

MUSICIAN



WARREN HAYNES

Gov't Mule's fearless leader adapts and survives

By Chris Neal

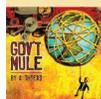
IF PLAYING IN A ROCK 'N' ROLL BAND IS A FULL-TIME JOB, Warren Haynes is successfully holding down three full-time jobs at once. He has fronted his own band, Gov't Mule, for the last 16 years; he continues to bring his virtuoso lead guitar work to the Allman Brothers Band; and since 2004 he has performed alongside several former members of the Grateful Dead in a reconstituted lineup known as the Dead. This is a man who loves his work.

"In each band I'm being allowed to utilize a different side of my musical personality, so it allows me an opportunity to express myself differently," says Haynes. "The key is to adapt to your surroundings. For me, it's a welcome challenge because it allows me to be creative in a lot of different ways, and each one brings fresh energy to the mix."

Lately Haynes has been focused on his role as the singer and guitarist in Gov't Mule, which recently released its sixth studio album, *By a Thread*. It's the Mule's first album featuring new bass

player Jorgen Carlsson—now occupying the spot once held down by founding member Allen Woody, who died in 2000. "We've played with a lot of amazing bass players who all did a wonderful job," Haynes says. "But Jorgen has brought back the initial spirit of Gov't Mule and reminded us why we started this band in the first place."

As always, Haynes has a busy work schedule ahead of him. He plans to release a solo album later this year that he says "sounds like soul music of the early '70s combined with B.B. King and Albert King blues of that same era. It's something that I've wanted to do and waited to do for a long, long time. I'm really proud of it." After that he aims to make what he calls "a singer-songwriter record." And he'll rejoin the Allman Brothers Band for a handful of dates the group has planned for this year. We caught up with Haynes during a rare day off from the road at his New York home to discuss the state of the Mule—as well as his many other musical adventures.



'I'm surrounded by great musicians, so every day is a learning experience.'

What does each member of the group bring to Gov't Mule's chemistry?

[Drummer] Matt Abts is an amazing improviser. He's listening to everything that everyone is playing and responding to it in a very uncanny way. Even though he's a rock drummer in a rock band, he's listening and responding like a jazz drummer. What he plays on a particular song could change from night to night based on what he's feeling and what he's hearing someone else play. [Keyboardist] Danny Louis plays, again, very much in a jazz musician sort of way—Danny was originally a jazz trumpet player who taught himself to play many other instruments, one of which is keyboards. My relationships with Matt and Danny are both indicative of the fact that we're taking a very jazz-like approach to rock music. Danny also plays guitar, which is nice. Since the band started out as a trio, it's good to not always lean on the one-guitar, keyboards, bass, drums format. Jorgen, who is the newest member of the band, is the missing piece to the puzzle. When we started playing with Jorgen, it felt like Gov't Mule more than it has since Allen passed away, due to the aggressive nature that Jorgen instinctually brings to the music. When it's time to write, his instincts are very similar to Allen's in a way that kind of spooked all of us. He's become part of the band more organically and quickly than we expected.

Had you previously avoided someone who played in a style that similar to Allen's?

I wouldn't say we avoided it. We knew that it would be futile to try and rediscover the same kind of chemistry that we had with Allen. Any band that's ever been through a situation where they lost a band member can empathize with the fact that that chemistry dies with that person, so the most you can hope for is to discover a new chemistry. Had we heard Jorgen shortly after Allen's passing, I'm not sure we would have been ready for that. But this far down the line it's a very welcome change.

When the four of you write a song together, how does that usually work?

The three songs [on *By a Thread*] that we wrote together in the studio, which were "Broke Down on the Brazos," "Any Open Window" and "Steppin' Lightly," were all born out of jam sessions. Then we would start putting the music together in some

sort of cohesive arrangement. We'd take a break and I'd disappear and write some lyrics, come back and, in the case of those three songs, start recording.

Tell me about some of the guitars you played on the record.

I played my signature Les Paul, my '61 [Gibson ES] 335, my custom shop 335, my 12-string Les Paul and a [Gibson] Non Reverse Firebird with three P-90 [pickups]. I think I actually used another Non Reverse Firebird on one song, and my original '64 Firebird on another.

You have a close working relationship with Gibson. How did that develop?

I've been playing Gibson guitars all my life, and somewhere around 1989 I started working more closely with them, and each year I've become more involved with them. They're constantly building different stuff for me to try. It's a perfect situation for me, because we can collaborate and communicate on what it takes to get a sound that's only in my head.

How about the rest of your studio setup? Do you bring a lot of stuff in?

Yeah, we bring a ton of gear—like a semi truck full of gear. We bring a lot of different amps and cabinets. I have a Bradshaw Switching System that all my gear runs through, which makes it really easy to say, "Hey, let's try this amp on that song," or "What if we mixed these two amps together?" Most of the sounds on this record and on the previous record were a combination of three different amplifiers. Usually two big amps through 412 cabinets, then a small amp, like a Fender Pro Junior or a Gibson Skylark—something that helps fill out the middle in a way that only small amps tend to be able to do. That's not to say that any of the three amps on their own wouldn't sound great, but the end result of blending the three always seems to be more satisfying. The ultimate goal is to not EQ if at all possible. Move the microphones, turn the knobs on the amps, change the microphones, whatever the case may be. To try to get a non-EQ'd guitar sound is a really important thing for us. One of the things we've been doing recently is to put two different mics on the same speaker—one mic will be brighter and one mic will be darker, so if you want the sound to be brighter you turn the bright mic up and if you want it to be darker you turn the dark mic up.

MAKING TRACKS ONLINE

Gov't Mule has always allowed fans to record and trade its shows, a common practice on the jam-band circuit. But in 2004 the group began preserving its own live legacy through muletracks.com, an online outlet that sells professional recordings of every Mule show performed since the site opened. "It's a little scary, because every note we play is available to the public," says Haynes. "Our worst show stands there right next to our best show. But we're used to that." Each show is available in three different formats, at three different price levels: 128 kbps MP3 (\$12.95), 256 kbps MP3 (\$13.95) and lossless FLAC (\$14.95).

Haynes asserts that muletracks.com is successful because Gov't Mule is constantly shifting its setlist and improvising throughout every performance. "I think it's the way of the future for bands like us, but it wouldn't make sense for a band that played the same songs the same way night after night," he says. "Our repertoire is hundreds of songs, and you never know what you're going to get."

Haynes regularly listens to the recordings offered at the website to ensure



Danny Clitch

Matt Abts, Danny Louis, Haynes, Jorgen Carlsson

the audio quality is up to snuff, but otherwise has little interest in trawling through Gov't Mule's virtual concert vault himself. "If there was a really great show that I have fond memories of, maybe I'll check it out," he says. "But for the most part I'm thinking about what we're going to do tomorrow."

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Haynes and Gov't Mule drummer
Matt Abts at the Incheon Pentaport
Rock Festival in South Korea, 2007



Chung Sung Jun/Getty Images

'In each band I'm allowed to utilize a different side of my musical personality'

Are you also thinking ahead to how you're going to translate the studio sound to the stage?

No. I don't think about that 'til much later. It may cross my mind for an instant, but for the most part I'm trapped in the studio headspace.

What's your onstage rig like now?

I have the same Bradshaw Switching System. I usually am running two amps, but not at the same time. It'll be a combination of either a Cesar Diaz or my modified Soldano or a Marshall or my new Paul Reed Smith amp that I'm playing a lot these days, or a Fuchs amp. In some cases maybe even a Fender Super Reverb or something like that. But normally two amps that I switch back and forth to give me two completely different sounds, and then between the guitars and effects and whatever knobs I'm turning there's a lot of sound variation.

Do you change up your sound much when you're playing with the Allmans or the Dead?

When I tour with the Dead I'm playing different guitars and amps, utilizing more effects. In the Allman Brothers, it's Les Pauls and 335s straight into the amp with no effects. In Mule there are more guitar changes, more different tunings. So everything changes from setup to setup, from the speaker cabinets to the amps to the guitars to the effects.

As a player, how would you ideally like to continue to evolve?

I'd like to get involved with situations that challenge me in different ways. All the different musical situations I'm in influence me and inspire me from all directions. I'm surrounded by great musicians, so every day can be a learning experience. You never know from where inspiration will come.

A BROTHERLY BREAK

For the Allman Brothers Band, 2009 marked a major milestone: The group celebrated its 40th anniversary. The Allmans were accordingly active on the road, most notably with a 15-show engagement at New York City's Beacon Theatre that included guest appearances from Eric Clapton, Sheryl Crow, Bruce Hornsby, Buddy Guy, Trey Anastasio and others.

Now, Haynes reports, "The Allman Brothers are scaling back drastically. Everybody was pumped up to make the 40th anniversary a huge blowout, and it obviously was. So I think we're all content to wind it down a little bit." Only a handful of Allman shows have been scheduled for 2010, most of them at multiple-artist affairs like Eric Clapton's Crossroads Guitar Festival and the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival.

Unfortunately, Haynes says the Allman Brothers Band also has no plans to hit the studio anytime soon to record a follow-up to 2003's critically acclaimed *Hittin' the Note*. "We all enjoyed the way it turned out, and we enjoyed making it," he says. "But at the moment I don't foresee that happening."

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