lot for these shows, or do you just wing it?

**MATTHEWS:** We're winging it. Only at the beginning of the tour did we sit down and practice. And we did other people's songs then. We'll do them live at some point. It isn't really real practicing. Maybe it'd improve the mood if I practiced more. [laughs]

**GWA:** Are both of you trained guitarists?

**REYNOLDS:** For the most part I'm self-taught. I started out taking piano lessons, but I blew them off. My parents expected me to play piano, so I rebelled, of course.

Other guitars are like little girls.

**REYNOLDS:** [in a Hans and Franz voice] They're girly guitars. But you can smash a Martin, and it won't break.

**MATTHEWS:** Martins are hardcore. I finally got one a few years ago, and I'm hooked. I like a guitar you can really hit, and it likes to be hit. With the Dave Matthews Band, I play a midrange-sounding Gibson Chet Atkins through a great wall of effects. That guitar is great, too. It cuts through the band's sound. It's hard to get that acoustic studio sound onto the stage, especially at the volume we play.

**GWA:** What kinds of strings do you use?

**MATTHEWS:** D'Addarios.

**GWA:** Both of you create unusual voicings on your guitars. Does that result from your use of alternate tunings?

**REYNOLDS:** Once in a while I'll drop the low E to D, or A or B, but I've always been into making new voices out of standard tunings.

Over the years, I've written one or two songs that have been in different tunings, but I've always been more of a standard-tuning guy. You can really get any sound you want from traditional tuning, and

"We may wear clothes when WE PLAY, but it's AS IF WE'RE NAKED to each other."  
—Tim Reynolds

**MATTHEWS:** It's similar for me. I started with piano, too, but it wasn't as cool as the guitar. I've been playing guitar for a long time, since I was nine.

**GWA:** What accounts for your great love for the acoustic guitar?

**MATTHEWS:** I can't play the electric guitar. It feels much more foreign to me—I actually feel more at home with the piano than with electric guitar. It must be the way I play. I feel extremely strange with electric, like I'm going to break it or something.

**REYNOLDS:** To me, it's all about the music, and I wouldn't want to play only one or the other. But the acoustic guitar is something I have a reverence for. It's like, "real men" play acoustic. But as you grow older, it becomes a matter of taste. And it depends on my mood, as well. I think acoustic guitar is harder to play than electric. So if you stay on top of your acoustic playing, you've always got what it takes. And when I play acoustic, I tend to pound the hell out of it. It's an awesome instrument—it's like the piano in terms of sounds and dynamics.

**GWA:** What's your live setup?

**REYNOLDS:** I play a Martin D-35 through a Morley wah and into a Boss digital delay.

**GWA:** And you, Dave?

**MATTHEWS:** I play a Martin D-28 and a D-28 12-string.

**GWA:** Why do you both play Martins?

**MATTHEWS and REYNOLDS:** 'Cause they rock!

**MATTHEWS:** [assumes Nigel Tufnel-like accent]

it's a lot easier that way. It all depends on how creative you are and the chords you know. There's this old book by Allan Holdsworth called *Reaching for the Uncommon Chord* [21st Century Music Productions], and the gist of it is that there's no voicing you can't do. You don't have to tune your guitar differently to get different sounds. I like alternate tunings for the variety of low notes you can get, I suppose, but I'd rather think of different voicings, and really work it out on my own. That's more exciting to me.

**MATTHEWS:** I'm extremely adventurous: I go from low E to D, and that's as far as that adventure goes. [laughs] And as soon as that's over, I hurry back to E because I'm frightened and lost in the forest. But Tim is unafraid to go searching for the lowest possible note he can find. Down, down, down he goes, until it's almost impossible that any note could emerge from that sloppy bow-and-arrow-looking thing. But then, sure enough, there will be some welling sound coming from the bowels of the earth, making music. Now if I touch that flaccid string, it goes fffffffttttt. Nothing. But he makes it sound like a giant church organ.

**GWA:** Dave, you have an unusually percussive style. Is that a result of playing solo before you formed the band?

**MATTHEWS:** Yeah, that's how it started. I always aim for the most simple thing, because I can't aim anywhere else. My idea is



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that I have a chord structure and then a rhythm underneath it. Even when I was a kid, I always had the rhythm there so that I'd have something to back up my singing—something that would sound like a band without my having to find a band. It was more to cover some bases than anything else.

**GWA:** You've been living in Virginia. Has any of the regional folk or bluegrass music had an impact on your playing?

**MATTHEWS:** If you could find bluegrass in my playing, you'd have to have a deeper knowledge of my skills than I do. [laughs] With my playing, what you see is what you get. Tim can play bluegrass really well.

**REYNOLDS:** I grew up around it, but I rebelled against it, same as I did against playing piano. I rebelled against folk music, country, bluegrass, whatever, because my parents listened to it. Although, again, as someone who grew up around it, I couldn't help learning bluegrass style because it was so prevalent.

Anyway, a good song is a good song, whether it's country or some industrial guy playing machinery. The way we take a Dave Matthews song and strip away all the production and the instruments just shows that it's about the songs, and that's the bottom line. That's what's so cool about taking an acoustic guitar and working out a chord and melody, the basics—whether that's a Marilyn Manson song or a John McLaughlin song. The interesting thing is how you arrange it all.

**GWA:** That would certainly apply to the version of "What Would You Say" that's on your new live album. The song sounds slower, bluesier—almost sexier.

**MATTHEWS:** Yeah, that grew out of our irritation with the loud, drunk gang of people who sang it on the [original] album. We deliberately played it differently to avoid that sound.

**GWA:** The song "Stream" on the live album is quite the virtuoso workout.

**MATTHEWS:** That's all Tim.

**GWA:** It manages to be flamenco-influenced and jazzy at the same time.

**REYNOLDS:** I never really got into flamenco, actually, but I love it. Paco DeLucia is one bad motherfucker. When he did that album with Al DiMeola and John McLaughlin [*Passion, Grace & Fire*], I thought he smoked both of them. Anyway, "Stream" was just made up in the kitchen one day. It's more jazzy than anything. I'd say that jazz is the only real roots music in my playing.

**GWA:** There are some strange, spacey sound effects on the intro to "Deed Is Done." Was that all done on slide?

**REYNOLDS:** Yeah. There's lots of great sounds you can make with a slide.

**MATTHEWS:** Timmy makes a lot of cool sounds. I spend a lot of time looking at the monitor, listening to what he's doing, and

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# dave matthews band

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**PARTRIDGE:** I actually have written 90 percent of my songs for the last few years on my daughter Holly's little nylon string school guitar, which is great. It doesn't sound great, and it doesn't stay in tune above the fourth fret. But it's lovely, because it's so tiny and light. And you can walk around the garden with it, or run up the stairs with it, or go anywhere. And it's so little and cheap and inconsequential that I find myself carrying it everywhere.

**GWA:** Do you feel like a larger guitar is more precious?

**PARTRIDGE:** Yeah, or it's heavier, or it's more, "I'm so expensive, you'd better be good on me." But with this little cheap school guitar, there's nothing precious attached to it at all. So that's one song-writing barrier out of the way. You haven't got the, "Oh, I'd better be careful with this," or "Am I in tune?" or "Gotta make sure the tone controls are set right on the amplifier." There's none of that. You just pick it up and *shplong shplong—nyahh!* And you're away! It's the troubadour thing.

**GWA:** Your biggest U.S. success to date has been "Dear God," which, ironically, Andy didn't want released.

**PARTRIDGE:** I was really embarrassed when I first wrote it. I thought it was a glorious failure. And then the attention it got *really* embarrassed me because it was only a tune; it was only a song with my thoughts on it. I didn't even think I'd done it very well. It just came out of dickering around with "Rocky Raccoon."

I wanted to write a song called "Dear God" because of these kids books we have in England called *Dear God* that are like children's letters to God. I was looking at them at the newsagent one day, and they have things in them like, "Dear God, why did you make my granny so quiet and...cold?" [laughs] And I thought maybe grown-ups should write letters to God as well. The great paradox is, what's the point in writing letters to God to change things? He doesn't exist. The song is like writing a letter to God asking why He doesn't exist. Is that a paradox? Is that a paradigm? Is that a pair of tits? Is that a paraglider? It's a paralyzed person in a wheelchair, that's what it is! [laughs]

**GWA:** It's also funny that you had a great success with the Dukes of Stratosphear album *Psonic Psunspots*, a spoof record that was also one of your biggest sellers.

**PARTRIDGE:** For me, the Dukes were like a purge of all things Sixties and all the bands I ever wanted to be in as a schoolkid. As a kid you think, when I grow up I want to be in a band just like Keith West's Tomorrow or Syd Barrett's

Pink Floyd. Of course, you grow up and you find you're not in a band like that, but you still have the old hankering. So the Dukes were like a good bit of fun to exorcise that.

**GWA:** The Dukes are a good example of how adventurous your music became once you'd committed to being a studio band. Did the decision to stop touring free you up to explore new musical directions?

**PARTRIDGE:** Oh, totally! I have this kind of misplaced sense of George Washington honesty about having to perform a song exactly as it was recorded. Once we stopped performing, it was like the blinkers were off in the studio; we could do anything we wanted.

**MOULDING:** We had always thought of playing live as musical aerobics. It was just a time when we lost a lot of weight and a lot of sweat. It had very little to do with music.

**GWA:** Now that you're back in the record-making business, in what direction do you see XTC developing?

**PARTRIDGE:** I would like to make an extremely sparse album, probably nodding its head toward songs like "Ire Feelings" [a.k.a. "Skanga"] by [Jamaican reggae artist] Rupie Edwards, or "Rock On," by David Essex. "Rock On" was a big influence for me; I'm always very envious of anyone who can make great sparse music.

**MOULDING:** It's different for me—I've got the film music bug about me. I'd like to do some scoring.

**GWA:** What do you think has kept the two of you together all these years?

**MOULDING:** I think that, being of similar age and coming from similar backgrounds, we have very similar tastes.

**PARTRIDGE:** Basically, we lived within half a mile of each other for the first 20-something years of our lives. We never knew each other but we had everything in common. We both lived in council estates; I think the closest thing you've got to that in America is called "the projects." So we had all those same influences—listening to the same radio station, going to the same school, playing in the same streets.

**MOULDING:** I suppose, too, that we have a similar philosophy about making records. We don't mind doing them in bits and pieces over a period of time.

**PARTRIDGE:** We're not afraid to show our influences. I think it would be totally faithless to deny them. And I'm sure a dollop of mutual respect for each other hasn't hurt us. If I never knew Colin and I got to hear his writing, I'd like it.

**GWA:** So what would you call XTC these days?

**PARTRIDGE:** A record-making...

**MOULDING:** ...corporation. [laughs]

**PARTRIDGE:** Conglomerate! [laughs] A record-making toupee. We used to be a threepiece. But now we're only a twopee. **GWA**

I'm amazed at what an old delay pedal, a wah and a slide can do in his hands.

**GWA:** This one is for both of you: whose songwriting have you found to be particularly influential on your own music?

**MATTHEWS:** Whoever I listen to filters into it. I love the Beatles and their melodies. Also Bowie, Bob Marley, Frank Zappa—even James Taylor. But also a lot of classical stuff. Honestly, though, I feel like I get as much influence driving in the rain with the windshield wipers on than I do from any songwriter. Or being on a train, that clackety-clack sound, or being alone in the bathtub. Those experiences more than anything.

**REYNOLDS:** When I first started playing in the late Sixties and early Seventies, the one guy I listened to more than anybody else was John McLaughlin, and his [mid-Seventies] albums with [jazz-fusion band] Shakti are the ultimate for me. I'm in a real hard-rock phase right now, although I listen to Shakti when I go to sleep. Hard rock is still fresh to me, because I didn't listen to it in the Eighties like everybody else.

**GWA:** Do the two of you write together when you're on the road?

**MATTHEWS:** We mess around at soundcheck a lot. It's more like jamming.

**GWA:** Have you ever thought about doing a studio album together?

**MATTHEWS:** I think we will at some point. We'd have to squeeze something in, though.

**GWA:** After the two of you have reworked Dave Matthews Band songs for your acoustic performances, do the songs take on new life when you perform them again with the band?

**MATTHEWS:** Sometimes they will. But sometimes, when I'm onstage with Tim, I forget how we play some of the songs with the band! It definitely breathes new life into me to do this thing with Tim, but I assume it'll breathe new life into the band as well.

**GWA:** Do you think this acoustic work will influence the next Dave Matthews Band record?

**MATTHEWS:** I don't know—it's hard to predict. Right now, this is the main thing in my life, so it's hard to see the future. What's exciting me at the moment is playing with Tim. What's inspiring my brain right now is being on the side of the stage, watching him do one of his solos.

**GWA:** Does Tim's guitar work ever inspire you to try your hand at playing lead?

**MATTHEWS:** The chances of me doing any lead work... I fear falling off a cliff, so I end up being the rhythm guy. I'm happy with that job. And singing. Timmy, though, is a whirlwind. His stuff can bring me to tears. And I can't think of any time where, night after night, he repeats himself. What he's got is a gift. **GWA**