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Matthews  
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# Dave Matthews Band

By Pat Lewis



Carter Beauford

Boyd Tinsley

LeRoi Moore

Stefan Lessard

Dave Matthews

It's been a whirlwind nine months for the Dave Matthews Band since the release of their RCA debut, *Under the Table and Dreaming*, which is rapidly approaching double-platinum status. Between a virtually non-stop touring schedule, video shoots, press duties and several television appearances, including *The Late Show With David Letterman* and co-hosting MTV's *Alternative Nation*, the band has hardly had enough time to catch its collective breath, let alone the time to fully digest the success that it has achieved.

"You expect the worst and hope for the best," admits singer/songwriter/guitarist Dave Matthews, who seems uncomfortable talking about the band's mounting prosperity. "I sort of spend my time think-

ing about other things—like where I'm playing or where I have to be next, more than how many albums we're selling."

Sometimes sounding more like a student of an ancient Chinese religion than a 28-year-old musician weaned on Led Zeppelin, the Beatles and Frank Zappa, Dave Matthews is humbled by the band's widespread appeal. "I sang a little song, and someone said, 'That's nice,'" says Matthews. "And then I sang another song and a couple of people said, 'That's nice.' And then I sang a song and twenty people said it, then 200 people and so on."

While the Dave Matthews Band—which also includes reedman LeRoi Moore, violinist Boyd Tinsley, bassist Stefan Lessard and drummer Carter Beauford—may seem

like an overnight success, the members have worked long and hard to get where they are today.

The band began to take shape back in 1991 while Matthews was still tending bar at a live music club in Charlottesville, Virginia. From his vantage point behind the bar and in between pouring Martinis and Bloody Marys, Matthews caught glimpses of his future bandmates as they performed in various local outfits. "LeRoi was playing in about four bands, and Carter was in about five," recalls the leader of the band. "Boyd was in a couple of bands, and Stefan was in high school and also in a band."

One by one, Matthews invited the various musicians to get together and jam. And

# MUCH LIKE FELLOW ROCKERS HOOTIE & THE BLOWFISH, THIS ALL-AMERICAN RCA QUINTET HAS ACHIEVED SUCCESS THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY—THROUGH HARD WORK AND INDEPENDENT BUSINESS SMARTS

even though they came from different backgrounds—both musically and culturally and were of disparate age groups to boot—they seemed to form a mystical, magical bond almost immediately.

With Matthews' visionary-in-training personality and a pair of eyes that seem to see straight through to the soul, it's not hard to understand why Moore, Tinsley, Lessard and Beauford forsook their other musical endeavors, as well as lucrative studio work in several cases, to concentrate solely on the Dave Matthews Band. Of course, it didn't hurt that Matthews had a pocketful of stop-you-dead-in-your-tracks, eclectic (Cajun, blues, R&B, classical, rock, etc.), acoustic guitar-based songs and a startling, soulful voice that perfectly complimented them.

Furthermore, he not only welcomed the other's input regarding song arrangements, etc., but he wanted the songs to actually reflect a combination of the five members' personalities. He never considered himself a leader, but rather, only a member of a creative team. And after all, to every rock & roll relationship has to be volatile and explosive to be rewarding.

Following a year of regional touring, Dave and crew had amassed an avid following that began in the southeast and quickly spread to the East Coast. Even states such as Colorado were ignited by the Matthews fever. And much like the fans of the Grateful Dead, Dave Matthews' fans were also notorious for bootlegging and swapping live concert tapes. Capitalizing on that enthusiasm, the band began designing and selling merchandise (hats, T-shirts, stickers, posters, etc.), which has become a booming business for the quintet.

But the one thing that the fans demanded during those early days, and the band hadn't yet delivered, was an official Dave Matthews Band album.

Not wanting to disappoint clamoring fans, the band self-released a CD in the fall of 1993 entitled *Remember Two Things*, a collection of ten tracks recorded live during various club dates in and around their hometown. The CD sold briskly via their mailing list, live shows and mom-and-pop record stores (it has sold in the neighborhood of 225,000 copies). They also released a five-song EP, *Recently* (which is still only available through mail order).

And you can bet the farm that the music industry was keeping a watchful eye on things as they developed in the Dave Matthews camp, even though Virginia has never been known as a hotbed for up-and-coming talent. Actually, the industry had been milling around for some time prior to the release of *Remember Two Things*.

But the band, in its typical laid-back

manner, took its time in making the move to the major label lifestyle. After all, they had successfully traveled the independent, grass-roots route for several years. They had their own touring, merchandising and record companies, as well as solid relationships with distributors. And as Matthews divulges, when the band had first formed, he sent demo tapes to several record labels and received no encouragement whatsoever. So he was somewhat reluctant to give in now.

"We just made ourselves something that the record industry wanted, as opposed to allowing them to be something that we wanted," confesses Matthews. "We never really made getting a record deal a focus. And even when we did have quite a few

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—Dave Matthews

record companies approaching us, we still were in no hurry to go over."

But the allure of a major label deal finally won them over, and within a few months after the release of *Remember Two Things*, they signed with RCA, one of the first record companies on their trail with more than a let's-see-what-the-other-guys-are-gonna-do attitude.

Following an endless parade of chauffeured limousines, lunches, meetings, contracts and lawyers, lawyers and more lawyers, it was now time to focus attention away from signing the band and onto getting them into the studio. But first, Matthews and his mates had to settle upon a producer. "We're five very different personalities," explains Matthews, "and the fact that we get along with each other and find it possible to work together is because of some lucky fate—that people from such different universes can find such a positive

common ground. And so, really, the focus in finding a producer was to find someone who could come in and not become a liability."

After meeting with a number of candidates, the band chose Steve Lillywhite (U2, Talking Heads, Rolling Stones) to helm their RCA debut, *Under the Table and Dreaming*. "He was just the one who struck a chord with us," says Matthews. "The fact that he said he didn't want to change anything, he liked the way [*Remember Two Things*] sounded and he wanted to make it sound clearer—that's why we went with him. His heart seemed to be in the right place, and he was also very humble. And we got along with him very well."

For the next two months, the band was holed up at Bearsville Studios in Bearsville, New York. "We chose Bearsville because it's pretty and it's out-of-the-way," admits Matthews, "and it's not in the city, because that would've been a distraction."

Other than entering the studio with the desire to record an album that had better fidelity than *Remember Two Things*, Matthews had no other specific sound, concept or approach in mind. Most of the songs had been written prior to entering the studio, and several, including "Ants Marching" and "Satellite," had been previously recorded. "We didn't say, 'Okay, we want it to sound like this or that,'" explains Matthews. "We went in and set up the microphones and said, 'Okay, what are we going to play now?' 'Okay, let's record that.' And then we'd record that. I mean, the process was from nothing to something, as opposed to going in having mapped out the next two months exactly how we're going to go about it. Which, for me, is a very healthy, creative process. If you leave it open, then you leave the possibility for miracles to happen, too."

The resulting album, *Under the Table and Dreaming*, met, and for that matter, exceeded Matthews' expectations. "Yeah," he confirms. "I was really happy with it. If it had sold ten copies, I would've been happy with it just because it's so good."

Since its release in the fall of 1994, *Under the Table and Dreaming* has been embraced by radio programmers across the country. Interestingly, it has managed to transcend the limited formats of many radio stations. Perhaps it's the band's eclectic nature that makes it so appealing to such a widely disparate audience. Or maybe it has something to do with Matthews' intelligent lyrics, which cut to the core of the human experience and describe in colorful language the types of common experiences that we all share.

"Ants Marching," for example, describes the frustration of our hum-drum, day-to-

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day existence and how we are chained to that repetitive existence by invisible handcuffs that we seem to begrudgingly wear like a badge of honor. The sultry "Satellite" touches upon our struggles to overcome our addictive natures—whether that addiction is love, food, alcohol, drugs, etc.—and how, if we don't get a grip on that addiction, it will probably kill us.

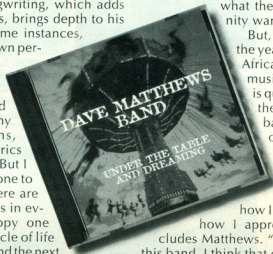
Matthews adopts a sort of yin and yang approach to his songwriting, which adds irony to the plot lines, brings depth to his characters and in some instances, actually hints at his own personal sense of spirituality. "I try and find things that I'm comfortable with and things that are from my heart," he explains, when asked if his lyrics mirror his own life. "But I don't try and imitate one to the next, because there are a lot of contradictions in everybody. We're happy one moment and the miracle of life is overwhelming us, and the next moment we're obsessed by the darkness and blackness of our temporary existence or whatever it is. So, I try and write from whatever space the words come and I try to include those opposites, because, as far as I can see, there are two sides to things."

A good deal of who Dave Matthews is and how he views the world can be culled

from his intriguing lyrics. And perhaps the fact that he spent his formative years scuffling between Johannesburg, South Africa (where he was born) and New York state, explains how he came to some of those viewpoints. "I think growing up in different cultures actually had a bigger influence on me than which cultures they were," he admits. "You start to look at different communities and begin to recognize what is real and what is a facade, regardless of what the particular community wants you to see."

But, while he agrees that the years he spent in South Africa have influenced his musical vocabulary, he is quick to point out that the music he and his bandmates create is a collaboration and very American.

"Obviously, that part of my life had a big influence on how I perceive things and how I approach music," concludes Matthews. "But when I think of this band, I think that our sound is a result of the five personalities, much more than just me and the songs that I wrote. And while it may sound a little bit unusual, I think the quirks and the unusual characteristics in the music are still really very much from this part of the world. And I think that's what makes us a particularly American band."



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