

Trans-Siberian Orchestra

Paul O'Neill Biography

Paul O'Neill launched Trans-Siberian Orchestra (TSO) 22 years ago with a vision for a band that was theatrical, conceptual, and, like the world itself, intended to be ever-changing. In short, everything *not* expected of rock music at that point in time.

"I think you can say we knew the odds were against us," O'Neill recalls. "The industry at that time liked bands they could fit into nice, neat, little niches and follow preordained paths to success or failure. We knew that we wanted to break all those rules, we just didn't know if it would work. Lucky for us there were people at our label who had a blind faith in artists. They were willing to take a chance and support us while we experimented (sometimes successfully, sometimes not) and discovered what we could create -- without the usual pressure of keeping to a schedule. I can't imagine that being the case in today's music business."



Unthinkable in the beginning, TSO has become one of the most unlikely success stories in rock 'n' roll history. Defying the odds with each project, they continue to search for new and original ideas to bring to reality no matter how difficult the challenge.

Today, many people assume TSO was a success out of the box, but it wasn't until they turned in "Beethoven's Last Night" (1999), and began to tour, that the band's fortune changed. To date, TSO has generated five platinum-or-better albums -- and turned into a touring juggernaut, becoming one of *Billboard's* Top 25 acts during the first decade of the 21st century. Overseas, TSO has played to more than 1,000,000 people at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin as the calendar turned to 2014, and in July 2015 headlined the Wacken Open Air Festival.

The TSO saga continues this year on the road playing "The Ghosts of Christmas Eve" and with a new album, "Letters From The Labyrinth" -- yet another endeavor in creating something different. O'Neill's inspiration for this album came out of his love for history. A collector of antiquities and historical artifacts, he explains, "Over the years I have been able to read and hold in my hands letters from people that have inspired me and left a mark on civilization. People like Mark Twain, Ben Franklin, Thomas Edison, Orville Wright -- when I actually held a letter in my hand that President Lincoln wrote, it brought me into his world in a way I could never have imagined."

"Letters From The Labyrinth" finds a conceptually provocative song cycle pushing the proverbial envelope yet again -- this time with what O'Neill calls TSO's "first hybrid album." The overall concept is based on TSO's "Night Castle" (2009) and a dialogue between the wisdom of the past and the hopes for the future, via a correspondence between a child and an old friend of the child's grandfather.

On "Letters From The Labyrinth" TSO deals with subjects as broad as humanity's journey through the ages ("Time & Distance"), and as specific as bullying ("Not The Same"), the fall of the Berlin Wall ("Prometheus") and the world banking controversies ("Not Dead Yet").

"I love making music and I love making it relevant," O'Neill says. "I always believed the arts have a way of inspiring and uniting people. We try to maintain that tradition on the albums and all the other projects we do. I think that when everything else is falling apart, people look to the arts to help make sense of things and put the events they are experiencing into some kind of context."

O'Neill was born and raised in New York City, surrounded by theater, classical music, R&B as well as rock. With his father having a doctorate in history he grew up in a home surrounded by books of classical literature, history and philosophy, all of which he read voraciously. The epitome of a well-rounded background helped form a worldview reflected in his writing. "I always love mixing history into the albums because it gives them an extra dimension. One of the abilities we have as human beings is unfortunately to forget hard-won lessons. We remember great accomplishments but not how we got there. The answer to 99 percent of the problems we have now, and will encounter in the future, are all there in the past, but they need to be re-told. So that's what we do. Basically we are optimists and believe humanity will triumph in the end."

There's more on tap in TSO's near future. Working at its studio in Florida, TSO has in various stages of completion two more rock operas -- "Romanov: When Kings Must Whisper" about the 1917 Russian Revolution -- while a live concert adaptation of "The Night Castle" is also on the future docket. O'Neill plans to bring the TSO experience to Broadway at some point.

"My biggest problem is simply time," O'Neill says with a laugh. "I need to get one of those magical stopwatches where time freezes and I can play catchup. Until that happens, we'll just keep working on things and being creative and find new stories to tell and new messages to deliver and new ways to entertain people."

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