

Toby Keith, One Angry American

Rolling Stone

THE MYSTERY
OF
OAK ISLAND
THE QUEST FOR
THE WORLD'S
MOST FAMOUS
TREASURE

The
Devil
and
Dave
Matthews

The
House
of Bush:
A Secret
History



*"All the news
THAT FITS"*



Matthews: "I'm
as regular as
Mao Tse-tung."

EVERYONE'S TALKING ABOUT...

Dave Matthews

He always seemed like such a jaunty figure up there, power-strumming his acoustic guitar and dancing around in his bare feet. Who would have guessed he's so obsessed with death? Walk the crowded streets of Seattle with the newly solo artist as he expounds on the clarity provided by a really bad car accident, his penchant for inserting nursery rhymes in his songs and his hatred of George W. Bush. And, oh, yeah, the next Dave Matthews Band album.

GET THE
WHOLE
STORY
ON PAGE

50



"I'm a happy drunk.
Joyful. Loud and
probably irritating."

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARTIN SCHOELLER



THE DEVIL IN DAVE MATTHEWS

He drinks, he curses and he thinks he can run the country better than George W. Bush. As he mounts a tour behind his first solo album, *Some Devil*, Matthews settles down to explain why death is on his mind so much



BY AUSTIN SCAGGS

"THAT'S RIGHT, KITTY. YOU'RE BEAUTIFUL, BUT I'M NOT GOING TO TOUCH YOU. I don't know where you've been, and I hope you're not related to the devil." These days it's hard for Dave Matthews to trust anything, not even a small black cat desperate for attention. He doesn't need any more bad luck. "Trouble, get behind me now," he sings on his solo debut, *Some Devil*. "Trouble, let me be." He acknowledges that his best album with Dave Matthews Band is five years behind him and says no God gives a shit about him and that suicide crosses his mind more often than you may think. "I've been in situations where I haven't been able to see how I'll get by," he says. But Matthews also says he has a "pretty solid sense of joy." He is happily married, his two-year-old twin girls, Grace and Stella, worship him, and, as he puts it, he makes "an exorbitant living," estimated to be north of \$20 million annually. In order to stay out of a lunatic asylum, Matthews has resolved to distract himself with projects, big and small. There's the solo album, which expands on Matthews' constant themes of loss, death and love; a craft project that involves designing and hand-painting a deck of cards; a president he vows to remove from the White

House; the winery he operates on his Virginia estate; and ATO Records, the label he oversees (David Gray, Ben Kweller, My Morning Jacket and five others are signed to ATO). "I want to, as desperately and joyfully as possible, fill my life with unusual experiences — make my life full of challenges and accept them," he says. "Change is like a vacation." What's taking over his fantasies at the moment is the thought of writing the next DMB album at the band's brand-new studio complex in Charlottesville, Virginia. "It's, like, my crazed ambition."

In Thibodaux, Louisiana, a bayou town fifty miles southwest of New Orleans, Matthews, who will turn thirty-seven on January 9th, has diverted his short attention span to acting. Sporting a full beard, he's on the set of *Because of Winn-Dixie*, directed by Wayne Wang. Matthews plays an ex-con drifter

who arrives in Naomi, Florida, and settles in as the owner of a pet shop, where he imparts his wisdom to a young girl. He'll also contribute new songs to the soundtrack. "I always said that if I ever do a part in a movie, I would refuse to play music," he says. "But I realized that this is the perfect part for me." His character, Otis, has trouble stringing thoughts together without a guitar in his hand.





Live in New York with Phish's Trey Anastasio, who contributed to the *Some Devil* sessions

The day after the movie wraps, Matthews races back to his home in Seattle—where the family is living while his wife, Ashley, studies holistic medicine—to begin rehearsals for a tour supporting *Some Devil*. The beard is gone. In the kitchen of Studio Litho, where he spent seven months recording the album, Matthews welcomes guitarists Trey Anastasio and Tim Reynolds. They spend the afternoon listening to potential covers, playing along to Little Feat's "Spanish Moon" and the Band's "Up on Cripple Creek."

"This song is eerily appropriate," says Anastasio, as Paul Simon's "American Tune" blares through the monitors.

Matthews begins singing along: "And I dreamed I was dying." Two creases form between his closed eyes, and a large glass of Scotch and a cigarette are nestled in his right hand. "And I dreamed that my soul rose unexpectedly/And, looking back down at me, smiled reassuringly."

There's a lot of death on "Some Devil": "Gravedigger" kills off four people in three verses, and in "So Damn Lucky," you describe an elongated moment before a car accident. Does that song stem from a near-death experience?

Well, I've been in a few car wrecks. I think five—one or two serious—before I ever drove a car. I was growing up in South Africa at a time when the youth was reckless, irreverent and excited knowing that the future of the country was uncertain. My circle of friends was very aware that the welcome demise of apartheid was all

but upon us, and that made for a reckless kind of abandon that made for a lot of recreational excess.

Like getting high and driving fast?

Yeah. I never drove. I was always in the car with some maniac. I'm familiar with that feeling of silence that comes with a very imminent catastrophe, when you know you have absolutely no control over a situation. Most recently, I was with my wife in the back seat of a friend's car. It was raining, and there was all this traffic and chaos in Johannesburg. A car came flying past us, through a red light. Then we heard screeching tires, and I looked behind us to see another car piloting toward us. I remember thinking, "I should tell everyone in the car that we're about to get smashed." Then, *bam!* It couldn't have been more than a second or two, but there was so much time to look around. Maybe when all responsibility for anything is taken out of our hands, then suddenly we have a lot of time to bear witness. So I thought [for "So Damn Lucky"] it was funny to make that analogy with your life spinning out of control.

How do you feel your songwriting on "Some Devil" stacks up against your work with DMB?

Some Devil has a clarity. The lyrics are more complete than any album I've done before. A lot of times I get in this corner where I say, "Now I've got to finish these lyrics." That wasn't the case with *Some Devil*.

"Gravedigger" is about slavery, a mother losing her children in World War II and the death of an eight-year-old. How did a gloomy song like that become the first single?

The songs I was most drawn to—"Gravedigger" and "Some Devil"—were the ones that would be the least likely to fit the mood of radio nowadays. And people were like, "What do we do? Christ. Put the one with some drum beats on it." But I'm glad. It's a lonely song that dwells on the topics

we're more inclined to escape. One radio station said it didn't want to play the song anymore because a woman had phoned in saying it made her cry. I was like, "Oh, thank you. I succeeded." If I induced vomiting—that would be different.

You include a bit of "Ring Around the Rosie" in "Gravedigger." This is not the first time you've incorporated a children's song in your music. What's the attraction?

Kids come up with really great songs. I didn't know what to do for a bridge in that song, and I hadn't used that nursery rhyme before [laughs]. I believe "Ring Around the Rosie" was something that kids would sing during the plague. It's the classic of classics about dying. Nowadays, can you imagine what kids in Sierra Leone or Baghdad are doing? Probably picking up pieces of buildings or body parts and dancing around with them. Just like singing songs when everyone in your European town is dropping dead.

How will you approach the next Dave Matthews Band album?

So much of the writing on *Some Devil* was done by me—or [producer] Steve Harris and me—playing a click track and getting ideas down, building songs piece by piece, taking things apart and rearranging things on the computer. It's something I'd like to get into with the band: all of our heads facing the same task at the same time. We did that with *Before These Crowded Streets*, which I think is our best album. It had a lot of surprises.

Is that your game plan, or the band's game plan?

"PEOPLE THINK, 'HE'S BORING.' BUT IT'S SO WEIRD TO LIVE IN HERE. I'M AS REGULAR AS MAO TSE-TUNG!"

I think it would become everyone's idea [smiles]. This summer was the best tour we've ever had. The music was so on. Carter [drummer Beauford] was driving like a maniac, and everyone else rose to the occasion. This next record, we'll build around Carter. When you have such a strong hand in the rhythm section, then you can be a little more aggressive and experimental.

DMB uses a microphone system that allows you guys to communicate with one another onstage. What do you talk about during shows?

We talk about rude shit. Just bad humor.

Do you talk about girls in the audience?

Yeah. Sometimes we're kind of brutal. We might just laugh at someone who can't dance, the size of breasts. We talk shit about each other. I spend a lot of time asking Carter how much I suck.

Speaking of touring, Clear Channel has monopolized airwaves and venues across the country. Ticket and parking fees have gone

through the roof. Do your fans complain about that?

We're not going to exclusively tour with Clear Channel. We may work with them because in some markets it's hard not to. They often approach us to tour exclusively with them, and that's absurd. We certainly keep a healthy distance. Like, "We'll give a show or two at the new amphitheater in Seattle, and we'll do a show or two at the Gorge—because you don't own that one." Just to say, "Well, fuck you."

You have a pretty dirty mouth...

I'm trying not to do that anymore, because my girls are gonna start cursing pretty soon.

Yet you rarely, if ever, swear in your songs.

I was thinking the other day if I could write a nice song about the word fuck. It's such a great word, and such an ancient word. Ryan Adams and Liz Phair are good at putting fuck into songs. It's so beautiful and conversational. You need a certain kind of confidence. I don't think I have the cool.

You've got such a massive fan base. But you rub a lot of people the wrong way. Why do you think that is?

Success turns a lot of people off. I have a pretty solid sense of joy and respect that irritates people, and can irritate me, too. You can't please everyone, although I'd probably like to, which makes people hate me, as well. I'm a fairly tormented artist, and I'm less willing to indulge myself in self-pity, outside of songwriting. I don't think I've got it hard at all, so I keep my

more unusual qualities to myself. That, and a strong, strong effort to be warm to strangers, is often misconstrued as me being a regular Joe. People think, "Well, he's just fucking boring." But I'm not boring. It's so fucking weird to live in here! God! I'm about as fucking regular as Mao Tse-tung!

You met your wife at a Halloween party in college. What costumes were you wearing?

She was just freaky. She was a pretty nutty girl in college. That's the first time she saw me. I never dress up for Hal-



Matthews on the set of *Because of Winn-Dixie*

DIG FOR MORE DAVE

Matthews talks about acting, his winery and the future of DMB in exclusive interview outtakes at rollingstone.com/davematthews

loween, but this night I shaved my head, painted it yellow, put on a lot of eye makeup and wore a leather jacket and blue jeans. My whole torso was painted white. I definitely looked very sick. My wife saw me then and told me she thought I was gay. She thought I was cute.

So it was love at first sight.

Not for her, but for me.

What's it like watching your twin girls grow up?

They're hysterical to watch — how much fun they're having, how they're turning into people and how much they love sugar and avocados. I worry that I'm screwing up all the time. But as long as I love them, it'll be OK. My kids are what gives me the urgency to say what I think about the world.

In 1996 you opened a string of European dates for Bob Dylan and ended up performing with him. What did you learn from him?

He was really gracious. I'd heard so

"I'D DRINK WITH BUSH JUST TO GET HIM OUT OF THE WHITE HOUSE. HE AND CHENEY ARE IDIOTS."

many horror stories about him, and I'm sure some of them are true, but like great men before, I don't think there's any reason he should be preoccupied with treating people swell. He couldn't have been nicer. We played "Rainy Day Women" and "Maggie's Farm," and it was just an amazing experience. I grew up on him. I have this great photograph of us onstage, but I can't put it up in my house because I'm wearing the worst pants that any man has ever worn in the history of all time.

Plaid pants? I've seen some pictures...

Yeah, I went through an awful stage with plaid. It was my intention to be counterfashion, but I became obsessed by it. I saw a lawyer of mine walking down the hallway in plaid pants, then I said to myself, "Aw, what am I doing? I hate myself."

Death is often a major focal point of your songwriting, partly because so many people

close to you — your father, your sister, childhood friends — have had untimely deaths.

I find it much more surprising that death is not part of the conversation at all. I guess as a culture we've grown to admire youth and the naive wonder of youth as somehow better than the wrinkles and wisdom that come with age, and that somehow there's a fault in accepting mortality. That is fucking stupid. Not to say that death isn't shocking, but if there wasn't death, life would be fucking useless. We'd be bored to tears. Mortality makes it so much more spectacular. That's the thing we should talk about more than the delusions of grandeur that come along in the afterlife. What an utter waste of time. But I guess it's more comforting if you think there's this Santa Claus in the sky who's waiting to make us happy, or if we haven't been good, he's not going to give us any presents. God has no plan. It's simpler to think that we'll go to heaven or hell when we die. To me, that seems like a way to avoid living.

At what point in your life did you formulate your ideas about death?

If anything, I think of the times I contemplated suicide.

When was that?

It comes and goes. I don't know that it will ever end. When things inside your head get kind of crazy, and you go, "OK, let's go through the list of options." And suicide was one of them. I've never indulged in it where I was sitting, snort pouring out of my nose, tears pouring down my face, saying, "This is it. Fuck it. I'm gone."

What's the closest you ever came?

Just thinking about ways, which I don't think is uncommon. But I've had a few doctors tell me that it's not necessarily that common.

Did you come up with a method?

The idea of throwing yourself off a bridge, but I'm afraid of heights. I thought about a gunshot, but it's so violent and

messy. Gassing oneself is kind of peaceful. When was this?

In my late teens, early twenties. What turned me away was something a friend of mine said, someone I used to wait tables with. Her name was Carter, and she was a wonderful girl. She told me that my death was done the minute I was born. It's the only guarantee, the only thing that you know is gonna happen. What's the point in hastening it? Why not stick around, if for nothing else than for curiosity?

Have you cut back your drinking?

Yeah, and it gives me a little more time. I like to drink, a lot — I think it's a healthy thing to do. But I've got a family, and I've got other things that impress me more than another drink. My kids, for instance. I go in phases. Some points in my life I'll drink a lot, and other points in my life I won't. I may pause, but I don't think I'll ever stop, because forever is a long time.

What kind of drunk are you?

I'm a very happy drunk, generally. Joyful. Loud and probably irritating. Apparently I repeat myself quite a lot.

Who do you usually drink with?

My wife. But I got a couple of friends I like drinking with. My friend Jonathan and I have been drinking together since we were twelve — lemonade, of course. You have those faithful friends who you can make a good bit of progress with on a bottle of alcohol that otherwise might be more of a challenge. There are people who I'd like to settle into a drink with. Not for the sole reason of getting drunk, but for the ritual of lubricating someone's personality. David Sedaris is one of those individuals. When I read his stuff, I'd like to sit down and have a drink with him. I'd drink with George W., but just to get him out of the White House.

Do you ever feel like an outsider in America?

A lot of people feel like outsiders, and we're viewed as outsiders by the government. Or as un-American. But I'm way more American than George Bush and Dick Cheney. They have no fucking idea what it is to be American. They're fucking idiots, programmed to have everything in the hands of the few. They think it's right that them and theirs have everything and everyone else can



"She was freaky in college," Matthews says of Ashley, his wife of three years.

just get by on good, hard work. There's something charming about a simple man in the White House. But that's what is deceiving: He's not a simple man. He represents the tiniest, tiniest percentage. He got here on the shoulders of giants. And I think much of the Christian world feels an obligation to support him, because he claims to be a Christian. I don't see much of a Christian in him. I think there should be a long line of nuns ready to spank the crap out of him.

Do you think you're more capable of running this country than George W.?

Yeah. I'd deal with things a little more delicately. I think I have a much clearer view of the world than he does.

How so?

I understand people a lot better than he does. And I don't want the job — but there's no shortage of people who could run the country better than him. The most important task facing America right now is to get this administration out of power. I think they're a very dangerous bunch, riddled with dangerous minds. There's a very ignorant view in the White House: a thoughtless, fundamentalist, scary view of how to better the world. I'm truly frightened of this administration.

Do you plan to be more politically outspoken in 2004?

My focus is to take them out. Hearing myself say that is sort of depressing. I don't know yet who I want to endorse, but I want minds like [Dennis] Kucinich. I want variety. But we're sort of in this avalanche, and we have to stop falling before we can fix it. The Bush administration has squandered everything, and they don't have a fucking clue.

You were raised a Quaker. What tenets of Quakerism have you held onto?

I think that we're all equally good and, for that reason, equally bad and have the potential for both. Kindness and love and all those things, without exception, are the most important. And I don't care how weak it sounds. If peace doesn't wear a leather coat, if it doesn't have studs or a nice haircut, if it's uncool, I don't care. Fuck it.

Associate editor AUSTIN SCAGGS interviewed Coldplay's Chris Martin in RS 938/939.



At age four, living in New York



Back in South Africa, where he was born, in 1979



Class photo: Thirteen years old in 1990