

HEAR THIS! 10 Great New Bands

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Back in
the groove

Dave Matthews Band

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BY DAVID FRICKE

Back *in the* Groove

How the Dave Matthews Band
lost its way, found one another
and made the best music of its career



DAVE MATTHEWS SINGS THE LINES IN A DEEP, grainy voice that reverberates like a steam engine in the chilly night air: "Bartender, please/Fill my glass for me/With the wine you gave Jesus that set him free/After three days in the ground."

Behind him, the rest of the band fights the despair in "Bartender," the epic highlight of the Dave Matthews Band's new album, *Busted Stuff*, with muscular resolve. Drummer Carter Beauford and bass guitarist Stefan Lessard hit a marching-army groove; Boyd Tinsley builds a wall of drone

on his electric violin; LeRoi Moore punches the beat with the elephantine honk of his baritone saxophone.

The extended mounting tension - Matthews repeats that chorus like a prayer - finally explodes in the song's bridge. The band veers into a jubilant stomp, Matthews blows his voice out in high hallelujah and a row of white spotlights blazes over the 18,000 fans at his feet - all standing and roaring - in Shoreline Amphitheatre, south of San Francisco.

It is an extraordinary moment, the midpoint summit of a two-and-a-half-hour show, and Matthews knows it. On the video screen overhead, the camera zooms in on his face as he sings and smiles, one eyebrow arched in what looks like surprise, as if Matthews can't help asking himself: How can so many people get so much joy from a song written from deep inside a bottle?

THE NEXT AFTERNOON, IN THE LONG, grand living room of his suite at the Ritz-Carlton hotel in San Francisco, Matthews talks at length and frankly about "Bartender" - in his estimation, one of the best songs he's ever written.

"It's not the happiest idea in the world, thinking about dying and what your life means," he says, sipping coffee, his ruggedly boyish features in dark profile against the gray mist outside his panoramic windows. "And the Jesus thing is an impossible comparison: Can God come out of the sky, take the form of this bartender in front of me and save my life?" But at the time he wrote those words, Matthews notes, "I was drinking a lot."

Born in Johannesburg, South Africa, and raised on the run in the New York suburbs, in Cambridge, England, and in Charlottesville, Virginia, Matthews poured a lot of drinks for other people in his early twenties. From 1987 until the formation of the Dave Matthews Band in 1991, Matthews worked as a bartender at a pub called Miller's in Charlottesville where, he says, "I'd meet people who would shatter your faith in the world. There was one fella whose wife was deathly ill. He spent everything he had, sold his business in New Jersey, because they couldn't get medical insurance. I watched this man crumble. Years later, I saw him working the early shift at Dunkin' Donuts."

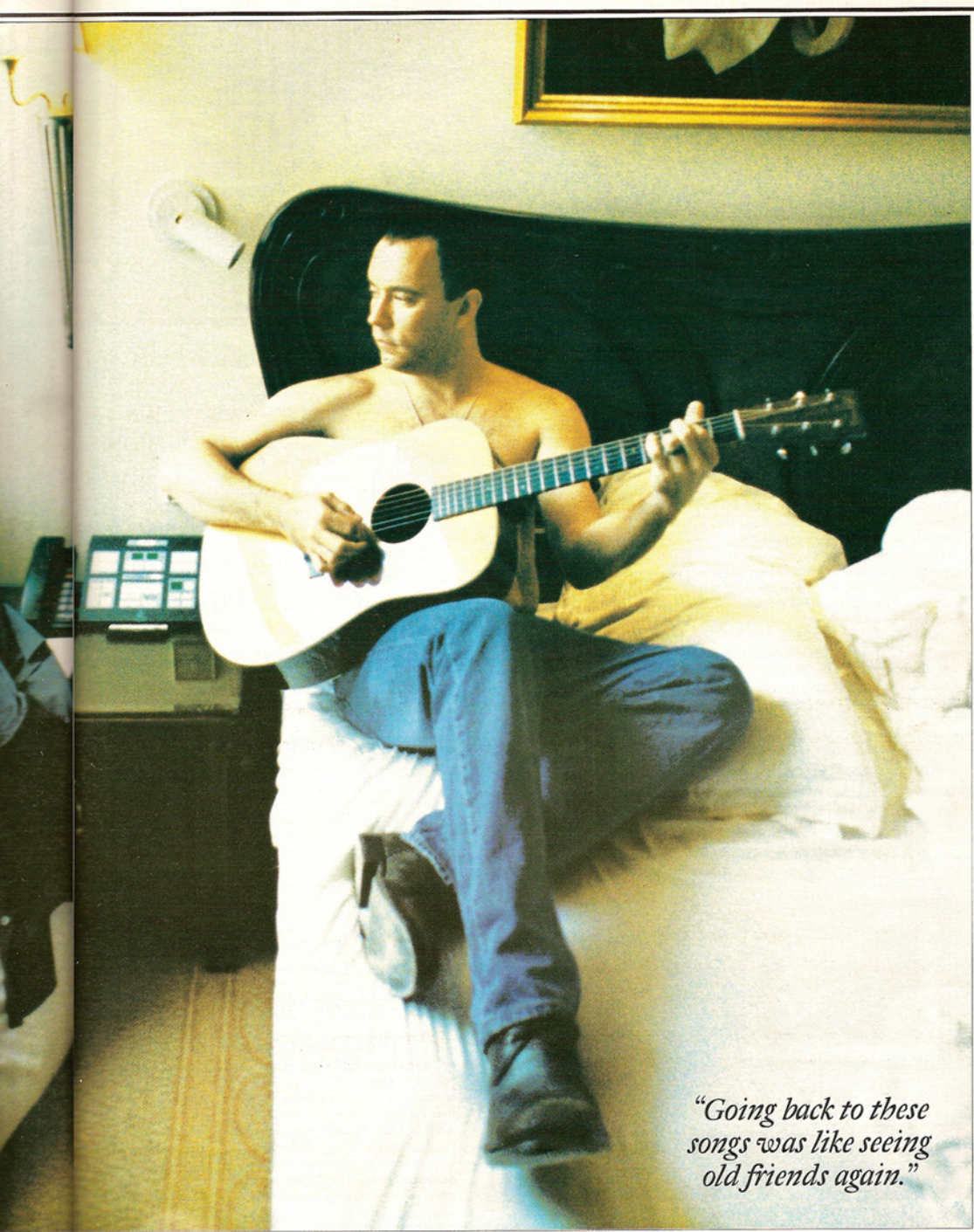
Matthews, now thirty-five, never fell that

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DANNY CLINCH



He did it: Matthews hoists one onstage in Houston.





"Going back to these songs was like seeing old friends again."



From left: Stefan Lessard backstage at New York's Madison Square Garden; Carter Beauford entertains the fans in Houston; Boyd Tinsley blisses out in his New York hotel room.

far. "Materially, I am wealthy beyond my wildest dreams," he states with awe. Since the release of its independent debut, *Remember Two Things*, in 1993, the Dave Matthews Band has issued four RCA studio albums - *Under the Table and Dreaming* (1994), *Crash* (1996), *Before These Crowded Streets* (1998) and *Everyday* (2001) - plus four two-CD live sets that have sold a combined 20.7 million copies in North America. The Dave Matthews Band is also one of rock's biggest touring attractions. In 2000 alone, the group grossed more than \$80 million on the road; last year, twenty-one of the fifty sold-out shows on the band's summer tour were in stadiums.

Naturally, there was a lot of celebrating. "To me, the Dave Matthews Band was all about the life of drinking," says Lessard, 28. The youngest member of the band by almost two decades (Beauford, the oldest, is forty-three), Lessard joined the group right out of high school. "This is how gullible I was: That line 'Eat, drink and be merry,' in 'Tripping

Billies' - I didn't know that was from the Bible. I thought Dave came up with that.

"But drinking was always a positive thing," Lessard insists. "It never got depressing. And if Dave was going too far, I never recognized it. Coming back drunk from the bar - that's what we were all striving for."

"I was what they call a joyful drunk," Matthews says. "I'm much more charming with a buzz on than without it. But drinking started to get in the way of things that mattered. It encouraged an indifference in me." He makes a dismissive grunting sound. "You know, those weird noises you make when you don't give a damn."

That's how he first recorded "Bartender" two years ago, during the Dave Matthews Band's agonizing, ultimately scrapped 2000 sessions with producer Steve Lillywhite, now known and widely bootlegged as *The Summer So Far*. "If you sing it like a sad bastard," Matthews says of the song curiously, "it sucks." On *Summer*, he moaned and grumbled through "Bar-

tender" like the kind of dipso you desperately try to avoid in a bar.

That's not how he sings it now. Matthews has stopped drinking, at least to excess. ("I like the way wine tastes," he says. "I'm not going to do anything too rash.") And he cites marriage and fatherhood as two big reasons for his turnaround. In August 2000, Matthews wed his girlfriend of eight years, Ashley Harper; the following August, Harper gave birth to twin girls, Stella and Grace.

"I feel like I've finished the picture," Matthews says of *Busted Stuff*, and "Bartender" in particular. "I'd left those songs in an ugly little pile. Going back was like seeing old friends again. This is some of the best stuff I've ever written and some of the best stuff the band has ever played.

"There's still a lot of melancholy," he notes. "Bartender" is still a heavy song. But it's not a fuck-it-all song. It's not sung by the guy you want to get

"I was what they call a joyful drunk," Matthews says.



"I'm more in wonder of everything," Matthews says. "When I wake up in the morning, it's not so much, 'Ugh, what happened?' If I'm away from my wife, the first thing I want to do when I wake up is call her. It's the last thing I want to do at night. And if I'm with her, I'm just so happy that I'm awake to that fact."

Lessard says he can tell the difference in Matthews: "His voice is much stronger onstage. We had some problems at the beginning of the year" - in April, Matthews postponed two sold-out nights at New York's Madison Square Garden because of throat strain - "but he took care of it. He didn't talk to anybody, didn't go out and party."

Busted Stuff testifies to Matthews' new attention to clarity. Nine of the eleven songs on the record, produced by the band's longtime engineer, Steve Harris, have been rescued from *The Summer So Far* and re-cut with a focus and force that opens up the hope previously hidden inside loner's hymns such as "Busted Stuff," "Grey Street" and "Grace Is Gone." "The lyrical content is similar, if not exactly the same," says Bruce Flohr, senior vice president of A&R at RCA Records, who signed the band in 1993 and has worked closely with it ever since. "But they're not dead-end streets. I find more joy in the songs. Dave is singing them from a different emotional place."

away from in the bar. He's somebody you can sit next to at the bar and go, 'Hey, nice to see you.'



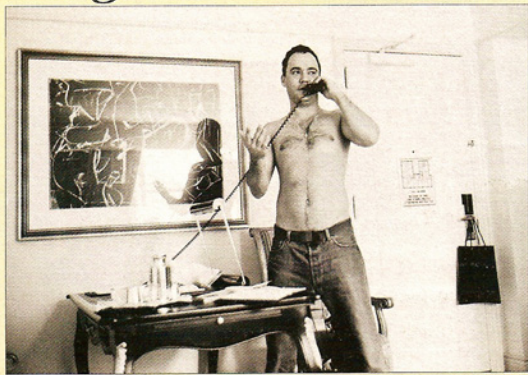
TWO YEARS LATER, MATTHEWS keeps spotting them at gigs - hard-core fans who are still upset about the canning of those Lillywhite sessions and about the mainstream sheen of the album the Dave Matthews Band made and released instead, *Everyday*, produced by AOR drill sergeant Glen Ballard. At a recent show, Matthews saw a woman wearing a T-shirt that read, LONG LIVE LILLYWHITE.

"Which is nice - I hope he lives forever, too," Matthews says. A British hit-maker who worked on U2's early LPs, Lillywhite produced the Dave Matthews Band's first three studio albums - combined sales: more than 12 million copies - before he and the group parted in May 2000 after five months of recording in Charlottesville and only the twelve tired *Summer* tracks to show for it.

Then there was the jerk who held up a sign in front of Matthews one night that said, GLEN BALLARD IS THE DEVIL. "I thought, 'Have you ever met the man?'" Matthews snaps. "I had someone take the sign away. I didn't

Senior editor DAVID FRICKE interviewed Ozzy Osbourne in RS 901.

Long-Distance Romance



"If I'm away from my wife," Matthews says, "the first thing I want to do is call her."

want to find myself diving into the audience and getting bad publicity for beating the guy up: 'Hippie rocker Dave Matthews pounds fan in the head.'

Lessard is astonished by his own small share of the grief. "I've had fans go off on me at two in the morning," he says, "about how much they hated *Everyday* and why didn't we release the Lillywhite sessions. I'm like, 'You're telling me you hate my work?'"

Beauford, a drummer of ferocious energy and forthright tongue, will tell you precisely what he doesn't like about *Everyday*: "My creativity, my expertise, as well as that of the other guys in the band, was smothered. The record didn't need us." Beauford replicated, beat for beat, drum licks from the Matthews-Ballard song demos. Tinsley and Moore played from charts, then had their parts folded into a mass of keyboards and power chords.

Everyday is tight, bright and commercial; it has sold 3.3 million copies since its release in February 2001. But it is not, Beauford says, "the Dave

Matthews Band. It is two people" - Matthews and Ballard - "and they did an incredible job."

Matthews is exhausted by the whole debate. "Just sitting here, doing this interview, is strange compared to what's unfolding in the world," he says wearily. "It's like talking about piña colodas in a blizzard." The fact is, he and the band were right to halt and discard the Lillywhite sessions. Steve Harris, who also engineered the *Summer* recordings, believes that Lillywhite and the group over-recorded Matthews' songs to death. "Sweet Up and Down" was one *Summer* number that didn't make it to *Busted Stuff*. "There must be ninety performances of it on tape," Harris says. "But number twenty-six is no different from number eighty-five." In comparison, "You Never Know" - a complex bundle of time signatures that is one of two new numbers on *Busted Stuff* - was written by Matthews, then arranged and cut by the band, in four days. "They can work that quickly," Harris claims.

Busted Stuff - essentially a brand-new *Summer* - is the best and quickest record the Dave Matthews Band has ever made, five weeks from first day to final mix. Of the band's five studio albums, it is also the most faithful to the group's unique live-show dynamics: the locked grip of Beauford's rolling drums and Lessard's pinpoint bass; the way Tinsley's iron-hummingbird flourishes and Moore's strong, wise blowing, with its echoes of King Curtis and Hank Crawford, color and lift Matthews' dusky voice.

Personally, though not musically, the Dave Matthews Band is a case study in disparity, a tremendously successful whole defined by remarkable differences in age, race and personal history. Beauford, who was born in Charlottesville, and Moore, who is forty and from Durham, North Carolina, were experienced jazz-fusion cats playing in Virginia clubs together while Matthews was bartending at Miller's and Lessard was taking piano lessons in high school. Tinsley, 38, and the band's other Charlottesville native, didn't pick up the violin until he was twelve, and that was by mistake. "I wanted to be a guitar player," he says with a gravelly laugh. "I signed up for this 'strings' class in junior high, figuring a guitar had strings. It was an orchestra class. That's how I started out - by not paying attention."

"We didn't grow up playing in the mud together," says Lessard, who is originally from Anaheim, California. And he had trouble, at first, adjusting to life on the road with much older musicians. "I had a pretty sheltered upbringing. When we pulled off the road to take a piss next to the van, I would be really worried, because I knew you weren't supposed to piss on the side of the road.

"It's not that we're not friends,"

The Road Warriors



Lessard, Matthews, Tinsley, Beauford and Moore (from left) in New York in May 2002

Lessard insists. But what you see on stage is "five completely different people pulling together to make something work. You're not watching a bunch of best buddies."

On tour, Matthews, Lessard, Tinsley, Moore and Beauford travel in separate buses - for comfort, to accommodate friends and family, and because they can afford it. Lessard says Beauford likes to split the venue immediately after the last note of the encore: "But I like to stay for at least an hour and hang with the crew, watch them load out."

There is also the matter of the set list. (In two nights at Shoreline Amphitheatre, the group played thirty-three dif-

ferent songs, repeating only two in the second concert.) About a half-hour before showtime, Matthews writes a lineup of tunes, then gives it to monitor engineer Ian Kuhn, who makes a computer printout and runs it by Lessard and Beauford for comments. "Sometimes Stefan will send it back to me, and the whole order will be changed," Matthews says. Tinsley and Moore are content to find out what's on the menu at the last minute. "They just go, 'What's first?'"

"The time when we hang out together the most is onstage," says Tinsley in his San Francisco hotel room one afternoon, surrounded by remains of his room-service breakfast. "That's the time." All five members wear earpiece

monitors during the show, and between songs Matthews often turns his back to the crowd, yacking and laughing with the others through a small microphone clipped to his shirt. "We're just joking," Tinsley says, "cutting each other down, pointing out some girl in the front row. The audience doesn't know. It's between us."

"It's an unusual band," he concedes, "one that is probably not supposed to work. Others look at it, see three black guys and two white guys, and wonder what the hell is going on. Not only that, there's a violin and a saxophone. They're seeing all these peripheral things."

"For us," Tinsley goes on, "that shit

"You're not seeing a bunch of best buddies," says Lessard.



Under the Covers

The Dave Matthews Band plays nothing but Matthews' songs, with a few special exceptions:

"All Along the Watchtower," written and recorded by Bob Dylan ("John Wesley Harding," 1967)
"We've played that since we got together. There's an urgency to the song. It's got this creepy ancient vibe. But I don't know what the hell it's about. I don't think Dylan does."

"For the Beauty of Wynona," written and recorded by Daniel Lanois ("For the Beauty of Wynona," 1993)
"I love that song. The whole thing is this moaning drone; he suddenly switches, then goes back to it. We did another of his songs, 'The Maker,' for a while. Daniel Lanois is such a badass."

"Waste," written by Trey Anastasio and Tom Marshall, recorded by Phish ("Billy Breathes," 1996)
"Come waste your time with me': That's a great song. I always felt that lumping us and Phish with all the jam bands was unfair. They are from their own planet, and that's how I feel about us. I know we're always changing time signatures too, but for me, it's as if I'm just changing my moods. They does that really well, too."

was never important. The big question was, 'What does the music sound like?' If the music is there, everything else will be fine."

THE SETTING IS PEACEFUL: A small patio ringed with greenery, adjacent to the studio at the Plant in Sausalito, California, where the Dave Matthews Band recorded *Busted Stuff*. The subject is racism - what Matthews saw, how it touched him - during his [Cont. on 86]

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DAVE MATTHEWS

[Cont. from 54] life in South Africa.

Matthews was two years old when his family moved to the U.S.; he became an American citizen at thirteen. But Matthews, who was raised in the Quaker faith, spent his high school years back in South Africa. His father, John, a physicist, died of lung cancer when Matthews was ten; his mother, Val, a painter and architect, then returned with Matthews, his brother, Peter, and his sisters, Jane and Anne, to the far northern suburbs of Johannesburg. Matthews emigrated for good when he was nineteen – five years before the fall of apartheid – to avoid compulsory military service. (Anne died in 1994.)

"I remember being with some friends from the Quaker church at a retreat in this little Afrikaner town and going into an ice cream parlor," he says, talking over the constant babble of a small fountain in one corner of the patio. "The people running the place said we couldn't sit there because half of us were black. Then we thought about the language they used: 'You can't sit in here.'" Matthews and the other white kids went back in and sat down; their black friends perched in their laps.

"They served us, but we didn't stay long," Matthews goes on. "We left and hoped we didn't get our heads kicked in."

When asked if forming a mixed-race band was a reaction to his experiences in South Africa, Matthews thinks for a long moment, then replies, "I don't know." He will say that Beauford and Moore were two of the best musicians in Charlottesville, a university town rich in hot players. Beauford recalls gigging at a local club, the C and O, where the entrance ran along a wall behind his drum kit. There was a small window in the wall, too, above Beauford's head. "A lot of times, Dave would be peeping in," Beauford says, "checking me out. I'd turn around and go, 'Who's this guy?'"

"I'll tell you though, I sometimes have this anti-European thing inside me," Matthews confesses, "which is crazy, because that's what I am" – of Dutch-Irish descent on his father's side and German on his mother's. "I find myself feeling ashamed, although I'm not responsible for history."

He gives an example. "Years before we got together in the band, I knew LeRoi – he played at Miller's a lot – and we used to get drunk together, sit at the bar and get into fights.

"Not serious ones," he stresses, "just arguments. I don't think he liked me much, and I think a lot of it was that I was a white South African. That was often the topic of conversation – racism." Matthews grins. "But we became good friends."

Pressed on the issue of who really

leads the band that bears his name, Matthews defers, at least in part, to Beauford. "I'm the principal songwriter," Matthews says. "I'm singing things I came up with. But Carter was the one who spoke out that summer of the Lillywhite sessions and said, 'We need to change.' I often choose not to speak my mind. I do that in every part of my life." He shrugs. "That's my shortcoming. But if Carter says we need to talk, we talk."

Beauford says Tinsley was the frontman in the Dave Matthews Band's club-and-frat-party days: "A lot of people thought Boyd Tinsley was Dave Matthews, because he was talking all the time. Dave never spoke at all. But he was doing the singing and writing – he had to step up. We convinced him and told him that when he did speak to the crowd, make sure it was very little. Don't give them a speech, just 'Thank you.'" Eleven years later, that's still pretty much what Matthews says, every fourth or fifth song each night.

On the patio in Sausalito, Matthews considers the magnitude of his success and the expectations dead ahead. He shivers slightly, and it's not from the breeze. "I feel this is definitely a point of change," he says. When the Dave Matthews Band's summer tour ends on September 8th at the Gorge Amphitheatre in George, Washington, Tinsley will complete his forthcoming solo album. Lessard is writing songs on his own; Beauford is interested in scoring films. RCA's Flohr says he's waiting "for LeRoi to say when he's got a window open, so I can use him on every session we do. I would have that guy blow a horn on any record out there."

Matthews has no plans other than to keep writing songs at his current home in Seattle, where Ashley is attending graduate school. (He still has a big spread on the James River south of Charleston, on the same country road where Tinsley and Lessard live.) "I'm a bit apprehensive about making the wrong choices," he admits. "That thought is always in the back of my head – 'Are we at the top? Are we finished doing what we do?'"

"But I've never worked as hard at anything as I have with this, at all of us keeping this band together," Matthews says proudly. "The important place the band holds in my heart – that is something I will never easily walk away from." ■

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A Simple Plan

★★★★

Dave Matthews Band

Busted Stuff

RCA

DAVE MATTHEWS IS RIGHTLY regarded as an artist who found success on his own terms – critics, record companies and mainstream convention be damned. But that reputation took a hit last year when Matthews scrapped an unusually somber, nearly finished album with longtime producer Steve Lillywhite and instead released *Everyday*, a collection of bright, concise tunes recorded with pop producer Glen Ballard that muted his quintet's instrumental eccentricities.

The chief virtue of *Everyday* was that it put an emphasis on the songs rather than on the overly busy arrangements and solos that had been Matthews' trademark, but some of the band's fans thought it went too far. Now Matthews returns with *Busted Stuff*, which resurrects nine of the dozen tunes from the Lillywhite sessions and tries to find a middle ground between the darker folk introspection of the aborted album and



the pop pithiness of *Everyday*.

The new versions of the leftover songs sharpen the melodies and shorten the arrangements: The sax riff on "Raven" now swaggers, and the concert staple "Bartender" is trimmed by nearly two minutes. Some clunkiness remains, particularly when the band tries to turn "Kit Kat Jam" into a funky stroll; drummer Carter Beauford is better at painting with percussion than at rocking a groove.

The band still tends to overplay: Its fussiness undercuts the strongest of the new tracks, "You Never Know," even as the singer reaches for some falsetto salvation. Similarly, "Grey Street" is spackled with pretty instrumental colors, but they

DMB resurrects fallen songs.

never match the intensity of Matthews' vocal.

Faring far better are "Grace Is Gone," which evokes the haunted air of a classic country murder ballad such as "Long Black Veil," and "Digging a Ditch," which the quintet patiently imbues with a hymnlike glow. At its best, *Busted Stuff* suggests that *Everyday* was a controversial but necessary detour. After years of trying to build memorable songs out of an awkward mix of jazzy instrumentation and singer-songwriter introspection, *Busted Stuff* suggests a new lesson is starting to take hold: Sometimes simplicity is the best route to the heart of the song. —GREG KOT