



"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 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 involved in separate alcohol and drug related auto accidents. While DUI, Collins 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 change radically his "skull-busting" ways. During the previous "five years of alcoholism" the singer had left a trail of trashed hotel rooms, whisky-soaked gigs and fistfights over mistakes in the show. But the birth of his daughter Melody on September 19, 1976, two days before the new 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 10 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



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 their biggest selling album yet under their belts, the group was free to take more time with their next studio LP. They considered their last three studio 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 song years earlier 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."

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 3-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 pair of new Van Zant-Rossington songs, the catchy "What's Your Name," which was inspired by a bar fight involving roadie Craig Reed, and a churning blues number called "Sweet Little Missy," that featured Billy Powell on keyboards and a searing Gaines solo. The band also recorded two new Gaines-Van Zant songs, "You Got That

Right," a rocking celebration of the band's exuberant touring lifestyle and "I Never Dreamed," an introspective ballad that addressed the fundamental shift in Van Zant's priorities.

Earlier, at Skynyrd's Jacksonville rehearsal studio on Riverside Avenue, they worked up a demo recording of another Van Zant-Gaines number called "Georgia Peaches." The track was recorded live by sound engineer Kevin Elson, who was invited by the band to hear the finished Criteria album during track sequencing. He stated his opinion of the 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 worshipped 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 re-cut 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 hit the road to complete their touring commitment. In early August, the band arrived at Studio One in Doraville, where they had recorded "Free Bird" and "Sweet Home Alabama," to finish the

album. "By returning to Studio One, we feel we've come home," said Van Zant. "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 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. Rudolph had worked with country music outlaw Waylon Jennings, one of Van Zant's heroes, which inspired them to also cut 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, the singer 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 release.

Gaines contributed "I Know A Little," another original song from his pre-Skynyrd days, to the mix, which featured the Okie guitarist's virtuoso flat-picking. The group also recut "I Never Dreamed" and Studio One engineer Rodney Mills and Elson remixed newly overdubbed Criteria masters of "What's Your Name," and "Ain't No Good Life." The band decided to



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drop "Sweet Little Missy," which was on the original Criteria version of the album. They replaced it with "One More Time," a six-year-old track from an unreleased 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 Skynyrd 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 and Elson and Rudolph received special engineering credits. After all the turmoil the band had endured, 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 yet, shipping over 500,000 units, automatically making it a gold record. The band's "Tour Of The Survivors" would include their first headlining show at New York's Madison Square Garden, which to Van Zant symbolized the group's

ascendance to the level of rock's super-elite. Tragically, Van Zant and Gaines would not live to see *Street Survivors* success. 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, and critically injuring the rest of the group and their crew.

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, it was "That Smell" and its eerily prophetic foreshadowing of the band's fate that would haunt listeners, it's 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 the greatest bands to ever carve their initials in the edifice of Rock 'n' Roll.

—Ron O'Brien



Ronnie Van Zant - vocals Allen Collins - guitar

Gary Rossington - guitar Billy Powell - keyboards

Artimus Pyle - drums Leon Wilkeson - bass

Steve Gaines - guitar, vocals

**1. What's Your Name 3:30**

(Gary Rossington, Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded Criteria Studios, Miami, Florida, April 1977

**2. That Smell 5:48**

(Allen Collins, Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded Studio One, Doraville, Georgia, August 1977

**3. One More Time 5:03**

(Gary Rossington, Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded Muscle Shoals Sound, Muscle Shoals, Alabama, 1971

Produced by Jimmy Johnson and Tom Smith

**4. I Know A Little 3:26**

(Steve Gaines)

Recorded Studio One, Doraville, Georgia, August 1977

**5. You Got That Right 3:44**

(Steve Gaines, Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded Studio One, Doraville, Georgia, August 1977

**6. I Never Dreamed 5:21**

(Steve Gaines, Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded Studio One, Doraville, Georgia, August 1977

**7. Honky Tonk Night Time Man 3:59**

(Marie Haggard)

Recorded Studio One, Doraville, Georgia, August 1977

**8. Ain't No Good Life 4:36**

(Steve Gaines)

Recorded Criteria Studios, Miami, Florida, December 1976

**Bonus Tracks:**

**9. Georgia Peaches 3:12**

(Steve Gaines-Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded Riverside Studios, Jacksonville, Florida, March 1977

Overdubs recorded Criteria Studios, Miami, Florida, July 1987

Produced by Tom Dowd

**10. Sweet Little Missy 5:10**

(Gary Rossington - Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded Criteria Studios, Miami, Florida, April 1977

Produced by Tom Dowd

**11. You Got That Right (Alternate Version) 3:28**

(Steve Gaines - Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded Criteria Studios, Miami, Florida, April 1977

Produced by Tom Dowd

Mixed by Kevin Elson for Elson Music Vision Inc., Mad Hatter Studios, Los Angeles, CA August 22, 2000

**12. I Never Dreamed (Alternate Version) 4:56**

(Steve Gaines - Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded Criteria Studios, Miami, Florida, April 1977

Produced by Tom Dowd

**13. Jacksonville Kid (a/k/a "Honky Tonk**

**Night Time Man") 4:06**

(Marie Haggard - Ronnie Van Zant)

Recorded Studio One, Doraville, Georgia, August 1977

Mixed by Kevin Elson for Elson Music Vision Inc., Mad Hatter Studios, Los Angeles, CA August 22, 2000 Add Barry Lee Harwood - dobro

**Original LP Credits:**

Special Production Credit: Rodney Mills

Mixing: Rodney Mills

Recorded at

• Criteria Studios, Miami, Florida. Engineer: Dennis Horkender/loc

• Studio One, Doraville, Georgia. Engineers: Rodney Mills, Tad Birch,

except as noted.

Special Engineering credit: Barry Rudolph, Kevin Elson

Mastered at Capitol Records with Ken Perry

Special Thanks to: The Markettes, Barry Lee Harwood, Peavy Amplifiers

and YDU.

Back-up Singers: The Handketties on "That Smell", Cassie Gaines.

JoJo Billingsley, Leslie Hankins

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, Tom Smith and Leslie Hankins, back-up singers.

Photography and cover concept: David Alexander, Art Director: George Osaki

Location coordinator: Larry Marmerstein

**Reissue Credits**

Reissue Produced by Ron O'Brien

Executive Producer Andy McKee

Audio restoration, assembly and digital mastering

from the original stereo master tapes by Doug Schwartz,

Mutelland Music, Los Angeles, CA

Art Direction: Vartan

Design while-in-print: Mike Diehl

Photo research: Ron O'Brien

Production Coordination by Beth Stempel

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Artimus Pyle, Larkin Collins Sr., Barry Rudolph, Redbeard,

Randy Aronson, Lynn Kerman, and Brendan Morris

at Universal Music Library, Ripon Hall at Universal Music

Creative Services, Eric Zolov, Reed Huenrich, "Toronto Mike" O'Hara,

Scott Bucholtz, Andrew Detergreen, and Troy Kathleen Carley

Original album cover courtesy of Ron O'Brien

Originally released as MCA LP 9029, October 17, 1977

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pronounced 'leh-'hnd'skin-'hnd (Remastered) (088 112 727-2)

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