

Episode Title: Paul Janeway of St. Paul and the Broken Bones

Episode Summary: In this week's episode, Sid Evans, Editor-in-Chief of Southern Living Magazine, talks to Paul Janeway, lead vocalist for Alabama soul band St. Paul and the Broken Bones, about putting his grandfather on an album, the small Tennessee pizza restaurant that held one of the group's most legendary performances, and singing in church at an early age.

Episode Transcript:

(Biscuits and Jam Theme begins - Fiddler's Barn on Epidemic Sound)

Voice Over from SID EVANS: Welcome to Biscuits and Jam from Southern Living. I'm Sid Evans, editor-in-chief of Southern Living Magazine. If you're a fan of soul music, chances are you've heard the voice of my guest this week. He and his band have built-up a grassroots following with their infectious performances and their own brand of Alabama soul.

PAUL JANEWAY: I think I think the continuous goal is to make something that stands the test of time, right? I don't know if you ever feel like you achieve that. Maybe we do one day? I've always said, like I've gotten to live seven more lifetimes than I ever thought I was, you know? And so I feel very fortunate in that.

Voice Over from SID EVANS: St. Paul & the Broken Bones are fronted by Paul Janeway, who grew up in Chelsea, Alabama and first began singing in church at the age of 4. And thanks to non-stop touring pre-pandemic, he and his band have gone from the cramped stage of a small Tennessee pizza joint to opening for the Rolling Stones.

This song, "Half the City," from their debut album of the same name, is a great example of how the band has made their mark—their sound clearly honors the past, but it also pushes the boundaries of what modern soul can be. And Paul's lyrics about being unable to leave his hometown speak to anyone who's ever been down and out, but still can't let go of their roots.

("Half the City" begins - "The streets paved with pain / of all my past loves / Please don't let it die / cause I have had enough...")

Voice Over from SID EVANS: On today's show, Paul tells me about the band's new album -- *The Alien Coast* -- as well as a recording of his grandfather that ended up on a previous Broken Bones album. Plus, what it means to him to be Southern, and the two words the band says backstage prior to each and every performance. All that and more this week on Biscuits & Jam.

(Theme music ends)

SID EVANS: Well, Paul Janeway, welcome to Biscuits and Jam.

PAUL JANEWAY: Thanks for having me.

SID EVANS: Well, Paul, listen, I've been a long time fan. I've seen you perform a bunch of times and I'm really excited to have you on the show. you grew up in Chelsea, Alabama. Which is right down the road from Birmingham, where we are now. Tell me a little bit about your hometown.

PAUL JANEWAY: Well, it's a proper suburb now, but when I grew up there, I think there was like a thousand people that lived there, and there was like the feed and seed. And I remember when the first grocery store kind of came in. So it was a very small town life, not a lot going on. Birmingham was definitely the big city. I grew up, uh, singing in church, that was kind of my home life.

SID EVANS: Was there a local place where you all love to eat?

PAUL JANEWAY: Honestly, Lloyd's was always kind of the place. It was obviously before 280 was what is it now, little local reference. But, uh, it used to be right in Chelsea, Lloyd's was, and then they moved it down the road. I still, to this day, get a hankering. They have a hamburger steak with like french fries or whatever. I salivate when thinking about it.

SID EVANS: Tell me about Lloyd's. I don't know much about Lloyd's.

PAUL JANEWAY: It's just Southern food. You know, it's like one of those places that, like they do the shoestring onion rings and they do barbecue. But they also do fried chicken. And then to me, the best thing's the hamburger steak. I think that's, that's my favorite thing to get. But you know, they do chicken livers and things like that. It was just kind of the place. If we were going out to eat, it was either that or drive to Pellum. And, so it was always kind of the place, you know, maybe on a Sunday.

SID EVANS: Worth the detour.

PAUL JANEWAY: Yes. Yes, definitely.

SID EVANS: Well, Paul, tell me a little bit about your parents and what they did for a living.

PAUL JANEWAY: So my dad, uh, worked in construction, paving crews and things like that, and then, uh, my mom still is a nurse for a OBGYN. My papaw was a mechanic and all the heavy machinery. My dad kind of, I don't think he had much taste for being a mechanic, but he worked on the crews. And then my mom's been a nurse for a very long time now.

SID EVANS: I know that you had your grandfather's voice on your album, *Young, Sick Camellia*, in 2018, which was such a nice tribute to him. Can you tell me a little bit about your relationship with him and how that came about?

PAUL JANEWAY: So that would be my papaw, who's my dad's dad. So he lived out...they had this trailer out in, I think it was Mount Juliet, right outside of Nashville. And he would work. I mean, my dad never went on a vacation or anything. Like the man would work six, seven days a week. When I was little, it was he would come home at like 7 p.m. and get a beer and want to play me in checkers. And that was about, that was about it. One of the best days of his life was when I told him that I was a gofer at a mechanic shop that did paving equipment. He thought that was the greatest. So he wanted to talk to me about that stuff. And then he only came to one show. I begged him to come to the Ryman. And he tried to sneak a gun in, and they told him, obviously, you've got to go put that in the car. And my dad said he was like, "Well, I guess they won't let me bring my knives in either," and he pulls up the pant leg of his pants and has knives wrapped around his ankle.

SID EVANS: Oh, man.

PAUL JANEWAY: So Yeah. Yeah, he was—he was a tough, tough, tough fella. But I did get to know him and I did get to kind of, maybe not appreciate—I mean, appreciate a little bit is probably the best way to say it of like, this is your DNA. This is, you can see elements of that, and so I thought it was really interesting with that record to kind of show that it was about that lineage and navigating that and understanding that we all come from somewhere and, and having his voice on there seemed right at the time.

SID EVANS: And he was talking about the weather, wasn't he?

PAUL JANEWAY: Yeah. We just were talking and, what I wanted to do was—is the idea that the storm kind of appears a lot in the imagery of that record. So I was like, you know, just out of curiosity, "What's the worst storm you ever saw?" He talked about a storm when he was working it, of course, in the mechanic shop. And he said they had to get, you know, in the bays under, you know, where they change the oil and stuff. And it blew the roof off and blew the church almost aside of the—you know? Which I think is all—we all from—you know, most people, I guess, especially in the South, when it's that season, we all have our brush with it at least once a year.

SID EVANS: Oh, yeah. That's all we talk about.

PAUL JANEWAY: Yeah, exactly.

SID EVANS: The weather.

PAUL JANEWAY: The weather, yeah, it's just kind of one of those things, and my wife is from Bristol, Tennessee, and so they don't quite have the same kind of tornadic kind of weather that we have. Like I'm some sort of weather man. I was like, "You can just feel it today. It's coming. It's going to be bad." Whether that's true or not, I don't know, but I feel like I can.

(Biscuits and Jam Theme begins - Fiddler's Barn on Epidemic Sound)

SID EVANS: Well Paul, I know you spent a lot of time growing up in the church, as you mentioned, and I believe this was a Pentecostal church, is that right?

PAUL JANEWAY: Well, technically it's nondenominational, but it is charismatic so you know, semantics.

SID EVANS: Right. Well, so what did a typical service look like on a Sunday morning and what were they singing?

PAUL JANEWAY: Well, I mean, it varied. When I first was there, it was fairly traditional. They would do the hymns, "Come Thy Fountain," that kind of thing. And then as I got older and probably the more influential, it would start a lot of that charismatic kind of speaking in tongues and the overall energy would change, which is a very interesting thing. But you'd have your standard hymns and still to this day, my favorites are always dealing with some sort of storm or, you know, "Stood on the Banks of Jordan" or, you know, "I Surrender All" or anything like that. But the upholstery was all like '70s orange, hideous, hideous. Actually, one of the reasons I love Tom Waits is that it reminds me of this lady in our church that would play during the offering, and the way he plays is kind of how she played. And I just have distinct memories of it being hot as hell and then there'd be worship and then you'd have the message and then it was altar call time. And you never knew—sometimes that took five minutes, sometimes it took 30 minutes, just depending on what was happening, right? And so you just never knew what, what the service was going to bring.

SID EVANS: So you've talked about the fact that you started singing pretty young, age 4 or 5.

PAUL JANEWAY: Mm-hmm.

SID EVANS: And I imagine you were singing a good bit in church. Was there a particular hymn or song that really kind of, uh, stood out for you or made a big impression on you?

PAUL JANEWAY: My first solo was "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands." But like I said, storm songs always for some reason, so like something like "I Surrender All" or "His Eyes on the Sparrow," you know, those kinds of songs that I just always loved singing. You know, some of those hymns are really hard to sing.

SID EVANS: How did one of those go?

PAUL JANEWAY: (Singing) "His eyes on the sparrow..." It's beautiful, beautiful. Some of those melodies are complex, honestly, really, really complex. And then, you know, "I Surrender All" is one of those. You know, (singing) "I surrender all," you know to kind of talk about the sea billows roll. Yeah, those songs I'm always I'm always attracted to even to this day, and I wouldn't consider myself to be particularly religious, but they still kind of move me.

SID EVANS: Yeah. Well, so for a young kid growing up in Chelsea, Alabama, what was the music that you were exposed to outside of the church? I mean, it seems pretty clear that you weren't listening to a lot of country or a lot of "Sweet Home Alabama."

PAUL JANEWAY: No.

SID EVANS: What were you listening to?

PAUL JANEWAY: Uh, well, definitely not. So it was only religious music, and then my mom had a Stylistics tape. She loved The Stylistics and The Commodores, Sam Cooke, and some of that stuff. And so I would learn—The Stylistics are one of those groups that has it like (singing) "My love..." got the real low part. Then, (singing) "liii," then the real high part. And so I would just sing those parts, which I think has probably benefited me to this day. You know and I didn't realize it at the time. You know, obviously, you don't know until, you're much older. You're like, "Oh, that makes sense now."

(Biscuits and Jam Theme begins - Fiddler's Barn on Epidemic Sound)

Voice Over from SID EVANS: I'll be back with more from Paul Janeway after the break.

BREAK

(Biscuits and Jam Theme begins - Fiddler's Barn on Epidemic Sound)

Voice Over from SID EVANS: Welcome back to Biscuits and Jam from Southern Living. I'm Sid Evans, and I'm talking with Paul Janeway, vocalist for the Alabama soul band St. Paul & the Broken Bones.

SID EVANS: So you started the band with your good friend, Jesse Phillips, who was extremely instrumental in y'all's success. Tell me a little bit about your relationship with Jesse and how this all got started.

PAUL JANEWAY: We've been doing this for a while now. We're still best friends. He was the best man at my wedding and—but me and Jesse were—I had a roommate and was playing in a band with him. And the drummer of the band worked at a music shop, so he's like, "Hey, we need a bass player." So Jesse worked at the same music shop. So Jesse came to practice, we played a little bit and we just hit it off from there. I really enjoyed making music with him and I just enjoyed that process with him. We just kind

of, we had the same sensibilities, like, where I am weak, he is strong, and where he's maybe not as strong, I'm stronger. And that relationship worked. Yeah, he was pivotal. I mean, if it weren't for him, this band wouldn't be around.

SID EVANS: You mentioned once in an interview that you used to say "Oasis Pizza" before you went on stage. Can you tell me the story behind that?

PAUL JANEWAY: We still say it every show right before we get on stage, just kind of a reminder of like, "Don't forget where you come from and remember that if you can put on a show there, you put on a show anywhere." We early on had this little tour that was kind of thrown together by our, um, guitar player, and he just got us places wherever he could. You know what I mean? I mean, we played this pizza shop/convenience store in Harrogate, Tennessee. And actually, my dad's from up there and I didn't realize how close it was, but, we were in the corner, and I remember the sound guy's name was Moose, and it was obviously an establishment that—there is an environment that is conducive to music playing. Well, this was not one of them. We are face to face with tables, with families eating their pizza. It was one of those times, you know you kind of get in there, you know, "Oh God, this is, this is going to be rough." But it was a mentality of like, "If there are four people here and these families are eating their pizza, we are going to give them the show of their life. We are going to, we are going to do it." And that night I was on the tables while these families were eating pizza and screaming and rolling and doing the show. And it's just a healthy reminder of like, don't forget that, that mentality. And I mean, we sold a ton of merch that night. I'm sure we scared some people, but it was a lot of fun.

SID EVANS: So Paul, you have had some serious run-ins with legends in the music business. Y'all opened for the Rolling Stones. You've performed with Elton John. You've played all the late shows, I mean, Letterman and Colbert, Kimmel. When you've been on stages as big as those, what are some of your goals when you look ahead?

PAUL JANEWAY: I think I think the continuous goal is to make something that stands the test of time, right? And that's the continuous goal. And I don't know if you ever feel like you achieve that. Maybe we do one day? I certainly don't feel that way. That's the perpetual goal, I think. As far as playing places we've yet to play Red Rocks. We were actually going to do it with Tedeschi Trucks, but—

SID EVANS: Wow.

PAUL JANEWAY: —2020 happened. and we've had off—other offers to open. I've just been kind of like, I want the name to be on top of the marquee if possible. And so we've not done that yet, so that's definitely a goal. We have not headlined a Radio City Music Hall, like that's a goal. I've always said, like I've gotten to live seven more lifetimes than I ever thought I was, you know? And so I feel very fortunate in that.

SID EVANS: Well, you got a lot more to go, Paul, and, you all have a new album called *The Alien Coast*, which is coming out in a couple of months and which your fans are going to be very excited about, and it has a little bit different sound than your previous albums. Tell me how that came together.

PAUL JANEWAY: Well, I think it's anything else like you are. You're always kind of pushing, like, where can the band go, musically? Where can it go? How much can we expand the palette of us and, you know, the palette of your audience is the other thing. Like, I think there are some challenging moments on the record if you're a fan of ours, but I think hopefully, you know, it's rewarding. Hopefully it doesn't scare everyone away. But it was a lot of fun and we ended up actually recording in Birmingham. There's a, uh, studio called Communicating Vessels that's down in, in Woodlawn, and we recorded the entire *Alien Coast* record there. And we just kind of thought—we've never recorded a full record in Birmingham, ever. Uh, we've done like an EP, but never like a full record, and we just kind of felt like it was time. And it's like a gritty and kind of cold record a little bit. So we kind of thought, "Oh, this would be a perfect space for that." So it was a really interesting experience, for sure.

SID EVANS: What does *The Alien Coast* refer to?

PAUL JANEWAY: So I was reading a book about the history of the Gulf Coast, and I think when the Spanish were coming up on the coast, they referred to it as the alien coast because they couldn't figure out, "Is this part of the ocean? Is this a sea? Is this a river? What is going on here? It's so vast." And so it even got into like, what's the difference between a gulf and a river and an ocean? But I just always, I love that term, the alien coast. I just thought it was a really interesting phrase. And obviously with our connection here in Alabama with, with having the Gulf Coast and it being, just so readily available, it felt like, "Oh, home, safe place," that kind of thing.

SID EVANS: Well, I'm excited about the album. And, I wanted to ask you about the last couple of years. For a band that's so driven by live performances, I've got to imagine that it's been really tough not being on the road. What have you all been doing as a band to get through this?

PAUL JANEWAY: Well, I mean at the beginning, obviously, of 2020, it was incredibly hard to navigate because we had some finishing touches that we had to put on this record. You know, you're like, well, we can't go in the studio. Like, that part was really you know difficult and hard to navigate because you're like, what's safe? What's not safe? And obviously, as time has gone on, we've kind of figured out, a semblance of safe, right? I think what we focused on, though, is we had little things. Like we've gotten pretty good at recording at home. We did this little like covers, little EP that we put on band camp. There were some live stuff that we hadn't really done anything with. And so we, we did that. You know what I mean? We just tried to do our best to stay creative and feel like there was some sort of connection. I mean, I spend more time with those guys than I do my wife.

Now, granted, me and my wife found out we were having our first child of February of 2020. So 2020 was very strange, because one of the greatest things to happen in my life obviously happened in September

of that year. And I saw my wife in labor, uh, she had to push for four hours. She was literally in labor for 24. And she wore a mask—

SID EVANS: Wow.

PAUL JANEWAY: —the whole time, which was just insane. I was like, man, a lot of respect. So that part, that gave me something, you know, personally. But I think for the band, we just—we did do some like weird, socially distanced drive-in things. We were in North Carolina and we played in 32-degree weather as people were in their cars. It was a unique experience, but I think we all tried to look at it from a positive standpoint. Like we've not been home that long in a very long time, you know, there's some recharging the batteries a little bit that I think has definitely happened. But yeah, we just came up with projects. Some of it saw the light of day, some of it didn't. You know, it was just like, all right, let's try little projects and, and see what happens, and just try to be creative.

SID EVANS: Well, are we going to see a lot more of y'all in 2022?

PAUL JANEWAY: God willing. It will be the busiest year we've ever had.

SID EVANS: Well, that's great to hear. well, Paul, you were born and raised in the South. And your Southern identity has really followed you around your whole life. It's been so much a part of your story. What does it mean to you to be Southern?

PAUL JANEWAY: It's a complicated journey. You go through phases where you're like, "That's who I am," and then you go, "Oh, how do I get away from this?" But I think, I think what's really interesting is that now I kind of embrace it, whereas I used to just like, when can I get out of here? Like, when am I leaving? And I never thought in a thousand years that would be a part of, like, my story. I think it's a beautiful thing now. And so, uh it's—and plus overseas, you're like a mystical beast if you're a musician from Alabama, because they think about Muscle Shoals and everything, like the, the level of respect you get from being from Alabama and a musician, like, in Europe is unbelievable. It's really funny.

SID EVANS: Well, that's good to hear. I should try going over there some time and—

PAUL JANEWAY: Well, you got to be a musician, like you need to play some shows. I don't, I don't know. Yeah, I—

SID EVANS: I can't play that. That's not in my, uh, quiver. Well, it must feel good to walk back into Lloyd's every now and then.

PAUL JANEWAY: Yeah, I mean I try. It's kind of further down now. Actually, what's crazy is, you know, my sister, who I love dearly, I think is moving back to about, I would say, about 200 feet from where we grew up, and I'm pretty thrilled about that just because, you know, having a daughter, I can take her down there and show her like, "Oh, this is, this is where I grew up," and it's pretty awesome.

SID EVANS: That's great. Well, Paul Janeway, thank you so much for being on Biscuits and Jam.

PAUL JANEWAY: Thanks for having me.

(Biscuits and Jam Theme begins - Fiddler's Barn on Epidemic Sound)

Voice Over from SID EVANS: Thanks for listening to my conversation with Paul Janeway. The Alien Coast, the new album from St. Paul & the Broken Bones, is available wherever you get music on January 28th.

Southern Living is based in Birmingham, Alabama, and this podcast was produced and edited in Nashville, Tennessee. If you like what you hear, please consider leaving us a review on Apple Podcasts or telling your friends about the program.

Biscuits and Jam is produced by Heather Morgan Shott, Krissy Tiglias and me, Sid Evans, for Southern Living. Thanks also to Ann Kane, Jim Hanke, Danielle Roth, Andy Bosnak, Matt Sav and Rachael King at Pod People.

We'll see you back here next week for more Biscuits & Jam!