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RICK CORNELL

# california dreaming

Raleigh musician David Dyer has been writing songs for close to 30 years and playing in a variety of bluegrass, country and rock bands for almost that long. But now, breathing hard down the neck of 42, he's making a real run at it—it being high-profile music success. And he's getting some impressive help from the producer's chair.

You can bitch about the Web presence, or lack thereof, of Scott Mathews, the guy who's providing that help. (Internet searches produced exactly nothing, though I did learn a lot about another Scott Mathews who specializes in jingles and inspirational songs.) But it's tough to find fault with his resume. Here are some highlights: Onetime member of the Beach Boys. Writer of Barbara Streisand's hit song "Superman." Participant in multiple Oscar- and Grammy-winning projects. Musical colleague of Eric Clapton, Bonnie Raitt, Carlos Santana, John Hiatt, John Fogerty, Jerry Garcia, Keith Richards and Van Morrison. Keep in mind that's a partial list; access to Mathews' Rolodex would also yield the cell phone numbers of Ringo Starr, Todd Rundgren and Booker T. Jones. Now that's a dinner party. A couple of weeks ago, Mathews did a quiet little Saturday gig, with Steve Miller and a decent portion of the San Francisco Philharmonic.

At first, Dyer had some healthy skepticism. "He's dropping these names," Dyer says with a chuckle, recalling his initial meeting with Mathews. "And I'm like 'Who in the hell is this guy, trying to fleece me?' But then, we start working on this album, and it becomes readily apparent that this guy is really good." That goes a long way toward explaining the picture in the studio of Mathews jamming with

Garcia and Elvis Costello.

So how did Dyer, a Raleigh-ite by way of Charleston and Hilton Head, SC, end up working with the Marin County-based, unabashedly Californian Mathews? "My wife bought a book, and Scott had written some pieces in it on songwriting and hanging on to your publishing," explains Dyer. On a whim, Dyer's wife started exchanging e-mails with Mathews; next thing Dyer knew he was sending the producer a tape with 30 songs and then heading to the West Coast for his first of several trips to record vocals, guitar and harmonica with Mathews.

An album is gradually coming together, courtesy of the work done in Mathews' Marin County studio as well as some recording that's being done at Durham's Overdub Lane with local musicians, including keyboard ace Jim Crew. In addition to his production work and all-around guru-ship, Mathews has played standup bass, fretless bass, drums, pump organ, cello

and viola at the sessions.

Dyer's looking for an October release, and he describes the music on the record as "twangrock" and as being a "Hank Williams Sr./Rolling Stones type thing." If that means sounds in a "Dead Flowers" vein (no pun intended), then sign me up.

"The guy is nuts," offers a laughing Dyer at one point about Mathews, with obvious affection and maybe even a bit of awe. "His mind doesn't work like an East Coast mind." With any luck, come October we'll get to hear how this meeting of the minds worked out. In the meantime, you can catch Dyer and his band Crooked Smile at the Berkeley in Raleigh on August 9.

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Rick Cornell writes about music matters for LatherWeekly.

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