

# **TRANS-SIBERIAN ORCHESTRA – The Interview**

This interview with Paul O'Neil and Al Pitrelli took place in February 2011 and originally appeared on the website Get Ready To Rock;

[https://www.getreadytorock.com/rock\\_stars/tso.htm](https://www.getreadytorock.com/rock_stars/tso.htm)

**Trans-Siberian Orchestra, or TSO, are a US phenomenon who are about to storm Europe on their first visit. In the USA they sell a million albums a year, and when they tour they sell 600,000 tickets a month. Impressive huh?**

**And this orchestra are just that: an orchestra. Mixing hard rock, neoclassical rock and progressive rock, they are an orchestra of a rock band and that's before you add the actual orchestra, they record with 20 strings and 20 backing singers.**

**Their live shows (think 10 Pink Floyds playing with an orchestra) are huge, and have been known to blow out the power for an entire stadium (an in one case, the surrounding town too).**

The project, formed in the mid 90s, is the brainchild of producer, songwriter and guitarist Paul O'Neill who, while working with Savatage, brought in John Oliva and famed guitarist Al Pitrelli (Savatage, Megadeth, Danger Danger, Alice Cooper, Asia et al).

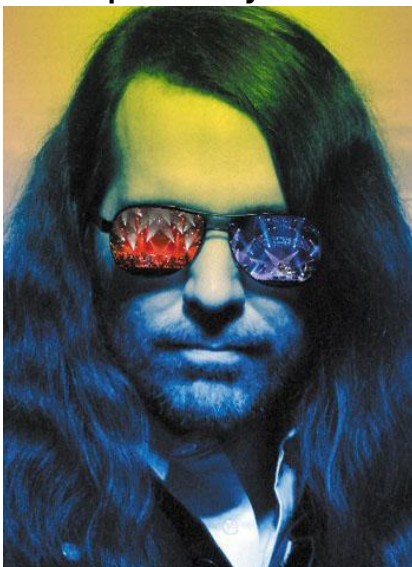
Their new album Night Castle is typical TSO in that it is a rock opera, with a lead singer taking on every role, and the 2 CD comes in an impressive gatefold digipak with a 60 page book (lyrics, story the works).

To sum up the story, a young girl ventures out late at night, and finds a man building a castle in the sand. He tells a story of voyage, of a lieutenant who meets a wise stranger in a magical castle, who then marries shortly before being posted to Cambodia, of finding out his wife is pregnant and writing stories for the child to be.

He is then captured and dies in captivity, but the Cambodian general holding him realises the war is futile, and he vows to escape and deliver the message and the lieutenant's stories to the wife. The story ends with the man on the beech revealing he is that general, saying he was not brave enough to finish the journey, and of the bravery of the girl to approach and talk to the stranger.

There are several bonus tracks to the album, which are equally fantastic yet are in addition to the story of the rock opera. One of these, Nut Rocker, features ELP's Greg Lake.

**Paul O'Neill - one of the most intelligent, affable, amenable and talkative guys I've ever met - takes up the story behind the new album...**



**Joe: Can you tell us about the lyrical concept of the new album? The girl and the Cambodian soldier.**

**Paul:** Basically, the story comes out in 5 minutes, then it'll take me a couple of days to write the whole thing, the a month or two months to write the songs. The hard thing is recording, getting the right voices for the right songs, make it more real. Have you heard the album?

**Joe: Yes, I've got a copy of the album here.**

**Paul:** It's one of the reasons we're heard a lot less by the internet than a lot of other bands, because when you open it up it has the story, the lyrics, the illustrations, it helps you understand the whole thing.

Going back to the early 90s Ahmet Ertegun (Atlantic boss) called me and said "Paul:, you've worked with all these other bands, how about you do your own" and I said OK but it would be pretty different. He asked what does that mean and I replied that it would be a progressive rock band with a full rock band so you'd have 2 drummers, orchestra, 24 lead singers, in the studio and on the road. Why? Well, I want to do mini rock operas. I wanted to do six.

Maybe one day we'll do a regular record but at the moment it's rock operas. And what we do is, like with Night Castle, after the rock opera is over we have a bunch of songs so we put them on as a bonus, and we use them to pay tribute to the people who have influenced us, may be to showcase or try out some things we have coming up in the future.

But when I told them all of this they kind of rolled their eyes, but they wrote a blank cheque. But the first rock opera was about communism and the revolution and it was the 90s with the Berlin wall coming down and some very credible people heard it and said this is too good to go on an album, this has to go to Broadway.

But I fought for creative control and what Broadway considers a credible production we consider, well I consider... and you can't do that on Broadway. Our first stage production will probably happen in Vegas which has the stages and the power.

**Joe: You probably need your own generator for the show you put on.**

**Paul:** Touring in the US, in 2009, we played this theatre just outside New York City and about 15 minutes in to the show the stage goes dark, and normally things don't go wrong, and the stage manager comes up and says "Paul, you're not going to believe this but you just blew the circuit breaker for the entire building" so after that we started carrying a couple of generators with us, to give the buildings some extra juice.

We were playing in Jackson Mississippi and we're hooking up the generators they say "We're a state of the art building, we can handle anything" and we thing great, less work for us. And 15 minutes into the show, stage goes dark, and I go "I know, just blew the circuit breaker for the building" and they say "Paul, no, you just blew the breaker for half of Jackson", not the whole city just part of it. The show's massive, and over the years it's gotten bigger and bigger.

It's by far the biggest, most complicated tour production ever. In 2009 we played the stadium in Baltimore and we had to leave about a third of it in the truck. So I said to our tour manager let's just skip Baltimore this year as we can't fit in the arena. And he says, when you tell me to skip this small city in Idaho, I can deal with that, but when you can't fit into Baltimore...

My biggest regret with TSO is that it's taken so long to get it together (for Europe), because we're so Euro centric as part of our influences.



**Joe: So this stage show, is that why it's taken so long to come over?**

**Paul:** No, it was, well, when the band took off in 1999, when things exploded, and in the mean time I've been doing other albums, soundtracks, things distracting us, and originally we were going to tour here in 2010, I got a little nervous because of the banking crisis, recession, whatever you want to call it.

Truth is I didn't have on my radar what I saw with TSO, you know the complete meltdown of the record industry, and with most of the western civilisation committing financial suicide and it didn't help when I heard that Madonna's rig had collapsed in France and killed some people. Her show isn't a 20th of what ours is, and in America I really know my vendors and if one of them has so many tours cancelled then tell me and I'll write them a cheque because it's important that all the spot welds are x-rayed and everything.

I love what we do, I love the look on the face of the audience at the show, but it's not worth it if a single person gets hurt. And I'm very aware that, when things started, we've been touring there for 12 years selling 600,000 tickets a month, but we had to do what we did; tour and tour and tour.

But you bring up an interesting point, in America, and Canada, hockey and basketball are like national sports, and American Football too, so every city, no matter how small, has a great coliseum.

Here it is more soccer oriented so there's only 10 or 15 buildings that can hold a TSO show, where we're hanging 120 tonnes of lights, the lights move in time to the music, the pyros go off in time to the music. A tonne that is hanging there is a tonne. Once it starts to move it weighs less than a tonne, when it starts to stop it can way...

**Joe: Laws of physics, man!**

**Paul:** Yeah exactly, so we really need to dot our I's, cross our T's.

**Joe: And like you say if you don't know your suppliers you need to double check everything.**

**Paul:** That's exactly it. And the show, it's musically driven, not celebrity driven. It's a prog rock band, but it's also an idea and an ideal. And you mustn't forget that the fans own the band. Some bands forget that, I've seen it happen, I've been in the business 37 years.

Sometimes bands take it for granted, they think it's the fans' privilege but it's not, it's our privilege, otherwise we'd have to go get real jobs. And it's not every year, you have to earn it every night, every album. And I think that TSO is incredibly lucky in a lot of ways.

The first album came out in 1996, and when you think about Pink Floyd, Yes or Genesis had old fashioned artist development. The first album didn't sell well but the label said we're onto something.

**Joe: Yes, Pink Floyd changed style considerably before they made it, Genesis' first album flopped.**

**Paul:** This is it, artist development, and especially for colosseum bands which are very expensive to tour and constantly trying to make money, and the record label said you're on to something here, and by 2000, 2001, the band's big enough to stand on its own feet. But you see back in the 90s there were like 45 labels, all had a tonne of money.

By 2009, there's only 4, well 4 big ones, then in 2010 EMI went bankrupt, now it's only 3. So unless your Dad's David Rockefeller, you know, because the labels don't build a solid tour foundation.

We're one of the last bands to have old fashioned artist development from the labels. Especially from Ahmet Ertegun, when you consider who he's worked with. If TSO had come out in 2006, instead of 1996, we would have been dropped.

When I started in the business, in the 70s, you were considered a stadium rock band if you could sell out stadiums for 5 years in a row, and nobody has done that in the new millennium. It's not lack of talent on the band's behalf, it's lack of support in the labels' behalf. The support to help you get to that level doesn't exist anymore.

On the Night Castle album, even though we have 24 lead singers, when I wrote the story you had the two main adversaries, Lieutenant and General Trans Do, and the guy singing General Do's part, Rob Evan, tremendous voice, and the guy we had singing the Lieutenant's part was just getting steamrollered.

I like to have voices that match the parts. I kept trying people, and then turned to Al Pitrelli who suggested Jeff Scott Soto, who'd been in Yngwie Malmsteen's band, now in Journey, and said "Al, that's too high, the Lieutenant is a baritone" and Al said "Jeff is a baritone". Oh. So we flew him in and it was like two battleships going at it.

The band is allowed to breath, it's musically driven, and it's great with Jeff's experience. We've recently had some female backing singers join us and two of them were born in 1992 and one of them, her octave range is amazing, and this girl who sounds like Janis Joplin was born in 1993, it's really weird, I'm forming the band and she's busy being born (laughs).

The majority of the band are 25 to 45, there's a couple in their 50s. It's bad enough being old enough to be their parents, but grandparents?

**Joe: Coming back to album's concept, do you think adults could learn from the innocence and trust of children?**

**Paul:** Absolutely, and I try to write the story so it's enjoyable, whether it's a 15 year old kid reading it, like an adventure, or a 45 year old guy reading it. We try to design every album, every concert, so that you find what you want to find from it, whether you're 7 or 77 years old.

It's like pulling up the drawbridge to the castle, depending on your age or your mood, it's where you want to go, the highest tower or whatever. I learnt that from The Who, the album Who's Next, my favourite track from that album changes as I've gotten older. So we try to design every concert and every album so that you find what you need to find. And the more you explore it, the more there is to find.

**Joe: Do you have a personal interest in history?**

**Paul:** Oh yes, I have a library of about 50,000 books, some of Churchill's original letters...

**Joe: So you did plenty of research for this album?**

**Paul:** Yes. I have letters by Horatio Nelson, and to think, if I'm researching Nelson, I'm holding letters he actually wrote. It makes it easier to write, and I know that sounds corny...

**Joe: There's a lot of Good vs Evil in the concept; are you quite religious?**

**Paul:** I don't consider myself overly religious, I mean, I'm Christian, but I don't think god cares what you wear or if you finish a bottle of wine. You know, god talks to man through logic and reason. I've read all the books of the main religions, and I picked Erasmus (a character in the story) because, when Luther said kill those who aren't Lutheran and Erasmus said Luther doesn't understand god. Because in the end, god isn't just going to save Lutherans, not just Christians, but god is going to save Satan. Now that is an all powerful heavy metal god. I think that anyone who says kill those who don't believe, they have nothing to do with god. For either for all or for no-one. It's like, my hero is Winston Churchill, in the world war, 1939, Churchill didn't fight for Great Briton, he didn't fight for the allies, Churchill was fighting as much for Germany, who were under Hitler and Himmler, and the Japanese having to live under Tojo, Churchill was fighting for everybody.

**Joe: It's like you see the footage of the Germans cheering when the war was over.**

**Paul:** Yes, again it's living under evil.

**Joe: Like the point you make in the concept, you're either fighting for good or you're fighting for no-one.**

**Paul:** Yes that's it. I didn't want to be too philosophical, there is a turning point. In a few hundred years our descendants will explore the universe and find out what it's all about. Or nuclear weapons, on the hands of people who know how to set them off but not how to build them.

To me, the first great civilisation were the Greeks, they were the first to say the Universe doesn't work by magic, it works by a set of rules and they then figured out those rules. And although Mesopotamia and Egypt were great civilisations, millennia before Greece, the word freedom didn't exist, they invented it. They came up with Pi out of nowhere, basis of science and mathematical rules. But then Winston Churchill said civilisation isn't an accident, it takes a turn of vigilance, but what it takes 1000 generations to build, a single generation can lose.

And I think civilisation is at its most danger after long periods of peace, it gets complacent. And there's a lot to be said for trust, when people don't trust each other. Stalin killed 36 million of his own people, an amazing number.

His soldiers were killing in the Ukraine because they weren't turning over their farms and his right hand man said to him, be careful, the West will turn against us, and he didn't look up from his desk, he just said "Bury it. A single death is a tragedy, a million deaths is a statistic". And he's right.

Was it 36 million people? It may have been 50 million people. Pol Pot killed millions of children, and Cambodia is not a big country, but he died on his bed surrounded by his family and people from the UN. People stand by and do nothing. It's appeasement, which just makes the evil think it's ok to carry on.

It makes me realise I've got to keep my eye on the ball, not let people down.



**Joe: So what can people expect from the tour?**

**Paul:** It's our first tour over here. As I was saying, in America and Canada, every city, no matter how small, has a decent stadium, over here it's more soccer oriented and there's only 10 or 15 places, like the O2, that can hold us, and a lot of people can't afford to travel.

So my tour manager says Paul: you got allow the band to breath, you design it for the album, you might need to do it the production so you don't have to bypass minor cities like Berlin. OK OK got the point (laughs) so we're designing it to breathe, this is going to be the first run and we've realised we've got to work hard, because work on the other side of the pond doesn't count over here.

**Joe: Who's going to be singing on the tour?**

**Paul:** As soon as we fly back to New York, the whole band is going to be there, production managers are going to have the sizes of the stadiums and everything, the band is designed, depending on needs, and we figure it all out on Monday.

**Joe: Good luck**

**Paul:** Thanks, I think we'll need it. It's also to correct some of the flaws that have built into the rock music industry over the years. I won't name names but there's some big singers who have blown out their voices and the reason is, in America they release 20-30 thousand albums a year, of those only 4-500 recouped.

Of those, only about 50 made real money, enough money to recoup all the other mistakes. If you're a rock band, they expect you to tour, and by tour I mean 11 months on, 1 month off, 11 months on, 1 month off, then another album back in the studio.

I have a friend who had an operation to remove nodes from his vocal chords, and the chords are only this thick, they're not designed to sing for 2 hours a night, 5 nights a week.

Look at Arnold Schwarzenegger at 19, works out for 2 hours a day for 5 days a week and gets calluses on his hands. With TSO, we try to give the best possible concerts for the best possible price, but on the other hand, do no harm, especially to the lead singers. Since we have so many lead singers, no singer has to sing more than 4 or 5 songs a night. Now that you can do, it's more like a party.

**Joe: Going back to the recording, it's a far cry from the early 70s when bands regularly put out 3 albums in 2 years and toured as well.**

**Paul:** Well back then a record was only 40 minutes, over 45 and you're losing fidelity, but a CD you can get nearly 80. There's a lot more to sing.

And one thing you get with our albums is the packaging, with the story. You explain to some people an album's concept and it's like huh? So what I do is write out the prose, it goes with the album, and I've turned some of it into poetry for some of our concerts, with a narrator, so if someone who knows the concept takes his girlfriend he's not got to explain it all over.

You can follow it all the way through. And what we do is, no disrespect to bands like The Who when they do a rock opera, our show is the rock opera, then some of our other songs as a bonus. And we do all that we can to make each song cut deeper, more emotionally. We spent over \$100k cutting one song and then I realised if you change the key by half a step, make it 0.1% better, it goes in the garbage, because I want that extra 0.1%.

Back in 2005, we were one of the top touring bands in the world, and a friend of mine who's a numbers nut did a breakdown of our audience, and the average age was 21. It's like all the 15 year olds cancel out the 40 year olds.

There's a great schism in music, back in 1950 when Les Paul invents the electric guitar. Before then you grew up with the orchestrated music or after that with Chuck Berry. It's now 60 years later, in the 50s you had Chuck Berry, in the 60s you had the Beatles, Rolling Stones, in the 70s you had Led Zeppelin, Temptations, Earth Wind & Fire, so for the first time, unless you're like 80, everyone has some kind of rock in common.

We get a lot of fan mail and it tends to be two extremes, either "My 15 year old son dragged me to one of your shows kicking and screaming" or "My dad dragged me along", and it's such a great feeling to jump the generational wall. And on Night Castle it's the same.

We recorded "Nut Rocker" with Greg Lake, and so it's TSO paying tribute to ELP paying tribute to Tchaikovsky. And we recorded "Carmina Burana" because that's one of the first songs that really woke me up to the power of music.

I first heard it in the 70s, and in the 80s I was at an Ozzy Osbourne show and the show starts with "Carmina Burana" and the crowd go nuts, and then in the 90s a friend of mine takes me to a rap show and before they take the stage the tape goes on and it's "Carmina Burana", and the crowd goes nuts. It's written by a monk in the middle ages, composed by a classical composer in the 1930, It's been around for centuries, the lyrics are Latin; I'll bet a lot of money that 99% of that audience at Ozzy Osbourne didn't know any Latin.

### **Joe: What are your main influences?**

**Paul:** I grew up in New York City, where you have rock, you have Broadway, but I grew up with bands like Emerson Lake & Palmer, Yes. To me Mozart's the first rock star, Beethoven's the first heavy metal rock star. And then writing wise, Oscar Wilde, Charles Dickens, but my influences are always changing.

The internet has changed a lot. In 1995 the music industry was easily worth over a trillion dollars. Now you could probably buy every record company, every publishing company, for \$10 Billion. That's 1% of what it was worth 15 years ago.

The meltdown happened so fast. I recently saw that my daughter has every song I'd ever written, ever produced, on her computer. I say 'Honey, where did you get all of this' and she says 'Daddy, you're not going to believe this, but all of your music is on the internet. For free' and I'm like Wow.

And shortly after that there was an article in the Wall Street Journal - it's not a music paper, it's financial - and it explained what was going on, that the labels were sticking their heads in the sand and hoping it was going to go away.

So it was a case of do you make your money through your record player or by touring. And on one hand technology giveth and on the other hand it taketh away, and ouch I didn't want to hear that.

But technology can also open doors, like with our light show we have over 3000 light changes, impossible without computers.



**Joe:** But on the other hand, with downloads, you don't get this wonderful packaging (holding up new TSO album, 2CD, gatefold digipak, 60 page booklet).

**Paul:** Very true, and with MP3s, you don't get the sound quality either, they're ok in the car but not on a decent system at home, when you get the full frequency coming at you. But eventually it'll catch up.

**Joe:** Have you embraced CD technology or are you still a vinyl junkie?

**Paul:** Interesting you say that (gets up to shake my hand), because I've had a lot of enquiries asking if we can rerelease the entire TSO catalogue on vinyl and I say Twist my arm. In the US a lot of artists are releasing albums on vinyl again now

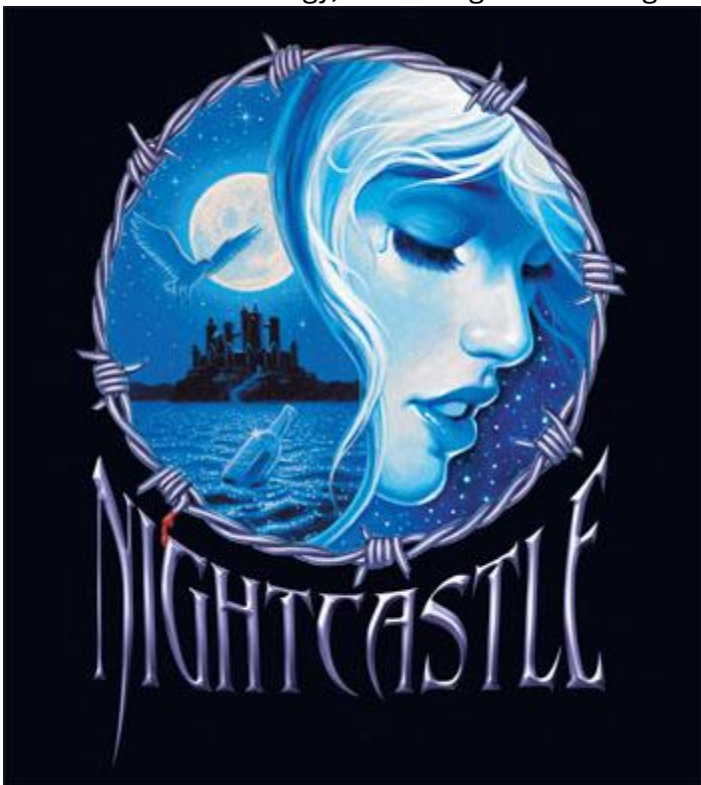
**Joe:** Here too.

**Paul:** And I ask is it the baby boomers rediscovering their childhood and no, it's high school kids and college kids are getting into vinyl, you get the sound and the packaging. But most new albums are 4 or 6 sides, 2 or 3 LPs, while a TSO album would be 4 LPs, 60 page booklet, that's a decent box. I've just approved the test pressings, and I was down in my basement and it took me 2 hours to find the record player.

**Joe:** The physical record and packaging is all part of the release, the whole thing is a work of art.

**Paul:** God bless you, you get a 12' by 12' piece of art. When you get gatefold sleeves, inserts, it's a work of art. CDs are getting smaller and smaller. Warners gave us a lot of rope to hang ourselves with; Night Castle has come out in this digipak because 36 pages is the most you can get in a jewel case CD now, and when they realised that TSO's fans were buying more hard copies than downloads, because they want the booklets, the pictures, they want the whole 9 yards, so they said, OK it'll have to be a box. It's marketable, you pick it up there's something in there.

But with this technology, streaming is becoming more efficient and it's bankrupting the industry.



Night Castle cost a couple of million dollars to make, and it's something someone in Nigeria can download for free. Something's going to have to happen. It's like in Finland they did away with copyright, then someone said Wow it's been years since anyone wrote anything in Finnish, does that have anything to do with it well possibly, so they bought it back.

We're living in rapidly changing times. It's going to be interesting to see how things go in the next few years. But in the meantime we have this tour, we're back in New York next week to see how it's going to go, work out who's going to be in the band. It's going to be an adventure, it's been a strange journey. Couldn't have imagined it in a million years.

**Joe: Is there anyone you've not played with that you'd like to?**

**Paul:** Wow. We've had so many special guests do appearances and encores with us over the years. Many of them weren't really rock but to have Greg Lake with us, the aristocracy of prog rock. The label asked me once what is a prog rock band and I said it's the ultimate form of music. If you're a jazz band and you play reggae, you're not a jazz band any more, if you're a reggae band and you play a waltz, you're not a reggae band any more. Prog rock doesn't have those limits, it's progressive, it's what it's all about.

**Joe: Yes, if you look at In The Court Of The Crimson King, some of those drum rhythms are straight out of a jazz textbook.**

**Paul:** Exactly, and King Crimson evolved into a legacy, and I saw Greg play with ELP.

**Joe: With Keith Emerson, who probably along with Jon Lord was instrumental in the whole rock / classical crossover.**

**Paul:** I 100% agree, I love Jon Lord, I love Keith Emerson. Another one is Jon Anderson. He played with us, and wanted sing 'Roundabout', and he says only if it's like on the album, because you got all the harmonies in there, so I say OK. But we've had Roger Daltrey, a lot of class acts.

**Joe: Would you ever consider an 1812 drum solo, like Cozy Powell used to do?**

**Paul:** Oh I love Cozy Powell. First time I saw him was in Whitesnake, I love Cozy, John Bonham too. Listen to 'Fool In The Rain', Bonham's drums make that song, I played that for the kids, because now there's not the club scene.

New York City used to have 100 studios, each with 5 rooms, the older generation could mix with the young. Now with ProTools, for \$5000 you could rent a better studio than the Beatles ever had. ProTools is great for tidying things up, but it won't help you write a better song. And also, now, with the drinking limit being 21, the whole club scene died. The way club bands used to break it in America is you'd be a cover band, then at the end of the night you'd do a couple of originals.

**Joe: Back in the late 80s I saw a lot of good bands like that at The Cat Club.**

**Paul:** [Gets up to shake hand again] Great someone remembers all this stuff besides me (laughs). And the good thing with an audience like that is, if the songs were bad, they'd let you know. You have to work, they keep you on your toes, makes you practice. So yes it's going to be interesting to see how the industry goes.

**Joe: Is there much unreleased in the vaults?**

**Paul:** Oh my god, tonnes of stuff. There's 2 rock operas for which I'd done the score, a bunch of movies, loads of stuff.

**Joe: In terms of recording, would TSO ever do a more mainstream rock album in the future?**

**Paul:** Whatever I do, it has to be magical, it has to be great. It's hard to put a definition on it, you just know it when you see it, it takes your breath away. There's three types of art, bad art, good art and great art. Good art is hard to do, it makes you feel an emotion you've felt before, takes you back to the first time you fell in love, that kind of thing. But Great art makes you feel an emotion you've never felt before.



**Al Pitrelli has played with everyone from Alice Cooper to Megadeth...and has been with TSO since the start after working with Paul O'Neill in Savatage.**

**Joe: Coming from New York, you must have played The Cat Club? (13th Street, Manhattan)?**

**Al** Yes, one of the great clubs of New York, I've played there a gazillion times. It was one of the few clubs to allow young bands to play original music, so many bands exist because of The Cat Club.

**Joe: So how's life?**

**Al** Busy (laughs).

**Joe: Why has it taken so long for the album to be released in Europe?**

**Al** I don't know why, I don't get involved in the business or politics, I like to keep on the creative side. It took two years to record, then we've been on the road for two years. Only now have we had the opportunity to stop and think about things.

**Joe: Do you have any other projects going on?**

**Al** This is my side project! (laughs). It embraces every side, every aspect, it's year round full time, so I have no other aspirations right now. Now, what about me? I guess the side project is me, I need time out to look after me. I've had a career spanning 30 years, I've done everything. TSO is like having a baby, you hope you do your best. It's like giving birth and watching it grow. I'm so proud of it, I can enjoy it now, I can travel and do me.

**Joe: What else are you listening to?**

**Al** When I was growing up? Gary Moore, RIP. The Beatles, I was a child of the 60s, what they did was amazing. The Allman Brothers, I like that improvisational side of things. And Jeff Beck. I've learnt so much from him. I have a passion for cars too (Beck is a legendary petrol head). But everything he touches works out. If he covers a song, you hear his version and never want to go back to the original.

**Joe: How about now?**

**AI** When I was growing up, my dad was into Frank Sinatra, and musicals like South Pacific, so when I bought home my first Kiss LP, my dad threw it away, 'Don't want this rubbish in the house' kind of thing. It's easy to just like what you grew up with, but when I hit 40 I embraced a new philosophy. So I bought a new car, and in it there was this subscription radio, which is commercial free, and has 200 stations you can pick up anywhere in America. There's a rock one, a metal one, a country station and so on.

And I happened across Top 40, this channel that just plays the new stuff, and I've been stuck on that ever since. I love new music, Alicia Keys, Eminem, Katy Perry, anything new. Our audiences range from 7 to 77, why should I grow up. It's all the same 12 notes, from Beethoven to Black Sabbath.

Saying that, I will pass on the bubblegum pop, but I do like discovering new bands.

**Joe: Who would you most like to play with?**

**AI** Not Jeff Beck. I'd just want to bring him a drink while he plays. But maybe Greg Allman, would like to play 'Melissa' with him. Perhaps Gladys Knight. But we've had Jon Anderson onstage with us, we've had a lot of guests join us on stage, so I've played with almost everyone I'd ever want to.

I love that old Motown stuff, Mike McDonald has done a Motown covers album, Rod Stewart did his American Songbook which is older stuff. I grew up in New York when the Vietnam War was going on and the protest songs, it was a different world then, you knew where you were when a certain song was on radio.

**Joe: Who else will be playing guitar on the tour?**

**AI** In TSO, there at 2 or 3 guitarists at any one time, I like a rhythm guitarist, so you have harmony and rhythm. I think Malcolm Young is the definitive rhythm guitarist, the powerhouse of the band's sound.

**Joe: Dave Peverett is up there too.**

**AI** Oh definitely. Actually we're all meeting in New York next week to work things out, we'll have the plans for all the stages we're going to be playing, so we can work out how much we can fit.

**Joe: What can fans expect from the tour?**

**AI** Our all. Whatever they expect, we'll exceed. It's the biggest rock show in the world. They'll be amazed by the ferociousness. We've grown up with it, from 1 or 2 trucks to something like 30 trucks of stage gear, it's like giving birth then unleashing a teenager, a huge show. Paul's a genius. My job is the band, to make sure they all do their job.

**Joe: Are there plans for another CD?**

**AI** Always, Paul's always a step ahead. He's got a couple of shows planned and one he wants to put on Broadway.

**Joe: How do you see TSO in 5 years?**

**AI** Not too different, we're always expanding. I'm nervous about the reaction, but If I can keep doing it I can. TSO will always go beyond. I'm proud to have been at the birth, it will outlive me.

*Trans-Siberian Orchestra will play London's HMV Hammersmith Apollo on 28th March 2011.*