

THE MUSICIAN'S TEXTBOOK

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intune

MONTHLY

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COVER
A SONG

How **Dave Matthews**
Became the Sultan of Summer

THE
groove
ESSENTIALS

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ON WHAT MAKES A HIT

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COVER: COURTESY DAVE MATTHEWS BAND
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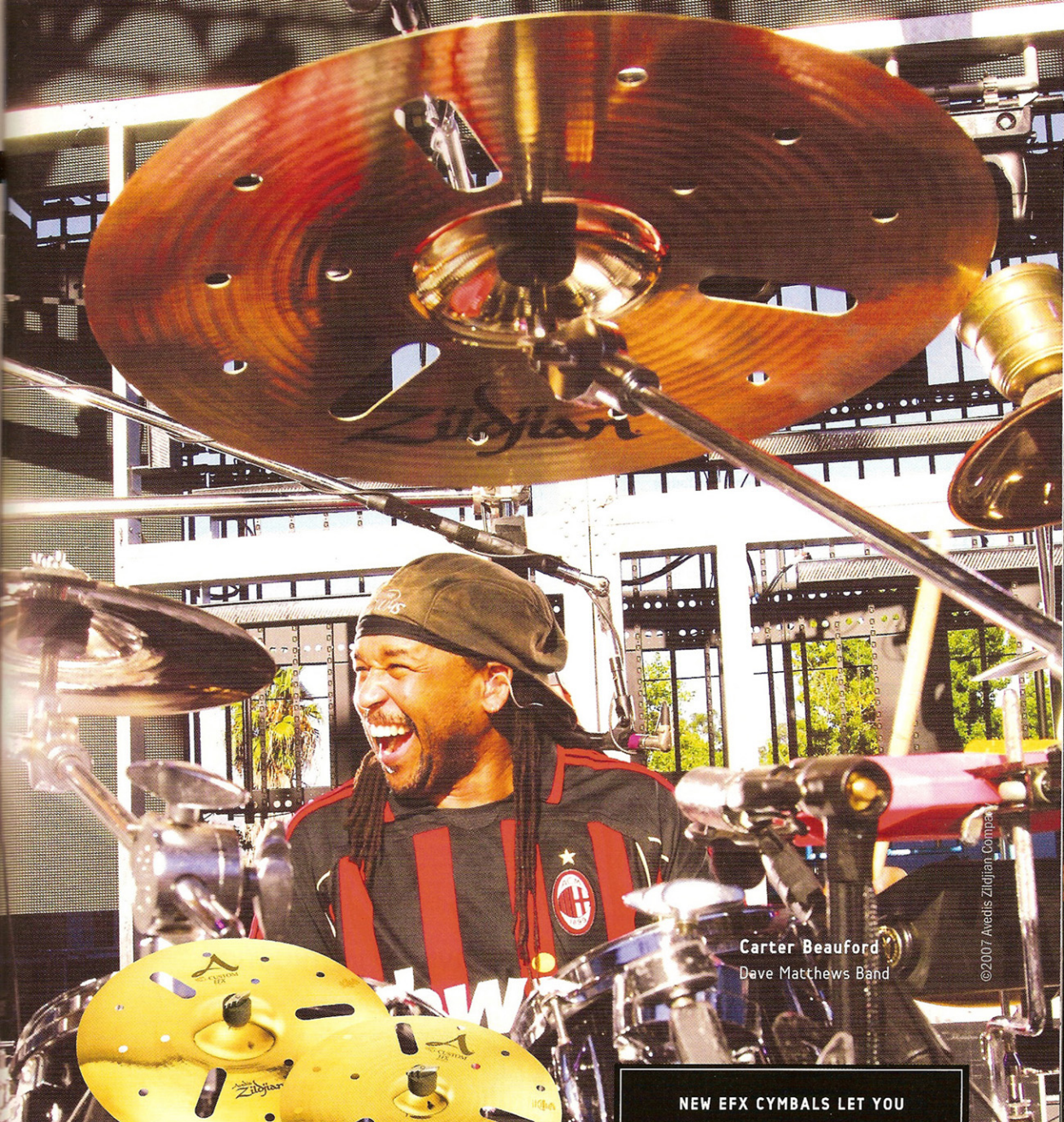
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G1 Special Insert: The Gig

The Gig features stories from Washington, D.C.'s National Music Center and Museum, created by a team of student reporters and editors. In this issue: The Roots of Rhythm, summer programs and more! Turn to page 30 to check it out.



Carter Beauford
Dave Matthews Band

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Dave Matthews didn't set out to be a superstar. But by recruiting an unusually diverse roster of crack musicians he created a unique sound that has garnered consistent fan support and even won over radio.



PHOTOS: LEFT, © RICK DIAMOND/WIREIMAGE.COM; RIGHT, © DANNY CLINCH

If it's
Summer
it must be

Dave

By Bob Gulla

They feature a **frontline** of a saxophone, a violin, and an acoustic guitar. They've got a quirky leader who isn't exactly "leading man" material. The members of the band range in age from thirty-something to 50. In concert, they are skilled improvisers. They jam with gusto on songs that boast intricate arrangements. By all rights, the work of the Dave Matthews Band should have "acquired taste" scribbled all over it.

But since debuting in 1993 with the live *Remember Two Things*, the quintet has sold over 35 million records in the U.S. alone. Not only that, their songs—OK, let's call them "singles"—have found a comfortable home on FM radio, something no jam-oriented band (save perhaps the Allman Brothers) in pop history has been able to do. Not the wacky Phish, not the tie-dye happy Grateful Dead (until classic rock radio), not the hook-friendly Spin Doctors (much) or Blues Traveler (much).... None

has experienced the kind of consistent and enduring reception by radio programmers and the music-buying public that Dave and the Band have enjoyed. They're still filling large venues and operating as true troubadours at the highest level of the popular music business.



DMB Personnel

Why? There are many instrumentally intense bands on the jam circuit that would remove an eyeball with a fork to get the same treatment from radio that Dave Matthews has received. Some have said that DMB succeeded because they *didn't* try. So many bands make overt attempts at gaining radio play by writing and recording music that comes not from their hearts, but from their heads. And their heads are hearing their songs on the radio.

"We certainly didn't set off to be a huge pop band," Matthews admits, "and it's nothing any of us could have anticipated. We all just knew that this band was unlike anything any of us had ever played in."

1. Dave Matthews | Vocals/Guitar, 40 Born in Johannesburg, South Africa, Matthews split his childhood between the United States and his native country. After finishing high school in South Africa, he moved to Charlottesville, Va., where he started the Dave Matthews Band in 1990 when he was 23.

2. Stefan "Fonz" Kahil Lessard | Bass, 33 DMB's youngest member, Lessard was just 16 when Matthews asked him to play in his band. At the time, he was also the only member playing an electric instrument! Lessard plays a variety of bass guitars, including six-string and upright bass, and he's been known to play piano, organ and Dobro as well. He's currently working on an undisclosed side project.

3. Boyd Tinsley | Violin, 43 Tinsley learned violin by accident. He wanted to study guitar in middle school, but he mistakenly signed up for "stringed instruments." As a teenager he helped found the Charlottesville-Albemarle Youth Orchestra. In the early 1990s, he formed the Boyd Tinsley Band, which lasted only a couple years. In 1991, he was asked by Matthews to play a song, "Tripping Billies," for a demo tape. In 2003, Tinsley released a solo album, *True Reflections*, featuring the title track he wrote over a decade earlier.

4. Carter Beauford | Drums, 50 Insisting that he decided on becoming a drummer at the age of 3, Beauford has lived behind his kit as far back as he can recall. He played his first pro gig at age 9. As a teenager, he played in Secrets, a Richmond-based band that also counted LeRoi Moore in its ranks. Secrets performed throughout Virginia, often at Miller's, the Charlottesville club where Matthews tended bar. Beauford also played with Moore in Blue Indigo, a jazz band, and has played on side projects with such artists as Carlos Santana, bass virtuoso Victor Wooten, and the band Vertical Horizon.

5. LeRoi Moore | Saxophone, 45 A jazz musician by trade, Moore also plays bass, baritone, tenor, alto, and soprano saxes, along with the flute, bass clarinet and pennywhistle. On the side, Moore has appeared on Code Magenta's self-titled album and on Soko's album, *In November Sunlight*.

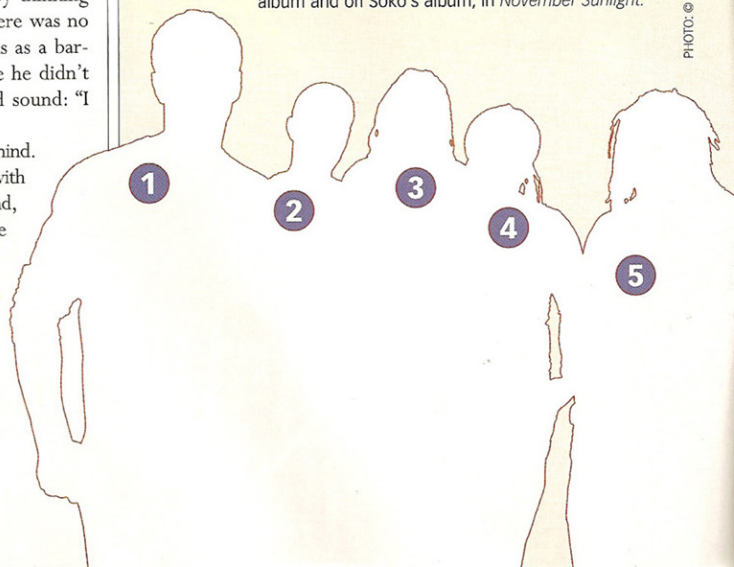


At first, Matthews assembled the band as an all-star group of Charlottesville, Virginia-area musicians he thought would be great to jam with. "I never thought they'd join my band," he admits. Saxophonist Leroi Moore and drummer Carter Beauford, both jazz players of local renown, didn't have rock experience at all. But that didn't prevent Matthews from inviting them to jam with his band. It was their musicianship that attracted him.

Over the course of a career that now spans more than 15 years, Matthews managed to become a huge star by thinking outside the box. He says this started back when there was no box at all. He wrote songs between pouring drinks as a bartender and didn't write in a specific genre because he didn't have a band. He had no idea how his songs would sound: "I didn't know who'd be playing my music," he says.

He went into the band experience with an open mind. Before jumping into a musical style, he waited to see with whom he'd be playing. When he finally assembled the band, he allowed its sound to develop organically at the able hands of the musicians he admired and chose.

Matthews's attitude of "let's just play and see what happens" suited the musicians and their personalities. Little by little a sound took shape, and then an attitude, and finally, a style: acoustic rock that folded folk, jazz, and African influences into the mix like eggs into cake batter. But it wasn't the kind of style—with its sophistication and jazz-pop orientation—that you'd naturally hear on the radio.



BUILDING A FOLLOWING

Over the years, that changed. Radio opened up to a new generation of artists just as DMB was building a following. The band, touring constantly, established a loyal fan base, one that wanted to see them not just once, but *every* time they played a venue. Part of that was because, as improvisational musicians, they sounded a little different each night. They began selling concert tickets by the thousands and they made albums like *Under the Table and Dreaming* and *Crash* that satisfied their fan base and sold in the millions. Their appeal couldn't be denied, and so, despite a sound that can only be considered "unusual" for radio, programmers began wedging songs like "What Would You Say," "Don't Drink the Water," "Crush," and "American Baby" into their playlists. Listeners responded with enthusiasm and the Dave Matthews Band achieved accidental superstardom.

"I think people are a little more intellectual about their music today than they used to be," says Matthews, taking little credit for his band's evolution.

Most jam bands don't sell large quantities of records because their fans—more interested in the unpredictable concert experience than a studio recording—would rather listen to them live than listen to highly produced and sometimes "sterile" studio projects. In fact, the most difficult part about being in a jam band, and the inherent conflict within most skilled instrumental bands, is that the fans who go to a band's concerts don't necessarily appreciate their studio efforts. At the same time, fans who first discover a band on the radio may not want to hear their favorite radio hit extended into a 20-minute free-for-all.

Nevertheless, DMB and some other acts—like Phish, moe, and Umphrey's McGee—are able to divide their efforts. In the studio, they work out tight, accessible songs with focus and precision. Live, they chuck that precision out the window and see where the wind takes them.

"Our albums capture some of the elements of our live act, but not all of them," says Matthews. "Our records attempt to be clear, simple. Not as busy as the band is in concert."



In the studio, the band applies certain live principles to help it communicate musically. The members remain in one place to record the basic tracks, playing together in a circle where they can all see each other. It's the technique employed often among jazz and bluegrass musicians. Matthews feels the concept gives the experience a certain live "spirit."

"It's what we did when we first started out," he says. "We're all in a room together. There's a spontaneous input, which is what we get when we play live."

That spontaneity may be the single common denominator between the band's studio recordings and its live gigs. "With great musicians like the guys in my band," says Matthews, "everything just flows. They don't think like most other musicians, like 'I've got to remember the next fill,' or 'how does that run go?' The spontaneity comes naturally. I'm blown away by them all the time."

That spontaneity also results in fresh ideas. Matthews' band generates a sound that is both familiar and fresh at the same time. When DMB released "Don't Drink the Water" to radio, it's safe to say that commercial FM radio had never heard anything like it. And they played it. The hooks were accessible, the performance inventive and, importantly, you could understand Matthews' lyrics. "I wanted people to hear and understand my lyrics so they could, if they wanted to, write their own, so they could play music and sing songs in their own lives. I wanted to bring them my music in hopes that they could make music of their own."

Matthews's songs were the hooks that made the world take notice of this unlikely collection of musicians from the South. But the longevity of the act may well boil down to the band's talent as players. At this point, it doesn't matter if the band is cranking out a schedule of new hits. Fans come to listen to the band play, sitting back and enjoying the skills and the harmony. Especially at this time of year, and for millions of fans all over the world, if it's summer, it must be "Dave." **T**

