



Van Zant, the brother of late Lynyrd Skynyrd frontman Ronnie Van Zant, and Barnes co-founded the band in its hometown of Jacksonville, Florida, nearly three decades ago. In its early days, the band built its reputation with its brand of Southern boogie and blues-rock, before transforming into a more arena-rock-friendly style. In its second decade, the band scored big with a slew of hits, including such rockers as "Caught Up in You," "Hold on Loosely," "If I'd Been the One," and "Rockin' into the Night." Since 1975, the band has released more than 15 albums and from the start, they've toured relentlessly. And the magic's still there, says Van Zant. "It's a high I can't describe to you. It's almost like flying. When I walk up those steps to that stage and hear that audience roar, sometimes I feel like Don and I don't even have to sing, because the crowds are so vocal." Says Barnes, "We've always carried an attitude that we're going out there to win and God help whoever has to follow us, you know? We've never taken a backseat to anyone. We take the crowd for a ride and try to end up triumphant every night. And since we've had the good fortune to have a lot of hit songs over the years, we just line 'em up and shoot 'em down. By the end of the show, they're completely exhausted along with us." And it should be no time before those fans are singing every word to the tracks that compose *Drivetrain*. Some listening advice from Van Zant: "The way to play this disc is to turn it up to 10, and get ready to take the ride."

38 SPECIAL

DRIVETRAIN

After more than two decades together, 38 Special is still playing more than 100 shows per year. And at every one of them, thousands of audience members are completely blindsided by the power and muscle of the band's performance. "When we come out, people are like, 'Whoa! It's like a freight train rolling over them...'" says vocalist/guitarist Don Barnes. While most associate the group with its arena-rock '80s pop smashes, these days the band's harder edge is what is immediately noticeable. Barnes says it's all about maintaining the intensity that they deliver in their live shows.

So when the group went in to record *Drivetrain* (July 27, Sanctuary Records), its first full studio album in years, it sought to capture that live energy on disc. And as a result, 38 Special, over twenty-five years later, has never sounded so powerful and 'in your face.' Having had its share of success in the pop realm - selling some 15 million albums - the group sought to make this album all about attitude. It sounds rude, Barnes says, and it was meant to.

"This album won't get labeled as the pop record of the year," frontman Donnie Van Zant says with a hearty laugh, noting that, to him, *Drivetrain* is the ultimate 38 Special album: "It really personifies what rock and roll is all about. It's greasy, it's

loud and it's proud. We've always been a band that strives to stay honest with what has driven us over the years. And it's the greatest validation for us to reach that kind of longevity. The 'drivetrain' on any motorized machine, from giant earth-movers to Indy cars, is what keeps the wheels on the road and in the game," Van Zant states, "This music keeps our wheels on the road."

The often-bombastic blues-rock tracks compiling *Drivetrain* owe their rawness to a more natural production approach favored by Barnes and fellow guitarist/vocalist Danny Chauncey, who produced the disc together. Barnes says that over the years they had grown weary of the safe, slick approach employed by some of the band's previous producers. "They always felt that they needed to clean everything up, put everything in its place and make sure that it's all nice," Barnes says. "Our goal was to make this not real nice." No other track on the album reveals their edge and horsepower like the lead radio single "Hurts Like Love."

Danny Chauncey offers his take on the production, "There always seemed to be that intangible thing missing from past recording sessions. Sometimes controlled chaos can be a good thing, so we cranked up the amps and turned the room mics up to get the ambient noise from the bashing drums and bass. We wanted to capture that explosive attitude, capture what we sound like live with a 50-foot-tall P.A. system."

Drivetrain's southern-rock-tinged, sometimes big chorus-laden tracks—some of which were penned with longtime songwriting partner Jim Peterik—touch on politics, hope, love and rampant passion. But mostly, it shows the heart of a seasoned band after decades of intense roadwork.

"Something I Need," "Quick Fix," as well as the first single from the album, "Hurts Like Love," focus on extreme desire to the point of obsession. "Jam On," like many of the cuts on the disc, came from an idea that the band had been kicking around for a couple of years. After Barnes saw U2 frontman Bono on the cover of *Time* magazine waving an American flag, they were inspired to finish the track. The song became sort of a reaction to the war-torn world we now live in, with an idealized solution.