



by Diane Szulecki

When you see Tedeschi Trucks Band live, you quickly learn to expect the unexpected. Pretty much guaranteed is a varied setlist each night, scorching improv by the group's 11 members, and a fusion of sounds culled from assorted eras and cultures. Not guaranteed? Being able to go a few minutes without witnessing someone in the band—or the band as a whole—doing something awesome/creative/soulful, usually all at once.

It's been nearly five years since guitar wizard Derek Trucks (previously of the Derek Trucks Band and the Allman Brothers) and famed blues singer Susan Tedeschi—who are married—joined musical forces. Two studio albums, one live album, and a Grammy Award later, TTB has laboriously earned a reputation for its integrity as a live band. Fresh off the energy of their 2013 release, *Made Up Mind*, 2014 has been a big year for the crew: they've toured several continents, made their Bonnaroo debut, and are now preparing to host their fourth consecutive residency at New York's Beacon Theatre.

At home in Jacksonville, Florida, on a quick break from tour, frontwoman Susan Tedeschi took some time to chat. (Bonus: she shared her running playlists!) **Your band went to India for the first time this year. What was that experience like?**

It was awesome. We got in rickshaws and drove around. We'd go to different neighborhoods and go to churches and explore or we would visit friends. It was also heartbreaking—there's a lot of poverty,

that's for sure. You really see the reality of how people live in other countries and it makes you not take for granted where we come from.

But the people are so sweet. I thought it was an amazing experience and I understand why India is so special. There's a lot of spirituality and I think people really come together as a community, and they appreciate things. It's a beautiful place, in a lot of ways. **The Tedeschi Trucks Band's music is deeply rooted in the influences of music from many cultures. What other places have you been to that have inspired you?**

Our band has been really inspired by Japan. We've been to Japan quite a few times—we were there earlier this year. We really love the food, we love the people, we like to see the big Buddhist temples and the amazing gardens.

We also had a silversmith that Derek knew through Eric Clapton, Goro [Takahashi], make us these beautiful feathers that we wear around our necks. They're spirit feathers so they have a lot of different spiritual meanings. It was an inspiration for the band to have something that we got together, and that kind of bonds us all.

The band played Bonnaroo for the first time this year, and you were also part of the SuperJam that Derek organized featuring guests like Chaka Khan and Taj Mahal. What did it take to pull together the jam in such a short amount of time?

It was a little chaotic. Derek and Eric Krasno, a good friend of ours from Soulive



PHOTO BY MARK ROBBINS

and Lettuce, were on the phone all the time planning who they thought would be cool to get at the jam. It took a few months to make all the contacts, get people to commit, and have them come out and do a couple of rehearsals. We had two days of rehearsals—all the rhythm section guys and all of the featured artists.

Some of the featured artists were also the rhythm section, like [bassist] Willie Weeks, who has played with Donny Hathaway, Eric Clapton, and Stevie Wonder. On drums there was James Gadson, who played with Bill Withers and also played in a lot of the Motown sessions. It was one of the most famous, badass living rhythm sections that you could have put together. Willie is in his 60s, and James is in his 70s,

but he was amazing. He schooled all of the boys who were like, 25 through 45 (laughs).

What can you tell us about your upcoming shows at the Beacon Theatre? What can the audience expect?

We're really excited because some of them already sold out. We're looking forward to some of the bands that are opening. One of them is Hard Working Americans, which is a band put together by Dave Schools and Derek's brother Duane Trucks on drums, who is awesome. And we also have guests coming to sit in with us. I know Jerry Douglas is going to come one night—he's an amazing guitar player. We'll get to mix it up. It's going to be exciting, because

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we'll have a lot of different people joining us.

That's why residencies are fun. It's easy to make a conscious effort—we're here in the same place four times so we have to make sure it's different every night. So we plan ahead and we rehearse ahead, and I think that makes it special for the audience. **You're going on your fourth year doing this Beacon residency. Do you foresee it turning into a long-term tradition?**

You know, I think that's Derek's hope for sure. Since I've known him, he was in the Allman Brothers. We met in July of '99 and he started [playing with the Allman Brothers] in June of '99. So most of our life together has included the Allman Brothers. Every March they played

the Beacon Theatre—we've always had a great time being part of residencies at the Beacon. It's such a great venue and it's such a great location. For us to get to have four shows in two weekends is pretty awesome and we definitely don't take it for granted. We try to make it fun and kind of crazy, sort of like the Allman Brothers did.

Your band is known for keeping things fresh on stage. What goes into making that happen so well?

A lot of communication, whether we're on the road or at home. We're at home now, and Derek was just on the phone with [singer] Mike Mattison. There's always

TEDESCHI TRUCKS BAND WILL BE PLAYING AT THE BEACON THEATRE ON SEPT. 19, 20, 26, AND 27. *MADE UP MIND* IS AVAILABLE NOW. FOR MORE INFORMATION, GO TO TEDESCHITRUCKSBAND.COM.

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brainstorming and communication going on amongst the band. Everybody will come up with ideas, but it’s hard to call 11 people every day. So there will be a couple of people that we kind of focus on, and once we get a bunch of ideas then we’ll run them by everybody else and say, “Learn some of these tunes,” or, “Do you guys have any ideas?” Derek is really forward-thinking about always keeping it new.

And always learning stuff—even if we have to practice at home and then get on the road and do it at a soundcheck. A lot of tunes we might play only once before we play them in front of people, which can be kind of intense, especially as a singer. I just want to tell you, for the record, I have a hard job (laughs). I’m the only woman in the band, and I’m in heels, and I’m trying to sing lyrics—never mind the 40 or 50 tunes that need to be memorized at all times. And then I’m also playing guitar, so I need to have all the chords memorized, all the stops and hits. It’s insane.

You do everything! You’re a badass.

Thank you! I don’t know, I think I’m just a woman, and we’re good at multitasking.

What have you learned from playing in such a large group? It must present some interesting opportunities and challenges.

That’s true. What’s funny about playing in a large group is that everybody is so aware of everybody, night to night. People will have comments on everything from your clothes to how the song went. There are a lot of different people giving input, which I think is nice. In a small band you’re more apprehensive to bring anything up because it’s so personal. But in a bigger band, it can be a little bit more communal.

It’s easier to bring stuff up.

But everybody is still just as sensitive as in a small band, that’s for sure. Oh my gosh, we have some sensitive boys (laughs). But it’s good, because it means they’re aware and that they care. People just want to do the best they can in this band. Some bands don’t give a crap—they just do whatever, just to get by, just to make a paycheck.

But this band cares. They’re like, “I want to play more,” or, “It’s OK, I don’t have to play.” They try to be humble. Everybody wants to play, and everyone wants to be involved. At the end of the day we do whatever is best for the music. It’s not about, “This is my 10-minute jam.” It’s about, “How can we make this song really great?” or, “How can we build it?” “How can we make it better?”

What are you listening to lately?

Well, I run a lot and I make playlists. Recently, there are three records that I have on rotation: one is The Wood Brothers’ *Smoke Ring Halo*—I love that record. Another one is The Beatles’ *Tomorrow Never Knows*. It starts off with “Revolution,” which is great to start running to. Another one is an old standby that I haven’t listened to in years and decided I should start listening to more: Bonnie Raitt’s first [self-titled] record.

I actually just took up running and I’ve been looking for some playlist suggestions—I’ll give those a try.

Honestly, our new record, *Made Up Mind*, is all I ran to for like, two months. Which is funny because I never listen to any of my own records. That’s embarrassing (laughs) but I do like it, which is good. It’s a good sign.