

WEEKENDER

MUSIC ON THE MENU: Twelve Twenty Four's 'Miracle'

by Alan K. Stout
Music Columnist

For nearly a decade, the devoted musicians of the local Twelve Twenty-Four project have spent the holiday season performing their inspired tribute to Trans-Siberian Orchestra. Members say they find the music invigorating and inspiring and that performing it live is something they look forward to each year.

This particular Christmastime, however, is even more special to Twelve Twenty-Four, as it brings with it the release of the group's first CD, the TSO-inspired "Miracle On Rock Street." "This is our ninth season playing, and over the last five years, when it seems we've really been getting people's attention, people have been asking us for a CD," says drummer and co-founder Rich Kossuth. "And we'd always say, 'Buy TSO music. That's what we're doing.' But when we sat down and decided to come out with our own CD, we wanted it to be our own. We didn't want to just redo their music. Some of the songs are originals, and some of the songs are just redone covers but are ones that TSO has never done, or maybe they never did a full version of it. They were the inspiration, but we really tried to stay away from everything from TSO."

The Twelve Twenty-Four project consists of founders Kossuth, Jason Santos and Lenny Kucinski, along with a large and important supporting ensemble that can include up to 15 additional musicians. Kossuth says the first time he saw the Trans-Siberian Orchestra was about 10 years ago, when it played the F.M. Kirby Center for the first time. He instantly loved what he saw and heard, and when a friend, George Houseknecht, decided to put together a tribute, he was immediately interested in getting involved. And, to this day, he says the entire unit still enjoys spreading the holiday cheer.

"When you have a show like this, you really try hard to please people," he says. "Especially doing Christmas music around Christmas — everything is festive. Everybody is just really into the music and into the show. When you see their faces, they have energy. It's like they're mesmerized by this band playing this music. After the show, you'll meet people, and they'll be like, 'Oh my God, you guys made our Christmas!' It's just really a great feeling."

The Twelve Twenty-Four project rehearses year-round but only performs for about two months each year, starting around Thanksgivings and ending shortly after the New Year. The new album was recorded at Rock Street Music in Pittston, which Kossuth co-owns with his family, and at Studio Independence in Hazleton. It was mixed and mastered at Barbershop Studios in New Jersey. Tracks include "God Rock Ye Merry Gentleman," "What Child Is This," "Funky Little Christmas," "Cold December Night" and "Angel Lullaby."

Kossuth credits the entire Twelve Twenty-Four ensemble for making the project a reality. He says it takes a lot of time, work and creativity to pull it all together, and he credits Santos with crafting most of the arrangements. He adds there was plenty of collaboration between Santos, Kucinski and himself on the songs, and that all of the musicians and singers on the project made important contributions. One track, "Carol The Drum," features a vocal performance from every member.

The CD is available at Rock Street Music and at www.twelvetwentyfour.net, where it can be purchased in either CD form or as a digital download. A portion of all sales will go to the Earthly Angles Autism Fund of the Luzerne Foundation. After nearly 10 years of offering its TSO-inspired show to fans across NEPA, Kossuth says it feels wonderful to now also have a TSO-inspired album of its own, especially since the group was able to do it while also presenting something original.

"I just hope it makes them happy and makes them smile, and that they go, 'Wow, these are the guys we've been going to see for all of these years, and they have their own music,'" he says. "I am, personally, so proud of it, and I know the whole band is proud of it."

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