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# Tedeschi Trucks Band

**STRENGTHEN  
WHAT REMAINS**



"I was pregnant when Trump got elected and, when I had my baby, I found myself staring at him with my headphones on, trying to be positive."

SHARON VAN ETTEN



and new motherhood, Van Etten also found time to launch an acting career with her supporting role on Netflix fantasy-drama *The OA*. (She also popped up for a cameo on David Lynch's *Twin Peaks* revival.) But Van Etten and Congleton did manage to reunite two months later and finish the album properly, with the producer frequently rotating the studio musicians from his crew of famous session friends (including four drummers: Midlake's McKenzie Smith, Joey Waronker, Brian Reitzell and Warpaint's Stella Mozgawa)—in an attempt to "constantly keep it interesting."

"She was pissing in the wind," Congleton says of Van Etten. "She was ready to try anything—like, 'You just put it together, and we'll see how it goes.' I felt free to try anything. I took her references and what she talked about, took it to heart and pushed it all the way, and she responded."

Van Etten felt liberated by this leap into the unknown. She trusted Congleton's instincts on the arrangements—that's his eerie theremin on "Jupiter 4"—and the final production. (He decided to keep her raw scratch vocal for the pulsating lead single "Comeback Kid.") But she admits it was a bit nerve-wracking to hand over some of her directorial vision.

"I was also a little intimidated initially by the idea of working with John because of who he's [produced]. But I was finally ready to relinquish that kind of control," she says, noting the freedom of focusing primarily on her vocal performances. "It was definitely challenging. It took a second to get used to—to think, 'This isn't something that I would do.' I would laugh internally because I would know immediately: 'That's why I'm working with John. I would be doing it myself if it's something I would do.' He would pull things out of people. He would tell each musician some different reference and, when they'd play together, you wouldn't know what to compare it to."

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FOR ALL ITS EXPERIMENTATION, *REMINDE ME TOMORROW* is far from a shark-jump. Van Etten's confessional, if a bit mysterious, lyrics remain integral—and she had plenty of real-life drama to draw from. The record's early direction felt joyful, she says, after the birth of her first son. But Donald Trump's presidential rise, and the bitter social landscape it created, altered her focus.

"The only time I was able to write was when my child was napping," she says of her early progress on *Remind Me Tomorrow*. "I'd put my headphones on and listen to my demos and finish writing lyrics. It was a really crazy perspective—I started writing all these demos when I was super happy and in love, at home. I was pregnant when Trump got elected and, when I had my baby, I found myself staring at him with my headphones on, trying to be positive. There are different perspectives at every editing point."

As *Remind Me Tomorrow* proves, it's a new phase in more ways than one.

"It's a collection of all those [emotions]," she adds. "It's been happy in this dark time and feeling guilty about it. [Laughs.] And trying to be positive while being scared. Realizing that no matter what goes on, your biggest job is to make your kid feel safe. When it boils down to it, all you can do is what's in your control: to be a good partner, to be a good mother, to be a good friend, even though all this other shit's going on. It's conflicted, yet I think it's still hopeful. But I'm not going to back down and not admit that it's a dark time and that I'm struggling with these emotions in this new phase of my life." ①

Ryan Pfluger

## Strengthen What Remains

The mighty Tedeschi Trucks Band: Ephraim Owens, Kofi Burbridge, Mike Mattison, Mark Rivers, Kebbi Williams, Susan Tedeschi, Derek Trucks, Alecia Chakour, Tyler Greenwell, J. J. Johnson, Elizabeth Lea, Tim Lefebvre (l-r)



Tedeschi Trucks Band recovers from a season of loss with a new record that looks optimistically to the future.

By DEAN BUDNICK

"We're not big on self-pity and staying down in the mud," Derek Trucks observes, while reflecting on the bereavement and distress that informed the new Tedeschi Trucks Band album, *Signs*. "You honor people when you can, you grieve and then you get to work. You always want to find the sliver of hope and light somewhere at the end of the tunnel. Then you point down the road and get back on your horse."

Six months earlier, while still in the midst of completing the record, Trucks had described the work in progress as "a heavy experience." At that time, he revealed that in drafting their new material, "We'd been dealing with our share of loss," referencing the deaths of family and extended family members over the preceding year. In 2017, two of Trucks' fellow Allman Brothers Band members passed away: The guitarist's uncle and founding ABB drummer Butch Trucks, as well as the group's namesake Gregg Allman. In between the passing of those former bandmates, Col. Bruce Hampton—the "friend and mentor" to whom *Signs* is dedicated—suffered a fatal heart attack onstage during the finale of his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration, while performing alongside an assembly of all-star acolytes and well-wishers, including Trucks and his wife/musical partner Susan Tedeschi.

As Trucks contemplates the process of completing the album in early December, while seated in a dressing room at Boston's Orpheum Theatre a few hours before TTB's final performance of the year, he notes, "Sometimes we go in with a bit of a concept, but we usually get in a room and just start writing. It's like what we do on any given night at a gig—we just feel out the air and what's on our mind. When we went into this one, there was still a lot of coping going on. In some ways, I think this one was more of a challenge than any record that we've made for that reason; there was a lot of fog in the air."

Not all of the material on *Signs* references physical loss—some of the songs express dismay

Shervin Lainez



TEDESCHI TRUCKS BAND

with the increasingly polarized political discourse. On this afternoon, before the group's third consecutive sold-out appearance at the Orpheum, the world is still responding to the prior day's demise of George Herbert Walker Bush. Both Tedeschi and Trucks take a few moments to compare the dignity and grace of the country's 41<sup>st</sup> president with the vitriol and invective of the current executive, even if Tedeschi had otherwise intended to limit her pre-show conversation in an effort to help preserve her voice for the final night.

Still, a few days later, when speaking via phone on the morning after her 17<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, the singer echoes the band's resolve not to dwell in the mire on *Signs*. "It's very challenging but very important to try to make music that's positive and hopeful and joyful in the midst of all the heartbreak and sorrow and disgust and horrible things that are going on in the world," she affirms. "When people come to see music, it needs to be an escape from all the bad stuff and it needs to be hopeful. Even though something can be melancholy, there's still hope underlying it."

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WHEN TRUCKS WOUND DOWN THE DEREK Trucks Band in 2010, even as that group was increasingly gaining traction, he decided to align forces with Tedeschi in what would eventually become a 12-piece entity. They acknowledged all the logistical challenges and expenses even as they maintained the firm conviction that they were bound for glory.

Some of their motivation was to unify tour schedules, since the two artists often found it challenging to find time when they would both be at home with their young children. In assessing the long-term impact of this arrangement, Trucks looks back and says with a laugh, "It's a strange thing. My kids are 16 and 14. They've got a few more years at home and then they're out of the house. You think about the way we set up this band and built everything so that we could be home and then, all of a sudden, that whole dynamic started to shift. We'd get home and our kids would rather be with their girlfriends or boyfriends. We're like, 'Hold on a minute. We scheduled this time so we could hang out.' And they're like, 'Yeah, but I got stuff to do.'"

Where TTB has achieved unqualified success is Trucks' crusade to utilize Tedeschi as a complete performer, from her vivid, soulful vocals to her lucid expressions on guitar. He recalls, "I knew how good Susan was and I also knew that you don't get a chance very often to put a cast of world-class musicians behind a world-class vocalist. She's also a vocalist that you can talk to, who's not a diva, who's going to just lay it out and is also going to be a band member. There are 20 of those bands that ever existed."

Tedeschi acknowledges and embraces the dual nature of her musical contributions: "There are moments when I'm out front and moments

appreciate Derek and what he does. To me, he's the captain of the big ship, and I'm more of the first mate. Derek has given me an incredible opportunity to play guitar in this band. I know I'm not Derek Trucks on guitar. I know I'm not Jimmy Herring. These guys can do anything, anytime, anywhere. It takes me longer to figure stuff out because I'm a slow learner and I didn't play [electric] guitar until I was in my mid-20s. But I'm learning all the time."

Despite coming to the instrument a bit later in life—she played acoustic guitar and piano from a young age—Tedeschi has a facility for it. To employ a sports analogy, as she and her husband are wont to do, Tedeschi's something of the Scottie Pippen to Trucks' Michael Jordan—her playing can be overlooked but she's certainly got game. Some of most thunderous applause at a given TTB show comes in appreciation of her absorbing, melodic solos, which build on a blues lexicon.

Tedeschi has also been able to maintain a steady, calm demeanor within the torrent of sounds emanating from all corners of the stage via the 11 other musicians situated behind her—Mike Mattison, Mark Rivers and Alecia Chakour on vocals, Tyler "Falcon" Greenwell and J. J. Johnson on drums and percussion, Tim Lefebvre on bass, Kofi Burbridge on keyboards and flute, along with a three-piece horn section comprised of Kebbi Williams (saxophone), Ephraim Owens (trumpet) and Elizabeth Lea (trombone). The singer's ability to maintain a preternatural quietude while remaining in the moment is a product, in part, of her extensive stage experience. While her husband was hailed a preteen guitar prodigy, so too was Tedeschi performing in front of audiences from the age of six, appearing in plays and musical theater around the Boston area.

This background accounts for some of Tedeschi's current-day expressive vocalizations. In addition, her decision to forgo a potential acting career after enrolling at the Berklee College of Music highlights a foundation of Tedeschi Trucks Band's staying power.

"What happened was that I had to make a conscious choice; was I going to keep pursuing acting or was I just going to do singing? Through all my formative years, I'd been all these different people—whether I was Princess Winnifred in *Once Upon a Mattress*, Sandy in *Grease* or 99 in *Get Smart*. It's fun to be different people, but I started questioning what I really added to the equation. Focusing on music gave me back my freedom and creativity. I embraced the songwriting aspect, sitting alone with a guitar or piano and writing about how I feel."

Tedeschi Trucks Band features a sparkling roster of musician's musicians, who are adroit improvisers and interpreters. Even so, the group's swelling success is a product of its vibrant, engaging original compositions.

"When we put this band together, we weren't sure if the audience was going to take to it," Trucks says. "You can fight the headwinds for a

TEDESCHI TRUCKS BAND



don't get the wind in your sail at some point, it's not going to keep going. Then about two to three years in, we could really feel that shift in momentum—that there was an audience here for this band, not for Susan's solo career or mine or the Allmans or wherever they got turned on to us. There were people who heard these records and saw these shows and knew the music. There was something this band was specifically doing that was bringing them in. Up to that point, I'd never been a part of anything like that. I'd look out and realize that they knew all of these songs that we'd written as a band. It still takes me by surprise sometimes."

This point is repeatedly illustrated over three nights in Boston via the animated crowd response a few notes into "Midnight in Harlem," "Anyhow," "Made Up Mind" and numerous other tunes.

In January 2016, Tedeschi Trucks Band released their third studio record, *Let Me Get By*. By the summer of the following year, the group recognized that it was time to fortify the foundation and add to the canon with a new album of original music.

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IN AN EFFORT TO COORDINATE SCHEDULES and provide as much advance notice as possible to band members and their families, TTB

typically slates each year well in advance. The band intended to devote the first half of 2017 to touring and then turn the focus to songwriting, with the goal of recording in December. However, a dismal stretch of events began four days after President Trump's January inauguration, when Butch Trucks took his own life. Hampton passed away on May 1 and Gregg Allman succumbed to liver cancer on May 27. Calamity then followed in late June when Kofi Burbridge suffered a heart attack, which necessitated emergency surgery and sidelined him until October. (Carey Frank assumed keyboard duties in Burbridge's absence.)

Mike Mattison describes the mood during the months preceding the initial recording sessions as "pretty bleak." He adds, "There were a lot of deaths in the family—whether that was actual family or extended musical family—and things just got kind of crazy."

When the band returned to Swamp Raga Studio—which is situated on Tedeschi and Trucks' property and where the group recorded its three prior albums—they initiated something of a ritual cleanse. Mattison recalls, "We totally rearranged the studio setup. We were all used to being in our little corner or hole, so we just reorganized the room. We literally put a new coat of paint on the whole studio and rewired the boards, thinking, 'Let's make it like moving into a new apartment'

"I'd look out and realize that [the audience] knew all of these songs that we'd written as a band. It still takes me by surprise sometimes," Trucks reveals.





Trucks and Tedeschi perform as a duo during the John Henry's Friends benefit concert on 12/3/18 at New York City's Town Hall.

That helped give everybody's heads a slightly different space so it wasn't the same old, same old."

This remodel helped adjust their collective outlook, particularly as the group returned for the bulk of the tracking in March. Ultimately, the material selected for the album reflected TTB's longstanding ethos. Trucks explains, "We don't make music to feel bad; we make it to get things off our chest. So when we do go through things, a lot of time that strengthens what it's all about. You also come to realize that, no matter how bad something you're going through is, you're not the first or the last to deal with it. People certainly are dealing with much worse. We try to keep that in mind."

One can hear this sentiment on the album's opening track, "Signs, High Times," a unified call to action, in which the band's four vocalists share lead duties while proclaiming that the time has arrived for individuals to jettison their lethargy and languor. The clamorous, propulsive music feels organic and familiar, which it should, as the band reworked "Satie Groove," adding vim and vigor to a slow-grooving instrumental that appears as a bonus track on *Let Me Get By*.

There is a crackling energy to a number of the compositions on *Signs* that emerged from stage improvisations. "It's funny how many songs have come out of the jam section of 'Bound for Glory,'" Lefebvre says in reference to "Walk Through This," a tune that Trucks' longtime ABB bandmate Warren Haynes helped write after hearing an inchoate version during a visit to Jacksonville. (Haynes even contributed some backing vocals when Trucks determined "there

was something about that Warren/mountain/North Carolina harmony on the demo he sent us that we needed in there.")

"Shame," which originated with a Lefebvre vamp during "Let Me Get By," carries the most explicit political overtones on the record, although the lyrics are open-ended enough to address their personal failings as well. The song kicks off as Tedeschi intones, "Shame, there's poison in the well/ Shame, you know we can't unring the bell." She admits, "There are cities that don't even have clean water, and lead poisoning is causing defects in children. We have the technology, resources and awareness in this country, so why is this? I don't know if it's ignorance or greed but it's shameful; we can do better. I become frustrated when people don't realize we're all connected."

Trucks adds, "We can't help but write about the things that mean something to us. There's another tune we recorded, 'High and Mighty,' that's a bit like 'Shame' and will probably come out for Record Store Day or as a bonus track. We don't want to preach too much—we don't want to preach to the choir and we don't want to blast over people's heads. But there are certain themes that are pretty universal, and sometimes people forget where they stand on things that are obvious. I also think there's enough shame to go around these days."

An altogether different vibe emanates from the elegiac Tedeschi original "When Will I Begin," which came together after Trucks suggested she combine two of her songs that he notes "were both really good, but I kept having this feeling that, if we put them together, it'd be amazing." He characterizes the result, which incorporates a string section arranged by Kofi Burbridge, as "one of my favorites on the record."

"When Will I Begin" opens with the image of someone overwhelmed by paperwork, which Tedeschi reveals, "really did happen to me. I was sitting in my office surrounded by taxes, mail, just stuff, and I was thinking about how many people have the same stuff. It could be medical bills that they're inundated with, it could be divorce papers, but it's keeping them from living their lives and enjoying the moment." Despite this entry point, the song is not devoid of hope, as the narrator acknowledges, "it's not too late to start anew."

The two songs that Tedeschi names as her favorites on *Signs* were both written by Mattison.

"They Don't Shine" is a rocker that builds to a rousing outro following the lines, "Now the comedy is over/ The tragedy is done/ You got my eyes burning/ Like honey in the sun," before a joyous declaration that "They don't shine just for anyone." Tedeschi raves, "I love that idea. When you're in love, your eyes are shining for somebody; they don't shine like that for anybody."

"That was a song I hadn't intended for TTB," Mattison reveals. "TTB is a rock band, but the real focus is on blues and jazz. To me, this is our first foray into straight rock or at least rock from

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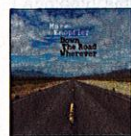
# REVIEWS

Compiled by MIKE GREENHAUS

## MARK KNOPFLER

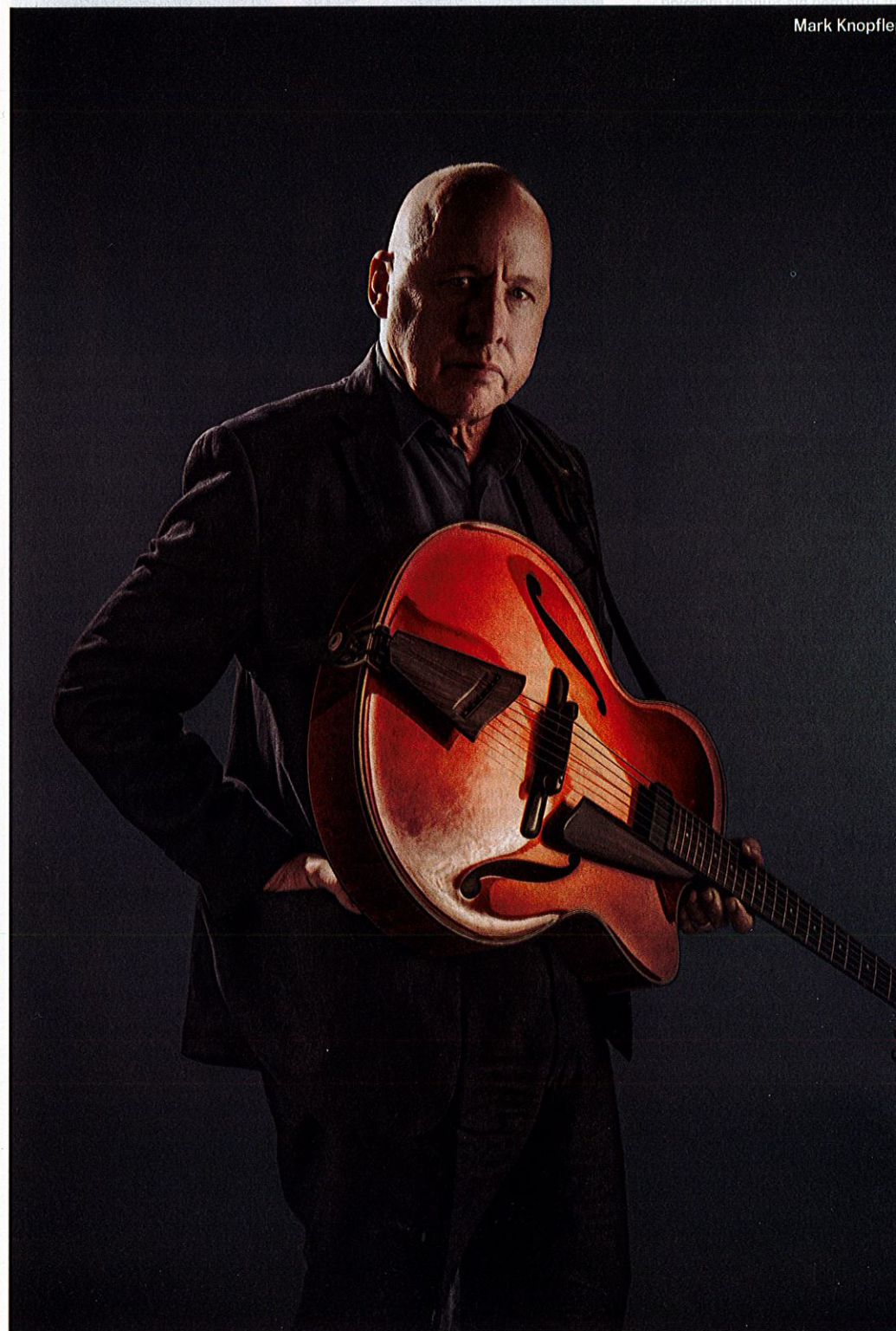
**Down the Road Wherever**

BRITISH GROVE/BLEU NOTE



Not every song on Mark Knopfler's ninth solo album derives from a personal experience, but each one feels

as if it does. From the "Trapper Man," "in from the hinterlands/ Filth and grease on his clothes and hands" to the lilting "Floating Away," in which the singer declares, "In the mirror, my withering skin is a thorny pleasure/ I stand unflinching and I mark each crease and sting," there's an implied invitation, with each new song, to come closer and partake. "I've always tried to... keep my own geography happening in the songs," Knopfler is quoted as saying in the album's press release, and *Down the Road Wherever*, while not strictly autobiographical, acts as a map. Knopfler's songs have always served as vehicles though: Even if one were to ignore the lyrical storylines altogether, there'd be enough in his expressive guitar-playing and keenly honed arrangements to put a tale across. A core team of nine musicians, supplemented by others, worked closely with the former Dire Straits leader to shape each track—all of them produced by Knopfler and Guy Fletcher—into a self-contained mini-world of its own. In "Good on You Son," Knopfler carefully offers up a melodic intro of crystalline, single-note guitar lines that prove the less-is-more axiom in their sparseness. It lasts just over half a minute, but it's enough to weave a hypnotic spell that's broken only when he sings. "Nobody Does That" goes the title of another particularly soulful track, whose lyrics consist of little more than that line applied willy-nilly. Nobody else does what Mark Knopfler does either. Jeff Tamarkin



Mark Knopfler

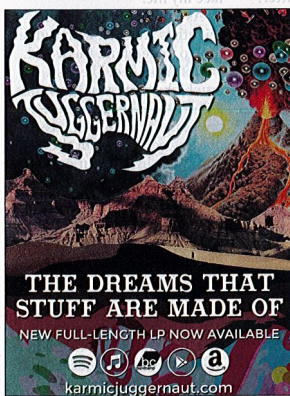
Derek Hudson

Marc Millman

"[Col. Bruce] changed our lives significantly, and we love him to no end. We needed to heal after that. It was a very difficult thing to process."

SUSAN TEDESCHI





Albert King, Freddie King, B.B. King. [Laughs.] But the thing about Television, especially, is that there was much less improvisation than you might imagine. We would work on a song for a year and a half, and it pretty much had a form, though there was room for improvisation during that. After we did the record, I would often play a solo that was different from the record, but it usually wasn't as good as what was on the record, so I'd just return to that. I could always return to it and leave it.

**What inspired you to write your autobiography?**

I've always told stories and I'm finally at the middle of my life, so I thought I should write them down and get them in a place for my son and the other people who kept asking me, "Would you tell me the story about such and such again?" I wanted a memory jogger, but nobody would do it. I asked some people if they'd be co-writers or editors, and all of them said that I had a writing style that was strong enough that I didn't really need that. So I got voice-recognition software, and I spoke the book—just told stories to the computer and it typed for me. I took typing in high school, and it sucked. Then the computer came along and everybody's gotta type again. Now that I have all that stuff in a 400-page book, I can't remember anything. It's finally clean-out-the-attic time.

**In Everything Is**

**Combustible, you mention being a fly on the wall while Jimi Hendrix was recording. How did you meet?**

A guy named Velvert Turner—a scrawny black kid from Brooklyn. He said he knew Jimi Hendrix, and I thought to myself: "Well, he must know somebody

on Earth. Why not this kid?" He looked the part, and he *did* know him. We ended up going to a bunch of concerts and following the rock stars around. Steve Paul's The Scene—it's a porn shop in a basement now. [Laughs.] Amazing things happen in small places.

I was in the studio with Jimi. I remember listening to an eight-minute version of "Izabella" backward. His store tapes tailed out, so when he would go into the studio to listen to yesterday's tapes, he had the engineer play it backward first. I remember him talking to the engineer; he wanted to do a song that would be four bars forward, four bars backward throughout the whole song, and the guys said, "Jimi, we can't do that. It'd take a year of cutting tape." Jimi slumped in his chair like, "What a drag that I can't do that." But we can do it now in the digital realm.

**You were also on the guest list for some of the Grateful Dead's first New York shows.**

I saw them about eight times around then, [including] at the Fillmore East when it was still The Village Theatre. They played for so long that I made a bet with myself that I'd beat them and stay awake, but it never happened. Finally, I would leave at 3:30 a.m. and be like, "They're never gonna stop." It was raver than the hippies back then; the hippies followed that and came up with flower-power. The Dead were the elder spokesmen for that movement, but not part of it. I went to a soundcheck and I didn't have a ticket, and I asked Jerry—because they didn't have security back then—if he could put me on the guest list. I yelled out at him: "I got an

allowance, but I can't buy a ticket." And he said, "Well, mine's full of business people." Then he turned to Phil [Lesh] and said, "What about you?" And Phil said, "I don't know anybody in New York. What's his name? I'll put him down." So I had some backstage adventures then.

**Television always fell between scenes. You recently said: "I never felt the angst necessary to be a punk. I was too young to be a beatnik and too old to be a hippie. I like to say I'm an anthropologist from another planet who is observing human nature and expressing my observations through rock-and-roll."**

I was too young to be a beatnik, chronologically and old enough to not really fall for the hippie trip, although I went to the love-ins, the be-ins in Sheep's Meadow in Central Park. One time we went down to something called the League for Spiritual Discovery [LSD] and saw Timothy Leary sitting on a silk pillow waxing philosophical. And we were like, "Where's the acid, man? Give us the real deal!" And they didn't have any, so we split. [Laughs.]

Nobody was the same at CBGB. It was all original music; there were no covers. That was the real law: You couldn't play covers in there. When Television first formed, we wore torn shirts and ratty clothes—and I called it the glamour of poverty. Think about it: We're playing in a dingy bar under a flophouse on Skid Row. You didn't see anybody with a suit on for about two years. We couldn't get the music-business people down. They were like, "I'm not walking over no bums." Now it's a restaurant at Newark airport. ●

a different genetic strain. That song is straight-up Chuck Berry via the Stones, which doesn't really get into our world a lot. I'm glad we did it. It was fun to take a crack at something off the beaten path."

"Strengthen What Remains," which Tedeschi lauds as a "deep, beautiful tune," is the fifth of the 11 tracks on *Signs*. Trucks maintains, "There's some good air on the record. When you get to 'Strengthen What Remains,' the drums are gone, the bass is upright and there is an acoustic guitar. The flutes are outrageous and the strings that Kofi wrote are just gorgeous. That's one of my favorite moments. For me, it was almost the album title—'Strengthen What Remains'—because it sums up the whole thing. You've got to keep going with what you've got."

*Signs* concludes with "The Ending," a song that is something of an anomaly, which is fitting because it memorializes someone who occupied his own unique space in the world. Tedeschi, Trucks and Oliver Wood wrote and recorded the tune as a trio in tribute to Col. Bruce Hampton.

Tedeschi explains, "This isn't a song we tried to write for this record or any record; this is a song that came about because Oliver, Derek and I have all known Colonel since the late-'80s or early-'90s. We all knew him separately—he actually pulled us all together—and we were all there when he passed. He changed our lives significantly, and we love him to no end. We needed to heal after that. It was a very difficult thing to process."

"Oliver came to our house, told us he had started writing a tune and asked us to help him," she continues. "One of the lines I wrote was something Derek said that night, which was, 'The door opened up and he walked right through.' We tried to think about what had happened and use actual moments. I remember him being onstage and saying, 'I gotta go. It's time to go,' and he kept pointing to his watch. I was like, 'Where you going? Don't go!' I was in the middle of singing, and he left. When he came back out, I couldn't really see what was happening but I could tell something was up because the vibe changed. Once we all really realized what was happening, it was a shock. I think he had trained us to think he was faking."

"The lyrics convey the beauty of who he is and was and how he moved all of us. You might not understand everything he said but he was pure joy, pure truth. He never had an agenda. The music was real—he was inspired—and we were all moved by him and lucky to know him. He changed our lives, so we wanted to heal and talk about the beauty that is Colonel. It's not supposed to be a sad song, but it is because he's gone now; although, he'll always be alive within all of us. The three of us loved him so much."

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**A BAND'S FINAL SHOW OF THE YEAR CAN PROVIDE AN OPPORTUNITY for reflection. Beyond completing a new record, 2018 offered a number of other musical zeniths for the Tedeschi Trucks Band.**

Trucks points to the group's fourth annual Wheels of Soul Tour, in which the ensemble hit amphitheaters with The Marcus King Band and Drive-By Truckers. (The event will return in 2019 with Blackberry Smoke and Shovels & Rope.) He remarks, "It was a lot of fun being out there and seeing Marcus coming into his own—you could feel that momentum. This also was the first year that we took a band out that we didn't have a long connection with: Drive-By Truckers. There was some blowback from certain parts of the audience for whatever reason, but I don't mind shaking it up a little bit. Sometimes a little confusion is nice. [Mike] Cooley and Patterson [Hood] are just good people and super intelligent. Their tunes expect something of you. It's a different feel. I'm glad we did it. I really enjoyed connecting with those guys."

He also singles out LOCKN', where the band performed over two days, including a Sunday set that featured a memorable guest appearance by Branford Marsalis. "Branford used to come out with DTB and sit in at the Visulite [Theatre in Charlotte]," Trucks recollects. "He was with us for some of the best moments we had. At LOCKN', we ran into him on the way to the stage. He came out,

of the van and was like, 'I heard you guys were playing. I had to get down early.' So I told him: 'Well, if you have the time, come on up.' It was totally spur of the moment. I didn't realize that Branford was the guy who made Kebbi want to play in the first place. So that became a real hero kind of moment. I don't know if I've ever seen Kebbi as happy in his life. He called me two days later to say, 'Man, I'm so glad that happened.' He was still beaming. Both those shows were highlights of the year."

As for the group's annual Beacon Theatre fall residency in New York, Trucks comments, "We worked hard on that run. It's been a long few years. We varied the setlist a ton and we really tried to dig in. Everyone was gassed after that run. It took something out of us, in a good sense."

All told, the Tedeschi Trucks Band had certainly earned the right to some R&R following the final date in Boston on December 1 before returning to the road in mid-January. However, those best-laid plans went awry, following the recent decision by Lefebvre to part from the group after a five-year-stint. The bassist, who married singer-songwriter Rachel Eckroth on November 24, is leaving on amicable terms. He produced Eckroth's latest album *When It Falls*, which came out in the fall, and will take on additional endeavors in that capacity. He will also gig with other projects, including some dates featuring many of the friends and colleagues he joined in the studio for David Bowie's final album, *Blackstar*.

This is not the first time that the TTB bass position has been in flux. Oteil Burbridge originated the slot before giving way to a series of other players who preceded Lefebvre. His departure will provide the band with another opportunity to reexamine this aspect of its sound.

Lefebvre offers, "With 12 musicians, you've got to carve your role out and avoid getting in the way but, at the same time, when you're improvising, you've got to be the impetus and help move things along. You've got to think about a bunch of things at once, and there are two drummers, so you have to concentrate on that also. It's challenging but it's so much fun."

At the close of the final Orpheum show, Tedeschi gestured to Lefebvre and mentioned his recent marriage but didn't quite go so far as to announce his departure. She explains, "Derek and Falcon were trying to get me to say something like, 'Tim is taking off from the band to join a monastery and is going to be celibate for eight years.' They wanted me to say something jokingly but I just couldn't do that, even though it would have been done with affection. I love him and I'm gonna miss him a lot. I think he was really great for this band. It's amazing that we had him out on the road for five years. He's a very creative, artistic guy with a lot of things to offer but he's not somebody who likes to tour a lot. This band isn't for everybody. It can be intense and demanding. You've got to be all in; you've got to be a lifer."

Trucks echoes this sentiment in adding, "Tim's a badass free-agent mercenary. He wants to try everything all the time and that's awesome. He sent the band in a lot of directions that we otherwise wouldn't have gone, and we have to be thankful for that. It's hard traveling as much as we do. We're in tight quarters and there're a lot of us. Two tour buses sounds like a lot of space, but there are 20-something of us on the road. I'm a lifer; I don't even think about it, but not everybody's built for that. We're not kids. I don't know a lot of people in their 40s or 50s who are all piled up together all the time."

When asked whether he ever longs to return to a less-congested environment, with a combo such as the five-piece Derek Trucks Band, he responds, "I'll sit in with other people, but I don't often get onstage with this group and go, 'I sure wish it was less powerful; I sure wish I was doing something less good.'"

Trucks laughs and then says of his upcoming plans: "I had been excited to have a few weeks to relax and take walks in the woods, but we're going to be doing something else. So let's get back to work." ●