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Dave Matthews Band

KEYBOARDIST BUTCH TAYLOR

Film Composer

David Newman

On Roland's VP-9000



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On Tour With

Dave Matthews

Keyboardist

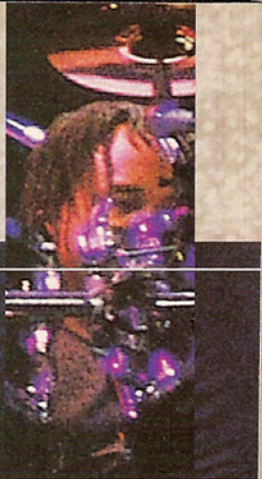
Butch

Appearing in front of 20,000 rabid fans at San Diego's Coors Amphitheater, Butch Taylor, keyboardist for Charlottesville, Virginia's immensely popular Dave Matthews Band, whirls dervishly between his Roland XV-88 128-Voice Expandable Synthesizer and his VK-77 Combo Organ, attacking both with an aggressiveness that belies the Matthews Band's laid back reputation.

Taylor is the sixth addition to this five-piece musical outfit known for its extended improvisational flights, whose members play with the telepathic unity of musicians who have known each other since college and have honed their sound through near constant touring.

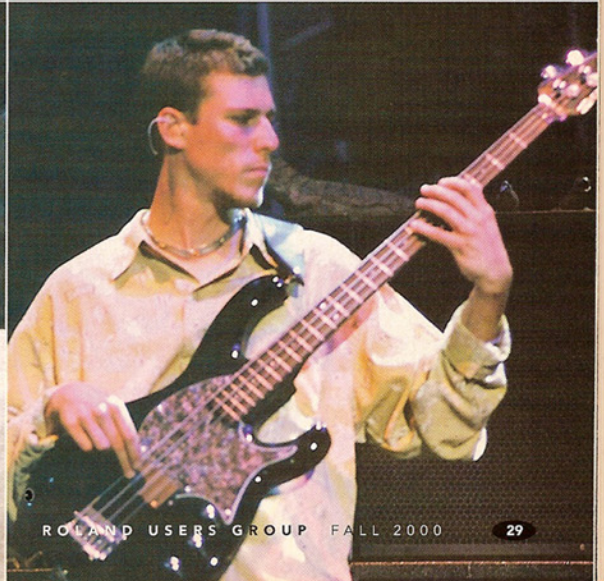


BY SAM
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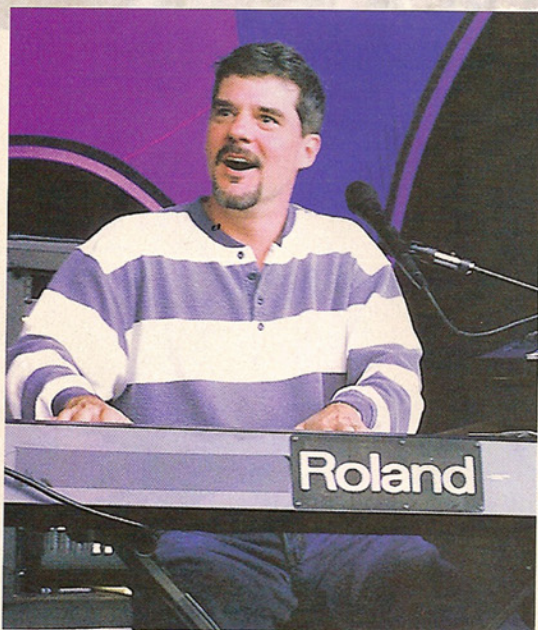


ews Band

Taylor



Since forming in the early '90s, Dave Matthews Band has gone from strength to strength, notching up over 10 million sales with now-classic albums such as their breakthrough *Under The Table & Dreaming*, the Grammy-nominated *Crash* and the Billboard #1 smash hit *Before These Crowded Streets*, under the direction of acclaimed British producer Steve Lillywhite. Like the Grateful Dead and Phish, two "art-rock" bands with whom they're often compared, Dave Matthews Band knows it's their live appearances that show them at their very best, and unusually for a turn-of-the-millennium rock band, they've alternated their studio releases with a pair of live albums—1997's *Live At Red Rocks* and last year's *Listener Supported* (Dave and guitarist Tim Reynolds also put out the all-acoustic *Live At Luther College*). Every tour is recorded by the group's long-serving sound crew, the whole team pulling together to reinforce the core "live jazz" ethic of the group.



"No two Dave Matthews shows are ever the same," maintains Taylor, relaxing in the grassy backstage area of the Amphitheater while bandmates and crew play a little pitch and putt, and friends and relatives of the band are welcomed with warm hospitality. "That's the joy of this gig. We don't want to repeat the same jokes night after night. We like to twist the punchline, or blow it off completely and start another joke."

Taylor, like saxophonist LeRoi Moore, drummer Carter Beauford, bassist Stefan Lessard and violinist Boyd Tinsley, is primarily a jazz musician. He studied music at the same college as Beauford and Moore, James Madison University in Harrisonburg, VA, where all three played in the college jazz ensemble and subsequently remained together throughout the '80s in a local Charlottesville band called Secrets.

"I've known Carter and LeRoi for over 21 years, and they've known Boyd since they were children," says Taylor. "Stefan's father I knew when I was working in a music store in Virginia. He was a rep for a guitar company, so when I met Stefan 10 years later it was like I already knew him. I think that's what makes it so easy for us playing together, we all feel like we've known each other, or each other's families, for so long that we don't pull any crap on each other. We genuinely love what we're doing and we play the best we can for each other and for the music."

Although this is only Taylor's second proper tour with Dave Matthews Band, he's hung around the same haunts as the others for years and he remembers well when the group first got together. "I was teaching at JMU and had just started my Masters degree in composition and theory, and LeRoi called me on the phone soon after he first met Dave and said 'Hey man, we've got a cool band, the singer's really neat, he writes cool stuff, do you want to come out and play?' I had to turn him down because I really didn't want to give up my studies. But lo and behold they all piled into Dave's mom's station wagon, and went out and became immensely successful."

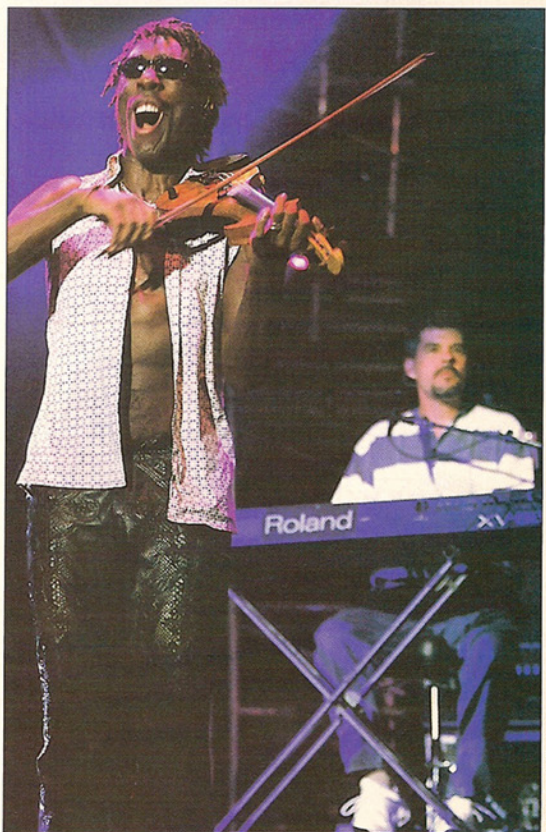
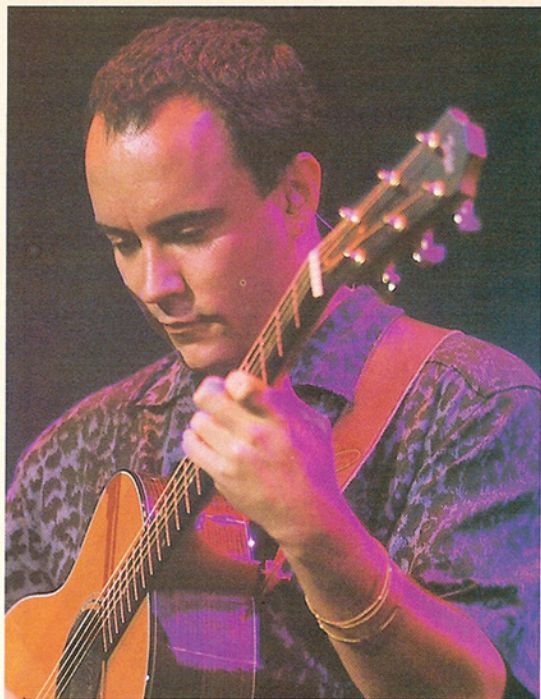
Dave Matthews Band's genre-blending style—a little funk, a touch of jazz, a splash of world beat and, of course, some good old rock 'n' roll—may have seemed out of step with the predominant grunge-rock trends when they first set out, but they managed to tap into some sort of underground zeitgeist, creating a spirited sound all of their own. Through relentless touring they amassed a sizable following almost from the get-go, and it wasn't long before their self-released debut, an impressive showcase for their instrumental prowess, was selling at a staggering rate of 10,000 copies a month. With their next album *Under The Table & Dreaming*—released on major label RCA and boasting the million-selling hit single "What Would You Say"—came overwhelming breakthrough success.

For his part Taylor kept in touch with his friends and former bandmates, and after graduating for the second time he was himself cutting his teeth on the national touring circuit MD'ing for the country singer Tanya Tucker alongside another Virginia native and former Secrets bandmate, bass player Keith Horne. He returned to Virginia after that tour but before hooking up with Dave Matthews Band, began working as a staff composer at a large post-production and original music facility in Richmond called In Your Ear. "My dream was always to work as a studio musician, and that's what I have at In Your Ear," he says of his day job, a position that's flexible enough to enable him to tour once a year.

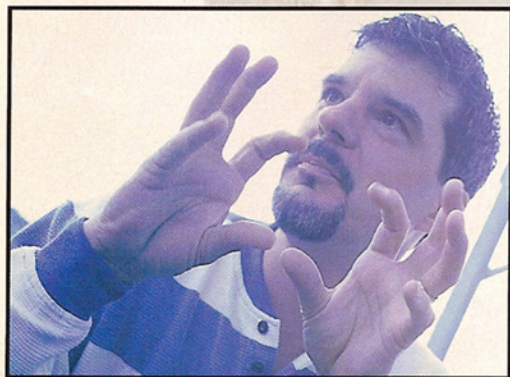
Taylor's reassociation with Dave Matthews Band was almost inevitable. In 1998 they invited him to contribute to the recording sessions of their third studio album *Before These Crowded Streets*, and before long he was on the road once more, playing stadium shows with the band he'd always loved.

Right from his early gigging days through his first years on the road and subsequent studio work, Taylor has always been a Roland junkie. His first keyboard was a Fender® Rhodes™, but before long he was gigging with a Roland RD-250 Digital Piano, which he later upgraded to an RD-300.

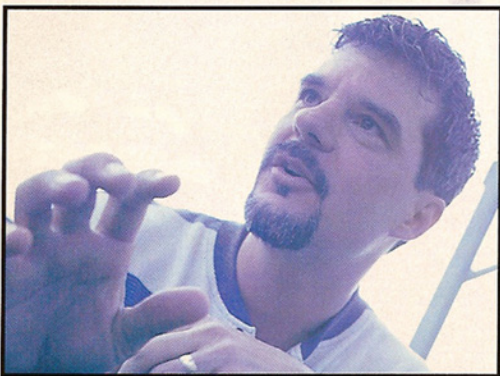
"I also had a JX-8P [Polyphonic Synthesizer] which was a nice warm addition at a time when everyone else was into that clam-



photos: Axel Forno



"The organ is magnificent. I use that in at least half the tunes. There's such a nice variety of sounds."



photos: Axel Forno

orous digital FM sound. Then I got a D-50 [L/A Synthesizer] and a D-550 [L/A Synthesizer Module], which I loved, and a U-220 [RS-PCM Sound Module] and an R-8 [Human Rhythm Composer] for my home studio. Later I got a JD-990 [Super JD], two JV-1080's [Super JV's] and then two JV-2080's [64-Voice Synthesizer Modules], and most of those I'm still using at the studio where I work."

An aficionado of well-programmed sounds, Taylor says he's always admired Roland sounds, particularly those created by chief Roland programmer Eric Persing. "That guy's a monster! His programming and his sample libraries are unparalleled, they're just amazing," he enthuses.

"I rarely get enough time to program my own stuff, but what I like with my Roland gear is I can fill everything up with the expansion boards and I know that if I need a great sound there are hundreds to pick from. The extra cards are absolutely necessary for my stage gear because I can just push a few buttons, scroll through the list and find something that's right."

When it comes to touring Taylor likes to keep his rig simple, mainly so he can set everything up quickly and easily without having to preprogram any parts of the show. "It's definitely not one of those programmed shows. Dave writes the set lists just before the show and many times he'll work in new songs, which are evolving all the time. As far as my parts are concerned, there's little call for a lot of complexity in the sounds because there's complexity in what I play. So I keep my rig straightforward, which is great because it's easy to operate and always completely reliable."

Just before stepping out on tour this time around, Taylor completely overhauled his keyboard setup, investing in the new XV-88 128-Voice Expandable Synthesizer and XV-3080 128-Voice Synthesizer Module (both of which he's loaded up with sound expansion boards) and also a new VK-77 Combo Organ.

"The organ is magnificent. I use that in at least half the tunes. There's such a nice variety of sounds, including one I use a lot called 'VK Organ' which I really like because I can add the after-touch Leslie™ on the upper manual. That's a real help on a bunch of tunes because I don't have to reach over and switch anything on. It's also great fun to solo on, and what's really cool is I can change the sliders as I go. So as a song progresses and the density of things evolve, I'm able to dial in a little here and there, and by the end of the song I feel I've gotten somewhere."

The XV-88, on the other hand, is his chosen piece for acoustic piano sounds. As a pianist he really appreciates its full-length weighted keyboard, and more than anything, its generous 128-voice polyphony.

"That's the thing I absolutely love about all three of these instruments, the VK-77, the -88 and the -3080. Both the module

and piano are 128-voice polyphonic, which I use massively. There are times in the set when my sound gets real big and I need to have some roaring thing come up, and the notes just never cut off! I find they build in a natural organic way, the same way an acoustic instrument does. And the organ, I can just take a nap on that thing, roll around on it, and I never run out of notes," he laughs.

As the keyboard player in a group that until recently hasn't ever featured keyboards, Taylor says his biggest challenge on stage is finding the right parts and working in new ideas that fit in with the band's unconventional lineup. With only one chordal instrument—Dave Matthews' trademark acoustic guitar—and two melody instruments, violin and sax, over the standard rhythm section, figuring out the keyboard role is sometimes a case of trial-and-error.

"There are times when I'll play very closely with Dave to thicken that sound, and that's great because he plays the strangest chords. He has really long fingers and comes up with these bizarre, wonderful gnarled chords like minor 9ths where the 9th is adjacent to the third of the chord. It's nice to play with a guitarist who doesn't play barre chords," he says. "Then other times I might play a part that's some of what he's playing on the guitar and parts of the bass line too. Or when there's space I'll throw in something that's completely new like a string part or a Wurlitzer™ or Rhodes™ sound from the -3080 or the -88.

"What we don't do is copy the original arrangements from the records. That doesn't appeal to any of us. So in that sense I have quite a free rein to develop my sound as I see fit, changing it from night to night."

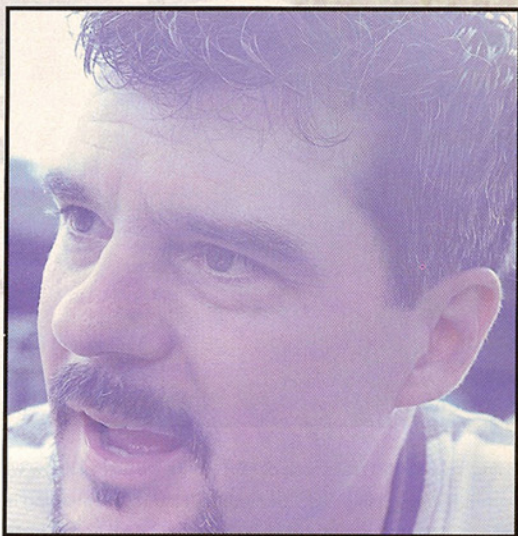
Acoustic piano sounds feature largely in Taylor's brew. He maintains a staple of three or four different acoustic pianos which he'll choose from depending what sort of touch a certain tune requires.

"There's a big compressed piano sound that really jumps out in the mix. It's called 'Comp Piano', I think it's from the [SRX-02 Concert Piano] card. That works great on songs like 'Stay' and a new tune we have called 'Sweet Up And Down,' both of which demand a big punchy sound," he explains. "At other times on the more delicate tunes like '#41,' I use the 'PremierGrand' sound, which has a real wide range to it and responds really well in quieter passages."

Taylor likens his choice of sounds to the straight guy in a stand-up comedy duo, using the metaphor to illustrate why he mainly sticks to using straightforward sounds. In other words, it's what he's actually playing and how he responds to the music on stage that's the funny guy, or, as he puts it, "the guy with the punchline."

"There's so much improvisation going on onstage, particularly with Carter, LeRoi and I. Our jazz backgrounds are in constant interplay all night long," says Taylor. "Even when we're not impro-

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vising, there's this real sense of ESP, where we just all know what each other are going to do. Sometimes I'll throw something new out there and Carter will instantly respond in some way, change the drum groove a little bit or just have a little splash and a hold somewhere. He has such great ears that no matter what I throw out there, he'll find a way of responding."

On stage a wireless microphone system connects each band member to one another, enabling them to communicate with each other via in-ear monitors. "Invariably at the end of a tune somebody congratulates somebody else on a great solo," he says, clearly impressed with the technology that allows them to interact even on a gargantuan stage as they would in a small club. "That's really how we operate. Everybody in the band earnestly has that desire to support each other and feed off each other, which is very rare in a rock band. I definitely think that our audience appreciates that."

What Dave Matthews Band's audience clearly appreciates, judging by the electrifying atmosphere out front at the Coors

Amphitheater an hour or so after we finish the interview, is the chance to see their heroes perform every summer with almost clockwork regularity. Having built up a strong reputation on the summer season HORDE tour alongside other grand-scale neo-hippie jam bands like Blues Traveler, Phish and Big Head Todd and the Monsters, Dave Matthews Band now goes it alone, criss-crossing America for two months of every year, bringing their spontaneous live show to their enthused masses ("the ants" as they've become known).

This year's tour is their biggest to date, and also one of the most anticipated. The group has interrupted recording sessions for its forthcoming studio album to make the current trek, and as such they've worked as many as eight new songs into their already expansive live roster. Later on, as the hot Southern Californian sun gives way to a warm breezy evening, the crowd lap up songs such as "Grey Street" (featuring Butch on the VK-77 organ), "Grace Is Gone" and "JTR," patently aware this is the last time they'll hear these numbers until December,



when the band are expecting to have finished their new record.

"I believe the album was supposed to be released this summer, but they felt with the tour fast approaching they didn't want to rush it," says Taylor, glad of the opportunity to be a part of the new songs' evolutionary process. "I'm not sure how it will pan out just yet, but it's possible I could wind up in the studio for the next one. This entire Roland rig that I have here now will be in the recording studio where the guys are working, so that if they do decide there are certain things that need keyboard parts then they can just call me in and we'll be ready to go."

Almost indifferent to the pressures that come with success and certainly to the trappings of fame, Dave Matthews Band continues to do what it likes best: playing virtuosic live music and making artful jazz-rock records, with a conviviality that's rare in today's music scene.

"We just have so much fun playing," confirms Taylor. "Everybody in this band is aware to their core how this works. That when this tour's over, or at some point in the near future, we could

all be sitting at home again. We know what a transient thing it is to be 'popular,' but it's not like we sat in a room and decided how we wanted it to be. We just all want to enjoy playing music together. Everyone has complete respect for each other's space, and we genuinely love each other.

"It's a weird rock band in that sense because we're just not animals. When people meet us they kind of go 'Well this is different, these guys are actually okay, what's the deal?' you know," he continues with a smile. "We laugh because 'Your mama raised you right' is sort of the mantra, it just winds up being that way, everybody says thank you for this, and we're all really polite. I know most everybody's moms so I know why these guys are nice people! It's great fun to hang around with these guys and it really carries into the gig.

"I don't think I could have a better gig," he beams. "I couldn't be luckier than to have folks who I've spent most of my life with who are willing to let me come out here and do this and then welcome me home when it's over." 