

# The Music Corner

Danny DeMelfi

Ready or not, the Christmas season will soon be upon us. In fact, over the last several weeks many regional retailers have already set up their holiday displays and begun to promote the Christmas shopping season.

I, for one, have always loved Christmas music. Perhaps this goes back to the anticipation of the holidays that I had as a child (and still do). Playing carols on the accordion as a kid meant that we were in the throes of the season and, of course, that Santa Claus would soon be coming down the chimney. As an adult, the sound of holiday music is still significant to me as a sign of the family togetherness and enjoyment the season provides. My car radio gets tuned to the 24-hour Christmas music station the day after Thanksgiving, and doesn't move from there until the day after Christmas.

But, for musicians and music educators, the playing of Christmas music starts much earlier. In school, we begin rehearsals for our holiday concerts very early in order to be ready for the big night. As an example, along with non-holiday music, my mid-school chorus at MMI has been rehearsing John Lennon's "Happy Christmas (War Is Over)" since early October for our December 10th performance. At DeMelfi School Of Music, we also began in October readying the students for our annual holiday recital which will be held on November 29th. I was even once commissioned by 60s folk singer Trini Lopez ("Lemon Tree," "If I Had a Hammer") to write two Christmas songs for him. My writing partner at the time (outstanding guitarist/vocalist Dennis Chabala from Larksville, PA), and I were in the studio recording Christmas songs in the month of May so we could ship them to Mr. Lopez in time for him to get them done. (Unfortunately, his record label never signed him to a Christmas album and he never recorded them).

Early rehearsals and preparations for holiday concerts can be exemplified no better than by this month's featured musical act, Twelve Twenty Four (also known as 12/24), which includes some Hazleton-area performers. This world-class ensemble of sixteen musicians and singers not only does an outstanding job of performing music by the Trans-Siberian Orchestra (TSO), but also has recorded two albums which contain original songs as well. Formed in 2002, 12/24 "performs music with a theatrical rock edge and combines it with a narrated story line to create a family-friendly holiday show suitable for all ages." This year's tour is their thirteenth in a row, and begins on November 22nd at the Bangor High School (Bangor, PA) and continues throughout Pennsylvania

and New Jersey until late December, when they will perform at the Sherman Theater in Stroudsburg. Along the way, they will grace the stages at well-known venues including the Mauch Chunk Opera House in Jim Thorpe and the Zoellner Arts Center in Bethlehem. Band members include: Lenny Kucinski-Guitar, Jason Santos-Keyboards and Vocals, Kevin Reilly-Guitar and Vocals, Frank Gruden-Keyboards, Dirk Yahraes-Bass, Richie Kossuth-Drums, and Vocalists Bobbie Kucinski, Krysten Montgomery, Mallory Diltz, Dane Bower, and Kyle Segarra. The string section consists of Jill and Michaelina Trapane-Violins, Christina Barnes-Viola, and Dan King-Cello. Young Kelsey Barnes is the storyteller. They, along with their seven-man road and production crew, give their audiences an incredible holiday music experience night after night.

Along with TSO favorites, 12/24 will be playing songs from their debut album "Miracle On Rock St." and from their second album "Light In The Dark." I have attended several of their shows and when they say they appeal to all ages, it's true. I have witnessed that first-hand. At their shows, I have seen children along with their parents and grandparents. In fact, I brought my mother to their show on her 90th birthday and she had a great time watching Lenny, whom she dubbed "the crazy guy on the guitar." Yes, he and this band are crazy—crazy good!

Besides their extreme musical talent, I am also impressed by their spirit of giving back to those less fortunate. They have performed free concerts for residents of the White Haven Center and donated a portion of the proceeds from their debut album to the Earthly Angels Autism Fund. This means they not only promote the Christmas spirit through their music, but they exemplify the Christmas spirit through their generosity!

I have had some professional connections with this group. In 2005, I was honored to perform with their guitarist, Lenny Kucinski, at the Georgia Dome in Atlanta for a crowd of more than 50,000 with another super rock band called One Night Stand. I am also proud to say that Twelve Twenty Four recorded a song I wrote, "Cold December Night," on their "Miracle On Rock St." album.

Check them out at [www.twelvetwentyfour.net](http://www.twelvetwentyfour.net) and on Facebook. Give your family an early Christmas gift—take them to a Twelve Twenty Four show. Tickets are available online. I guarantee that you will be entertained and amazed by this incredible group!