



For the first time since 1994, Warren Haynes is not logging substantial time with Gov't Mule and The Allman Brothers Band. Rather, he's leading his new eponymous soul revue project and adjusting to life as a new father.

Papa's Got a Brand New Bag

By DEAN BUDNICK *Photograph by* MARIUS BUGGE



It's a few hours before the Warren Haynes Band will open their East Coast fall tour in Providence, R.I. and the group's namesake is channeling John Scofield.

As the band begins their soundcheck, moving from Sly & The Family Stone's "Stand" to Haynes' "Sick of My Shadow," the guitarist steps toward keyboard player Nigel Hall and lets loose with a few signature licks from the Scofield composition "Hottentot."

A wide smile breaks across Hall's otherwise intense, focused visage. Later in the month, he and Warren Haynes Band drummer Terence Higgins will leave to join Scofield on a three week European tour, and Haynes, who holds the jazz guitarist in deep regard—offering a nod to him years ago with the original composition "Sco-Mule"—jokes that he's preparing them for the gig.

Not only is Haynes' playing spot on in terms of tone and delivery but his riffs are also jocular, affectionate and true to the musical moment—hallmarks of his approach as a bandleader and performer.

THESE TRAITS WERE evidenced earlier in the year, when Haynes extended his initial invitation for Hall to join the group, which came with an alluring mandate.

"The first thing Warren said was, 'Don't worry about anything; play everything that would get you fired from any other gig,'" Hall says. "I was sold off that and it works. Warren is a great bandleader because he really appreciates what we—as individual musicians—bring. He is a super bro, a super homie and this is a great, great gig."

Haynes chuckles when he learns of Hall's pronouncement.

"It's something [founding Gov't Mule bassist Allen] Woody said about Gov't Mule," confides Haynes. "One time we were talking about

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at 15, you can’t work that late. But when they called me back after I turned 16, I wasn’t interested because I was in a band. We were having fun and I was going to see what happened as a musician trying to make a living.”

As it turned out, he did OK for himself, receiving an invitation to join country outlaw David Allan Coe’s group at age 19. Haynes reflects, “I was a little over my head as far as the lifestyle was concerned. It was a little too crazy for me but, from a career standpoint, it was a step up and it was through that experience that I met Gregg Allman and Dickey Betts, which eventually led me to join the Allman Brothers.”

He remained with Coe for four years before settling down in Nashville, Tenn. and briefly contemplating the life of a for-hire studio musician. He came to discover, however, that he just wasn’t cut out for it.

“I tried dealing with the whole nine-to-five approach and it didn’t work for me,” he says today. “I didn’t like fashioning my music to what somebody else might want it to be. Being a studio musician is a thankless job. There are few times when you’re able to be yourself. There’s usually somebody pushing you in a direction that is not the direction that you would choose and it becomes very cookie-cutter. I was feeling very limited.”

An opportunity presented itself in 1986 when Dickey Betts invited Haynes to a vocal session where he was recording a demo. Matt Abts was the drummer for the Dickey Betts Band and recalls, “Marty Privette, the bass player, who lived in Nashville had been talking about Warren Haynes and [told Betts], ‘You’ve got to hear him play.’ He had quite a reputation back then.”

Betts liked what he heard, welcoming Haynes into the group and into The Allman Brothers Band when they reformed in 1989. Throughout the years, as Haynes met new steady collaborators in Gov’t Mule, Phil Lesh & Friends and The Dead, he continued to push against the limitations that those studio sessions imposed.

“The whole idea of discovering the music as you’re playing it is something I’m very intrigued by and is a big part of everything we do,” Haynes says. “When you’re talking about some of the more complex numbers, especially in odd time signatures, there are certain ones that if someone gets off track, it’s really hard to get back on.

“An example in Gov’t Mule is the song ‘Wandering Child.’ If any individual loses the time signature, it’s hard to get back. And I can remember two instances where we almost had to stop playing because we were scared we weren’t going to get it back.

“In The Dead, an example would be ‘King Solomon’s Marbles.’ That’s another one where you’ve got to be completely focused and if you lose it, then it’s hard to jump back on the train.

“I’m more enamored with collective improvisation than I am with improving my own playing, and maybe those two things go hand-in-hand. You have to shut the cerebral part of your brain off to a certain extent and get lost in the music. You can spend years—sometimes

the original trio with him—[drummer] Matt [Abts] and myself—and he said, ‘Yeah, in this band, we can play all the shit that would get us fired from any other band.’ It’s half serious but half true. There is a common philosophy that all my projects share and that’s a pretty appropriate, albeit humorous, description of that philosophy. Don’t think of the music in a traditional sense—think of it in a way that’s paying it forward and trying to take the music somewhere it’s never been before.”

Haynes has developed this ethos during the past 36 years as a live performer. As he reconsiders the sweep of his career, he recalls the last job he had other than being a musician, which was as a 15 year old growing up in Asheville, N.C.

“I worked at KFC for 30 days and they laid me off because I was too young to be working the hours I was working,” he recalls. “They said, ‘When you turn 16, we can rehire you according to the state law but,

decades—learning how to play what’s in your head, and then, I think you reach a point of, ‘Do I play that or do I challenge myself and not play it and wait until I hear what somebody else plays and completely respond to that with no forethought of what I was going to play?’

“The greatest example to me is the Miles Davis Quintet with Herbie Hancock, Wayne Shorter, Ron Carter and Tony Williams. When you listen to the band, you get the sense that none of them knew what they were going to play until they heard what someone else played immediately prior and it’s momentary composition. I feel like I’m getting better at that and it’s something that really appeals to me in a big way.”

Still, Haynes remains drawn to the more traditional form of composition as well. The self-described “lyrical fanatic” and “song-writer freak,” names a pantheon of influences that includes Joni Mitchell, Jackson Browne, Elvis Costello, Neil Young, Roger Waters and Tom Waits.

“I tend to write based on lyrical inspiration more than musical inspiration,” he explains. “I find it easier to take the mood that a lyric evokes and create music to go with that mood. To me, that’s easier than finding the mood that the music evokes and writing a lyric to it, which is like threading a needle in the dark.”

Haynes cites books as particular sources of inspiration, with Chuck Palahniuk’s *Choke* and Paul Neilan’s *Apathy and Other Small Victories* as recent favorites, while the works of John Steinbeck and William Faulkner have served this purpose in the past.

“From a writing standpoint, I’m always moving in a sine wave,” he analogizes. “Sometimes I’m writing; sometimes I’m not. Throughout my life or career, I’ve always had slumps where I don’t write for months at a time. It always freaks me out when it happens, and then, out of the blue, I’ll get an idea for a song and then another one and another. The next thing you know, I’m juggling two or three songs at once and I’m out of the slump.”

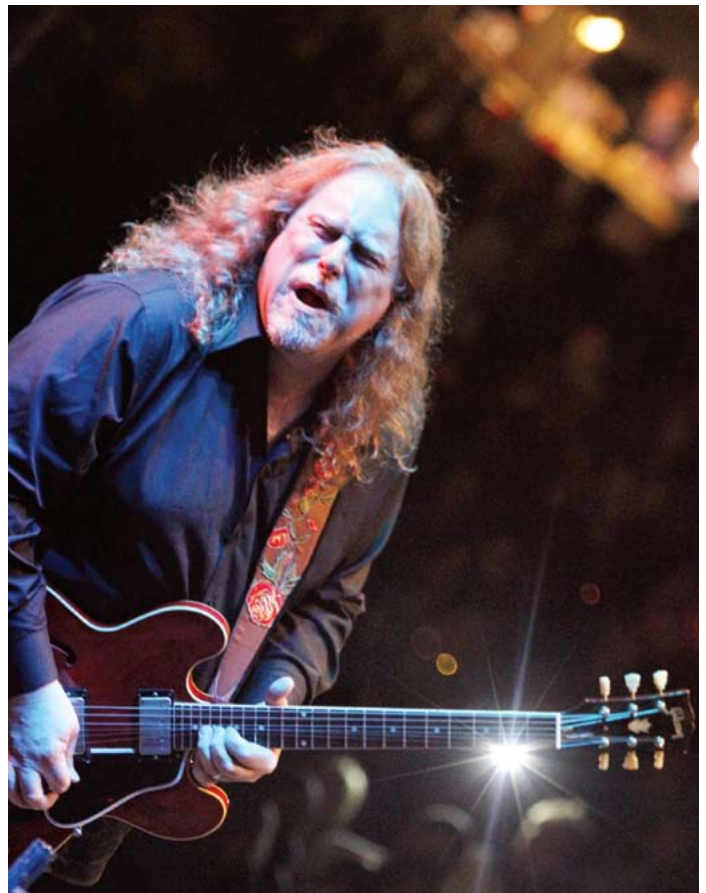
Given the breadth of his influences, the openness of his approach and the range of his musical contexts, it’s not surprising that some of the compositions that Haynes has written over the years didn’t feel suitable to any of his existing bands—until now.

Recorded on vintage equipment in a Texas studio with top-notch talent (including George Porter Jr., Ivan Neville, Ian McLagan, Raymond Weber and Ruthie Foster), the Warren Haynes Band’s *Man In Motion* harkens back to the soul music of Haynes’ youth. The album is exposing Haynes to some new listeners, who may have found his earlier efforts to be too loud, heavy or steeped in improv.

Still, he is quick to dismiss any notion that the album is an effort to reorient himself toward the mainstream. “I’ve been doing this too long to chase anything,” he says. “Whatever airplay I’m getting, I’m getting because people like what I’ve chosen to do and not because I’ve chosen to do something that’s similar to other things that are currently successful.

“Any time you second guess the market, it’s going to change before you know it, anyway. Soul music was my first love. Before I ever heard Cream or Jimi Hendrix, my heroes were James Brown, Wilson Pickett and Otis Redding. So it’s more of a full-circle thing for me, and there was no trying to determine whether it would be less appealing or more appealing than what I was doing. It was being able

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The Warren Haynes Band, June 3, 2011

to express myself in a way that felt honest.”

One can hear this in the editing (or lack thereof) on the tracks that Haynes and fellow producer Gordie Johnson selected for *Man In Motion*. “When we recorded the record, right up to the very end, we could have opted for shorter versions—less guitar solos, less jamming—but the final decision was going back to the way I felt and Gordie felt when we were kids listening to music,” offers Haynes. “You’d hear these records fade. And it seemed like just when the band started cooking, they faded out and you always wondered what happened that you didn’t get to hear. We wanted to give people the parts that they wouldn’t have gotten to hear.”

GOV’T MULE WAS on a predetermined hiatus for 2011—one that they discussed for a few years but postponed after bassist Jorgen Carlsson replaced Andy Hess in late 2008. In fact, Haynes cut *Man in Motion* immediately after *By a Thread* in the spring/summer of 2009 in the same Texas studio, but shelved it because he felt it was important—for Mule’s longevity—to make sure that the new lineup with Carlsson gelled on the road. Meanwhile, The Allman Brothers Band scaled back their tour itinerary, so that the members could focus on their other projects after Gregg Allman’s liver transplant limited his ability to work in 2010. This meant 2011 would be the first time since 1994—the year that Gov’t Mule began—that Haynes didn’t log substantial time on the road with either group.

After reviewing his tour docket, one might be tempted to strip him of the “Hardest Working Man” badge that the media continues to pin on him—if the very designation were not so misguided. Haynes observes, “I think way too much is made of that. Housewives work harder than me. I don’t consider what I do to be hard work. There are a lot of jobs out there where I wouldn’t last two weeks. That’s doesn’t mean I don’t give 100 percent to what I do given the conditions



The Warren Haynes Band, l-r: Terence Higgins, Alecia Chakour, Haynes, Ron Johnson, Nigel Hall and Ron Holloway in San Francisco, Calif., 8/13/11

of my employment. There are no guarantees in any situation, but in the music business especially, you can give 110 percent and still not be successful. I think people who work hard are just reducing the odds that are against them.”

This work ethic has seen him bound from one musical setting to another, including a marathon day on June 29, 2002 at Deer Creek Amphitheater in Indiana when he took the stage for nearly six hours as a member of Gov’t Mule, the Allmans and Phil Lesh & Friends. More recently, on May 16, 2009, he performed with both the Allman Brothers and The Dead, who shared a bill at The Gorge in Washington state.

Throughout the years, a few critics have wondered whether his commitments to multiple groups might take a creative toll on Haynes. But he has consistently offered a contrary view and continues to do so, explaining, “I think from a learning standpoint, the inspiration factor outweighs the draining factor.”

Matt Abts echoes this sentiment. “Warren has thrived from his involvement with the Allman Brothers, the Grateful Dead and the Mule,” the drummer relays. “He understands them as different musical entities and they all require a different kind of nurturing, a different kind of stroke. I’ve learned from him that it’s a good way to not to be stuck in the same musical pool. You get other things thrown at you, and these elements can later come in to whatever you’re doing at any given time. So it’s a healthy thing for sure.”

While this may be the case from a creative perspective, there is still a bodily toll. “What we do takes a deep focus and it can be a physical challenge to play a three-minute guitar solo that starts in one dynamic and ends up in a whole other dynamic,” Haynes acknowledges. “It can be mentally and emotionally draining because you have to hang on every note—not only that you’re playing yourself—but that everybody onstage is playing.”

Back in 2005, when Haynes took a few nights off during The Allman Brothers Band summer tour, rumors swirled that he might be sidelined for an extended period due to a stroke or other severe ailment. As to whether there was any truth to them, Haynes suggests that it, “kind of got blown out of proportion. I missed a few shows because I was having a bunch of tests run but it all turned out to be good!”

In response, however, he currently places renewed thought and effort on treating his body properly while on tour.

“One of the hardest things about being on the road is eating properly, and obviously, I’m someone who struggles with that, but it’s a unique lifestyle and we’re on a unique schedule,” Haynes says. “People don’t get off work and immediately go to bed. If we play a show until midnight or one o’clock in the morning, it’s not like you’re going to bed an hour later. A lot of musicians, especially singers, don’t like to eat right before a show. Let’s say I ate something at four or five o’clock, showtime’s at eight or nine, then, at midnight, I’m starving. The worst thing to do is eat late at night or eat right before you go to bed, especially when the choices might be really bad. So it’s hard to maintain a healthy lifestyle in that way.”

Such considerations have become all the more important, following a profound life change that took place in late September: Warren Haynes became a father.

IN OCTOBER OF 1997, Haynes married Stefani Scamardo. (The Radiators served as the wedding band, although Gov’t Mule made an appearance as well.) Scamardo met Haynes in the summer of 1989, when she lucked onto a pair of house seats released just prior to The Allman Brothers Band’s appearance at Merriweather Post Pavilion

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and received an after-show pass from a friend of the promoter who was sitting in her section. Backstage, she met both Haynes and Woody, who had both recently joined the group, and a friendship blossomed into something more. Scamardo, a recent George Washington University grad and a former college athlete who had captained the basketball, softball and soccer teams, soon found her way to New York and began a job at Island Records, where she eventually ascended to the role of A&R coordinator. Her career path impacted Haynes, a lifelong Southerner, who soon settled in New York City as well. (“When I left Nashville in ‘89, New York was on my mind, and then, when I met Stefani, it all kind of fell into place.”)

A couple of years later, Scamardo started a management company called Hard Head from a nickname Haynes had given her when playfully referencing her obstinacy. She worked out of a spare bedroom in the apartment that she shared with Haynes, advocating for such groups as Xanax 25 and Cherokee Sex Workshop. In 1996, at the suggestion of Abts and Woody, she began managing Gov’t Mule and has been at it ever since—in addition to signing talent and running the company’s Evil Teen Records. In 2003, she also started juggling a gig as one of the founding DJs on SiriusXM’s Jam_On channel.

Amid all of their collective activity, Haynes and Scamardo had always planned on entering the ranks of parenthood only to experience heartache along the way.

“Stef and I have been trying to have a baby for years and years,” Haynes explains. “We tried all the natural stuff and we went through four tries at in vitro insemination. We’ve done it all.”

Eventually, the couple looked into adoption and during the break from Warren Haynes Band tour, while Hall and Higgins traveled to Europe with Scofield, the couple welcomed a newborn son into their lives.

“This is a whole different type of pressure than I’m used to,” an exhausted Haynes explains with a laugh four days after adopting Hudson Samuel Haynes. “[It’s] someone else’s life that you’re about to adopt into your own family and take care of forever. The first couple of nights in the hospital, I hardly slept between the uncomfortable conditions and just being a nervous wreck. It’s a serious lifestyle change. One thing that’s different about adoption is that unlike going through nine months of pregnancy, one day we’re not parents and the next day we are.”

An enthusiastic Abts shares: “I am so excited for him. I called him yesterday sobbing because I know their deal and they’ve wanted a child so badly and it’s taken them a long time. When he emailed me a picture of the child, saying what a proud father he is, I crumbled. It’s so good. My son just turned 18. The thing I’m proudest of in life is being a father and Warren is going to be such a great dad.”

Haynes has already anticipated the years to come, which will see him focus more of his energies at home. He hopes to break ground soon on a long-discussed home studio in the couple’s Westchester, N.Y. house. There, he expects to demo his catalog of compositions going back a few decades, some of which currently exist only in his head. He will also likely revisit the “singer/songwriter type record with a lot of acoustic instruments” that he has long contemplated. He hopes to accomplish all of this while enjoying precious family time.

Perhaps, in anticipation of this era, Haynes has made the most of his non-touring hours recently, joining colleagues and friends on their own studio sessions. The fall and winter months will see him appear on no less than nine releases. (Cue the “Hardest Working Man” theme.)

Haynes appears on new recordings by Peter Dinklage, Trombone Shorty, Bill Evans, The Lee Boys, Johnny Winter, Rich

Robinson, Edwin McCain and William Shatner. (Haynes added guitar to the actor’s cover of Golden Earring’s “Twilight Zone” but alas he never met Shatner who sent him a lovely thank-you email.)

He also is serving as co-producer on a Tommy Bolin tribute album, recruiting fellow guitarists such as John Scofield, Derek Trucks, Steve Morse, Brad Whitford and Nels Cline to add performances to outtakes and alternate versions of the music from Bolin’s two mid-1970s studio albums. (Bolin, an accomplished guitarist, died of a heroin overdose at the age of 25 in 1976.)

Still, Haynes maintains a focus and passion for the group that he assembled to support *Man In Motion*. Along with saxophonist Ron Holloway—the lone holdover from the album—he has tapped Hall, Higgins and bassist Ron Johnson with Alecia Chakour on vocals for most of the dates. It’s an animated, agile collective that is capable of riotous funk grooves, soulful statements and stirring improv.

The bandleader raves: “Every day at soundcheck, some members of the band wind up onstage before the entire band does and get into some exploration that’s interesting and cool. I’m looking forward to watching this band explore more new territory because everybody’s interests are so diverse and everybody’s abilities are equally diverse. It’s fun to see something as new as this grow and watch the directions it’s going.”

The Warren Haynes Band will tour into December before Haynes and Abts close out the year with Gov’t Mule at the Beacon Theatre in New York. (Mule will also spend a little time in the Caribbean for the band’s third annual Island Exodus getaway in Jamaica.) While the details are still fluid, it appears that perhaps a new studio album will precede Gov’t Mule’s return to more action in 2012.

As Abts offers, “We dropped ourselves off at the highest point we’ve ever been. You don’t want to bail when you’re down and out—you want to go while you’re on top—if only for a little bit—which is what we did. Nothing will kill the Mule, that’s for sure.”

Meanwhile, Nigel Hall is similarly sanguine about the Warren Haynes Band. And if audience and musician enthusiasm are any indicator, the group looks to endure beyond the *Man In Motion* album cycle, even if the members focus their energies elsewhere for a while.

“I’m going to ride this motherfucker until the wheels fall off, let’s just put it that way,” Hall says. “If everything is properly maintained and everybody wants to keep going, then I’m in for the long haul.”

There’s no doubt that Warren Haynes will welcome the journey—proud papa through it all. **🎸**

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