

Wheels of Soul Tour rolls into The Wharf

BY STEPHEN CENTANNI

Band: Wheels of Soul Tour featuring Tedeschi Trucks Band with Blackberry Smoke and Shovels & Rope

Date: Wednesday, July 3 at 7 p.m.

Venue: The Wharf Amphitheater, 23325 Wharf Lane, alwharf.com

Tickets: \$10.75 - \$140.25 (does not reflect resale prices) available through Ticketmaster

Tedeschi Trucks Band is more of a family than a music project.

The familial aspect of this long-running, blues-rock project from husband/wife guitar powerhouses Derek Trucks and Susan Tedeschi is especially prominent during the summer months. Once school is out for the summer, the couple's children join them for a number of tour dates in a variety of locales.

When Lagniappe connected with Tedeschi, she was busy packing the family's necessities for a run of dates in Japan. Even though packing the entire family for an overseas trip is challenging, they were all still thrilled by this unique summer "vacation" of sorts.

"The kids are so excited, because they're gonna go with us," Tedeschi said. "They went to Japan when they were 2 and 4, and they don't remember it at all. So, they're really excited to travel and get out of Jacksonville for a minute. It's so hot down South right now. It'll be a welcome break. Even though it's summer over there, it's in the 70s and 80s."

When the group returns from Japan, Tedeschi Trucks Band will celebrate another Wheels of Soul Tour. What has turned into an annual tradition for the Tedeschi Trucks Band is just another extension of the family-like atmosphere that has kept the band on the road for almost a decade.

To hear Tedeschi describe it, the Wheels of Soul Tour is the ideal working vacation for musicians. Tedeschi says that the communal atmosphere shared between Tedeschi Trucks Band and the bands that join them on the road is what has made this tour into a fun event for all involved. Tedeschi says it gives them a chance to connect with other bands both socially and musically.

"You get to know people and see what they do," Tedeschi explained. "It's just nice to see other people. A lot of times, you only get that at festivals, but with the festivals, you're in and out. So, you don't get to hang with people."

Tedeschi likens the Wheels of Soul Tour to a "little traveling circus." Off stage, she says that it is not uncommon for the bands to have functions ranging from festive picnics to epic cook-outs in hotel parking lots. Tedeschi adds that they even include several grills in the tour gear just for the occasion. The socializing does not stop when the bands take the stage. Tedeschi says that it is not uncommon for members from each band to intermingle throughout the night. Each night, the crowd will never know what to expect from this ambitious tour.

"We'll invite people up to play and figure out tunes that we can work up," Tedeschi said. "We can experiment and play together. It's a new way of getting together with other musicians. It's a nice experience for the audience. They get turned on to other music that's usually really good."

Tedeschi Trucks Band's following already knows to expect the unexpected with live performances. The Wheels of Soul Tour will be no different. Since the release of the band's latest effort, "Signs," Tedeschi says that many of the album's tracks have flourished in the live setting.

When it comes to the song "Shame," Tedeschi says the band has

shaped two different versions. The "TV version" is ready for when a set demands "Shame" to be more succinct. The "live version" allows the band to stretch and "go a lot of different places." Those places could include a different ending or a completely new section. Either way, Tedeschi says that this version of "Signs" is a jam that cannot be ignored.

"It shows a side of the band that's more Allman Brothers-y with that 6/8 feel, and the drums are driving and Derek is just crushing the guitar," Tedeschi said. "It's just awesome."

As far as choosing tour-mates for this tour, Tedeschi says that they have chosen bands that they considered close friends including The Wood Brothers, North Mississippi Allstars and Doyle Bramhall.

This year, Tedeschi says that they depleted their pool of familiar faces from which to choose. After making connections with a couple of members of Blackberry Smoke, Tedeschi says that they decided to include this countrified, Southern-rock band from Georgia. She adds that their infectious songs and impressive live delivery has been a hit not only with her but also the public.

"They're just a fun band," Tedeschi said. "People just like them. Their songs are upbeat, and you can just sing along. They also look like they're out of Spinal Tap or something, which is a trip. They're just cool. They've got a cool personality about them."

Tedeschi is also excited to experience Shovels & Rope, which is also a husband/wife project. Respected singer-songwriters in their own right, Michael Trent and Cary Ann Hearst have been combining their creative forces as Shovels & Rope for over a decade. The end result is a versatile, electrifying sound that is an expert concoction of folk, indie rock and alt. country that belongs to Shovels & Rope alone.

When these two accomplished songwriters sit down to compose these unique cuts, Trent and Hearst swim in collaborative methods. Trent says that the two will work individually "over the course of a year or maybe more." When they decide to create an album, Trent says that the two will workshop "half songs or very small ideas or fully written songs"

"We put everything in a pile and look at what we got," Trent said. "Then, we just pick it apart and say, 'Hey, I got this far on this song. What do you think?' The other one will give it a crack or talk about it or do some stuff from there. We do a lot of hand-off. One person might write half a song and give it to the other person. It's different for every song."



TEDESCHI TRUCKS BAND
Photo | tedeschitrucksband.com

"It also depends on babysitter availability," Hearst added.

For the duo's latest album, "By Blood," Shovels & Rope had two goals for its seventh studio release. First, the duo wanted to make each track as grand as possible by maintaining a creative environment without restrictions. The 10 tracks found on "By Blood" meet this goal.

Throughout the album, Trent and Hearst's combined vocals are a flashback to the classic days of country. The two entwine their trademark vocals in dynamic layers of instruments and a clever blitz of musical influences, which puts the band in its own aural dimension. Each song is a dramatic musical movement that ensnares all who listen. Even though the duo set no boundaries for the music on "By Blood," Trent says that Shovels & Rope's second goal was always present. He says that they also wanted to make sure that they could pull off the grandeur of this album in a live setting.

"We didn't want to make a record and not be able to come close to pulling it off live," Trent said. "We wanted to have an equally dynamic record and live show. We wanted them to be their own experience. We put as many different instruments as we wanted to. We tried everything that we wanted to try."

"We think it's our best work," Hearst said. "It's definitely our most cinematic record. Personally, I'm really excited to perform it. It just feels exciting and fun, and it seems to be going over well, which is cool. We're definitely spreading our wings on it."

With Trent and Hearst's tendency to change instruments throughout the set, Shovels & Rope is sure to complement the Wheels of Soul lineup. Shovels & Rope's trademark style should also make for some memorable collaborations as well. However, Trent and Hearst are most looking forward to the camaraderie between this trio of bands. Hearst is especially looking forward to "that summertime picnic" vibe that is sure to be shared with everyone in the audience.

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