

FREE Entertainment Weekly for El Paso • Juarez • Las Cruces

what's up

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What's Up Classifieds

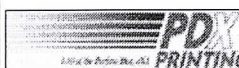
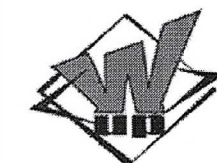
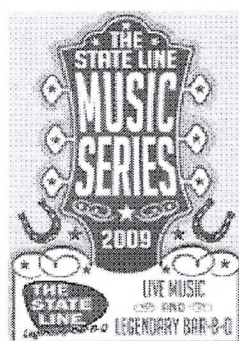
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EL PASO MUSEUM OF ART

what's up singles



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TSO Rocks the Region

By Cheri Pearson



Trans-Siberian Orchestra, one of the world's top touring bands, once again promises to deliver a rock opera show that can hardly be contained. The TSO crew of 17 semis and 12 tour buses will roll up to the Pan American Center in Las Cruces on Wednesday, Dec. 9.

The show – rife with heart-pounding music, dancing lasers and visions of fire and snow – has come a long way since its humble beginnings in 1999 as a couple of fog machines and lights. Now it's a palatable visual and audio feast with big screens and pyrotechnics.

But it's the energy from the audience that counts.

"I am most proud when I look out in the audience and see three to four generations enjoying music together," says Al Pitrelli, TSO lead guitarist and music director.

TSO is the brainchild of Paul O'Neill, who grew up in New York with influences from Broadway to rock 'n' roll artists like Pink Floyd. O'Neill endeavored to take the very best of all forms of music to create a new style that pushed boundaries.

"Basically I was stealing from everybody I worshipped," confessed O'Neill on the TSO website. The public has supported the theft by driving all their albums to gold and double platinum.

From about 15,000 tickets in 1999 to more than 1.2 million in 2009, audiences are growing with TSO.

"I can't get my head around it," Pitrelli says. "I avoid the magnitude of it like the plague. I'm just a kid from Long Island in a very good rock band and I prefer to keep the innocence of it."

Many of the band members live four to five blocks from each other and have known each other for many years.

"I've known (drummer) John O'Reilly for more than 26 years. We started out in some puked-out places when Jimmy Carter was President," Pitrelli says with a laugh. When he looks over and sees his wife and friends playing alongside him, he says he feels "safe onstage, where the dreams have come to be."

For many, the TSO show has become a holiday family tradition. The first half of the show focuses on storytelling and music from the band's double-platinum album, "Christmas Eve and Other Stories." The second half of this year's set will introduce "Night Castle," and Pitrelli says it lets them "loosen their ties" and play songs from other albums, including their popular "Beethoven's Last Night."

"Night Castle" debuted at No. 5 on the Top 200 Billboard Albums chart and sold a career high of 83,000 in its first week, according to the band's PR firm. Five years went by between their first and second albums.

"There is an old saying that you have your entire life to write your first album and six months to write your second," Pitrelli says. "In the beginning it was just about making great music, the second time around we were more nervous. We wanted to do something great, to push the envelope, and have it not be contrived or self-indulgent. There is a fine line between stupidity and brilliance."

Composer and producer, Paul O'Neill, a lover of history, weaves a tale of the triumphs and follies of man in "Night Castle."

3 Great Things

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"It's an album about good and evil and the opportunities you have in life to choose between them," he explained on the TSO website.

The album explores age-old conflicts with which individuals and nations struggle, while themes of transformation and redemption echo throughout.

"Paul is such a student of history," Pitrelli says admiringly. "He can explain what it smells like in ancient Rome."

El Pasoan Fred Loya graciously brings the TSO experience to the streets with a coordinated light show at his Eastside home during the month of December.

"Five years ago, I saw a house lit up with something similar on YouTube," Loya says. "I just thought that (TSO) was a great genre of music to go with the light show we wanted."

Loya, now in his fourth year with the light show, begins planning in July and starts setting up lights in September.

"It takes the patience, understanding and full cooperation of the five neighbors across the street," said Loya, who went on to profusely express his appreciation of the church, police and maintenance chief, Alex Soto. "It is a true community effort."

TSO stopped by Loya's house last year.

"(Vocalist) Tommy Farese said, 'You represented us well,'" Loya said. His assistant, Tina Mayberry, recalled how incredulous she was watching TSO videotaping the light show with their cell phones. After attending their rock concert, she was amazed at the band members' delight.

Loya's show is a tantalizing tidbit, but if you make it to the grand production of Trans-Siberian Orchestra this year, Pitrelli guarantees a spectacular show.

"It's always a pleasure to see repeat offenders."

Trans-Siberian Orchestra

Pan American Center, NMSU, Las Cruces
Wednesday, Dec. 9 - 4 p.m. and 8 p.m.
\$25-59.50 plus service fees

Tickets available at Ticketmaster outlets, Ticketmaster.com
or call 1-800-745-3000

Fred Loya's Light Show
12001 Paseo de Oro
Begins Dec. 4 every weekend on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, and Christmas Eve and Night
6 p.m., 7 p.m. and 8 p.m.

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