Dave Matthews Band, The Most Compelling Band Around Essay, Research Paper

Dave Matthews Band is a unique, musically gifted band. Its combination of sounds of folk, jazz, rock, world beat, and reggae give it its originality and musicality that extends the bounds of music. The five members of the band: Dave Matthews, Boyd Tinsley, LeRoi Moore, Stefan Lessard, and Carter Beauford, provide a blend of influences that create this originality. It s an interracial music group compromising of three blacks, and two white, and an age difference of over 20 years between members. (Guitar World: Different Strummer ) “Our musical style illustrates our different backgrounds, both musically and non-musically,” says Matthews. “We’ve been influenced not only by pop, but by African music, jazz, just about everything. We incorporate lots of different textures, so we’ve been able to create a very unique sound — a very American music.” (Relix Magazine: One Nation Under a Groove ) As LeRoi Moore states, It is this blend of influence that creates the blend of texture. (FAQ) This rich texture from the blend of influence is what creates the most compelling band around, Dave Matthews Band.

The band came to be in April 1991, playing its first gig for an Earth Day celebration. Dave Matthews had always dreamed of starting his own band. He approached his favorite jazz players, (who he also served drinks to as a bartender) LeRoi Moore and Carter Beauford to make a demo tape of the songs he had written. Moore and Beauford liked what they heard and decided to stay with Matthews. He also approached Stefan Lessard to play with them, a 16-year-old prodigy bass player. Boyd Tinsley was added to the band after playing the violin in the song, Tripping Billies in the album Crash. Soon the band began playing gigs at area bars, fraternities, Universities, They soon later joined the band circuit, H.O.R.D.E. In 1993, they released their first Album, Remember Two Things, which sold over 150,000 copies. After that, another successful album, Before These Crowded Streets, was released, selling more than 30,000 copies in the first week alone. (Guitar World: Different Strummer) DMB is a big touring band, making long and exhausting concert tours. Dave Matthews is more than just a radio band, they are a band that can play its music live and have it still sound good, for they use acoustic instruments. DMB is a band to be admired for these reasons. (Relix Magazine One Nation Under a Groove. )

Dave Matthews, the bands namesake, provides unique influences to the band. He was born in South Africa in 1967. His father was a scientist and moved around a lot, explaining Dave s unique accent. As a teenager, he moved to the United States. Without a United States high school diploma, Dave s opportunities were limited and therefore decided to go into music. Dave spent his time in Africa soaking up African percussion music, and listening to artists such as King Sunny Ade, Salif Keita, and Hugh Masekala. When he moved to America, he spent his time soaking up Western rock, pop, and funk, listening to the Beatles, and Pink Floyd, among others. Dave plays the acoustic guitar for the band, as well as the vocals. (The Officials Dave Matthews Band Website)

The ways he plays the guitar and sings is how he makes his unique contributions to the band. His guitar playing is influenced by the sounds of African percussion. Dave explained his hard-driving guitar playing as this: I think it s a love of drum and a love of percussion that led me there. I really almost try to think of the guitar and each string on the guitar as a percussion instrument. (The Boston Globe: How Dave Matthews Found His Groove ),

Carter Beauford provided jazz influences to the band. Since childhood, he has been playing jazz drums. Music came natural to him as a result of his father, who played trumpet in a jazz band. Before joining Dave Matthews Band, he was a member of a fusion band called Secrets , auditioned for an Arsenio Hall show (not making it), and landed a spot as a jazz pianist on Bet on Jazz , the jazz show. Carter moved back to Charlottesville, and was approached by Dave Matthews in making a demo tape. (The Officials Dave Matthews Band Website) He liked what he heard, and stayed with Dave. The tape Dave gave me grabbed me immediately. It wasn t jazz, it wasn t rock, it wasn t folk it was something different. (Spin Magazine: Fanfare For The Common Man )

Stefan Lessard and LeRoi Moore add jazz influences to the band. Lessard was only 16 when approached by Dave Matthews, however, his talent shone through as a jazz bass player. Though he originally played upright bass, he converted to the electric bass for the band. However, he does include the upright in some live shows. (The Official Dave Matthews Band Website) LeRoi Moore added a beautiful touch of blend of influences through his jazz and classical background. He plays a variety of saxophones, as well as the flute. Before joining Dave Matthews, he played in a variety of jazz nightspots in the Charlottesville area. LeRoi added a touch of classical sound into the bands music from being trained in the classics. (The Official Dave Matthews Band Website)

Boyd Tinsley s unique character adds to the bands own uniqueness. As LeRoi Moore, Boyd Tinsley contributed to the bands sometimes-classical sounds. 1985, he was a classical violinist, then he switched to rock and roll; thus contributing a rock and roll sound into the blend. Tinsley defined the rock n roll violin sound. Previously to joining with Dave Matthews, Tinsley had his Boyd Tinsley Band. After making demo tapes with Matthews, Beauford, Moore and Lessard, he made a decision to quit his band and join theirs. His words were, I like what you re doing, I like your sound, so I m going to quit my other bands and join you guys. (The Official Dave Matthews Band Website) Tinsley wasn t originally going to be added to the band. He was first brought in to play the violin for Tripping Billies. However, both DMB and Tinsley fell in love with the idea of a violinist being added, adding to the both classical and acoustic influences in the band. Tinsley is more than just any other violinist. He is a one of a kind with the image he presents of himself, musically as well as physically. My whole life pretty much revolves around working out.. , Boyd says. He spends three hours a day, six days a week working out, making him the most in-shape sideman in music. (Spin Magazine: Fanfare For The Common Man ) This is quite a picture; a dreadlocked, 6 2 violinist. Boyd is quite a unique character.

When considering the members of this band, and how they affect its sound, one cannot forget Tim Reynolds. Although he has not been officially stated a member of the band, he has played in each CD, and tours with Dave Matthews Band when not touring with his own band, TR3. Reynolds is a friend of Dave Matthews, and has played with him longer than DMB has been together. Tim Reynolds plays the guitar, and adds an acoustic sound to the band. (The Official Dave Matthews Band Website) (DMB Forum: A DMB Info File)

Dave Matthews Bands success also makes them a compelling band. Success is determined through the ability to provoke emotion, and this is achieved through its instrumentation and lyrical content. Dave Matthews Band provokes incredible feeling to the listeners of their music. Some bands have the same sound in each of their songs, or they play the same songs over and over at concerts, such as Smashing Pumpkins (complained a DMB fan to Dave) (Spin Magazine: Fanfare For The Common Man. ) DMB creates a new sound and feeling for each of their songs and performances. For example, in giving live performances, the band unrestricted themselves from emotion and showed their feelings of the song. In concert, Carter Beauford can be seen going nuts on the drums and cymbals during a roll in a song such as Too Much. In the CD, Live at Luther College , one cannot help but notice the emotion Dave Matthews is giving off in a particular song he is singing. He soulfully strums his guitar, and rings out his voice to his hearts content. Dave Matthews achieves being a successful music group by successfully provoking emotions.

Another factor in provoking emotion is through its instrumentation. Dave Matthews Band helps capture such emotion through the instrumentation of acoustic guitar, violin, bass, drums, and a variety of woodwinds. Such instrumentation will be hard to find in another band. Dave Matthews puts it as; “Maybe we’re just a retro group that sounds like all the other old rock bands that had acoustic guitar, violin, saxophone, acoustic drums, and one electric instrument. Which, I can’t think of any offhand.”(Spin Magazine: Fanfare For The Common Man ) Each individual of the band has their own instruments to play to their interpretation of each song, giving off a variety of sounds and emotions. . In listening to Too Much , it is easily noticed the emotions and feeling LeRoi Moore gives off in his bari saxophone solo. DMB s soulful instrumentation provokes emotion thus making the band quite successful. The variety gives a unique style to Dave Matthews Band, which makes them such a compelling group (The DMB Forum: A DMB Info File).

Another contribution to their success is the message their songs give out through its lyrical content and poetic influences. The theme of a song gives off emotion, aiding it in becoming a great piece of music. The song Tripping Billies is about a day during Dave s childhood, that he was hanging with his friends, and was being chased be the police. The song gives off a bouncy feeling, arousing ones senses. Lie in our Graves is about being dead, and having no regrets. It is a happy song, provoking happy thoughts and mood. Typical Situation is based on a poem: Prayer in the Pentagon , by Robert Dederick. This poem arouses ones senses with its descriptive language. Passages such as: arched over the tidal blue and branching grey and grazing green and foaling brown down and away with gorsing yellow glow and honeyed hay and petalled blush and mottled winging whir and, Six senses thee were then In us who were salt-tasting all along the salt-scented shore who felt crust cool and looked on shrinking sea… Dave Matthews converted this poem into a sense provoking song, capturing emotion. The ability to provoke the listeners emotion through its lyrics helps make a band successful. (The DMB Forum: A DMB Info File)

In hypocrisy to the above paragraph, the true meaning of Dave Matthews Bands songs are not through its lyrics. In paying close attention to the songs, multi messages are given. One message is the one through the instruments and how they are played. Another message is through the voice of Dave Matthews. The last message is through the actual words Dave says. Perhaps the strongest message is given through the instrumentation. The unique players give off their emotions through their own interpretations. This is done because the instrumentals are put together by the band. Dave wrote his guitar part, and the rest of the band helped put the song together in their own way. Next, Dave sends an emotional message through his voice as he would through his guitar, or the others would through their instruments. This is dependent on how he says the words, not what he says. Dave s last step in writing songs is writing the words. Even though the instrumentation and vocal emotions send off the messages, the words still do matter. This is proven through the feelings of Dave Matthews himself. He fears that the words he make to a song will not be as good and emotional as the music itself. He puts it as, “Just before I went back to do the vocals was the scariest part,” he says. “Because the music was so good, so chest-out. Like, ‘Don’t Drink the Water’ was angry and plodding, and none of us had played anything like that. But my lyrics were gibberish. I was singing with real emotion, but it could have been about, like, the worms in Steve Lillywhite’s (producer) stomach. (Spin Magazine: Fanfare For The Common Man. ) He is saying that he sings the words in its own story, without the words actually telling the same story. Multi-messages are told through a single song, provoking more emotion than the common band.

The deep emotional content of Dave Matthews Bands songs are linked to the emotional background of Dave Matthews. He has experienced some devastating life issues that have aided in his gift for capturing ones emotions through music. His father died when he was only ten. For the next few years after his fathers death, he experienced sleepwalking spells accompanied by nightmares. He would wake up insane, screaming things such as I can t find my Frisbee to save me from the Chinese Mothballs (Spin Magazine: Fanfare For The Common Man ) Another incident is in 1994, when his sister, Anne, and her husband were murdered. He dedicated his album Under The Table and Dreaming to her. These experiences trigger some emotion and meaning into some of his quotes, such as Celebrate we will, because life is short Despite these tragic events, Dave Matthews’ emotions are most triggered through spending time with his mother and family. He is a man of many emotions, sharing it with the world through his music.

Dave Matthews Band is truly a compelling and musical band. The individuals of the band and their interpretations give off a unique style that can be appreciated by anyone who appreciates the art of music. Dave Matthews contributes soulful vocal and guitar, introducing music styles from around the world. Carter Beauford and Stefan Lessard contribute jazz, as well as Moore and Tinsley, who also contribute a classical style. The music gives off many messages, through the instrumentation, voice inflection and the actual lyrics of a song. They fulfill the requirements of any good band; successfully conveying a message through their music to trigger ones emotions and arouse ones senses. These different aspects, and how Dave Matthews Band not only meets, but exceeds the standards of good music, is what makes them the most compelling and gifted band around.

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