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INTERVIEW

Dave Matthews

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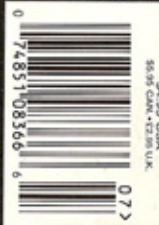
Lessons From
The Masters

How To Buy
An Acoustic

A Gallery Of 12 Rare Beauties

PLUS! ANI DI FRANCO ■ FASTBALL ■ RITCHIE BLACKMORE

JULY 1998



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Hometown

BY BOB GULLA

"It's spring! It's lovely! It's spring!" shouts Dave Matthews out the window of his Subaru, as we cruise around the residential suburb of Charlottesville, Virginia, his hometown. "It's young! It's spring!" His very Keatsian outburst is not so much a jubilant call to the joys of the season as it is a fat-pumping, fat-boy gesture in honor of the skimpier outfits the warm weather brings to the bodies of the many University of Virginia coeds walking around town. "Oh, how I love the spring," Dave sighs again, eyeing one toothsome target walking alone across the campus. "If she would only just come up to me and say, 'Excuse me, Mr. Matthews, I'd very much like to have a private relationship with you for just a couple of hours. You just need to promise me, Mr. Matthews, that you won't tell anyone. Promise me, please, you won't tell your girlfriend. But I need you so—just for a short time.'" He looks back at the road.

"Hello?" Matthews' romantic reverie is suddenly interrupted by the fat, approaching back end of the Honda Prelude stopped in front of us. He reacts quickly, sending us both toward the windshield. No contact is made, no braking, no blood. He shoots me a coy look of relief. "I guess I take that as a sign."

Dave Matthews is Charlottesville, Virginia's first favorite son since Jefferson. But his rural romanticism didn't stop him from unleashing the angry *Before These Crowded Streets*.



If you follow pop music at all, you know the sunshine's been keeping the Dave Matthews Band's career path lit since the early '90s. From their humble, hard-working, heavy-gigging beginnings to their tour dates opening for the Rolling Stones last year (they've since been invited back for eight more dates this summer), Matthews and company have led charmed lives—reveling in the warm receptions of their faithful legions, basking in the refreshing breezes of success, enjoying the sweet smell of a blossoming career, and any other springtime/career cliché you can think of. And, well, let's just say the chance is good that the bloom will stay on

the rose long after *Before These Crowded Streets*, the band's new album, hits record stores.

Produced by faithful collaborator Steve Lillywhite—who also helmed the band's previous two records—the set reaches deeper into the collective's personality to come up with an artist's palette of colorful, percussive jazz pop. This time, Matthews and company lunge at their material with the same teeth-gnashing gusto they bring to their gigs. It's a surprising new studio sound, one that'll likely gain the band that most elusive grail of trophies: musical credibility. Perhaps.

Whonk, whonk! As we drive on, a fire

engine happens by, disrupting the stillness. *Whonk!* Matthews pulls over.

"Twenty rock concerts don't do that to my ears," he says, cringing. "I can understand that kind of warning in New York City, but this is Charlottesville. There's no machinery loud enough to warrant the horn on that truck. They should just have a guy out front saying, 'Excuse me, would you people please step aside?'"

The name of Matthews' band's new recording may or may not have to do with the newly bustling streets of Charlottesville—an overcrowding attributed to university expansion, bad zoning, and colonial cowpath streets. Though Matthews zigzags around sidestreets with the fluency of a cab driver, each direction he turns is busy with Saturday traffic and crosswalks full of co-eds. Dave sneezes. "Ah, I've got this post-quitting cold," he says referring to his having quit cigarettes for the band's upcoming tour.

"I have the lung capacity of an asthmatic 60-year-old. I just can't blow hard into those pipes the doctors make you blow into. It's like trying to knock one of those bell things with a hammer at a fair. Everyone else hits it and it goes *DINGGG!* I hit it and it goes *doink*. I've never been one for strength."

Our driving route on the way to the Matthews' homestead outside of Charlottesville takes a turn into the countryside—Virginia horse country where narrow, often dirt roads are lined by ancient, dewy forests, glorious, undulating pastures, and bucolic, TV-fantasy expanses. We pass the entrance to Monticello, the hallowed homestead of our third president and another local hero (Thomas Jefferson), who also happened to be the guy responsible for establishing the

University of Virginia. Because it's spring, the cherry blossoms and rhododendrons beckon with new blossoms and the groves of oaks show their first verdant signs of life. The air smells fresh and clean, seasonal enough to enjoy the warmth but not notice the heat.

A dog jets out in front of the car. Dave veers only slightly as if to see the mutt coming. "Dang dawg's always there," he says in a hillbilly accent. "You know he ain't gonna kill himself, that dawg. He just doin' his jawb." He adjusts his voice back to normal. "I wonder about that dog's universe," he says. "He thinks the cars coming past his house are going to attack him or attack his house and the only way he can stop that attack is by chasing them

Dave's Split-Signal Personality

away, by scaring them. That's his only purpose. Right now his adrenaline's pumping! He brings the hillbilly back. "Yep, that there takes care of another one."

A few more hairpin turns and a couple of long dirt-road miles and we reach his home—a fantastic, bulky brick edifice perched on the bank of a swollen river. "Used to be an old wheat mill," he says, looking up at the place, "built in the 1700s." The sound of birds and whitewater shake the rural solitude, but are undeniably part of it. We walk to a cement deck hinged to the back of the house. "I buy up land when it comes available," he says pointing to the far side of the river. "I've got somewhere around 150 acres out there." He smiles. "I want to make sure nothing happens to it."

Inside, only the second floor of the mill is livable, with an open floor plan, six-foot windows overlooking the water, a couple of pianos, and some sensual black and white photographs, framed, waiting to be hung. The place feels beyond rustic—historic, really—with large wooden beams both traversing the ceiling and holding it up. Old coffee burns in a white plastic pot next to some tea and a couple of half-drunk whiskey bottles. A picture of his longtime girlfriend, Ashley, who also lives here, hangs by magnet on the refrigerator, but she's nowhere to be found. There's a Gibson J-200 acoustic laying face up on a long wooden table.

"I don't touch the Chet [Atkins] when I'm home," he says of his de facto live axe, picking up the Gibson. "I write with this sweetie, or on piano, whatever." Why is he so true to the Chet? "It has a comfort in its size. If you just plug it in, it has an acoustic quality. Of course, it helps to put it through the many bubbling machines that my guitar tech, Monk, puts it through. They've worked on it with Gibson and the people at Fishman pickups to get it to sound the way it does live. It just feels to me—how

Dave Matthews has a sophisticated stage setup that involves two signal splits into three separate signal paths, an iso-cabbed amp sound, and some high-end (but subtle) EQ and processing. His trademark guitar is a black Gibson Chet Atkins SST, configured with a Fishman piezo pickup. The action is set to a medium height to accommodate Dave's percussive playing and up-the-neck chord forms. Matthews has experimented with different string sets, but currently uses D'Addario Acoustic Bronze .011's.

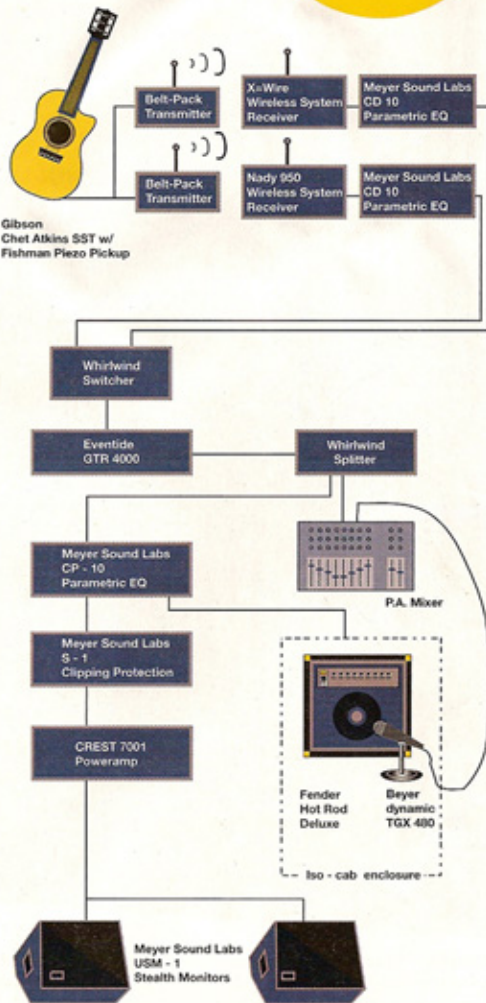
The piezo comes out of the endpin jack and goes into a belt-pack transmitter, which is broadcast to either a Nady 950 or X-Wire wireless system. Out of the receiver, the signal goes into an API 512-B preamp via a 1/4" jack.

From the pre-amp, the signal goes into a Meyer Sound Labs CP-10 5-band dual-channel parametric EQ. A Whirlwind Switcher allows for selection between the two guitar setups, and provides emergency options in case one of the paths malfunctions.

The basic guitar signal comes out of the switcher and into an Eventide GTR 4000 guitar multi-effects processor. Here, the signal is split with a Whirlwind Splitter. One path goes to the P.A. and is what the audience hears. The other path continues on into another CP-10 EQ and power amp and becomes the onstage monitor sound, eventually driving two Meyer Sound Labs USM-1 Stealth Monitors.

There is yet another split immediately after the splitter box, at the second CP-10. A signal is tapped off and sent into a Fender Hot Rod Deluxe amp, which is miked with a Beyerdynamic TGX 480. This configuration is "iso-cabbed," or built into a completely enclosed box. The miked signal is blended into the overall sound at the mixer and is not used for stage monitoring purposes. Matthews blends the slightly overdriven amp sound with his straight piezo signal to create a crunchier color, which is now a staple part of his sound. —Jon Chappell

Thanks to Monk, Dave's tech, for help in the preparation of this piece.





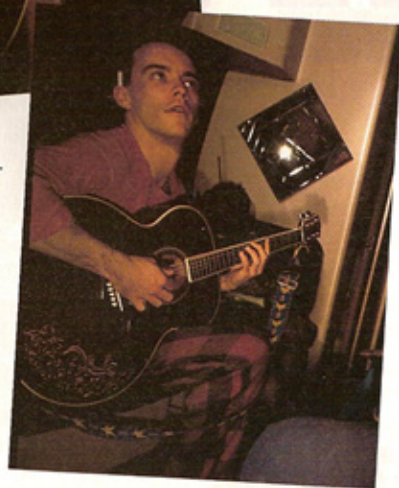
the lower notes, the thicker strings—damn if I ever know when they're talking about lower or higher, that's how much I know—for a more percussive sound. I can get more of a feel on those strings, so I stretch unnecessarily to play those chords across four frets and I end up damaging my tendons terribly. The only way I can relieve that tension is if I move the guitar higher. So eventually I'm gonna have the guitar strapped to my chin, and maybe play it with a bow! Eh?" He plops down on the couch.

"Eventually, I'll just play the piano."

But there are other fixes. "Monk changed the action on the strings and made it lower but he has to balance it out with the way I hit the strings. A lot of players are amazed at how high my action is. Their hands would fall to pieces—really good players, I mean, as opposed to me. I play very aggressively so if I have it low, it just goes *jooveeze, jooveeze*, and it sounds utterly horrible."

it sits in my hands—very similar to sitting down with a big acoustic guitar." That's the reason he wears it so high.

"I see photographs of myself and I have to wonder: Do I really wear it that high or did they move it up there for this photograph?" he laughs. "I watch all these rockers wear their guitars slung really low. How do you play guitar down by your knees? Long fingers, I guess." We move to the window and look out over the river. "I'm going to be moving to lighter strings," he says. "I have problems with my style because it's really uneducated. I find I spread unnecessarily." He demonstrates, spreading his finger over four or five frets. "When I play I concentrate mainly on the lower strings,



Matthews' gift with sound effects ranks him up there with Robin Williams for pure comedic effect. "Every time I pick up an electric guitar it sounds like I'm swim-

ming under water with it: *blurg blurg, plah, plah, plah*," as I rattle and buzz the whole way through a song. That's why the acoustic—and especially the Chet Atkins—makes me feel as comfortable as I can possibly feel."

Matthews' playing on *Before These Crowded Streets* gets a boost from bluegrass legend Bela Fleck on banjo and from longtime guitar-playing companion/frequent collaborator Tim Reynolds, the guy Matthews takes on the road with him when he performs solo acoustic. "Tim is a miracle guitar player, and probably the only reason I'm talking to *Guitar* magazine right now," he admits. So why doesn't he add Tim, a real electric player, to the lineup? "For a couple of reasons," Dave says, clearing his throat. "First, it's not his thing to be on the road with us. He's kind of into it, but not into the commitment. Then, you see, we have this sound live that's not really like the sound we get with Tim in the studio. Playing live there's this interaction with all five of us that's really strong, always has been. Not to say that Tim couldn't fit in—when he joins us it's awesome. But I think it would change the chemistry quite a bit and we've worked hard to get that."

Alchemy is more like it. In contrast to the band's breezy past efforts—'94's unrealized *Under The Table And Dreaming* and '96's giddy *Crash—Before These Crowded Streets* is a rainy monsoon of lust, passion, and darkness, full of Matthews' rather harsh observations and unexpectedly dark arrangements. Not the horse-country, TV-fantasy world he enjoys commuting back and forth to for rehearsal every day, but, you know, the "world" world.

"The unhappiness I address in the album is more of a frustration with how people treat each other," he says later, on our way back into town. "That's always been a frustration of mine. I'm not saying my life sucks or that I've thrown away hope."

On "The Dreaming Tree," for example—the song which hosts the title lyric—Matthews talks of the dreaming tree having died. "But it's still about hope," he says, "and it's about not being reckless with our dreams." Our roadway opens up next to a wide meadow covered by golden grass not yet recovered from the winter cold. The expanse is held down by a single, craggy oak tree, bare of leaves but full of character—full of hope. "Now that's a great tree, maybe the 'dreaming tree' hasn't died after all."

Back in the center of town, Matthews belts down a double latté to keep the

Continued on page 120

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DAVE MATTHEWS

Continued from page 34

energy level up. If you've ever seen Matthews in concert, you know the guy functions on an astral energy plane—always on, always ready with a quip, a voice (he did adroit renderings of Scottish, Irish, South African, and Deep South accents today), or a smart aleck remark. Perhaps that's from his bartending background, or perhaps he used it as a defense mechanism as a Methodist schoolboy in his native South Africa. Regardless of where he got it, in the company of friends it's always on.

"For most of my career I was singing from just above my Adam's apple," he says when the topic moves to his exponentially more visceral vocals on *Streets*. "I sounded like a kid from the Lollipop Guild. Really, I'm more surprised than anyone at how thin and soft my singing was. Back then there was more hesitance in my singing. But on the new record I indulged other sides of my personality."

One reason Matthews indulged those deeper aspects of his personality had to do with the timing of the new release. Because all of the songs on *Streets* were new and written after the band's tire-balding *Crash* tour, they did not get "road-tested." As a result, Matthews had to react more instinctively, more spontaneously, when writing lyrics and laying down vocals. "In a way—at least for us—songs get happier as you perform them on the road," he says, "especially if I have no lyrics written and there's no emotional center. The more we play a song the more it gets a mood about it, and the more we play it the more we react to the crowd, which, of course, is usually positive."

A case in point is the tried and true live hit, "What Would You Say?" "It's a giddy, happy, stupid, vacuous flun of a song that started out being slow but was redefined by our fans and their reactions. It was a completely different song when Tim and I worked it out in the beginning. The songs on the new album haven't been tested and altered in the same way, so they maintain the same aggressive and uncompromising feel."

One cut that benefits from the unrefined, untested approach is "Stay," a melancholy ode about the fear of loss that reflects Matthews' erotic obsessions in his patented, primal poetry. Matthews' monomaniacal concerns with love and permanence addresses the concept of losing someone, or something, intimate. "There's this element of what we had as the Dave Matthews Band that's already lost," he



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rued. "What we had just starting out, it's gone. It was great, but now it's gone. It's been replaced by something else, something bigger, something different. Whether it's better is up to each individual. For me, there's a recklessness that's lost that I really miss. ... I could use a cigarette," he says, patting the breast pocket of his light blue t-shirt.

Just then a girl, a fan, approaches. She had circled a few minutes earlier, unsure of her hunch, then returned with a napkin and a pen. "I know I'd kill myself if I didn't do this," she tells Dave with a big, embarrassed smile. "I'm such a big fan of yours." Dave obliges her with one of his signature illustrations, a roughed-out sketch of a face he draws for autograph seekers. "Anyway," he says, changing subjects after she goes on her way, "I'm not sure what the future will bring."

Matthews toys with a few uncharacteristic notions for future projects. There's an all-acoustic album he's pondering, and the possibility of a "strange, dark" record using cellos and acoustic guitars. He also entertains the idea of moving to the forest in South Africa to become a "drunken old

folk singer." (He trots out his inebriated voice and sings, "Oh, when I was the son of a seacook!") The fact is, he's infatuated with chameleonic performers like David Bowie and Sting; musicians who've changed as the times have changed without losing credibility. "You have to open yourself up," he says, "become an adventurous spirit, one that's not afraid to change. That's more admirable, I think, when an artist is more concerned about something they like than being obsessed with doing something they can guarantee will go over well.

"I feel lucky to have what I have and I'm not going to discard it," he continues. "Maybe I'll keep doing what I'm doing and in 10 years I'll still be writing music that's valid. I don't know if whether what I write now is valid, but as soon as I start writing what I think is an attempt to recapture something—an attempt to do something over again—I hope I'll know enough to stop. Please stop, someone stop me!"

For now, though, it seems Matthews would rather focus on the new album, the impending summer tour, and coping with

the intense, short-term future that confronts the band. Ten million albums under his belt and multi-format radio staples like "Crash Into Me," "Ants Marching," and the new "Don't Drink The Water" have secured Matthews eminent stature as a prominent personality heading into the millennium. The band's *Live At Red Rocks 8.15.95* recording, the first in a series of releases issued to address the bootleg proliferation problems the band experienced a few years ago, went unexpectedly platinum. And the new *Streets*—ebbing and flowing in bold new directions—should take the band to even higher ground. That's all Matthews can think about now. That, and taking care of his mother and sister. Oh yeah, and finding a good place we can eat before his rehearsal tonight.

"I take it for granted that my life is gonna change," he says over an enormous steak and a couple of pints, "but then I think my obsession with music will still stay right where it is. The decoration around my life may change—it already has—but that obsession will stay where it is." ■

Performance Notes

by Jon Chappell



The Dave Matthews Band

Don't Drink The Water

Much of the exotic color in this song can be attributed to the banjo, which provides an underpinning of steady staccato 16th notes. These are all performed as backward rolls (except for the brief forward-roll segment in the pre-chorus and chorus), in groups of three. The three-against-four pattern creates a built-in syncopation, and the use of accents on the high D heightens this effect. In addition to the syncopated rolls, the banjo (arranged here for open-D-tuned guitar) turns some tasty little fills between the vocal phrases. Of particular interest is the slide technique, heard in subtle support of the vocals and in the fills. These are rendered with a pinkie slide, which allows normal left-handed fretting.

Celtic Suite

In honor of our special acoustic issue, we've arranged three Celtic songs in a suite. Each song highlights a different acoustic-guitar technique. In this way, they are like etudes: accessible but

not simple. You should be able to get the gist of them quickly, but it will take you some time to get them really singing. All three songs are available free as .wav files from our website, www.guitarmag.com, or as RealAudio and .wav files from Kaman Music's website, www.kamanmusic.com. Download and prosper.

"Boys Of Bluehill" is a lighthearted fiddle tune, played in a lilting, jig feel. This is the most conventional of the three arrangements as far as techniques go, and is probably the easiest to master. The special technique used here is the driving melody with a steady, alternating bass underneath. One of the highlights occurs in the B section (most fiddle tunes follow an AABB format, with repeat signs separating the sections) at bar 3, where the bass ascends step-wise from A up to D in the following bar. Bring out the bass here with your thumb to highlight its movement.

"St. Anne's Reel" is a very popular fiddle tune played by flatpickers, fingerpickers, banjoists, and fiddlers. I've

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