

STREET SCENE

Dave Matthews' bass player graduates road 'college'

BY CHRISTINA FUOCO
STAFF WRITER

Most college students' undergraduate years involve meeting new friends, going to class, studying, getting a fake ID and gabbing until dawn in a 12-by-12 dorm room.

Stefan Lessard earned his "degree" in a non-traditional fashion. The 22-year-old spent his formative years as the bass player for the Dave Matthews Band. Instead of sitting in a lecture hall with a couple hundred people, Lessard showed up to 15,000 people a night a thing or two about fluid funky bass playing.

"For the first four years, I took it very much like school," said Lessard who joined the band at age 16. "I really had to learn from everybody. I feel as if I had gone to school for the past four years and graduated. Now I'm going to let loose and relax for awhile."

"Next year I'll start thinking about 'graduate school.'"

Lessard's diplomas are four platinum albums, each signifying one million sales of the Dave Matthews Band's debut studio album "Under the Table and Dreaming" (RCA), which spawned the Grammy-nominated single "What Would You Say." The band's latest album "Crash" (RCA) is poised to be just as successful. The first single "Too Much" has inundated the radio airwaves and the video is on heavy rotation at MTV. The



Playing Pine Knob: The Dave Matthews Band - from left, drummer Carter Beauford, violinist Boyd Tinsley, singer/guitarist Dave Matthews, bassist Stefan Lessard and saxophonist LeRoi Moore.

song, Lessard said, is representative of the aggressive nature of the album that integrates some electric guitar from Tim Reynolds, who also appeared on

the live album "Remember Two Things" (1993) and "Under the Table and Dreaming." "I think that's just our direction now. We're a lot more rougher now; not rougher as in mean. We're a lot more aggressive when it comes to what we play. We're more confident of this band working together. ... It's a reflection of us - the dark sides of us and the light sides of us. It feels like it's more of a

rounded out album."

Matthews credits producer Steve Lillywhite (U2, Talking Heads, Rolling Stones) with the relaxed, yet adventurous attitude in the studio. Lessard said that watching Lillywhite and Matthews work together on the songs was like watching an artist at work.

"Half of the things (Matthews) does in the first part of recording he's not really singing lyrics. He's just singing phrases that fit well with the melody that he hears in his head. From his phrasing, words start to appear. Steve would take all those bits and pieces that weren't really words and help Dave pick his brain."

"What we do from there is we grab from the different areas of music - this part would sound good with this part. As a group that's when we really start to fine-tune the song. When Dave plays guitar, it's like he's making a sculpture from there."

The Dave Matthews Band formed in 1991 with Matthews, saxophonist LeRoi Moore, Lessard, and drummer Carter Beauford with violinist Boyd Tinsley jumping on board later that year. Lessard said his parents were pretty relaxed about his teenage obsession.

"At first they definitely had the parental concerns of who I was hanging out with - 30, 20-year-old crazy young people - and what I was doing, going into bars and things like that. They were pretty loose about it, though. Both of them are musicians, but I had a couple of all-nighters that didn't go by quite as coolly as I thought."

Lessard should be soaking in his parents' advice. Lessard

takes another class in adulthood in August when he and his wife, who married Wednesday, Feb. 7, in New York, are expecting their first child in August.

"In a way it makes me really want to get the whole touring thing worked out. Boyd has a child, too, so we're trying to plan future tours where we have a

baby bus."

The Dave Matthews Band, The Freddy Jones Band and Ben Harper perform a sold-out show at 6:30 p.m. Saturday, June 22, at Pine Knob Music Theatre, 1-76 and Sashabaw Road, Independence Township. For more information, call (810) 377-0100.

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