

OCTOBER - NOVEMBER 2002

Music For The Mind

relix

**MICHAEL
HOUSER**
1962-2002

PHISH
THE HIATUS ENDS

ART OF THE
CONCERT POSTER

6 BEST
BURNERS

*Dave
Matthews
Band*

WHY THE HELL ARE THEY SO BIG?



LISTENER

SUPPORTED

The Dave Matthews Band wasn't always mainstream and as many know (or don't know), has shared stages with Phish, Blues Traveler and the Grateful Dead. Since becoming a mainstay of adult contemporary and active rock radio, selling out the country's largest venues and seeing massive album sales, they've been criticized by some of the original community that embraced them. "It was someone else who told us we were a jamband, and we said, 'Okay, whatever, we just play and if people come that's a good thing,'" says the band's leader. While people come in staggering numbers, it hasn't stopped the band from being the same as it ever was, as it continues playing with artists like MMW, Robert Randolph, North Mississippi All-Stars, The Flecktones and Gov't Mule. Contributing editor Dean Budnick spent some time with them and tried to figure how a little band from Virginia, who built their sound on violin, saxophone, acoustic guitar and vocals, became the biggest band in America.



THE DAVE MATTHEWS BAND FROM BARS TO BUSTED STUDIOS

Photography by Danny Cl

Dave Matthews 46 Band



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46 DAVE MATTHEWS BAND

They used to be a small bar band from Virginia that fell in with the jamband crowd, playing alongside Phish and The Grateful Dead. Now, they're the biggest band in America, selling out arenas, blaring in several radio formats and selling millions of albums. Contributing editor Dean Budnick talks to the band about its roots, their current state and how the term "jam" got applied.

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Relix goes on tour to Alaska and Japan with the Jazz Mandolin Project



Leroy Moore



LEROI MOORE STANDS ALONE. Dressed in black with his arms crossed and sizeable sunglasses obscuring his visage, Moore radiates the assured yet inscrutable air of a secret service agent.

He is the archetype of cool as he casually picks up a saxophone and starts to blow. "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" serenades his fellow bandmates as they saunter on stage for a mid-afternoon soundcheck at Cincinnati's Riverbend Music Theater.

The atmosphere is loose and collegial. Carter Beauford steps onto his drum riser while sharing a laugh with one of the band's techs; an amused expression remains even as he plays. Boyd Tinsley slaps a few hands, crossing behind Matthews, who jumps back and with a good-natured gesture pretends to hit the violin player in the head with his guitar neck. Stefan Lessard smiles as he runs his fingers across his bass, warming up.

As the musicians huddle near Beauford's kit, collectively exchanging a joke, their body language is casual and comfortable. They could be any old friends, hanging out at a backyard barbecue or street corner but for the fact that they are wielding instruments (and in Matthews' case, a near-ubiquitous mug of tea) that provide a focal point for a production crew seeking to make adjustments

in a 20,000 capacity amphitheater. Long time "special guest" Butch Taylor remains behind his keyboard but is drawn into the conversation as the five DMB members reconnect (with no gig the previous night, they had a day and a half to their individual pursuits). After six or seven minutes the confab concludes, as the musicians insert their inner-ear monitors, move to their standard positions and begin to play, starting slowly yet with precision.

As the soundcheck begins in earnest, a Riverbend employee in her mid-twenties walks back and forth through the front few rows of the venue, counting seats for some purpose only she seems to understand. She strolls within yards of the band yet makes a point

THE BAND MEMBERS' EASYGOING DEEMANORS RUN CONTRARY TO THE FERVOR AND SCOPE OF THEIR FAN BASE. INDEED, IF ONE FACTORS IN THE TRADITIONAL METRICS TO GAUGE AUDIENCE RECEPTION—CONCERT TICKETS, ALBUM SALES AND RADIO AIRPLAY—THE DAVE MATTHEWS BAND IS CURRENTLY THE MOST POPULAR MUSICAL ACT IN THE NATION.

of keeping her eyes from the stage, feigning indifference by placing an unnatural focus on the seat numbers. She soon betrays herself; with her task mysteriously completed, she disappears only to return moments later with a Coke and a smile, to watch the group slide into "Grey Street," the second track on its latest release, *Busted Stuff*.

The unalloyed truth behind her façade is not all that surprising as the band members' easygoing demeanors run contrary to the fervor and scope of their fan base. Indeed, if one factors in the traditional metrics to gauge audience reception—concert tickets, album sales and radio airplay—the Dave Matthews Band is currently the most popular musical act in the nation. One can fairly say it is the only quintet comprised of acoustic guitar, violin, sax, bass and drums to emerge from the grassroots jam scene and occupy such a position.

CARTER BEAUFORD SPEAKS WITH HIS HANDS. He is an expressive, affable raconteur who punctuates his conversation with swirls and swoops, as the active drummer finds a way to busy his hands. At present, he is sitting behind a table in his tour bus, tracking the musical development of the Dave Matthews Band, which began with a series of rehearsals in his mother's basement in Charlottesville, in early 1991.

Recent reports have tried to read something into the fact that all five members of the group occupy separate buses. Earlier in the day, Stefan Lessard bristled at these accounts, denouncing an article that seemingly related these travel arrangements to a larger fracture within the band. "We don't need to see each other during the day. When we're on stage there is no angst, no stress. The ability to work in a situation with that freedom of expression where you're encouraged to be yourself is rare."

Beauford concurs, suggesting that the five buses are simply a

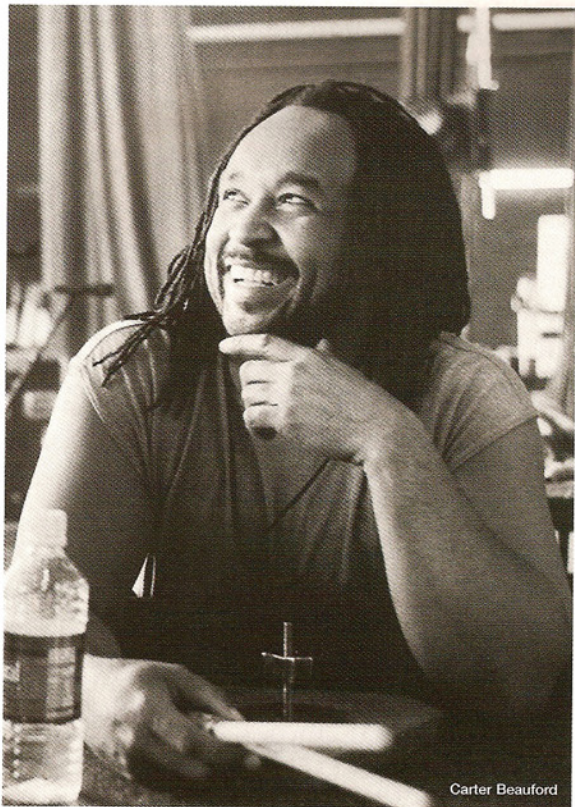
matter of convenience that, if anything, sustains rather than detracts from the band's music and the future thereof. The buses facilitate family visits with minimal disruption. This ease of travel also allows each member to focus on the "true matter at hand—connecting on the stage." Plus the five musicians clearly have varied thresholds for physical clutter in their personal spaces, with Carter coming down on the Felix Unger/Kitty Bartholomew side of the spectrum. The drummer's engaging smile lingers as he leans forward to describe Lessard's first rehearsal with the band. Although Matthews refers to the bassist as "Fonz," Beauford opts for the formal name, which carries something of a regal air when he pronounces it.

"Stefan and I played together before this band even started. I would hire him for these straight-ahead jazz gigs. He was 15 and playing upright bass. His dad, Ron Lessard, played the bass and we did a lot of gigs together but then Ron got really busy, and one day he told me, 'Why don't you call my son?' So I gave Stefan a call and said, 'Look I need a bass player, I got a gig.' It was a band called Blue Indigo: myself, a guitar player and a Hammond B-3 player. So Stefan came to the gigs, 15 years old, I'd throw some charts in front of him and he'd read them down like he was Chick Corea or somebody.

"When this band started it was just Leroi, Dave and myself, the three of us sounding like absolute shit. It was the worst stuff I've ever heard in my life and one day we were discussing how we needed the bottom to happen. So I said, 'Let's get Stefan.' He came over

with his big upright bass and it didn't hit, it didn't fit with what we were trying to do. So we asked him to get an electric bass. Well, he went out and got one but it was fretless, so his intonation was all over the place and that made it sound even worse than we were making it sound. It was just a mess." Beauford stops himself, laughing at the memory. "But after a while we got it together. His dad said every day he was home studying upright and then electric bass. He listened to a lot of John Patitucci. He was just studying his ass off and it seemed like overnight he turned into a completely different bass player. He became the backbone of this whole thing."

While speaking about his early days in the DMB, the drummer also makes a point to single out the resonant contributions of percussionist Miguel Valdez, who performed with the group a number of times during its first two years before succumbing, reportedly to hepatitis, in 1993 ("#34" on *Under the Table and Dreaming* is dedicated to him). "A lot of people say I play so busy, but one of the reasons is that I've played with a percussionist in almost every band. Even this band, when we started, a very good friend of mine, Miguel Valdez from Cuba was playing percussion. It was locked and I got used to that thing he was doing and then he passed. From that point on I felt like I had to compensate for him not being there. It's been ten years since then and I'm still thinking about what Miguel would do in this part. It's the weirdest thing."



Carter Beauford

WHEN THE DAVE MATTHEWS BAND FIRST gained renown outside of Virginia in 1992 and 1993, the group was singled out for its inventive and often extended extemporized runs and flourishes. Some of this notoriety arose from the group's instrumentation, although given its longevity, it is now easy for one to overlook the band's signature entwined violin and saxophone riffs, layered over percussive acoustic guitar textures and driven by a propulsive backbeat. The group also drew strength from its core songs, which featured memorable melodies and provided rousing re-entry points after the band carried its music outward.

On some level this practice continues today. Beauford affirms, "We're still striving to make this band original and I think that's a big part of our success. These kids come out here and they see us play every night. They may hear the same songs but they won't hear them played the same way. There's always something new, something different happening."

While this is true, the variations are often subtle and circumscribed, within four bars of a given song. When compared with the band's early shows, there are far fewer epic statements from the group. Indeed, one irony is that while DMB is still criticized in certain press circles for its penchant to improvise, one community of listeners rebukes the group for its reluctance to take it further.

This move away from open-ended jams has proven dissatisfying for the latter collective on a few levels. First and foremost there is a sense of frustration, given the band's gift for improv and its players'

“I THINK THAT A LOT OF WHAT WE WERE DOING IN THE EARLY DAYS WAS OVERKILL. WE DIDN'T HAVE A LOT OF TUNES AND WE HAD TO STRETCH THE DAYLIGHTS OUT OF THEM TO MAKE IT WORK.” — CARTER BEAUFORD

demonstrable chops. Prior to forming the DMB, both Beauford and Moore thrived in a number of jazz-fusion settings, both individually and collectively (Beauford's pantheon of heroes includes Chick Corea and Tony Williams). Boyd Tinsley has continued to build on his classical background, while introducing both novel notions and new gear to his sound.

Stefan Lessard has come a long way since his days as a callow teenager, of which he states, “At first I wasn't flashy. I couldn't be flashy but as a young kid on stage that was flash enough. I wanted to be as solid as possible.” Still, Beauford relates a story that suggests the bassist's learning curve was accelerated. “There was one time we opened up for the Allman Brothers and Jaimoe [Johanny Johanson, drummer] had a jam session. Stefan went down to play even though Jaimoe didn't think he could cut it. Well, don't tell that to my boy Stefan. He started playing and thumping, the whole bit, and Jaimoe freaked out. I had never seen him do that before but Stefan just took it to another level and he got the respect that he deserved.”

Even Matthews, by his own admission the weakest instrumentalist in the group, adds flair. “I think my guitar playing is pretty unusual. Technically I'm not a guitarist's asshole but I challenge most technical guitarists to be able to play anything like me. I don't know where it came from. I think it's partially because I spent a lot of time traveling and I was exposed to a lot of different music. That's how I met all these guys—I was drawn to good music, not necessarily of any kind. I also think my guitar playing came out of a love of percussion. I think if I had a drum kit I probably would have done that rather than stay with the guitar but at least the way I approach the guitar is like a drum; I approach it as a percussive instrument. I've acquired a distaste for strummy, strummy playing. The last thing I want to do is try and sound like a guitarist. The people I would like to emulate are pianists: Abdullah Ibrahim, a South African pianist; Keith Jarrett and his playing; Monk and his playing; the quality of piano playing that is drum, that is percussive.”

The diminished incidence of all-out improv in DMB's shows also seemed discordant to some, given the band's longstanding musical rapport with other seemingly likeminded groups. For instance, on its debut album, the group offers thanks to four bands: Allgood, Aquarium Rescue Unit, Blues Traveler and the Samples. During 1994 and 1995 the band gigged on the HORDE tour, and in May of '95 opened the Grateful Dead's three-night

stand at the Sam Boyd Silver Bowl in Las Vegas. In a *Musician* magazine piece from that same year entitled “Building an Audience from the Grassroots,” Matthews also singles out Widespread Panic and Phish.

The latter association certainly has generated some of the frustration with the group. By 1994, Phish had eliminated openers from most of its shows. Indeed, the Vermont quartet announced only five opening bands for its 123 shows that year; in every instance the opener was the Dave Matthews Band. On the first three of these occasions, the entire quintet appeared with Phish for extended takes on “You Enjoy Myself” (4/20/94), “All Along the Watchtower” (4/21/94) and “The Maker” (10/15/94) with Beauford also joining Jon Fishman for a drum jam in the latter two instances. A number of Phish fans viewed these performances as endorsements and tacit pledges that the DMB would also improvise with the regularity of Phish. (The relationship between the two groups remains, as the Phish guitarist welcomed Matthews to the stage on 2/28/01 at the Landmark Theater in Richmond, VA for four songs, including Matthews' own “Everyday,” while Matthews seemingly reciprocated by introducing a solo version of Phish's “Waste” later that spring—a decision which probably did not ingratiate him with many Phish fans who consider the song too soft).

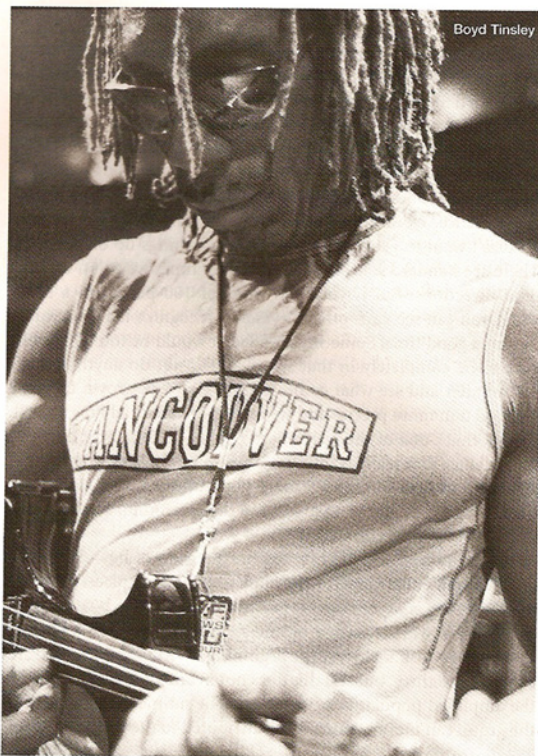
Phish provides another interesting reference point with regard to tour support and guest appearances. While the former group has long made the decision to gig without any openers, the Dave Matthews Band strives to expose bands to its audiences; the list



Stefan Lessard

includes the Funky Meters, Gov't Mule, Medeski Martin & Wood, North Mississippi Allstars, Robert Randolph & The Family Band and Soulive (see sidebar). In many instances the headliner also invites members of these groups to perform during its set, as soundman Jeff "Bagby" Thomas leaves six open channels to facilitate any short-notice sit-ins. One of the most successful and prevalent collaborations has taken place with Béla Fleck and the Flecktones, which has happened repeatedly and with a great measure of success, reinforcing the Dave Matthews Band's ability to move beyond musical structure with comfort and facility.

Whatever its members' individual penchants and proclivities, DMB's musicians repeatedly emphasize that they never considered the group to be a jamband. This is not just a matter of labeling; there is a larger semantic issue. For better or worse the term "jamband" has come to represent a corps of musical artists distinguished by their facility, fluidity and fearlessness with deep improvisation. Then again, some of it is just a matter of labeling. To this end, Lessard elegantly observes, "Music is too huge to put into categories." Matthews adds, "We never wanted to be a jamband; that was never what we thought about. We just got together, worked up two songs, and tried to get gigs. It was someone else who told us we were a jamband, and we said, 'Okay, whatever, we just play and if people come that's a good thing.'"



BOYD TINSLEY KNOWS FROM JAMBANDS. In fact, when one steps onto his tour bus, there is a vibe reminiscent of those International Harvester vehicles often appropriated and transformed for Dead roadtrips back in the day. The sitting room is redolent of patchouli, which wafts through the air and mingles with other sweet smells. The shades are drawn and amidst the clutter, a medley of candles offers the sole illumination.

The soundtrack is provided by the rough mixes to Tinsley's solo album, which he is happy to share following an inquiry about the project. The music has a blusier feel than much of what Tinsley has done with the Dave Matthews Band, something more akin to the Fabulous Thunderbirds (with violin) or Neil Young (ditto). The latter reference gains credence (but admittedly loses some bite) when Tinsley's reading of Young's "Cinnamon Girl" seeps in halfway through the disc.

"We were basically a jamband," Tinsley recalls, not describing the Dave Matthews Band or even his current project but rather the Boyd Tinsley Band, one of his precursors to DMB. "I played lead, we had violin, electric guitar, bass and drums. We did half covers and half originals. We did Allman Brothers tunes, Dylan... basically we'd get up in a club and just jam.

"The fraternity I ended up joining at UVA, Sigma Nu, was one of the major nightclubs in town during the early eighties. We'd have these coffeehouses that were benefits. We'd have acoustic acts from seven until midnight and then from midnight until the sun rose we'd have electric acts. Jorma Kaukonen came down after a gig one time, Bob Margolin, Leroi would come down late at night, Tim Reynolds would play. That was the atmosphere that I came out of musically, just before the Dave Matthews Band, and a lot of that is still in me."

While a lot of that is still in Tinsley, less of that element appears

on stage with the band. Tinsley (or "BT," once again a nickname that Matthews uses most freely) attributes this to the songwriting, both in the nature and number of the tunes. "I don't think we ever really intended to come out as a jamband. That was just a way it fell in because we had a limited repertoire of songs and I wasn't afraid of jamming, Leroi wasn't, Carter wasn't either. A lot of these guys had grown up or had played in jamming situations before, as well as more structured situations." Beauford similarly recalls, "Early on we didn't have as many tunes so we had to stretch songs to make a night complete, to try to get two hours out of a show. I remember when we had to stretch tunes to get forty minutes out of a show. That's something that we've kind of chilled out with, stretching the tunes."

The drummer also interjects another consideration as well: audience expectation. "We're trying to give people what they want to hear. You don't want to get on stage and just blow a bunch of notes. You want to make sure that the story you're telling is clear and the people that are listening understand what you're trying to say on your instrument. Now that we have more tunes, we can take our time with it and be more clear so everyone can understand the story we're trying to tell. Sometimes it's one big story

that the band is trying to tell and sometimes it's individual stories that the soloist is trying to say and the band tries to back him up and complement him. I think that a lot of what we were doing in the early days was overkill. We didn't have a lot of tunes and we had to stretch the daylight out of them to make it work. Now we're trying to focus on narrowing down and being precise in how we say it and when we say it."

Matthews echoes these sentiments. "I think we've changed with the audience. We still want to have a lot of improvisation because we don't want to get bored so we do make things up on the spot. There are standard solo sections and other times we go off on random directions. But if you're in front of 100 people in a small room you can see each other's eyes and recognize that everyone's having a good time. Sometimes we feel it would be too self-indulgent to be completely in that space—'Let's not do anything, let's just wander and see what comes of this.' As we've grown together we've gotten more precise and we have more material now as well. I think that's one of the reasons we've been able to cross between an audience that really is into the jam inventions sort of thing and a more rock audience and a more pop audience, too. I think it's nice to have a structure that you can dance around, a solid foundation that you can stand on."

Still, even these adjustments beg the question of how these burgeoning audiences came to the shows in the first place. One can look back to *Under the Table and Dreaming* and note how producer Steve Lillywhite "cleaned up the sound," for instance, reducing the number of snare hits at the beginning of "Ants Marching" from seventeen to three, but still this does not in and of itself account for the amplified popularity of the band. The ultimate ascendance of the group can more reasonably be attributed to the power of radio.



IN 1995, RADIO HAD BEEN BALKANIZED into various formats, each of which sought to fulfill a niche while the larger pop landscape looked for the next grunge. The Dave Matthews Band stepped into this vacuum and the eclectic nature of its sound allowed it to be adopted by a range of radio formats. A few tracks from *Under the Table and Dreaming* received airplay from a variety of these allegedly circumscribed formats, including album rock, modern rock, adult contemporary and pop. Although the band's sound was dense and atypical of other fare on these formats, each of them defined DMB as a core artist, as the energy, the hooks (and ultimately the enthusiastic listeners) taught radio to appreciate the group and define it as popular.

This is the moment when the band began welcoming newcomers to its live shows, and by this time it was prepared for them, as suggested by the title of the *Musician* article, "Building an Audience from the Grassroots." A Dave Matthews Band show comes with minimal artifice (increasingly important in these days of prefab pop). One gets the sense that the band members act on stage as they do in real life. This does not seem to be far off, as the group shows



And, of course, Dave Matthews

up for soundcheck wearing the same or similar clothes that its members will wear during the gig. They joke with one another in a similar way, and even the music is played in a similar earnest manner, signifying a comfort with the band's sound. Ties are reinforced by selecting opening acts that the band members want to hear, and by allowing the audience to freely tape the shows (even if at this point, mike stands are few and far between).

The musicians are profuse and sincere with their praise of their audience. "It says a lot about the fans that we have that they accepted us," Tinsley states. "In pop culture there's a model: here's

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— BOYD TINSLEY

*NSYNC, five guys and dancing and everything else has to be like that. We didn't follow that model, and it says a lot about the fans that they were open enough to listen to this music and say, even though it's a violin, sax and an acoustic guitar, 'It's cool, I like this, I'm going to come see it.' It does take openness to look outside the box and it's gratifying. It's surprised us every single week."

Still, at this point, the group's audience is not solely comprised of the stalwarts he describes. Let's face it, the Dave Matthews Band is the Most Popular Band in America. People who wish to function in good standing as members of mainstream American culture

"AFTER WE WALK OFF STAGE, WE'LL TALK ABOUT THE SHOW AND SAY, 'THAT WAS REALLY COOL WHAT YOU DID...' BUT ON THOSE RARE OCCASIONS WHEN IT'S NECESSARY WE ALSO DON'T HESITATE TO SAY, 'YOU STUNK ON SUCH AND SUCH...' — CARTER BEAUFORD

require some familiarity with its music. DMB live shows often are such tough tickets that it carries cache to have good seats (or even seats at all). The ambit extends far, as on the night of the Riverbend gig, 20-year-old American tennis sensation Andy Roddick, who was participating in an area tournament, explained to the local news media that he had finished his match in an expeditious manner so that he could make it to the show. There is a concomitant danger that this broad base of listeners won't have the perspective or inclination to criticize the group's efforts with any rigor.

To the band's credit, it continues to push itself and remain self-critical. Beauford admits that he most actively takes on this role. He notes, with a touch of humor, "My attitude is that being a drummer, I can't hug the girls after the shows because I'm a soaking wet mess. So if I can't get the hugs you guys better pick up the slack. Everybody works their ass off but every once in a while maybe one of us will have a late night but, 'Uh-uh, not here, get your ass in gear.' I think it's very important, otherwise you cheat the fans. After we walk off stage and go to the dressing room, we'll talk about the show and say, 'That was really cool what you did on "Tripping Billies"' but on those rare occasions when it's necessary we also don't hesitate to say, 'You stunk on such and such' or 'You need to get your ass in gear.' There are a couple sour faces every once in a while and that's going to happen but in the long run it turns out better. They come back the next night hitting and hitting hard. When we had eight people in the crowd it was the same way."

One of the group's decisions to refine (and redefine) its music took place a few years ago when it ended the regular "special appearances" of guitarist Tim Reynolds. Reynolds' angular playing often added a sharper, and at times more challenging, component to the sound. In his stead the band welcomed Butch

Taylor, another long-time associate. By contrast, Taylor's contributions are solid but subdued and sometimes seemingly redundant with the bass and guitar parts.

"It was just a stage," Beauford recalls. "We dug Tim's playing from day one. Tim and Leroi and I played together years ago. When this band first started we tried to get Tim to come over to my mom's basement and hang out and play some. But he had other things that he needed to attend to. Later on we decided to give Tim another shot, so we asked him to play on the first record and Tim sat in on *Remember Two Things* and tore it up. Then he did some touring with us. But that was just one stage. It was great while it lasted but it was time to change gears and go somewhere else, try another avenue. We did so by getting Butch to color things up another way. It's all about working the stages and seeing where the music's gonna go."

Tinsley offers similar thoughts in assessing his forthcoming solo project. "It's really unlike anything I've ever done before. When I started writing these songs I had no idea what they were going to turn out to be. I wrote "True Reflections," this song we still do in the Dave Matthews Band, about ten years ago. That was the only complete song I ever did and I also co-wrote "So Much to Say" with Dave and Peter Griesar. But I started this process about two years ago because I wanted to give songwriting a try. So I got down with a bass, started getting some grooves and put together all these different ideas. Then I got with this guy Chris Bruce, who plays bass with [singer] Doyle Bramhall. From there I took it and built on the melodies and the lyrics and now we've got eleven songs. It's been an awesome process and I didn't know what the music was going to be. I didn't have any preconceived notions, I was just going to let it happen; whatever came out of me, that was it."

The results are often absorbing and should also yield some intriguing live shows when the band tours later this winter. Still, it is telling that the violinist began working on this solo material around the time that the *Summer So Far* album was scrapped and *Everyday* was recorded in its stead. Indeed, to some extent, being The Most Popular Band in America can swallow up The Most Popular Band in America. The result is *Busted Stuff*.

DAVE'S VOICE IS THE LOUDEST IS THE MIX." This observation, which comes from Jeff "Baby" Thomas, is not metaphoric but rather references the band's live sound. Thomas should know because he's been the band's front-of-house engineer since its inception, working with the group from "birthday parties and frat parties" on to stadiums.

When asked to name a favorite recent show he demurs, indicating that every night is different but that none stands out for him. When asked if there was a show that he would place in the weaker side of the spectrum, he cites problems with the vocals in the preceding two. Thomas notes that this tends to be the principal debilitating factor in any given performance, as in such an instance, "Dave will worry about the next note and that will disrupt the pocket of sound."

Matthews later assents to this general criticism. "I think our biggest weakness is that my voice is somewhat unreliable. Its strengths come and go. It's not the strongest machine in the world and it gets rusty quite a lot. I don't go to vocal lessons but I do a lot of warming up and cooling down. I worry about my voice and I drink a lot of tea."

Moments later, he places a cup of tea in the microwave on his tour bus. Matthews has libations at the ready as the microwave adjoins an espresso machine and a wine rack with a coffee maker are also at hand. Matthews travels like Beauford, with only a hint of detritus lying about (keys, wallet, a few notes), the lone distinguishing feature being the shelf set into the wall for his guitar. He places it there just prior to the interview, later commenting, "I play all the

"THE WAY I APPROACH THE GUITAR IS LIKE A DRUM, AS A PERCUSSIVE INSTRUMENT. I'VE ACQUIRED A DISTASTE FOR STRUMMY, STRUMMY PLAYING. THE LAST THING I WANT TO DO IS SOUND LIKE A GUITARIST." —DAVE MATTHEWS

time but I very rarely sit and play scales. I often find little patterns that I play around and around. Then they sometimes end up as songs like 'Get In Line' or 'Satellite' or the bridge in 'I Did It.' I have exercises and then I sort of start enjoying the sound of them and they just turn into songs."

Since Matthews' voice is essentially the lead instrument in the band, the subject of his lyrics soon follows. "I very often describe the feeling of the song because we often have the music before we have the words. I write lyrics that have a similar vibe to what the melody is. I wait for the music for fear of saying anything too quickly. I wait until the band says it first with their notes and then I say it with my lyrics."

Given this mode of writing, the somber tone of the original songs from the Lillywhite Sessions should not be surprising. Lessard indicates that the North Garden Studio, where the band recorded, didn't right feel. "I didn't think the room was conducive to any band being in there. Prior to then we had only worked in two studios, Sausalito and Bearsville, both of which had great vibes. This one just didn't have the feel."

The band's attitude proved somber, as did the music and the lyrics. This led the group to scratch the effort, which it felt was too grim and distant from the Dave Matthews Band that its listeners wanted to hear. Matthews then traveled west to write and demo

new songs with producer Glen Ballard. The resulting record, *Everyday*, isn't a bad one but it doesn't feel like a full band effort. It's more of a generic rock statement, heavy on sheen and light on the lush interplay that one often associates with the group.

Everyday sold more than three million albums yet a form of audience populism led to the release of the abandoned songs. But while its hand was forced, the band still rearranged the tunes and added two new ones that countered the solemn feel. *Busted Stuff* has a subtlety and grace that mark it as the quintet's finest work.

In talking about "Where Are You Going," one of the new songs on the disc, Matthews comments that he currently aspires to two goals in his songwriting—ambiguity and simplicity. "Bob Marley, without question, was one of my favorite lyricists because he was never real specific but he was precise. I think 'Three Little Birds' is a massive achievement lyrically. It's so simple but that's the achievement. I think I manage to be ambiguous enough in 'Where Are You Going,' which you could take as a love song or you can take as anything you want. For me it's a song about America and all its reactions right or wrong to things that have gone on here in the last year. That's kind of what the song's about for me but you'd never know that if you listen."

At this point the band's tour manager enters the bus. Matthews' presence is required at a pre-show meet and greet. He gamely forestalled this a few minutes earlier but being the namesake of the Most Popular Band in America carries its responsibilities. Still, he offers one final thought on the group's music and his relationship to it. "I think the joy is the part that's most important. I think we enjoy it the most when we feel the most free but that comes in lots of different forms. It's fun playing with these guys because we all enjoy spinning around a center. Some songs are real precise, some a little less so, and other songs are complete basket cases. We just need to make sure that what we do is clear."

AN HOUR LATER, THE BAND EMERGES CASUALLY, almost diffidently, to the clamor of 20,000. The group moves through a range of songs that span its entire eleven-year career, balancing succinct statements with a few expansive expressions. The audience is generally attentive and effusive, even when the band takes it out a bit during "Two Step."

The process of becoming the Most Popular Band in America has been an active one. There's been an element of give-and-take, of mutual respect and discovery, with each side informing the other about the group's music and the best way to receive it. Still, one gets the sense that there has been minimal compromise or concession on the part of the quintet, which is quite content to find itself exactly where it now stands.

Halfway through the show, DMB launches into its first single from *Busted Stuff*, the aforementioned "Where Are You Going?" As the crowd hears the lines, "But I do know one thing for sure, Where you are is where I belong," it erupts, seemingly interpreting it not as a love song or post 9/11 tune but rather as a paean to itself, which in many ways it is. This music is a collective art that occupies its own niche, its own pocket. At its best, it moves and it is moving. ■

THE BEST OF WHAT'S AROUND

THE DAVE MATTHEWS BAND HAS BEEN GENEROUS IN GIVING OPENING SLOTS TO OTHER GROUPS, OFTEN INVITING THESE PERFORMERS ON STAGE DURING ITS OWN SETS. AS CARTER BEAUFORD NOTES, "IT'S ALL UP TO US; WE MAKE THE DECISIONS BECAUSE SOMEONE ONCE GAVE US A CHANCE. WE'RE TRYING TO EXPOSE OUR AUDIENCE TO REALLY TOP-DOG MUSICIANS, THE BEST IN THE BUSINESS AND THEY DON'T HAVE TO BE BIG NAMES TO MAKE GREAT MUSIC." STILL, THE GIG DOES CARRY A SPECIAL CHALLENGE, FOR AS MATTHEWS ADDS, "IT MAKES IT DIFFERENT IF YOU WALK OUT ON A HUGE STAGE AND NOT EVERYONE'S ARRIVED YET. IF YOU'RE UP THERE TO LOOK GOOD THEN THAT MIGHT BUM YOU OUT BECAUSE YOU DON'T LOOK GOOD RIGHT THEN WITH TEN PEOPLE IN THE AUDIENCE AND 20,000 SEATS. BUT IF YOU'RE THERE TO HAVE A GOOD TIME AND DO SOMETHING THAT YOU LOVE AND BELIEVE IN, THEN THOSE TEN PEOPLE ARE GOING TO HAVE A REALLY GOOD TIME."

MATTHEWS SHARES A FEW THOUGHTS ON SOME OF THE ARTISTS WHO HAVE SHARED TIME ON A BILL AND LATER ON STAGE WITH THE DAVE MATTHEWS BAND.

SOULIVE. They're great players and have cool energy. I think the first time we played with them was in Charlottesville. They opened and then Neil [Young] played and then we played. That's when we really heard them and wanted them to come back out with us. All of them are just phenomenal musicians and Kraz [Guitarist Eric Krasno] is a sick fuck. When they asked me to sit on their record I was really excited about that [Matthews appears on *Next*, contributing vocals to Ani DiFranco's "Joyful Girl."].

[On inviting Krasno to join DMB on stage for a song but refusing to tell the guitarist which song the band would play] You can have faith in people like him. If you brought me on stage and didn't tell me what you were going to play I might be in trouble. I probably wouldn't play a whole lot but like the guys in our band, he doesn't need to know. Somebody who plays as beautifully as him lets special things happen. He'll surprise himself and even if he thinks he's stumbling along what comes out is really beautiful. I hope he didn't mind that we had that kind of faith in him.

GOV'T MULE. I've known them a long time; that was a real tragedy with [Allen] Woody. When we first met Warren he had such a dif-

ferent vibe from anyone else. He's so loving and down to earth, he's everybody's neighbor. He makes me feel really comfortable and he's been generous to us from early on, sitting in with us at the Wetlands. He's always supported us and always played beautifully. I think he's one of the top rock guitar players of all time but on top of that for him to be such an amazing, nice man is inspirational.

ROBERT RANDOLPH. I'd heard a recording but I really connected when I went to a show of his. There's just phenomenal energy and while he maintains the integrity of song he also allows for a lot of movement. One of the songs we always play when people sit in with us is "Watchtower." He came up and played and it was smoking. I think he had a huge time, too. I think he was freaked out, we're good at backing people up. But he's awesome.

BELA FLECK & THE FLECKTONES. Sometimes one of us in particular will want a band out with us and it's always good and always different and always interesting. Sometimes, though, it's someone we all love having out like Bela Fleck and the Flecktones. They're all tremendous players but we're also great friends and we all love playing together. So there's a really cool vibe having them out with us because they love to sit in with us and we love to sit in with them so it makes for a fun event. ■

