

Gov't Mule

Big riffs, massive grooves, and expansive improvisations are the hallmarks of Gov't Mule's legendary live shows. Likewise, their well-crafted songs feature larger-than-life characters bearing life's heaviest burdens, performed by four musicians: guitarist/vocalist Warren Haynes, drummer Matt Abts, keyboard player Danny Louis, and bassist Andy Hess whose powerful musicianship and chemistry along with their tireless work ethic have earned them the respect of their peers.

With their new ATO Records release *HIGH & MIGHTY* produced by Haynes and Gordie Johnson, former leader of Canada's acclaimed Big Sugar, effectively bridges the gaps between rock and improvisational music. Laced with influences from blues, folk, reggae, soul and jazz, *HIGH & MIGHTY* has appeal for everyone, yet stubbornly refuses to be categorized.

Most of all, *HIGH & MIGHTY* is big, both in scope and in sound. Built upon the rock solid foundation of 12 original songs and clocking in at well over an hour, the disc boasts an urgent, in-your-face sound reminiscent of the band's thunderous live concerts.

"Our goal was to capture the chemistry and the spirit of the band, which has progressed into something beyond what it was for the last record," says Haynes. "The last record was the first with the new lineup, and this being the second one I feel that the chemistry is that much stronger. We took the interplay that happens on stage and utilized it to create something magical in the studio."

Yes, *HIGH & MIGHTY* was recorded the old-fashioned way: four musicians in one room, together capturing in the studio the band's uniquely telepathic interplay. It's a high level of improvisation for a rock band. "Even within the structures of straight ahead rock songs, this band plays with a jazz sensibility," explains Haynes. "Nobody is just playing a part. It is all about listening and call and response. We are all steeped in jazz and blues, so improvisation is our life's blood."

So is rock and roll, as evidenced by the leadoff song that gives the disc its title, "Mr. High and Mighty." Opening with the irresistible punch of a mammoth riff riding atop a colossal groove, the song is quintessential Gov't Mule: strong and catchy, with memorable guitar and bass lines and dramatic organ flourishes. The dynamic interplay between band members adds considerable flavor to the song's melodic structure. In short, a new Gov't Mule classic, and one that introduces the listener to yet another of Haynes' flawed character sketches.

"Mr. High and Mighty, standing with your back against the wall—They better jump when you say jump, they better crawl when you say crawl."

"Most of my characters are composites, and that song was inspired by several people," the guitarist explains. "My life has been very colorful, and I've been around a lot of characters who find their way into my songs." True to Haynes' word, *HIGH &*

MIGHTY's songs detail the trials and travails of characters encumbered by guilt, pain, and regret, who have obtained their personal golden ring only to find bleakness and darkness undermining their success.

"We're at a place in history where the bar is at an all time low-We've applauded mediocrity till there is no lower we can go"

"There's a generation coming up now, as far as people pursuing entertainment careers, their only goal is to be famous," says Haynes in reference to the song "Like Flies." It's not about being good at what you do, it's about doing what will make you famous, even if that means destroying your integrity. I heard someone say that art is less important in today's society than it has ever been, and I think that's true in a scary sort of way."

"Fake liberty is just another form of hate—Unring the bell, before it's too late."

The values or lack thereof in much of our society is explored in "Unring The Bell," a song that questions our definitions of liberty and equality. The song is buoyed by a strident reggae rhythm that righteously underpins its socially conscious message. Dub-mix sound effects, courtesy of Gordie Johnson, enhance the song with a vibrancy that is new for the band, yet enticingly familiar.

"A million miles from yesterday and a million more to go—Still I search each day, trying to find my way home."

That decline of values is echoed in "A Million Miles from Yesterday," a heavy rock ballad featuring a gospel background singers, organ, and an undeniably soulful groove. ("A Million Miles from Yesterday" is the only song not written in the last eighteen months by Haynes.) As he does throughout HIGH & MIGHTY, Haynes sings with the fervor of a gospel singer and the grit of a blues troubadour. The song's narrator searches for the principles - real or imagined - of an earlier time that he can never return to. "That song works for me now, but it was actually written ten or fifteen years ago," recalls Haynes. "When I wrote it, maybe the timing wasn't right, but I dusted it off recently and suddenly it made sense to me, much more so than when I wrote it."

Perhaps the song's newfound poignancy comes, at least in part, from the very real values inherent in Haynes' songs and in the band's music. Gov't Mule is a democracy of four, in which each member inspires the others to greater heights of creativity. "When we are onstage, we pay more attention to ourselves than we do to the audience," says Haynes. "It's not that we are ignoring the audience, rather, we are utilizing them as a source of energy. We are listening so deeply to each other in hopes that our interplay will take the music as far into as many directions as it possibly can go."

That interplay is what Gov't Mule's legion of devoted fans crave. Haynes says that Gov't Mule is "blessed with an amazing fan base. They not only allow us to experiment onstage, they encourage it, to the extent that we can feel that encouragement coming from the crowd. I trust the band implicitly, and I trust our audience, because they want to be a

part of the experience. They didn't come to hear the records, they didn't come to hear the same show we played last night, they came to be part of a moment in time, and that's what we are there for. It's an experience that we all share together. A high percentage of our audience is deeply in tune with our music, and that is the most you can ask for."

That unique relationship is something Gov't Mule has cultivated since its formation in 1994 as a power trio offshoot of the Allman Brothers Band. Their self titled debut was released in 1995; in 1997 Haynes and bassist Allen Woody followed their collective muse and Gov't Mule became a full-time band. After Woody's death in 2000, Haynes and Abts performed and recorded with over 30 bass players for the celebrated "Deep End" projects. Longtime acquaintance Danny Louis joined the band on keyboards in 2002, and the following year Andy Hess became the band's permanent bass player.

"Moment by moment, this current band is the most exciting ensemble that I've ever worked with," insists Haynes. "There are constant surprises, and the interplay is borderline telepathic. It's just one of those unspoken things that happens when you get these four musicians together. Something can be really good, or it can be beyond that, and what we've discovered and kindled goes way, way beyond."

In early 2003, "Sco-Mule," a funky instrumental track from THE DEEP END VOL. 1 featuring jazz guitarist John Scofield, was nominated for a Grammy Award. This marked Haynes' seventh overall Grammy nomination; in 1995 he accepted an award along with the Allman Brothers Band for an incendiary live take on the band's classic "Jessica."

In 2004, Gov't Mule celebrated its 1,000th live show. The past year has seen the band headline venues across the nation that include Colorado's famed Red Rocks Amphitheatre and multiple nights at New York's historic Beacon Theatre. In 2005 Warren Haynes was ranked No. 23 in Rolling Stone's list of all-time top guitarists, elevating him into the prestigious upper echelon of six-string heroes.

And there is plenty more excitement to come. With the release of HIGH & MIGHTY, Gov't Mule will once again hit the road, thrilling its devoted fan base while introducing their thunderous sound to even more aficionados of rock and improvisational music. Opening select dates on Gov't Mule's tour will be artists such as My Morning Jacket, Wolfmother, Robert Randolph and the Family Band, and Michael Franti and Spearhead.

Quite simply, the time for Gov't Mule is right now, and there is no better place to start than with HIGH & MIGHTY. So, as the band's diehard fans would say, get on the Mule train. Have a serious ass-kicking. Get up on a soapbox, and get all HIGH & MIGHTY about Gov't Mule.

Because, my friend, this one is going to be very, very big.