Tedeschi Trucks Band - Made Up Mind (2013)

01. Made Up Mind 02. Do I Look Worried 03. Idle Wind 04. Misunderstood 05. Part of Me 06. Whiskey Legs 07. It's So Heavy 08. All That I Need 09. Sweet and Low 10. The Storm 11. Calling Out To You Personnel: Susan Tedeschi: guitar (6, 7), vocals, percussion (1); Derek Trucks: guitars, percussion (10); Kofi Burbridge: keyboards (1-10), flute (3); Tyler Greenwell: drums (1-10), percussion (1-10); J.J. Johnson: drums (1-10), percussion (1-10); Kebbi Williams: saxophone (1-5, 7, 8) ; Maurice Brown: trumpet (1-5, 7, 8); Saunders Sermons: trombone (1-5, 7, 8), vocals; Mike Mattison: vocals (1-5, 7-9); Mark Rivers vocals (1-5, 7-9); Pino Palladino: bass (1, 7-9, 10); Bakithi Kumalo: bass (3, 4), percussion (3, 4), congas (4); George Reiff: bass (6); Dave Monsey: bass (2, 5); John Leventhal: guitar (2); Doyle Brahmall II: guitar (5, 8); Jim Scott: handclaps (5); Erik Krasno: guitar (7), percussion (10).

In so many ways, Tedeschi Trucks Band has bucked the odds: a band, on paper, doomed to fail and yet, here it is with its second studio recording, after the 2011 debut, Revelator and 2012 live album, Everybody's Talkin' (both, Sony Masterworks). In these days of escalating touring costs, the idea of an eleven-piece rock/soul/blues band being not just viable but successful would seem impossible. Then there's the decades-old unwritten rule: never date—or, worse, marry—one of your band mates.

And yet, with a behemoth of a band and its two leaders a married couple, TTB continues, moving from success to success. Derek Trucks, nephew of drummer Butch Trucks—both now playing together in the Allman Brothers Band, where Butch is a founding member, for more than a decade—seems to embody a rare humility; his own Derek Trucks Band, which preceded TTB from 1997-2010, an ideal proving ground for the guitarist who has been on the road since the age of 12, picking up the torch left by the late Duane Allman and evolving, with influences that transcend blues and roots music to incorporate jazz and world music concerns, into today's most impressive, emotive and virtuosic slide guitarists, with a thick, singing and instantly recognizable tone.

Tedeschi, since achieving her first real success with Just Won't Burn (Tone Cool, 1997), has emerged as a blues singer for the new millennium; a singer whose interests, like Trucks, go beyond the purer roots and into the areas of soul, R&B, rock and roll, and more. With Bonnie Raitt a touchstone but a voice more powerful and with greater range and grit, when Tedeschi and Trucks hooked up (both in life and music), it seemed like a match made in heaven.

On the strength of Made Up Mind, it clearly must be, as the two lead a band with the only change being the loss of keyboardist/flautist Kofi Burbridge's brother, bassist Oteil. The music remains a thoroughly compelling and exciting blend, ranging from joyously upbeat ("Part of Me") and positively soul-drenched ("Do I Look Worried") to flat-out rocking ("Made Up Mind"), greasy funk ("Misunderstood") and folk-informed ("Idle Wind," featuring Burbridge's lovely flute work). But with a couple years of significant touring under its belt, TTB has become, at once, both tighter and even more relaxed. Trucks remains the predominant soloist, and his slide playing continues to evolve at an almost alarming rate, executing huge intervallic leaps with absolutely perfect intonation, for example, but never for the sake of it.

Because it's music—the joy of making it, the joy of performing it live and the joy of simply being in it—that clearly drives Tedeschi Trucks Band. Backup singer Mike Mattison (and previous Derek Trucks Band lead singer)—writes, in his liner notes: "What better way to gain resonance, to offer sustenance, to show your reverence for the deep meaning of the blues? Have a Singing Army! Throw DOWN the music like you mean it and make the performance bigger, crazier, messier and maniacal. "I'm going to THAT party." Me too. ---John Kelman, allaboutjazz.com

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