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COURTESY PHOTO
Dave Matthews Band is Boyd Tinsley, Stefan Lessard, Dave Matthews, Carter Beauford and Leroi Moore.

Dave Matthews returns with 'Streets'

By Rob Moseley
Oregon Daily Emerald

The strength of the Dave Matthews Band has always been, in my mind, their intensity. Their hard-driving grooves have attracted a fiercely loyal following, and rightly so. The group's latest effort, "Before These Crowded Streets," does its part to maintain that intensity and even push it up a notch. Dave's vocals, which are usually intensely heartfelt, now border on angry at times.

Add the electric guitars and mandolin of Tim Reynolds (who appeared on last year's "Live at Red Rocks") to the five-man combo of Matthews on guitar and vocals, Stefan Lessard on bass, Carter Beauford on drums, Boyd Tinsley on violin and Leroi Moore on woodwinds, and the band takes on a decidedly edgier feel.

Unfortunately, "Before These Crowded Streets" also inherits one of the weaknesses of the band's previous two major label releases, although to a lesser extent. All three, including 1994's "Under the Table and Dreaming" and 1996's "Crash," open with four to eight strong tracks, then taper off. While "Crowded Streets" is noticeably lacking in the strung-out jams that close out the last two, including "Under the Table's" "#34" and "Crash's" "Tripping Billies" and "Proudest Monkey," its strongest moments appear in the first two-thirds of the disk.

The first full-length track, "Rapunzel," is an upbeat reminder of the Dave Matthews Band heard on the previous two albums. One highlight of the tune, and the album as a whole, is the increased presence of bassist Lessard, whose

CD REVIEW

Before These Crowded Streets

Dave Matthews Band

■ STYLE: jazzy rock

■ RATING: ★★★★★

talents have always been harnessed by the group's style. That's not to say his capabilities are fully unleashed on "Before These Crowded Streets," but his playing is superior, as always.

After the bridge of "Rapunzel" sets the stage for what should be another fun, sunsplashed Dave Matthews album, the group changes gears. Each of the next two songs contain strong social commentary by Matthews and dark, menacing support from the musicians, including performances by banjoist Bela Fleck on each.

"The Last Stop" is a condemnation of holy war, emphasized by the Middle Eastern flair in the violin and bass lines. "Hate so deep, lead us all so blindly killing ... Killing fools we are ... If hate's the gate to peace this is the last stop for raining tears ... War the only way to peace ... I don't fall for that," Matthews sings. But the music and lyrics take a more positive turn in the bridge: "Here, there's more than is showing up ... Hope that we can break it down ... It's not so black and white."

The album's first single, "Don't Drink the Water," follows, on which Matthews approaches the plight of Native Americans during westward expansion from the voice of a white settler, joined vo-

cally by Alanis Morissette.

"I have no time to justify to you ... Fool you're blind, move aside for me ... All I can say to you my new neighbor ... Is you must move on or I will bury you," sings Matthews over a foreboding musical background. The brilliance of this song is his ability to paint both attitudes of the whites with the words and music, as he moves from the aforementioned threatening tones to a more passive voice: "So you will lay your arms down ... Yes I will call this home."

"The Stone" is a frantic plea for reassurance after an unsaid misdeed that features the Kronos Quartet on strings and a playful reference to Elvis Presley by Moore in the song's outro.

"Crush" provides a return to the band's favorite theme, love, and a not-so-subtle reminder of "Crash." From listening to past efforts like "Jimi Thing" and "Crash," it would appear that Dave enjoys nothing better than smoking a joint and hanging out with his woman, and "Crush" does nothing to dispute that notion. "Sitting, smoking, feeling high ... In this moment it feels so right ... Lovely Lady I'm at your feet ... God I want you so badly," Matthews sings, and when he asks, "Am I right-side up or upside-down?" we all know the answer.

"Before These Crowded Streets" will not break any musical barriers. It does nothing that Matthews himself has not for the most part done already. But this is ear candy at its finest, guaranteed to bring a smile to the most sullen face. The combination of the new, improved weather in Eugene, a sunny deck, a brew and this CD will make for many a perfect afternoon to come.

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