

The road stretches for Dave Matthews Band

AP Associated Press

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2 hours, 43 minutes ago

Dave Matthews has long been touted as one of the hardest-working guys in the music business. With yet another extensive summer tour and the follow-up to 2005's "Stand Up" in the works, it looks like he's living up to that description.

It's hard to believe that the Dave Matthews Band, which grossed \$57 million in 2005 from touring North America and has consistently placed in the top 5 grossing tours annually over the last decade, still has the stamina to push on.

But when you've built your success on playing live, you tend to stick to a pattern that works.

"We do change the sets and let the music evolve and look for spontaneous moments in what we're doing," Matthews said by phone while sipping a beer at Heathrow airport, waiting for his flight back home from a week in London. "Maybe I get tired of not being in one place or not having the same pillows every night, but as long as we like playing, it sort of makes all the other (stuff) more bearable."

DMB has a following equal to other improvisational rock bands like Widespread Panic and Phish, and they quickly learned to capitalize on the fact that their fans relish following them around the country.

"More than anything, what has driven our career is touring," Matthews said. "If you're lucky enough to find something you enjoy, you put up with traffic jams."

This summer, like nearly every summer for the past 10 years, DMB itself will create many of those jams, incorporating new songs into their stretched-out, jazz-inspired live sets.

Over the last few months, the band has been working on fresh material in their new studio in Charlottesville, Va., for a forthcoming album slated for a late 2006 or early 2007 release. It's in this studio — in a renovated house in their hometown — that they've been able to really get back to their roots.

"It's our place. There's no pressure," Matthews said. "We can show up at the studio and just sit around and eat and talk and not do a thing. That lack of pressure, in a strange way, creates an environment that is even more creative."

For this album the band re-teamed with Mark Batson, who produced the platinum-selling "Stand Up."

"There's a back and forth between the band and Mark that is very surprising and very rich," Matthews said. "We've only scratched the surface of what might come working with him."

How itchy the band has gotten, Matthews wouldn't say. But he did reveal that this new project will have a more aggressive live sound and a few musicians, including trumpet player Rashawn Ross, who will likely join the band on many dates on the summer tour, will guest on the album.

This summer, longtime fans can expect to hear DMB dig deep into its musical repertoire and dust off old favorites like "JTR," which the band pulled out during their encore at this year's New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival. As for what other surprises they have in their bag, Matthews simply replied, "the rest I should just keep to myself."

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