

AP

Soul band St. Paul & The Broken Bones deliver musical punch

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — With their electrifying modern interpretation of classic soul music, [St. Paul & The Broken Bones](#) are a buzzed-about live band, even opening for the Rolling Stones on two dates last year.

Dressed to the nines in wildly colored suits, sparkly shoes and black glasses, singer Paul Janeway throws his microphone around like a drum major with his baton leading the parade while the horns blare. Drenched in sweat, he collapses to the stage where he sings on his back, an homage to the onstage antics of soul great James Brown.

On their second record, "Sea of Noise," Janeway and his Birmingham, Alabama-based crew deliver their musical punch with a message about Southern identity, divisive politics and social unrest.

"The struggle with this record was to find hope," said Janeway, 33, during an interview in Nashville. "And I know there are probably some people who won't listen to the lyrics and won't care, so I can say this: It's not a very hopeful record."

Janeway learned how to sing in a church choir. He was a full-throttle singer with an impressive falsetto.

"I think with the first record, it was all 'Ta-da!'" Janeway said of "Half the City," released in 2013. "I didn't know my own voice. This was the first time I had ever done this professionally, and that's a loose term."

Bass player Jesse Phillips said that early on, they referred to themselves as a punk rock soul band.

"We didn't have the finesse and we didn't play as far behind the beat as any of those soul bands," said Phillips, 36. "But whatever we lacked in terms of refinement and actual ability, we made up for in effort and electricity."

Three years later and road-hardened, Janeway wanted to take the eight-piece band to a new level, without losing the excitement of live performances. On the new album, released last week, they added a choir and recorded at the Stax Museum in Memphis, Tennessee, with strings orchestrated by Stax veteran musician Lester Snell.

"I think the strings add a bit of weight, almost cinematic quality to a track that is hard to get with horns," said Phillips.

But there was some concern that the album's conceptual theme would turn away their cultivated fan base.

"Some of us were worried about it coming off as too heavy-handed or high-minded and losing some of the playfulness that I think is important to our band," Phillips said.

On "All I Ever Wonder," Janeway laments the current party politics: "Velvet fist in the gut, while everyone is slingin' mud/ Jesus found his politics but nobody listens."

And he questions whether the South is hell or home on "Is It Me," reflecting on the mixture of gun smoke, dogwood trees and honey.

"It's the exploration of winding through that Southern identity and seeing what's going on in the world in modern times," Janeway said. "And is there even such a thing as Southern identity anymore? Though I have the accent, every suburb's got a Wal-Mart."

But there are still plenty of moments, both in the album and the live show, for a party. For the new tour, Janeway is stepping up his suit game, with three new suits with matching shoes that his wife makes. He ruined the last pair of gold shoes jumping and dancing all over the stage.

"I used to wear them with heels, but I was like, 'Sweetie, I gotta stop wearing heels,' cause it was killing me," Janeway said.

