

WHITE STRIPES • GOLDPLAY • VAN MORRISON

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DAVE MATTHEWS BAND

Back From the Brink,
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HE MUDHOUSE, A CAFE IN CHARLOTTEVILLE, Virginia, that employs the pierced, tattooed and generally bohemian, is not the kind of place where you pay for your mocha with a \$100 bill. To do so would be to invite a sneer that says, "Why not just go to Starbucks, you corporate asshole?" To do so if you're Dave Matthews, whose band got its start fourteen years ago playing gigs at a tiny restaurant a few miles away, would be even more gauche. This is a fact of which Matthews is well aware, and when he opened his wallet on a balmy mid-May morning and saw that the only currency it contained was the Benjamin he'd been given as his per diem a few nights earlier, he panicked. "I had to borrow five dollars from my daughters' nanny," he says in a deep, gravelly monotone. And five dollars barely covered his mocha, which he takes

Get Up, Stand Up

BY JENNY ELISCU



Dave Matthews Band became stadium kings playing good-time party music. Now they're ready to make their party political

Meet the Players

From left: Lesnard (bass), Lessard (bass), Carter (drums), Dave Matthews (guitar) and Boyd Tinsley (violin, mandolin). "I think all the time about how if I had taken a different cab one day," says Matthews, "I could be working in a post office right now."

Photograph by MARTIN SCHOELLER

with four shots of espresso.

Matthews is not just the biggest rock star in America — since 1993, Dave Matthews Band have sold more than 30 million albums and 10 million concert tickets — he is also one of the richest. DMB's new disc, *Stand Up*, sold 460,000 copies its first week, and the group is expected to rake in more than \$40 million during its summer tour, which began June 1st and will roll straight through

currently live in Seattle, where his wife, Ashley, is studying holistic medicine. "I got land, I got a big bathtub, and I travel easy," he says, that last part referring to the private jet he uses from time to time. "But what the money hasn't changed is the fact that we're still determined to kick ass. There's not a lot of bands that can say they've been together fifteen years and working as consistently. We got where we are in a pretty honest way

scrapping sessions he'd done with them in favor of a more slickly produced effort by Glen Ballard called *Everyday*. The album sold well, but DMB superfans were not happy. In 2002, the band revived the Lillywhite sessions with engineer Steve Harris and issued those as *Busted Stuff*.

"There was an underlying apprehensiveness going back into Haunted Hollow," says Bruce Flohr, the A&R man who signed

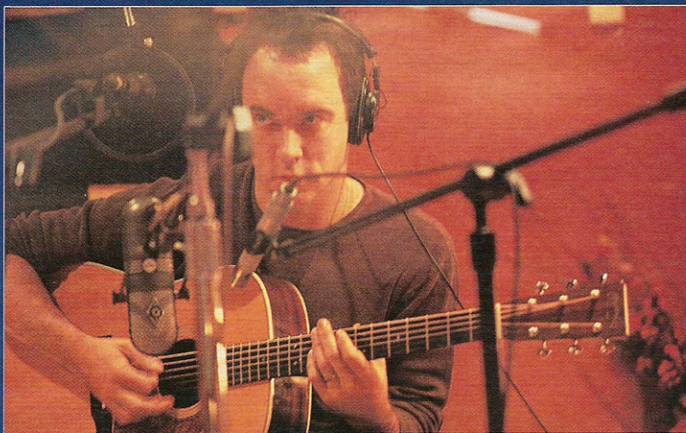
bassist Stefan Lessard, drummer Carter Beauford and saxophonist LeRoi Moore have when they're onstage, weaving rock, jazz, funk, bluegrass and world beat into extended jams that take them places even they never imagined. "I have always seen the Dave Matthews Band as a slammin', hard-hitting rock band," says the Brooklyn-born Batson. "Some people perceive them on record to be smooth, and since I make records that bump and bang, the band felt I might be able to help them capture their vibe. But they also wanted to begin a new era with a new sound. So *Stand Up*, in a funny kind of way, was like approaching a first album — like an introduction to the twenty-first-century Dave Matthews Band."

Often, Batson would have a microphone on and the musicians wouldn't even know it. "I could just be sitting right here and Mark would have the tape going," Tinsley says, reclining in a lounge chair on the studio's second-story deck. "American Baby" began with a simple plucked violin riff by Tinsley. "I definitely wasn't thinking that could be the major hook of a song when I was sitting there playing it," says the forty-five-year-old Charlottesville native.

The experience was in stark contrast to the making of *Everyday*, in which Matthews and Ballard constructed the songs almost entirely on their own before the rest of the group showed up in the studio. "This has opened our eyes that 'Hey, Dave can write songs, but the rest of us can also bring in ideas that will be just as strong, if not stronger,'" says Lessard, 31, who cranked out a grunge-inspired guitar part that became the basis of the ode to oral sex, "Hunger for the Great Light."

Tinsley compares the method to how the group works during sound check, where off-the-cuff jams develop into new song ideas. "If you keep going back, you miss what was cool about an idea initially," he says. "With this band, generally the first reaction is it."

"That's the magic of this band: shooting from the hip," says Matthews. "The lights



Making Stand

Matthews (left) during the recording of *Stand Up*, at the band's studio in Charlottesville, Virginia, Haunted Hollow, in October 2004. Below right: LeRoi Moore, Stefan Lessard and Carter Beauford (from left) at Hollow, which was gutted, rebuilt and customized for DMB before they started recording. Below left: Boyd Tinsley, Lessard, Beauford, Matthews and Moore (from left) in 1994, the year the band made its major-label debut.



"I like baseball, and I like apple pie," says Matthews. "I like jazz, I like rock & roll, and so I love America. I'll fight for it, however unfocused my silly liberal ideas are."

September. Even so, Matthews is loath to flaunt his riches. To buy coffee with a \$100 bill, he says, would be like "making out in a room full of lonely people."

"I have my extravaganzas," he admits the following night, busying his hands by folding and unfolding the corners of a piece of paper. His posture is, as usual, hunched, and his brow, as usual, furrowed, creating two sharp pleats in the middle of his forehead. We are seated in the dining room of Haunted Hollow, the sprawling house — with 140 acres of land and its own lake — that the bandmates have converted into their private recording studio. Everyone in the group has homes in the area — violinist Boyd Tinsley's got two — though Matthews and his family

and built the wall with our own hands."

For their first studio effort in three years (Matthews released a solo album, *Some Devil*, in 2003), DMB knew it was time to shake things up. They gutted their studio, then rebuilt and customized it to state-of-the-art specifications. There were some ghosts lingering in Haunted Hollow following their previous two records: In 2000, after much hand-wringing and months of studio work that went nowhere, they split with longtime producer Steve Lillywhite,

DMB to RCA Records in 1993. "The concern was, 'Is this going to be like the Lillywhite sessions all over again?' Each guy felt there was a challenge on this record to somehow reinvigorate themselves as a band."

The catalyst came in the form of producer Mark Batson, who has worked with Eminem, 50 Cent and India.Arie, among others. "We knew we had to work with someone different this time," says Matthews. "We're a great live band, and we've done good studio albums. We needed to find a way to become a really smoking studio band."

To that end, Batson suggested that each member of the group come into the studio individually. The goal was to capture the instant quality that Matthews, Tinsley,

have to follow our cues, because we're not going to follow their cues. We're not going to stick to a song the way it's supposed to be. Everything is up to us. That's music to me. That's American music. We're an American band."

Though not American by birth, Matthews, 38, became a U.S. citizen as a teenager. He was born in Johannesburg when South Africa was still ruled by an apartheid regime. His family — parents Valerie, a painter and architect, and John, a physicist, as well as his brother, Peter, and sisters Jane and Anne — immigrated to the U.S. when Dave was two years old. (John died of lung cancer when Dave was ten, and Anne passed away under what her brother will

DMB Up Close

Check out behind-the-scenes footage of Dave Matthews Band recording their new album, plus video interviews, at rollingstone.com/davematthewsband

only call "tragic circumstances" in 1993.) The family returned to South Africa in the late Seventies, but Dave came back to America immediately following high school to avoid service in the South African army. Raised in the Quaker faith, Matthews is an ardent believer in nonviolence and was dead set against the military.

That belief informs many of the songs on *Stand Up*, including "Everybody Wake Up,"

about speaking my mind. I'll fight in my way for America. But I won't fight for everyone's America. If someone else says America is a fundamentalist Christian nation that has to spread democracy through force, that's not the America I want to defend. That's somebody else's version. And I will defend America against that sort of idea. It's a troubling time in this country. But I like baseball, and I like apple pie, and I like double-scoop ice

'What about for 500 dollars?' Somehow—and I think it was my fault—the conversation turns to whether a person could conceivably eat her own excrement if the payoff was high enough. "You mean to tell me you'd rather eat your own shit than someone else's?" he asks me, incredulous. When I say yes, he arches one eyebrow and, putting on a fake British accent, he says, "Would you like to go to the Bahamas with me?"

Matthews' ability to switch without warning between the absurdly serious and the seriously absurd is, ultimately, the key to who he is as a songwriter. Barely two hours prior to our talk about dog shit, he had waxed philosophical about God shit. "The idea of a God that's preoccupied with our well-being is totally foreign to me," began his monologue. "I'm more inclined to think that a very miraculous indifference is responsible for most things. I have faith, but I think there's a difference between faith and absolute belief. Faith requires a certain amount of suspended disbelief, whereas absolute belief doesn't really require any faith. If you think God is absolutely there watching you, then why do you need any faith? But I do like the idea of a force that made all the miracles. All the stuff we don't understand that we arrogantly pretend to be in control of, that stuff is where I think my faith is."

He finishes what was left in a mug filled with coffee and Jameson whiskey and continues. "If all of us vanished off the planet," he says, "the profound indifference that the planet would feel, I think, would sicken even the most earnest environmentalist and would blow the head off the most absolute believer. If we're all obliterated, the planet won't give a shit. The stars won't give a crap. The moon won't give a crap. The sun won't give a crap. We matter only to ourselves. That's a good reason to be an environmentalist: I don't want everyone to die. I think people are pretty interesting. I think we're magic. But I certainly don't think we're chosen. I think we're a curious coincidence. That's my biggest inspiration: how happy I am to be a somewhat clever monkey."

Even the good fortunes of his band, he theorizes, reflect little aside from luck, and maybe a bit of synchronicity. "I don't buy the idea of destiny," says Matthews. "I think all

the time about how if I had taken a different cab one day, I could be singing opera or working in a post office right now. It's luck that people like the sounds we make. If I thought a melody was beautiful and other people didn't, I wouldn't be where I am. That said, I'm glad that what I think is beautiful is not too foreign to other people. It makes me think that we have more in common than what separates us."

IT IS CERTAINLY THE BIGGEST THING the members of Dave Matthews Band have in common. Though the aborted Lillywhite sessions and the subsequent recording of *Everyday* may have exacerbated existing tensions within the group, the members all say that their allegiance to the aesthetic sensibility they share has only been strengthened by *Stand Up*. "I think the turning of the page was Dave and Boyd's solo records," says RCA's Flohr. "After *Some Devil*, David felt like he'd gone over to somebody else's house for dinner but he still wanted to come home and eat with his family. I think they all realized that their best work is done among each other."

"In any relationship, there will be times when you become more defensive or take other people for granted," says Matthews, "but at the moment I'm just wallowing in how lucky I am to be with these guys and what a great band it is. I know there will be days when Boyd will want to smash me in the head or Stefan will want to strangle me, or vice versa. But every time the band starts to feel like, 'Argh, I'm choking, I've been wearing these clothes for too long,' something happens to shake us out of it. This record is one of those moments. Whatever, man: Naysayers might think we're mainstream, but this is a weird fuckin' band. The fact that we've managed to convince as many people as we have that what we're doing is valid is interesting because it's a great band, but it's a weird collection of people. No alchemists could have come up with this concoction and think that it could blow up, except for the ones who did. It feels like we're all laughing now—we're all laughing hard."

Contributing editor JENNY ELISCU wrote about *Mötley Crüe's* reunion in RS 974.



Entering the Fray

Matthews with John Edwards and John Kerry last July in New York at the "A Change Is Going to Come" benefit for the candidates. "I always expect the worst and hope for the best," says Matthews. "But when the election went the way it did, I wasn't surprised. If the odds are stacked against you, that's no reason not to fight."

which includes the line "See the man with the bomb in his hand," a not-so-veiled reference to President Bush. Of the album's first single, "American Baby," Matthews says, "The inspiration to that song, in part, is that we shouldn't lose sight of ourselves or of what makes this country great while we're fighting over how to defend it." The title track refers to the necessity to stand up and be counted, and in "You Might Die Trying," he sings, "To change the world, start with one step." To die trying, the song suggests, is better than to have done nothing.

Matthews has long been politically active, but his most concerted step toward changing the world came last fall, when he and the group were among the sixteen artists in the Vote for Change Tour, a twelve-state juggernaut with the goal of helping Sen. John Kerry boot George W. from office: "I thought it was funny that Bush lunched me in as being a 'Hollywood type.' He is so much more Hollywood than I will ever be."

Though 2004 was slated to be the year when Matthews promoted his first solo album, *Some Devil*, he spent most of his energy mobilizing to depose Bush. And then, alas, it was over. "I always expect the worst and hope for the best," he says, speaking slowly and deliberately. "But when the election went the way it did, I wasn't surprised. If the odds are stacked against you, that's no reason not to fight. Because you still stood up."

"I'm very much in love with this country," he continues. "I certainly consider myself liberal, which to me just means that I want to embrace the differences between people, as well as the similarities, because I think that's what makes us spectacular. America has a lot of bitter past and a lot of suffering in a short period of time. It's got a lot of young ghosts and still-open wounds, but there's a magic in America that I love, and that's one of the reasons I feel so strongly

cream. I like jazz, I like rock & roll, and so I love America. I'll fight for it, however unfocused my silly liberal ideas are."

Matthews isn't always so deliberative. On our third night together, we head to the Blue Light Grill, a Charlottesville sushi restaurant owned by DMB manager Coran Capshaw. After planting ourselves at a booth far in the back of the joint, Matthews orders a pint of beer and a shot of Patrón Silver tequila. As the liquor flows, so too does Matthews' stream of consciousness, which takes him from venting his contempt for the *Psycho* remake to his theory on how you're supposed to look at somebody with a lazy eye. "You have to switch back and forth between both eyes," he says. "Otherwise they'll know you're freaked out." A couple more beers and shots, and we find ourselves fixated on the scatological. "When I was a kid," he says, "I used to ask my mother, 'Would you eat dog shit for a hundred dollars?' And she would say, 'David, I will not do anything stupid for money.' So I'd say,

CLASSIC MATTHEWS TRACKS

"JIMI THING" from Dave Matthews and Tim Reynolds' *Live at Luther College* (1999) - Matthews and collaborator Reynolds tackle this DMB standby on twin acoustic guitars, stripping this tale of a mellow drug trip down to its bare essentials. Despite the obvious Hendrix references in the song, Matthews fans have speculated that the "Jimi Thing" referred to in the title is a condom. KEY LYRICS "Smoke my mind/Make me feel better for a small time."

"TWO STEP" from *Crash* (1996) - An uptempo tale of lovers full of haunting Biblical allusions, "Two Step" has been part of Matthews' set list since the band's days on the Virginia club circuit. KEY LYRICS "You come to me like wine comes

to this mouth/Grown tired of water all the time/You quench my heart and mind."

"THE BEST OF WHAT'S AROUND" from *Under the Table and Dreaming* (1994) - Matthews advises a distressed friend to enjoy the simple things in life in his distinct sleepy drawl. KEY LYRICS "If you hold on tight/To what you think is your thing/You may find you're missing all the rest."

"CRASH" from *Crash* (1996) - Remarkably, the arrangement to this huge Top Forty hit isn't so different from the dreamy, melancholic music DMB had been writing for years. The big difference was the blatantly sexy lyrics, which made this a date-rock classic - despite the fact that the relationship

in the song seems to exist entirely in the singer's mind. KEY LYRICS "Hike up your skirt a little more/And show your world to me."

"CRUSH" from *Before These Crowded Streets* (1998) - One of the most intimate looks into Matthews' private life, this jazzy tribute to his wife, Ashley, is both sweet and impossibly catchy. KEY LYRICS "Lovely lady, let me drink you, please/I won't spill a drop."

"WAREHOUSE" from *Under the Table and Dreaming* (1994) - The ultimate extended DMB workout; this fan favorite is seven minutes on record and always much longer in concert. KEY LYRICS "Shut up I'm thinking/I had a clue now it's gone forever."