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Trans-Siberian Orchestra brings inspirational rock theater to Memorial Coliseum

By James Grant of The News-Sentinel
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Fans of theatrical-rock music have good reason to rejoice with the return of Trans-Siberian Orchestra to Memorial Coliseum at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday.

Trans-Siberian Orchestra, to those who aren't familiar, was put together by musician Paul O'Neill in the 1990s as a recording and touring group and is the epitome of a theatrical-rock production.

Literally dozens of vocalists, musicians and technicians present an over-the-top performance that mixes storytelling, music and visuals to create a high-tech, majestic concert O'Neill likes to call "Rock Theater."

Though the band's unique mixture of rock, heavy metal, classical and symphonic music and its dramatic, Broadway-like production might not appeal to everyone, Trans-Siberian Orchestra has certainly created a loyal following with millions of fans around the world.

Along with Robert Kinkel and Jon Oliva, Paul O'Neill has written five Trans-Siberian Orchestra albums that have sold over 8 million copies and placed the group at No. 20 in the top tours of the past decade, according to Pollstar, and at No. 7 in top tours of 2010.

Although known predominantly for their Christmas music and CDs, Trans-Siberian Orchestra on this tour will be performing music from their 2000 CD "Beethoven's Last Night," one of their two non-holiday recordings.

O'Neill believes that, since Beethoven is such an inspirational figure, it made more sense to be doing this album now in light of the economic hardships facing the world in the past few years.

"When I was growing up in New York City, I always worshipped Mozart and Beethoven," O'Neill said in a telephone interview. "But I was always a little bit more in awe of Beethoven.

"He (Beethoven) fights his way through complete deafness, manic depression, manic mood swings, lead poisoning, mercury poisoning to write 'Moonlight Sonata', the 9th Symphony ... music that will bring joy, peace, happiness, contentment to billions of people but that he himself would never hear.

"It puts everything in perspective," O'Neill added. "No matter what boulder life dropped on Beethoven's pathway, ... he didn't just overcome it, he triumphed over it. I just think he's an unbelievably inspirational character."

As with most Trans-Siberian Orchestra tours, this one has been well-received.

O'Neill was pleasantly surprised by the group's success in Europe, where there is limited exposure to their music on European radio. While radio stations overseas may not have played them, the Internet gave the group a boost they couldn't predict.

"Last year, 2011, we toured Europe for the first time, and business was a gazillion times better than we anticipated," O'Neill said..

"So many shows were sold out that we weren't expecting," he added. "What we didn't factor in was YouTube, which basically laid the groundwork in Europe better than we ever could have imagined."

"Doing 'Beethoven's Last Night' in Vienna, the city where Beethoven and Mozart lived, in a sold out building on a street where they used to walk down — that was magical."

While Trans-Siberian Orchestra puts on an extravagant show that doesn't spare any expense as far as presentation goes, O'Neill is keenly aware of the economy and has adjusted how the group plans its concert schedule.

"I had been so concerned about keeping the tickets affordable that it had never dawned on me that the ticket price is only half the cost of the concert," O'Neill said. "Now with the price of gas, with the unemployment problem, we notice that people can't travel as far, can't afford it, etc.

"I told William Morris (the group's talent agency) in 2009, OK, let's just try and change what we've been doing and let's start to hit secondary and tertiary markets so that no fan has to drive more than one or two at-the-most hours to get to the show."



More Information

Rock spectacular

What: Trans-Siberian Orchestra performs "Beethoven's Last Night" in concert.

When: 7:30 p.m. Wednesday

Where: Memorial Coliseum, 4000 Parnell Ave.

Cost: \$35, \$45, \$55. For tickets, go to the Coliseum box office, Ticketmaster outlets, www.ticketmaster.com or charge by phone at 1-800-745-3000.

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To hear audio excerpts of our interview with Paul O'Neill of Trans-Siberian Orchestra, go to www.news-sentinel.com. Click on the link for Entertainment, and then on this story.

“For \$25 to \$60, anybody can afford tickets,” O’Neill emphasized. “Come to the concert. Whatever your problems are, leave them in the trunk of your car. While you’re in that building watching that show, all you do is absorb the story, absorb this great music.

“And while you’re doing that, your brain isn’t releasing stress hormones, which are so destructive,” he added. “So when you leave at the end of the night, your batteries are a little bit recharged and you’re better prepared for the speed bumps that are coming.”