



NEW ARTISTS

St. Paul's Southern Soul Revival

How Paul Janeway went from speaking in tongues to fronting one of rock's hottest live acts

BY DAVID PEISNER

AS A KID GROWING UP IN THE small town of Chelsea, Alabama, Paul Janeway used to line up the stuffed animals in his bedroom and preach the Bible to them. "My mother said, 'You're either going to be a preacher or a circus ringleader,'" says Janeway, 33, one afternoon at a barbecue joint in Birmingham, where he now lives.

In fact, Janeway almost did become a preacher; he spent his teenage years playing guitar and working as a janitor at his family's charismatic nondenominational church. "There was speaking in tongues," he says. "I saw people being unpossessed. Ain't no rock show I've ever seen can beat *that*." Janeway was considering entering the seminary at age 19, but started having second thoughts around the time his pastor told him Gandhi had probably gone to hell. "My worldview expand-

ed, and I fell out of love with [the church]," Janeway says.

These days, Janeway channels fire-and-brimstone energy as the frontman of St. Paul and the Broken Bones. During the band's feverish live shows, he yelps, screams, croons and often dives into the audience. At a gig in South Carolina recently, Janeway hoisted himself onto an audience member's back. "He's a cat who can do an Otis Redding—he's very interesting to watch," Keith Richards told *ROLLING STONE* last year, after St. Paul and the Broken Bones opened up for the Stones. Janeway isn't shy talking about his ability to fire up a crowd. "Our booking agent was like, 'Just be proud you're opening for the Stones, but nobody's going to pay attention to you,'" he says. "I was like, 'Fuck that. I'll get them to pay attention.' And I got them to pay attention."

Broken Bones bassist Jesse Phillips remembers when Janeway first got his attention. Phillips was brought in to fill a spot in Janeway's former group, the Secret Dangers. "I'd heard Paul could sing," Phillips says, sitting next to Janeway. "I thought, 'A lot of people can sing.' But then we started playing.... You don't expect *that* to come out of *this*."

Phillips isn't the only one to experience cognitive dissonance watching Janeway at work: While his voice has been compared to Al Green's, his looks have been compared to Drew Carey's. "I ain't the prettiest guy on the planet," Janeway says with a laugh. "I've had some of the greatest compliments paired with the greatest insults. 'Looks like Roger Ebert, sounds like Etta James.' *That* hurt."

For years, Janeway had no idea what to do with his voice. Phillips says their former band "had one song that sounded like low-rent Led Zeppelin and another was like Dave Matthews." After that group folded, he and Janeway started writing songs built around Janeway's voice; they finally hit upon a sound with "Broken Bones and Pocket Change," a slow-burner that recalled the classic soul Janeway heard in his house as a kid. "After my parents would get in a knock-down, drag-out fight, my mom would go to the piano," he says. "It was

SWEET HOME ALABAMA
Janeway (center) with the band in September

therapeutic for her." They named their new band after the song.

In 2012, the band released an EP, *Greetings From St. Paul and the*

Broken Bones. Expectations were low; they ordered only 1,000 copies to give out to friends and family as a document of their work together before they parted ways so Janeway could focus on studying to be an accountant. But the EP drew the attention of Jason Isbell's manager Traci Thomas, who helped St. Paul get signed to Single Lock Records, which released their debut LP. *Half the City* sold more than 115,000 copies, earning the band comparisons to local heroes Alabama Shakes (Shakes keyboardist Ben Tanner produced the album). From the beginning, the Broken Bones viewed the Shakes as friendly competition: "Man, when they got to play with Prince, *that* made me jealous," says Janeway.

While recording their new album, *Sea of Noise*, Janeway worked hard to distinguish the Broken Bones from bands like Alabama Shakes; in late 2014, he pulled the plug on sessions, fearing they were going to be pigeonholed as soul revivalists: "I realized we were going to make *Half the City 2*," he says. "That would've been dishonest."

Janeway found a new direction when he read *Just Mercy*, a memoir about the mass incarceration of black men in the South. "It was a religious experience," says Janeway, adding that the book helped him find a cause to get behind "now that I'm making a little money." "This city has a very complicated history," he says. "It birthed some

amazing movements, but it had to birth them out of darkness." The images of guns, bullets, heaven and hell run through the LP, which expands the band's sound to include multi-tracked vocals with ominous strings and horns. "There's a lot of finality," says Janeway. "It's a very

bleak record. I hate saying that, because it doesn't offer any solutions. I want it to be hopeful."

After lunch, Janeway and Phillips step outside for a walk through Birmingham's Avondale neighborhood, a couple of blocks of once-depressed real estate recently rehabbed into upscale restaurants and clubs. They start talking about what it's like to live in Birmingham: "A lot of these things seem amplified," says Phillips. "Racial injustice, gender roles. People love guns in the South, but also finding peace in spirituality."

"For 30 years, I wanted to move," says Janeway. "Then you realize, no matter all the scars, all the bruises, this is home. I don't feel that anywhere else." ☐

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