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It's not an overstatement to say Tedeschi Trucks Band is Northeast Florida's most visible act of the last decade. Venerable solo artist Susan Tedeschi and The Allman Brothers Band guitarist Derek Trucks formed the maelstrom of funk, blues, soul, folk and country when the couple combined their respective backing bands. Success didn't take long: Their debut record, *Revelator*, snatched a Grammy for Best Blues Album in 2011. Their fourth LP, *Signs*, dropped in February.

The 12-piece band christened Daily's Place in 2017, and they return for the third time in as many years to kick off the 24-stop Wheels of Soul Tour on June 28. Tedeschi told Folio Weekly they couldn't have picked a better venue.

"A gig at home is pretty rare these days," she said. "You can have a lot of family and local friends come out. It's a pretty good way to start the summer tour."

Their concert circuit, which stretches from Florida to North Carolina to Colorado, also features Charleston folk/alt country rock duo Shovels & Rope (husband Michael Trent and wife Cary Ann Hearst), and Atlanta roots/Southern/blues/rockers Blackberry Smoke. Tedeschi compared the atmosphere of the tour to a traveling circus.

"You see these people every day for a few weeks. You make friendships, lifelong friendships honestly," she said. "You get experimental—you never know what's going to happen. It gets a little crazy having three bands and the crew and a lot of buses. It's quite the production."

These days, off-stage camaraderie isn't essential for a major recording act. More than a few bands show up, play and then go their separate ways. Tedeschi was thankful that her group doesn't do that.

## SIGNS OF THE TIMES

**TEDESCHI TRUCKS BAND hits the road with a TOPICAL NEW ALBUM**

No one is above anyone else, she said.

"We talk about what we should work on. There's a lot of communication. We just love and respect each other. It's a family vibe on the road, unlike some bands where it's pure debauchery. We have that, too, don't get us wrong," Tedeschi laughed. "We're not perfect, but we keep it pretty tight. If somebody's unhappy, we work on it. We try to make each other happy."

Tedeschi acknowledged that the tone of *Signs* is political and pensive. The album came partly from a place of loss—several blues luminaries have died in recent years.

"We lost Col. Bruce Hampton, Gregg Allman, Butch Trucks and Leon Russell. It's sort of a reflective record," Tedeschi said.

And the heartbreak isn't over. Following a series of medical complications, band member Kofi Burbridge died the day the album was released. The keyboardist and flute player wrote the album's string arrangements, which were performed by the Jacksonville Symphony. Trucks called Burbridge the band's "resident genius" in a March Florida Times-Union story.

"We are really blessed with having that moment on the record," Tedeschi said. "It's been really hard on everybody."

The collaborative aspect is strong on *Signs*. The set was recorded on two-inch analog tape at the couple's home studio, Swamp Raga. The recording process imbued the album with a live feel, and the format provided crispness and warmth. Band members from diverse backgrounds bring new ideas to the group. Harvard grad Mike Mattison wrote "Strengthen What Remains," a song about his aunt's fruitless search for the child she gave up for adoption ("A world where dreams come true/ Wasn't meant for you").

*Signs* opens with the warning shot about uncertainty. "Signs, High Times" bounces the band's four singers—Tedeschi, Mattison, Alecia Chakour and Mark Rivers—off each other. The track list veers from the angry and worried "Shame" to comforting love ballads like "I'm Gonna Be There."

"[Signs is] about current events. It's no secret the American public is going through a hard time with this president and [the album is] calling him out

on stuff," Tedeschi said. "[Shame] is basically saying, 'Step it up, you're not above everyone else, shame on you for not caring about other people.'"

A bluesy and buoyant heartbreaker, "Hard Case" could fit in anywhere in the band's discography. ("You got a lot to learn/ I got a lot to lose/ Guess I hold a candle/ For singers of the blues/ You're a hard case to refuse"). While Trucks, who joined The Allman Brothers Band at 19, usually delivers three or four standout guitar solos on each album, the performance on "Still Your Mind" is among his best.

As for new arrivals to the group, Tedeschi lauded the talents of bassist Brandon Boone. Keyboardist Gabe Dixon is a tour veteran, with road experiences that include tours with Paul McCartney and Alison Krauss.

"We feel pretty honored to have [Dixon]," Tedeschi said. "It really adds to the arsenal of this band."

Rounding out the lineup are percussionists J.J. Johnson and Tyler Greenwell, and Kebbi Williams, who's been the band's saxophonist since 2010. Trumpeter Ephraim Owens and trombonist Elizabeth Lea joined the band in 2015.

"It's like an Olympic team," Tedeschi said. **Nick Blank**  
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Photo by Shervin Lainez

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