



VAN ZANT

Following the huge success of Van Zant's debut album, 'Brother To Brother', (released 1998), Johnny and Donnie Van Zant, the front men respectively of legendary US Southern Rock bands Lynyrd Skynyrd and 38 Special, have now recorded the even better follow-up, 'Van Zant II', set for release on SPV through Koch on April 2nd 2001.

A mind-boggling, core collection of ace session musicians played - and co-wrote songs - on both albums, which were produced by Robert White Johnson. Guitarist Shane Fontayne was in Lone Justice and has played with Bruce Springsteen and John Waite. Guitarist Jerry McPherson has worked with Amy Grant, Deana Carter, Reba McEntire, Wynonna Judd, Michael Bolton, Kenny Rogers, Randy Travis, Vanessa Williams and countless others. Guitarist Pat Buchanan has performed with Daryl Hall & John Oates, Dixie Chicks, Faith Hill, Tim McGraw, Marshall Crenshaw and Philip Bailey to name but a few. Keyboardist Bill Cuomo has played with Don Henley, Mark Knopfler, Greg Lake, Kim Carnes, Stevie Nicks, Whitesnake, Barbra Streisand, Faith Hill, Peter Criss, Alabama, Steve Perry, John Stewart, Dolly Parton, REO Speedwagon and more. Bass guitarist Mike Brignardello was a member of Giant before guesting with Alabama, Shania Twain, Clint Black, Faith Hill, Tim McGraw, Brooks & Dunn, Neil Diamond and Emmylou Harris.

Timing was a major factor in the recording of both albums. "Making 'Van Zant II' was a lot different to 'Brother To Brother'. We were fortunate enough to have a lot of time off on the first project, but with this new one, we had to write, record and mix two days here and two days there," Donnie explains. "The scheduling was very tough but what was cool about it was that it actually gave us a chance to really live with these songs. We'd go on tour with our bands, come back a couple months later and these songs still sounded inspiring and exciting to us."

"When we put down 'Brother To Brother' we actually had a few months off from touring, so we completed it in about a month and a half. 'Van Zant II' has been a two-year process, to be honest. We just did it in our off time. Vacations were definitely out of the picture," laughs Johnny. "Because of the time element, we weren't able to go into the studio and demo these songs; we simply wrote using a little ghetto blaster."

The host of guest musicians relished the opportunity to play with the Van Zants. As session players, they aren't usually given the chance to go wild in the studio, but Donnie and Johnny encouraged them to unleash themselves. "Spontaneity and creativity was what we were looking for," Donnie says. "You go talk to any of these guys about playing on the Van Zant brothers CD and they'll all say they had a blast because they are used to playing a certain way for producers, and we let 'em go for it," Johnny chuckles.

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For more than 20 years, the Van Zant Brothers have recorded some of the most influential, powerful American music of the rock era. The distinctive combined influence of rock 'n' roll, blues and country is in their blood - even in the very air these brothers breathed when growing up in Jacksonville, Florida - and the evidence is the music they make.

Eldest brother Ronnie Van Zant was a founder member of Lynyrd Skynyrd, but died 20 October 1977, in a plane crash, just as the band had achieved superstar status. Middle brother, Donnie Van Zant is a founder member of 38 Special, another band with roots in southern rock and blues, with a string of platinum albums stretching over the past two decades. Youngest brother Johnny Van Zant started as a solo artist with hit records to his credit before joining Skynyrd as front man/vocalist in 1987. "When I first started out as a solo artist," admits Johnny, "it was Donnie who basically taught me how to write songs. We've been writing together for almost as long as we've been brothers."

The brothers' ongoing recording and touring commitments to their own bands delayed a lifelong dream until 1998. Family, friends and fans had been telling them they needed to join forces musically. "We've always written together but having the opportunity to record together has been a blast. We'd had fans telling us for years, 'Why don't you and Donnie hook up?' and finally we got it through our thick heads that we needed to do it," Johnny says. "Our parents had always wanted us to do something musically together and they loved the 'Brother To Brother' record. Our mother passed away in April 2000 so she never had a chance to hear the songs on 'Van Zant II', but her spirit was with us and will always be with us the rest of our lives," says Donnie.

One thing the Van Zants wanted to accomplish was to create a musical identity separate from their groups. They are totally committed to Lynyrd Skynyrd and 38 Special, but the challenge of making music with others excites them too. It's for that reason that none of their fellow band members - except for Lynyrd Skynyrd backing vocalists Dale Krantz Rossington and Carol Chase on 'Van Zant II' - appear on the records, for now at least.

"All these people we work with really are good friends; they're players we've met over the years. Johnny and I sort of wanted to keep it separate from 38 and Skynyrd, but next time around if we get another chance, who knows? We would love to bring in some of the guys," says Donnie. "What's neat and scary about the Van Zant albums versus a band atmosphere, is that with a band, all decisions are done by committee, but with Johnny and I, it's our butts on the line. We are the ones making decisions regarding songs and performances. This is scary, yet exciting."

Now, with two albums under their belt - enough music for a decent length Van Zant concert - the brothers are considering touring. "The scheduling has a lot to do with it. We're still very dedicated to Skynyrd and 38, and that's really our priority. But we definitely want to go out and do this together. It would really be fun going out on the road with Johnny," says Donnie. "Touring is in the future. You don't really make music just to put it on CD. I think we would love to go out. We definitely have enough material and are actually looking seriously at going out and doing this. I imagine most of the (session) guys would jump at the opportunity to go out on tour, even though we can only pay 'em a buck fifty!" laughs Johnny.

Final word goes to Donnie; "We hope that people enjoy the music as much as we have enjoyed making it; we both felt in our hearts that we had something special here".



VAN ZANT:

Debut Album out on 3rd March 1998

Biography

When Musical families get together to perform a record magic can happen. For more than 20 years, the Van Zant Brothers have recorded some of the most influential, powerful American music of the rock era. Eldest brother, Ronnie Van Zant, was a founding member of Lynyrd Skynyrd, but died 20 October, 1977, in a plane crash, just as the band had achieved superstar status. Middle brother, Donnie Van Zant, is a founder member of .38 Special, another band with roots in southern rock and blues, with a string of platinum albums stretching over the past two decades. Youngest brother, Johnny Van Zant, started as a solo artist with hit records to his credit before joining Skynyrd as front man/vocalist in 1987. Now, Donnie and Johnny have realised a 20 year dream and have recorded a one-time collaboration, 'Brother To Brother.'

Last year, Johnny fulfilled one lifelong ambition when he performed a duet with Ronnie for Skynyrd's album, 'Twenty.' They were able, through modern technology, to lift Ronnie's vocals off a live version of 'Travelin' Man,' re-recorded the music tracks and have Johnny sing the song as a duet with Ronnie. "I kept wishing that Donnie were there too," admits Johnny, "So we decided it was finally time to do something about it." Donnie adds, "After Ronnie died, I made a promise to myself to carry on for him. I was determined to make it in music as much for Ronnie as for any other reason. Working with Johnnie just completes that promise within me." Although 'Brother to Brother' marks the brothers' first time recording and performing together, they have always collaborated.

"When I first started out as a solo artist," admits Johnny, "it was Donnie who basically taught me how to write songs. We've been writing together for almost as long as we've been brothers." Both brothers are still fully committed to their individual projects - Johnny will be going back into the studio with Lynyrd Skynyrd later this year after their summer '98 U.S. and European tours and Donnie is currently touring with .38 Special in support of their latest album.

'Brother To Brother' represents a true work of the heart more than a career move. Both Johnnie and Donnie agree that the best part of recording this record was hanging out together and the creative freedom and opportunity that they were provided. "For most of our adult lives," explains Johnny, "Donnie and I get to see each other on those rare occasions when we're both home in

Jacksonville. Now we got to spend all this time together - wake up in the same hotel suite, drive from Jacksonville to Nashville and see the sights of our childhood together; fight because he's starving me to death trying to get me in shape while I'm blowing smoke in his face. It was kind of like being kids again."

This project has been viewed by many as a landmark musical occasion, not just as a business proposition. The coming together of members of this legendary rock family is of a special importance that transcends business. Musically the songs stretch across genres, although that southern blues flavour is evident in most tracks. The opening cut, "Rage,???" draws the listener into the song slowly until the vocals kick in, then the music builds and builds and takes you away.

At the moment, there are no plans for Johnny and Donnie to tour together behind this record or to record together again in the foreseeable future. "We'll see what the response is to this one." Donnie admits, "and then we'll decide where to go from here. To be honest, this was more about making the record together for both of us than it was to begin something new and ongoing." Johnny adds, "I've had so much fun just making the record, that I don't care if we only sell one copy, and we figure Dad will take care of that."