

ONE AND THE SAME

Former child guitar prodigy Derek Trucks is now nearly 40 years old. He is still, however, dedicated to making music a family affair.

By Amy Christian

IT HAS BEEN A ROUGH MONTH FOR DEREK TRUCKS.

The bandleader of the Tedeschi Trucks Band, co-named for his musical and life partner Susan Tedeschi, was in Macon last weekend for the funeral of Gregg Allman. While Trucks has been touring and playing music since he was about 9 years old, it was Allman who gave him his start. Trucks began sitting in with the band when he was around 12 and became a full-fledged member when he was 19.

Allman died in Savannah on May 27, making it two influential individuals Trucks lost during the month.

"I guess around that time I was playing The Post Office and The Red Lion I met a good friend, Col. Bruce Hampton, and he really became family," Trucks recently remembered. "He became a part of our crew. He was close to everyone around us -- my little brothers and sister and then when we had kids. But even before that, when I was young, he was great about turning you on to the right things at the right times. When he thought you were ready for something he would drop the right book or the right record."

And yes, that's right, when he was between 10 and 12 years old, Trucks was playing the Augusta bar scene.

"In hindsight, it was pretty unique," he said. "My dad traveled with me. He made sure I was aware of what was going on around me. He shielded me from some stuff, but just enough to let me get an understanding. Usually when parents are supporting their kids in that way they are trying to extract something. My dad made it clear we could stop at any point. He wasn't living his music career through me. I was lucky. We have a very close family that way."

That music is a family affair is something Trucks credits for keeping him grounded and away from the darker side of the business that many musicians fall prey to.

"You would see people who would just let their ego get away from them and the music would suffer," he said. "A lot of darker things too: people that would OD, a lot of broken families, a lot of those things. You certainly are better for it when you survive those things or,



in my case, watch those things."

But for every dark side he witnessed, Trucks said there were people like Col. Bruce who showed him the flip side of the coin.

"And then you meet some people along the way who point you in the right direction and it's the other side of that coin. You don't only have to learn from the bumps in the road. There are some people who shine a light in different directions," he said of Col. Bruce. "My dad was always really good about making sure that your attitude and your humility stayed intact, and that was always the Colonel's thing, too, kind of taking musicians' egos and just shattering them... in a loving way. He made sure you knew that you weren't curing cancer for a living. It's a magical thing, music, when it's working, but the people that take themselves too seriously are missing the point. Take the work seriously, but not yourself was always kind of the MO."

Derek Trucks and Susan Tedeschi were, in fact, two of the people on the Fox Theatre stage in Atlanta on May 1 when Col. Bruce collapsed near the end of his 70th birthday celebration.

"We were right there," he said. "It was the end of the night and he was just a few feet in front of us and, yep, I've never heard of anything quite like that. Doing what you love and surrounded by people that love you... that's a minor miracle, without a doubt."

Allman and Col. Bruce aren't the only losses Trucks has

suffered lately, however. He, like everyone in the Augusta area, is still mourning the loss of Sharon Jones.

"It's been a rough few years for losing people close to you, Trucks said. "We had gotten pretty close with Sharon Jones, and she was an inspiration just because of how hard she fought through her thing, and then the Colonel. I've never experienced anything quite like that and I think people are still kind of processing that in their own way, but I feel lucky to have known him. It hurts losing a friend and someone who really felt like family, but you do realize how lucky you are to have people like that in your circle... ever. Sharon, too. You don't meet people with that kind of spirit often, and you have to make sure you don't take it for granted."

Trucks first started touring with his dad as a child and, now, as an adult, he tours with his wife Susan, a musical giant in her own right. Music, therefore, has always been the family business for Trucks and the two are so intertwined that it's difficult to separate one from the other, he said.

"I feel like there was never a separation," Trucks explained. "I grew up around the Allman Brothers mythos and, you know, if you look at the inside cover of "Brothers and Sisters" it's just full band and crew and family and that's the way I always thought about that. When I was traveling in the beginning, my dad was always there, but my mom and my brothers were there as much as they could be, so it always felt like one and the same. You know, when you put a band together and start touring, you end up spending as much time, or more time,

with your band as you do anyone else in your life so it really does become a family. So there's never been much separation. It's never felt like anything but that, and I think when we put this band together that was certainly in our mind. These are people you want to spend a long time with and go to bat for."

The Tedeschi Trucks Band tours a lot. In fact, their upcoming visit to the Bell marks only a little more than a year from their last visit to the venue. How do they make that work when they have two teenage children? The answer is simple. Family.

"Again, we're really fortunate," he admitted. "My parents live six doors down from us and my brother and his wife are 10 doors down in the other direction, so when we're on the road and the kids are still in school, Mom will move into our house and it's a little village over here. Yeah, I don't think we'd feel fully comfortable doing it if that wasn't the case. Before, it was Susan touring, I was touring, one of us was home or the kids were touring with one of us, but it's nicer now because when we're together, everyone's together. It's not as fragmented as it was before."

Then there's the husband-wife dynamic in the band. While Trucks swears that Susan's last name is first the band name simply because "Trucks Tedeschi just doesn't sound good; that's a total mess," it was certainly a smart move on his part. Another smart move is the band's policy of keeping issues out in the open.

"You don't want to carry anything to the stage, if anything is going on," he laughed. "And I think this extends to us as a band. We really try to deal with things as they come up. We try to just shine a light on what's going on. But, you know, we waited a long time before we put a band together. We had been together for more than 10 years and had been married a long time and had kids before we ever decided we were ready for a band together. We wanted to make sure we really knew each other before we jumped into something like this. I'm glad we waited because I think by the time we put a group together we knew each other really well. We felt like we were ready for it. We weren't naïve. We knew there would be bumps in the road but it really has been much smoother than we ever imagined. I think having a really good band helps. Everyone's in a good mood when things are

rolling along. Not that we started this group and everything was simple from the beginning, but you feel like you're on the right track, doing the right thing."

And though Trucks has been playing guitar for nearly 30 years now, it never feels like a chore.

"There are times when the traveling will get tedious or just the everything that comes along with being a bandleader with a 12-piece band running an organization. That stuff can get to be a bit much, but the playing is never a problem," he explained. "There are good nights and bad nights, but it's an amazing thing. You feel like there's always, always work to do musically. You feel like you're always just scratching the surface, which is a good thing. I never get into too major of a rut and, when you do, you just put on a few good records and it reminds you of why you play. You put on something that really moves you and inspires you and, somehow, it really cleans the slate and gets you back. In some ways you always want to be progressing, you always want to be moving forward, but you always want to keep that direct connection with why you are doing it in the first place and why you started playing when you were 9 or 10 and there are some things you do when you first step on stage that should really never leave you. There is a sound and a purity and an intention that, if you have that, if you can somehow keep a direct line to that, I think that keeps you sane and keeps you doing it."

Tedeschi Trucks Band, w/ Paul Barrere and Fred Tackett of Little Feat
 Bell Auditorium
 Tuesday, June 13
 8 p.m.
 \$19.50-\$79.50
 877-4AUGTIX
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