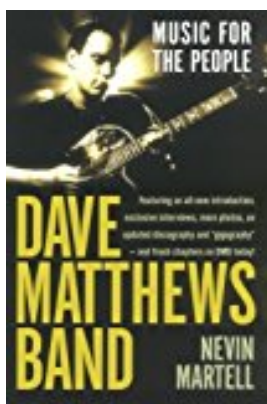


[PDF] Dave Matthews Band: Music For The People, Revised And Updated

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Description:

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In the Beginning

The story of Dave Matthews Band begins so far away from the stadiums the quintet would someday pack to capacity. It starts in Johannesburg, South Africa, on January 9, 1967, when David John Matthews was born to John and Val Matthews. During her pregnancy, Val listened to a lot of Vivaldi and years later some would joke that this early exposure to music would tune the then-unborn Matthews's ear for the art.

South Africa was not the ideal place to raise a child at the time. The white Afrikaners had officially gained their independence from Great Britain less than ten years earlier in 1958. In the years following, there was an increasing sense of disillusionment with the corrupt political system and its leaders by the majority black population. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s South Africa was a police state ruled by white minority leaders who maintained the overtly racist system of apartheid. Before the abolishment of apartheid in 1991, South Africa was torn by massacres, riots, and widespread social unrest.

However, when Dave was two and before he could truly adjust to his surroundings and be aware of the revolution happening around him, Matthews's parents moved to the New York suburb of Yorktown Heights. There Matthews's father worked for IBM as a physicist, developing superconducting circuits.

It was a tight-knit family, consisting of Dave, a younger sister, Jane, an older sister, Anne, and a brother, Peter. The whole family lived by the Quaker tradition, which is officially known as The Religious Society of Friends. This religious movement was started in England around 1650 by a group of people, though George Fox would go on to become its leader. The Religious Society of Friends is a Christian organization, but does not have a set creed or dogma, since Friends believe that God is within all of us. However, Quakers are pacifists and do not believe in violent action, a sentiment that is succinctly summed up in the "George Fox Song": "If we give you a rifle/Will you fight for the Lord?/But you can't kill the Devil/With a gun or a sword."

A former architect, Val Matthews was a painter, as well as remaining involved in the Quaker anti-apartheid movement. From a very young age, Val brought her son up with Quaker mores and the belief in interracial harmony, pervasive themes in songs he would write for DMB. Dave told *Rolling Stone*, "We were brought up, very aggressively, that bigotry and racism are evil things, and they stem from fear." This Quaker sense of inner peace and outer pacifism would be a defining moral trait for Matthews throughout his life. It would help him make some very big decisions and would be reflected in the ideals of his lyrics.

When Dave was five he was introduced to the Beatles. He later reminisced to *Rolling Stone* magazine, "They made me dream of making music when I was five. I stopped thinking about Little League. I was obsessed." Dave would never forget the Beatles: in fact, he would later cover a number of Beatles songs with DMB, including "Can't Buy Me Love," "All You Need Is Love," "You Won't See Me," and "Yellow Submarine." Touched by Beatlemania, the young Matthews began his life-long obsession with music.

The family moved to Cambridge, England, in 1974 when Dave was seven, but returned to Yorktown Heights a year later. Dave took an early interest in the guitar and started taking lessons when he was nine. "I was a horrible student," Matthews told Steve Morse of the *Boston Globe*, "But he [Matthews's guitar teacher] told me, 'Keep your foot tapping whatever you do.' That has always stuck in my mind. If you miss a note or you miss a chord, as long as you keep the rhythm going, it really doesn't matter. Maybe I already knew it, but he verbalized the necessity to stay in the groove." He liked the acoustic guitar from the start, because of the hollow body's percussive elements that he

couldn't coax from an electric guitar.

Tragedy struck the Matthews household when Dave was only ten. His father passed away from lung cancer, leaving the family devastated. He later theorized to *Rolling Stone* magazine, "We figure he might have got the disease from the radioactive material he handled." This was the young Matthews's first encounter with tragic death. Unfortunately, it would not be his last. Death would be an unfortunate specter that would haunt Matthews at far too early an age.

It is misfortunes like his father's death from which Dave may get his "carpe diem" sensibility, an attitude that is reflected in his lyrics. The idea of "living for today" pervades the lyrics of early songs like "Two Step," "Tripping Billies," and "Lie In Our Graves." Matthews admitted to the *Washington Post*, "There's always been a good handful of songs about death and loss, but always with the idea that [death] was something that should bring us together. There are arbitrary lines between bad and good that often don't make a lot of sense to me. I don't want to die, obviously, but really, the wonder of life is amplified by the fact that it ends. If it went on forever, it would be such a tiresome thing and we'd all be so bored: 'What are we going to do today?' 'Just live again, I suppose.'"

He later divulged to the *New York Post* that death had become less dangerous to him, "It's unfortunate that so many people think about perpetuating themselves and holding onto their youth, maybe because it is further away from death. I'm attracted to the idea of getting old. I like that young people will probably tell jokes behind my back about what a doddering old fool I am. That seems attractive to me."

After the shock of John Matthews's death, the family returned to Johannesburg. There Dave started attending middle school and later went to a local high school. While in South Africa, Matthews started listening to native artists like King Sunny Ade, Salif Keita, and Hugh Masekela, whose music would go on to shape Matthews's rhythmic sensibility and be responsible for the ethnic touches in his own work. Back in South Africa, Matthews found music and inspiration all around him through "appreciation of long hikes through the woods" and "the sounds of things around us: the heartbeats, the footsteps."

By high school Dave's interests were pretty much confined to drawing and noodling around on the guitar. He didn't really know what he wanted to do and no one was about to push him to figure it out. To avoid South Africa's compulsory military service, which ran against the tenets of Quaker philosophy, Matthews returned to the United States when he was nineteen, in January of 1986. Matthews remembered, in an interview with Michael Krugman, "When I finished up high school and got my call-up sheets, I made my departure hastily. Half my friends went [into the military] and half left the country. Things were pretty bad there. There were a lot of young people leaving to avoid the army. And a lot of young people going to Europe and going up north of the border. The demise of the then Nationalist Party was definitely visible on the horizon." At thirteen, while still living in South Africa, he had been granted U.S. citizenship and now he took advantage of that fact, but he still felt a very intense connection with South Africa and continues to be drawn back to the country again and again.

When he returned Stateside, he lived in New York and took a job as a clerk at the IBM research center where his father had worked. There were no firm plans for college and Matthews felt no heartrending draw for him. Later in 1986 the young Matthews moved to Charlottesville, Virginia, and rejoined his family, who had moved there while he had been in New York. His father had taught there before he was born and the family still retained connections to the region.

Charlottesville, or C'ville as the townies affectionately refer to it, is a beatnik Southern college town, the home of fifty thousand people, a burgeoning music scene, and a bohemian artist community.

Taking its name from Queen Charlotte-Sophia of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, the child bride of King George III of England, Charlottesville is located in lush Central Virginia on the upper Piedmont Plateau at the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains and at the headwaters of the Rivanna River. The area is rich with colonial-era American history and is home to University of Virginia, which was founded in 1819 by Thomas Jefferson. It now has over 18,000 students enrolled in ten schools and along with Piedmont Virginia Community College, C'ville has over 20,000 college students bent on studies and a good time -- the perfect audience for an up-and-coming band. Charlottesville is where the tale of Dave Matthews Band truly begins; its music scene is almost incestuous as one will see from all the connections among the many players within the DMB story.

Dave attended Charlottesville Community College on a limited enrollment basis. His chief interests were philosophy and partying. He batted around the possibility of attending art school, but the idea kept falling by the wayside. He still loved abstract drawing and guitar playing, with no thoughts that his idle strumming might lead to a career someday. In fact, some of the sketches Dave had done would later be turned into T-shirt and sticker designs for DMB merchandise. However constant his guitar playing, he had yet to write a complete song.

Between 1986 and 1990, Matthews traveled between South Africa and Charlottesville several times, a process that strengthened his love for South Africa's beautiful countryside and, perhaps most importantly, the music. Dave told Michael Krugman, "A large part of me is tied to South Africa. I go there as often as I can, and I do watch its political situation. The social change that took place seemed so impossible to the international community, and the media. When the transition [from apartheid] took place, they all seemed disappointed it went so smoothly." Until April of 1994, when the first multiracial elections were held, South Africa was under white minority rule, though apartheid was ended in 1991. Nelson Mandela and former president William de Klerk had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993 for their work toward a democratic South Africa and Mandela was elected president in a landslide victory, effectively ending minority rule and instituting black majority rule.

However, when Matthews was then visiting, it was still a time of grievous disorder. It was just prior to the abolishment of apartheid in 1991 and Matthews became friends with some activists there, including a young man by the name of Chris Hani. He and Hani bonded over their beliefs that South Africa's political and social systems were unjust and that it was time for a change. Both attended anti-apartheid marches and rallies and discussed the injustices around them. Dave would later tell *Rolling Stone* about his trips: "I would go back and stay with friends, and political conversations were going on because they were all in college now. My friends would go to marches, and I would join them. It was a really interesting, vibrant time. The theater and music we'd go to see was always a voice of opposition. Going back there now and seeing them striving for freedom is such an amazing thing."

Back in Charlottesville, Dave decided not to attend art school and took a job bartending at a local bar called Miller's, a bohemian hang out where local musicians gathered and jammed on the small stage. All the C'ville regulars played there, including many names that will pop up down the DMB timeline. One night at Miller's in 1987 Matthews met local guitarist Tim Reynolds, who was playing the bar that night. Dave and Tim bonded immediately and Matthews eventually sat in a couple of times with Reynolds's eclectically influenced trio, TR3, who played frequently around town. The bond between them stuck and Reynolds would come to act as a guide, teacher, and cohort for Dave's creative impulses.

Tim Reynolds started out playing the electric bass when he was twelve and would later pick up the guitar. He settled in Charlottesville in the '80s after a nomadic period and began TR3. His playing skills soon led him to become one of the most prominent figures on the local music scene. He counts

Carlos Santana, Bob Marley, Jimi Hendrix, and Led Zeppelin among his musical influences. Over the course of his career he has released three solo albums and three TR3 records, as well as contributing to projects like *Sticks & Stones*, *Secrets*, and *Cosmology*, and working with local musicians like Michael Sokolowski and Shannon Worrell.

Another respected local musician, John D'earth, saw Dave perform one of those nights he sat in with TR3 and was introduced to the fledgling musician by Reynolds. D'earth too would become a part of the DMB tale. Playing around Charlottesville with a number of bands, D'earth often crossed musical paths with future DMBers Leroi Moore and Carter Beauford. In 1989, D'earth wrote a piece called "Bypass" for a modern dance performance that Matthews and another local singer, Dawn Thompson, performed. Thompson knew both D'earth and Reynolds from a musical project called *Cosmology*, which they had collaborated on some years earlier.

Matthews loved to act and appeared in several local productions in the late '80s and early '90s. He was a theatrical natural, which proved to be a good skill when he started taking centerstage as a frontman. His innate good humor and quick wit shone through in his acting, and later, his stage performances. There was a time when Matthews's muse may have drawn him toward drama and the theater instead of rock 'n' roll, but luckily Dave was soon to be irrevocably turned down the road toward rock 'n' roll fame.

Dave started writing songs in earnest in 1990 when Ross Hoffman, a local songwriter who owned a studio, encouraged Matthews to take his scattered guitar noodlings, put them together, and actually compose a full song. He convinced Matthews to write and play for a set period of time every day and dedicate himself to the composition of some fully realized pieces. Matthews told *Rolling Stone*, "He was the guy who pushed me. He was the one who'd say, 'No, don't smoke that pot. Finish that verse. Finish that song.' He was my musical mentor, the guy who said, 'You should do this.'" By the end of 1990, or perhaps early in 1991, Dave quit his job at Miller's to concentrate on his writing full time. Hoffman began acting as Matthews's personal manager, helping guide him and his songwriting.

Dave later told the *Washington Post*, "I was not really sure what I was going to do. I didn't think of myself as much of a singer at all, but then it sort of became evident with what I was writing that there weren't a hell of a lot of people who were going to sing it. So I thought I might have to do it myself for it to go anywhere." Little did he know that the songs he was writing then would go on to be crowd pleasers from coast to coast, much less in Charlottesville.

His constant practicing would lead to one of the most fertile songwriting periods of his early career. The songs Dave wrote were intensely personal, dealing with relationships, family tragedies, and his views of South Africa's politics. Musically, Dave found his influences from a range of people, from Herbie Hancock (who would go on to open for the band) to guitarist Robert Fripp and a slew of African artists like pianist Abdullah Ibrahim, contemporary jazz pianist Keith Jarrett, and Senegalese born father of the mbalax rhythm tradition Youssou N'Dour. During an AOL chat a couple of years later Matthews also admitted that there were more Westernized influences -- "John Denver, the Beatles, Dollar Brand, Pink Floyd, Vivaldi, sex, and hangovers."

Another local musician, Greg Howard, was introduced to Matthews through Tim Reynolds and saw Dave play several shows with TR3. Howard is a master of the Chapman Stick, an electric 8-, 10- or 12-stringed instrument invented by Emmett Chapman in 1974. The Stick is played using a unique two-handed tapping technique, much like piano playing. Howard and Reynolds had collaborated before on a project called *Sticks & Stones* and over the course of his career, Howard has released four solo albums, toured the States, and taught workshops on the Chapman Stick. He and Matthews bonded over their love for making music and immediately became friends. Soon they started bouncing musical ideas off each other and talked of laying down some of the tracks Matthews was

working on.

Matthews gained confidence in his songwriting, finished composing several tracks, and eventually went to Howard's house in November of 1990 to record some demos. Howard remembers those first sessions, "He would come into my studio and record his voice and guitar and a few other things. The first demo was a four song demo and I played the Stick and sang back up on a few things." The first Dave Matthews demo consisted of "The Song That Jane Likes," "I'll Back You Up," "Recently," and "The Best of What's Around." Howard played Chapman Stick on "The Song That Jane Likes" and also played alto sax and added drum samples to give it a fuller sound. John D'earth laid down some trumpet and another local, Kevin Davis, provided additional percussion.

The first song on the demo, "I'll Back You Up," is considered the first song Dave ever wrote, though he had the music for "The Song That Jane Likes" first. "I'll Back You Up" is a song Dave wrote for his ex-girlfriend, Julia Grey, whom he had met in South Africa and who had subsequently moved to C'ville. He had proposed to her on three different occasions, only to be rejected each time. The lyrics are as lovestruck as they come and as Dave gently croons, "But I know no matter how fast we are running/Some how we keep, some how we keep up with each other" you can feel his earnestness shining through the soft guitar plucking.

"The Song That Jane Likes," so titled because his sister liked it the first time he played it for her, was the second song Dave completed. He actually had the music for it first, but failed to finish the lyrics before finishing "I'll Back You Up. The lyrics of "The Song That Jane Likes" are somewhat vague, though it seems to be an open letter to an old friend in Dave's past. Musically, it is based in a simple guitar melody that Leroi, Stefan, Carter, and Boyd extrapolated on to strengthen the melody. Definitely a popular song from the start, it would get many airings during Dave's acoustic shows with Tim in the years to come.

"Recently" would eventually become DMB's very first single, though Dave could not have foreseen that when he laid down a somewhat simplified version on the original demo. The song is reportedly about a girl Dave fell in love with during one of his many trips to South Africa, perhaps again his old flame Julia Grey. This song exemplifies much of Matthews's early lyrical stylings -- personal, unerringly emotional, and woven in a folk-tale manner.

The demo's final track, "Best of What's Around," was another of the very first songs Dave had written. Lyrically, it is filled with that pervasive Matthews optimism, as Dave, within a folk story of a damsel in distress, weaves his admonishments to look forward to better days: "And if nothing can be done/We'll make the best of what's around."

This four-track demo would be the start of a story that no one could have foretold. It would lead Matthews to his future bandmates and become four of the most loved songs in the DMB catalog.

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