



Ronnie Van Zant considered *Street Survivors* Lynyrd Skynyrd's greatest achievement.

It took almost a year to make. In fact, the record was made twice! The first version was recorded at Miami's Criteria Studios in winter and spring of 1976-77 with legendary Atlantic Records producer Tom Dowd. Dissatisfied with the results, Van Zant and Skynyrd returned "home" to Studio One in Atlanta, where their first album, *Lynyrd Skynyrd* (pronounced 'leh-'nérd 'skin-'nerd) was recorded with producer Al Kooper in 1973. This time Skynyrd took charge of their musical destiny and produced *Street Survivors* themselves. This is the story of how the band finally came of age with the making of their finest album, only to have fate deal them a mortal blow at the moment of their greatest triumph.

For the first time, this Deluxe Edition presents the complete versions of both the unreleased Criteria Studios version of *Street Survivors* and the remade Studio One version of the album, which was ultimately released. It also features key bonus tracks, including the last known recordings of the band, made less than two months before the plane crash, which give a sense of what the *Street Survivors* tour might have been like.

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"Whiskey bottles,
And brand new cars,
Oak tree you're in my way."

—Ronnie Van Zant

"That Smell," 1977

In September 1976, the Lynyrd Skynyrd band had one of the worst reputations in rock 'n' roll. Since signing with MCA Records three years earlier, the rowdy "Whiskey Rock-A-Rollers" from Jacksonville, Florida, had received as much publicity for their drinking, fighting and general hell-raising, as for any of their three gold- and platinum-selling albums. Yet the band, who displayed a giant Confederate flag backdrop during their onstage performances, had become one of America's top concert draws. Their potent brand of "Southern Raunchy Roll" and their relentless 300-day "torture tours" were legendary. "This is a rotgut life, but why worry," lead singer Ronnie Van Zant told *Time* magazine in a 1976 feature on the group. "We attract mostly drunk people and rowdy kids who come to shake."

On Labor Day weekend, 1976, just a week before the release of Skynyrd's new double-live LP, *One More From The Road*, the band's reputation went from bad to worse. While they were back home in Jacksonville, preparing for their upcoming tour, founding guitarists Gary Rossington and Allen Collins were both involved in separate alcohol and drug related auto accidents. First, Collins, while DUI, hit a parked car, knocking it across an empty parking lot. Fortunately, he emerged unscathed. Rossington was not so lucky. Passing out at the wheel of his brand new Ford Torino, with his foot on the gas, his car went out of control and knocked down a telephone pole, split an oak tree, and did \$7,000 worth of damage to a house. "It's a terrible

thing when you get behind the wheel and you're so drunk that you can't drive a car to begin with," Van Zant told journalist Cameron Crowe. "I can't tell you how mad I got at him for that. That's just plain bein' stupid, I told him on his hospital bed."

Even before these mishaps, Van Zant himself had already begun to radically change his "skull-busting" ways. During the previous "five years of alcoholism," the singer had left a trail of trashed hotel rooms, whiskey-soaked gigs and fistfights over mistakes in the show. But the birth of his daughter, Melody, on September 19, 1976, just two days before the tour began, marked a new chapter in Van Zant's maturity. "You know, the biggest change in myself that I've noticed is that for the first time I'm really thinking about the future," Van Zant said. "I've got a baby girl, and I plan to stick around and watch her grow up. I also plan to collect for the last ten years of self-abuse."

This new attitude soon manifested itself in Van Zant's songwriting. Skynyrd's lyricist was "basically a hot and cold writer" and with the band's constant touring, he felt he "hadn't been up to par with my writing." Rossington's accident sparked a burst of inspiration, which resulted in a new Van Zant-Collins composition called "That Smell." "I wrote that song when Gary had his car accident," the singer later explained. "Allen and Billy Powell also were in car accidents, all in the space of six months. I had a creepy feeling things were going against us, so I thought I'd write a morbid song."



Rossington recovered in time for Skynyrd's *One More From The Road* tour that fall, which kicked off September 21. By the time the North American leg ended in early December, the band had played a string of 35 sellouts and the live album was certified platinum. With the biggest-selling album yet under their belts, the group was free to take more time with their next studio album. They considered their last three efforts to be rush jobs. This new record would be different for a number of reasons, most importantly because of the fresh blast of songwriting enthusiasm by new third guitarist Steve Gaines.

When Skynyrd convened at Criteria Studios in Miami with producer Tom Dowd in mid-December 1976 to record "That Smell," they also laid down a bluesy Gaines tune called "Ain't No Good Life." Gaines had written the tune years before joining the band. "I've got a lot to contribute to Lynyrd Skynyrd, but I'm not in any special hurry," Gaines said at the time. "I'm going to work at finding my own niche first and getting along with the band second, then start contributing a little bit more. Learning to live with this band has been quite an experience."

The original arrangement of "Ain't No Good Life" featured background vocal parts sung by the Honkettes, Skynyrd's female backup singers, who included Gaines' sister Cassie. A new mix of the original Criteria Studios recording with the intact background vocal parts, which the band performed regularly in concert, is included in this new Deluxe Edition.

The original Criteria version of "That Smell" is also featured here for the first time, in both the final Criteria mix and a newly remixed version of the original recording that includes a never-before-heard extended guitar jam arrangement that was originally part of the Skynyrd classic.

As the year 1977 dawned, Skynyrd took off on the international leg of their *One More From the Road* tour. Their first ever round-the-world excursion found them jetting across the Pacific for shows in Hawaii and Japan, and then circling the rest of the globe for a triumphant sold-out tour of the United Kingdom. When the band returned stateside in February, they took some much earned time off, heading to the Bahamas to relax and write. When they convened back at Criteria in April 1977, they had a fresh batch of songs for the new album.

Despite the success of Skynyrd's string of gold and platinum LPs, MCA Records was still looking for a follow-up to their Top 10 single "Sweet Home Alabama." The label wanted the band to reach the pop market and pressured them to write three-minute-long hit singles, which according to Dowd, enraged Van Zant. "Ronnie would write a batch of songs and then ask me how long they were. I'd tell him they were over three minutes, and he'd say, 'Well, I can't cut any more out of that song. If I want to write a book, I'm going to write one and not a little piece of toilet paper.'"

During the April Criteria sessions, the band laid down tracks for a new Van Zant-Rossington song, the catchy "What's Your Name," which was



inspired by a bar fight involving roadie Craig Reed. The original Criteria mix, with Van Zant's vocals double-tracked, can be heard here for the first time on this Deluxe Edition. The band also recorded four new Gaines-Van Zant songs, all included as part of the Criteria version of the album, including "You Got That Right," a rocking statement of the band's exuberant touring lifestyle; "I Never Dreamed," an introspective ballad that addressed a fundamental shift in the singer's priorities; "Georgia Peaches," a strutting celebration of the ladies on Atlanta's famed Peachtree Street; and a churning blues number called "Sweet Little Missy."

"Sweet Little Missy" was also recorded earlier as a demo at Skynyrd's Jacksonville rehearsal studio on Riverside Avenue prior to the Criteria sessions by the band's live sound engineer, Kevin Elson, who was invited by the group to hear the finished Criteria album during track sequencing. He stated his opinion of the finished recordings in no uncertain terms. "If you release this album, your career's over," he told the astonished band members. "I told them the eight-track demos they cut in Jacksonville at their rehearsal studio had more power and life to them. They just worshiped Tom Dowd. Ronnie and I almost came to blows before Steve Gaines, bless his heart, stepped in and said he agreed with me. They let me take the tracks up to Studio One in Atlanta and have Artimus Pyle recut his drum parts. Then we took the demos and the new versions up to New York and played them for the band and their manager, Peter Rudge. Everyone agreed we should remake the album."

With a spring tour of the South and then a summer tour of America already scheduled, Skynyrd booked time in Atlanta for later that summer and then hit the road to complete their touring commitment. In late July, the band finally arrived at Studio One in Doraville, Georgia, the place where they had recorded "Free Bird," "Sweet Home Alabama," and "Saturday Night Special," to remake the album with house recording engineer, "good ol'" Rodney Mills. "By returning to Studio One, we feel we've come home," said Van Zant at the time. "Everything we have ever done which we felt good about was recorded here. When you are successful at one place, why mess with it? We like to go *live* rather than do a whole lot of overdubbing and punching, and this is a very live room. Most of this record we've been doing in concert so we know the tunes, and we haven't required a great deal of rehearsal time. We would arrange it one night and then come in and cut it."

Dowd was still finishing a session with Rod Stewart, so he sent engineer Barry Rudolph as "his representative" to work with the band for a week until he could get there. Rudolph ended up re-cutting new versions of "That Smell" and "You Got That Right" with the group at Studio One. The engineer had worked with country music outlaw Waylon Jennings, one of Van Zant's heroes, which inspired them to record a cover of Merle Haggard's "Honky Tonk Night Time Man." "Merle is my favorite songwriter and performer in the whole fuckin' world," said Van Zant. As an afterthought, Van Zant went back and wrote an alternate autobiographical lyric to the Haggard tune called

"Jacksonville Kid," which he recorded on an alternate vocal track but apparently decided not to use.

"Jacksonville Kid" is the last song Ronnie Van Zant ever wrote and recorded. It is included as a bonus track here. In this final personal musical statement, Van Zant sums up all his unresolved feelings about growing up on the west side of Jacksonville, his perceived rejection by his hometown, his continued sense of isolation in spite of his fame and success, and the rising new musical tides by which he feels engulfed. It's somehow fitting that it was, in effect, co-written with his idol Merle Haggard.

Meanwhile, Gaines continued his growing contribution to Skynyrd during the Studio One sessions, recording "I Know A Little," another original song from his pre-Skynyrd days, which featured the Okie guitarist's virtuoso flat-picking. He also added a new closing solo to "I Never Dreamed," while Van Zant recut his lead vocal part to the song and Pyle added a new drum track.

Mills and Elson put the finishing touches on the album, remixing the Criteria master of "Ain't No Good Life" and adding a horn arrangement to "What's Your Name," reminiscent of the Al Kooper-produced "Call Me The Breeze" from *Second Helping*. The band ultimately decided to drop "Sweet Little Missy" and "Georgia Peaches" from the album lineup, replacing them with "Honky Tonk Night Time Man" and "One More Time," a six-year-old track from an unreleased 1971 album recorded with producer Jimmy Johnson of Muscle Shoals' rhythm section fame, which the band polished with some new overdubs. "It could be another 'Free Bird,'" said Van Zant.



When Van Zant and Mills flew out to master the record in Los Angeles in late August, they ran into Dowd at the mastering facility. Although the producer helped the band finish mastering the album, he ended up taking his name off it. In the final credits, Mills received a special production credit, while Elson and Rudolph received special engineering credits. After all the turmoil the band had endured to reach the top, they decided to call the record *Street Survivors*. The album cover pictured the band standing tall, while flames engulfed them. "More went into *Street Survivors* than any other album we have ever done," said Van Zant. "Maybe there's not a big hit single on it like 'Sweet Home Alabama,' but it's the best we've ever done."

Street Survivors was the most anticipated Skynyrd album release yet, shipping over 500,000 units, making it an instant gold record. The band's "Tour of the Survivors" would include their first headlining show at New York's Madison Square Garden, symbolizing to Van Zant the group's ascendancy to rock's super elite.

Tragically, Van Zant and Gaines would not live to see the success of *Street Survivors*. On the first week of the tour, just three days after the LP was released on October 17, 1977, the band's tour plane ran out of gas and crashed into a Mississippi forest, killing Van Zant, Gaines and his sister Cassie, and original road manager Dean Kilpatrick, while critically injuring the rest of the group and their crew.

"The rip roaring three guitar lineup consisting of Gary Rossington, Allen

Collins and relative newcomer Steve Gaines burns with the same raging intensity as the flame on the LP cover," said a glowing *Billboard* review of *Street Survivors*, which appeared the same week as the plane crash. "Ronnie Van Zant's vocals are as gutsy as ever and best reflect pure southern blues boogie. Each of the eight tunes are delivered in a ferocious power charged guitar flurry that doesn't let up. This is rock 'n' roll boogie at its finest."

Just how big Skynyrd would have become had the tragic events of October 1977 not intervened can never be known, but all indications were that Skynyrd was about to break the Southern Rock genre wide open and become the American equivalent of the Rolling Stones. Nevertheless, the plane crash helped propel *Street Survivors* to multi-platinum status, while "What's Your Name" would eventually crack the Top 10 singles charts.

Ultimately, though, it was "That Smell" and its eerily prophetic foreshadowing of the band's fate that would haunt listeners—its majestic three guitar interplay of Collins, Rossington and Gaines soaring above Van Zant's ferocious vocals in a dark symphony of rock artistry which stands as a powerful testament to one of rock 'n' roll's greatest bands.

Live in California, August 1977

"They might have been the next Rolling Stones," said a promoter who booked Lynyrd Skynyrd during the band's short mini-tour of California and Nevada in the late summer of 1977. "They played to a full house, and it was crazy! They were probably the best live performers on stage today."



It was late August and Lynyrd Skynyrd had just finished recording *Street Survivors*, the album the Florida rock band felt would put them in the mainstream of American pop music. "Musically, we're going in several different ways," lead singer Ronnie Van Zant said at the time about the new record. "It's a good mix of country, blues, hard rock, jazz and R&B influences. There are eight songs, all different. The idea is to win new fans, but at the bottom, it's still us."

Now Skynyrd was headed to California to take care of some unfinished business. That included approving the mastering of *Street Survivors*, shooting the cover for the album on the Universal Studios back lot and filming concert footage for a short movie bio to be released with the upcoming movie musical *Grease*. They also had some unfinished business with their audience, which included a headlining festival show at the Anaheim Stadium, and playing their first ever date in Las Vegas at the Aladdin Theater. But first they had a makeup date in Fresno, California. Fresh from recording *Street Survivors*, the Fresno date was one Skynyrd could easily have blown off. But that would have been contrary to the band's philosophy. "It's a hard-



working band," said Van Zant at the time. "They all look forward to being on stage, and they all try 100 percent. We don't forget the smaller places either. You can sit back on your behind and just play Dallas, New York, Los Angeles. You can make a good livin' that way, but we like to go to the audience. You wait long enough, we'll be around to see you."

The real treat for faithful Skynyrd fans at the Selland Arena in Fresno that night was their first preview of new songs from the forthcoming album, which included "What's Your Name," "That Smell," "You Got That Right" and "Ain't No Good Life," a song written by guitarist Steve Gaines, who was also featured on lead vocals. "Before, Gary Rossington, Allen Collins, and myself were the writers," said Van Zant. "We carried the musical load. Now, Artimus Pyle, Billy Powell, Leon Wilkeson, and Steve Gaines are coming into their own as writers. It relieves the pressure and adds another dimension to our music."

The Fresno show was also a tuneup for the giant Anaheim Stadium show the following night, which Skynyrd co-headlined with Motor City madman Ted Nugent, who went all-out to rock the "Big A" to its foundation. Then, under a spectacular full moon, Skynyrd strolled onstage behind a

giant Confederate flag to the theme from Marlboro Country, while hundreds of yellow and white balloons floated across the stadium filled to capacity with 57,000 Nugent-energized rock fans.

"Ted's not an easy act to follow," observed a *Billboard* reviewer, "but Skynyrd's hot-pickin' guitars and Ronnie Van Zant's snarling vocals never missed a step as they took the crowd through a steadily building show that was a precisely crafted success. As lights bathed the crowd for the final encore, Skynyrd pulled out all the stops for "Free Bird," their soaring closer with a crashing crescendo that sent the crowd away smiling."

"The sound was tight, hard and full," observed another journalist who reviewed Skynyrd's Anaheim performance for the U.K. weekly *Sounds*. "You could even feel the press box vibrate. The audience got off on the band, the band got off on the audience and—well, Skynyrd stole the show, simple as that."

Skynyrd's Anaheim performance foreshadowed what was to come during Skynyrd's planned "Tour of the Survivors," a massive American tour that fall in support of *Street Survivors*, which was intended to break the band wide-open in the U.S.A. Instead, Skynyrd's short tour of California that August would become one of the last fleeting glimpses of a band whose legend would somehow overshadow the fact that these boys from Jacksonville, Florida, had only begun to fulfill the promise of those last days in 1977.

—Ron O'Brien



DISC ONE

The Original Album

Ronnie Van Zant – vocals

Allen Collins – guitar

Gary Rossington – guitar

Billy Powell – keyboards

Leon Wilkerson – bass

Artimus Pyle – drums

Steve Gaines – guitar, vocals

1 What's Your Name

(Gary Rossington–Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded at Criteria Studios, Miami, Florida, April 1977

2 That Smell

(Allen Collins–Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded at Studio One, Doraville, Georgia, August 1977

3 One More Time

(Gary Rossington–Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded at Music Shoals Sound, Muscle Shoals, Alabama, 1977

Produced by Jimmy Johnson and Tim Smith

4 I Know A Little

(Steve Gaines)

Recorded at Studio One, Doraville, Georgia, August 1977

5 You Got That Right

(Steve Gaines–Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded at Studio One, Doraville, Georgia, August 1977

6 I Never Dreamed

(Steve Gaines–Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded at Studio One, Doraville, Georgia, August 1977

7 Honky Tonk Night Time Man

(Marie Haggard)

Recorded at Studio One, Doraville, Georgia, August 1977

8 Ain't No Good Life

(Steve Gaines)

Recorded at Criteria Studios, Miami, Florida, December 1976

Original LP Credits:

Special Production Credit: Rodney Mills

Mixing: Rodney Mills

Recorded at: Criteria Studios, Miami, Florida

Engineer: Dennis Herkenderfer

Studio One, Doraville, Georgia

Engineers: Rodney Mills, Ted Bush, except as noted.

Special Engineering Credit: Barry Rodolph, Kevin Elson

Mastered at: Capitol Records with Ken Perry

Special Thanks To: The Hankkates, Barry Lee Harwood,

Poovey Amplifiers and YOU

Backup Singers: Cassie Gaines, JoJo Billingsley, Leslie Hawkins,

The Hankkates on "That Smell"

Musicians on "One More Time": Ronnie Van Zant, vocals; Allen Collins,

guitar; Gary Rossington, guitar; Ed King, guitar; Rick Medlock, drums;

Greg Walker, bass; Rick Medlock, Tim Smith and Leslie Hawkins,

backup singers.

Photography and cover concept: David Alexander

Art Director: George Osaki, Location coordinator: Larry Marmorstein

Originally released as MCA LP 3829, October 17, 1977

DISC TWO

Criteria Studios Album

1 What's Your Name (Original version) *

(Gary Rossington–Ronnie Van Zant)

Produced by Tom Dowd

Recorded at Criteria Studios, Miami, Florida, April 1977

Previously Unreleased Mix

2 That Smell (Original version) *

(Allen Collins–Ronnie Van Zant)

Produced by Tom Dowd

Recorded at Criteria Studios, Miami, Florida, December 1976

Previously Unreleased Master

3 You Got That Right (Original version) *

(Steve Gaines–Ronnie Van Zant)

Produced by Tom Dowd

Recorded at Criteria Studios, Miami, Florida, April 1977

Previously Unreleased Mix

4 I Never Dreamed (Original version)

(Steve Gaines–Ronnie Van Zant)

Produced by Tom Dowd

Recorded at Criteria Studios, Miami, Florida, April 1977

5 Georgia Peaches

(Steve Gaines–Ronnie Van Zant)

Produced by Tom Dowd

Recorded at Criteria Studios, Miami, Florida, April 1977

6 Sweet Little Missy (Original version) *

(Gary Rossington–Ronnie Van Zant)

Produced by Tom Dowd

Recorded at Criteria Studios, Miami, Florida, April 1977

Previously Unreleased Master

7 Sweet Little Missy (Demo)

(Gary Rossington–Ronnie Van Zant)

Produced by Lynyrd Skynyrd

Recorded at Riverside Avenue Studios, Jacksonville, FL, March 1977

8 Ain't No Good Life (Original version) *

(Steve Gaines)

Produced by Tom Dowd

Last vocal: Steve Gaines

Background Vocals: Cassie Gaines, JoJo Billingsley, Leslie Hawkins

Recorded at Criteria Studios, Miami, Florida, December 1976

Previously Unreleased Remix

9 That Smell (Complete original version) *

(Allen Collins–Ronnie Van Zant)

Produced by Tom Dowd

Recorded at Criteria Studios, Miami, Florida, December 1976

Previously Unreleased Remixed Master

10 Jacksonville Kid

(aka Honky Tonk Night Time Man)

(Marie Haggard–Ronnie Van Zant)

Produced by Lynyrd Skynyrd

Bobro: Barry Harwood

Recorded at Studio One, Doraville, GA, August 1977

Mixed by Kevin Elson for Elson Music Vision Inc.,

Mad Hatler Studios, L.A., CA, August 20, 2000

Lynyrd Skynyrd Live in California August 1977

11 You Got That Right (Live) *

(Steve Gaines–Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded Live at Selland Arena, Fresno, CA, August 24, 1977

Previously Unreleased

12 That Smell (Live) *

(Allen Collins–Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded Live at Selland Arena, Fresno, CA, August 24, 1977

Previously Unreleased

13 Ain't No Good Life (Live) *

(Steve Gaines)

Last vocal: Steve Gaines

Background Vocals: Cassie Gaines, JoJo Billingsley, Leslie Hawkins

Recorded Live at Selland Arena, Fresno, CA, August 24, 1977

Previously Unreleased

14 What's Your Name (Live) *

(Gary Rossington–Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded Live at Selland Arena, Fresno, CA, August 24, 1977

Previously Unreleased

15 Gimme Three Steps (Live) *

(Allen Collins - Bowlin Van Zant)

Recorded Live at Schmand Arena, Fresno, CA, August 24, 1977

Previously Unreleased

* Previously unreleased

Reissue Credits:

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Executive Producer: Andy McKain

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Lynyrd Skynyrd Box Set (3 CDs)

Lynyrd Skynyrd (pronounced 'lye-' 'weird' 'skye-' 'weird')

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Skynyrd's First

Southern By The Grace Of God (2 CDs)

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