

Alumnus goes 'schizoid' with music career

by Sheng Lee - Monday, May 09, 2011

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Over the past 32 years, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh alumnus John Steinhardt '77, a.k.a. "Schizoid Johnny," has performed more than 4,600 gigs as a professional rock 'n' roll musician.

From his start at a roller rink when he was just 15 years old, to performing at the Tony Award-winning Victory Gardens Theater in Chicago in 2004, Steinhardt always has wanted to be a full-time musician.

Humble beginnings

Born in La Jolla, Calif., Steinhardt was the youngest of four children. When he was a toddler, his family moved to Wisconsin, where he grew up in Allenville and attended Winneconne High School.

Steinhardt began playing the trombone when he was 9 years old, encouraged by his father, a fan of jazz legend Glen Miller. At 11, Steinhardt learned how to play guitar and drums.

In high school, he participated in concert, marching, pep and jazz bands and won numerous awards. As a senior, he already was taking music classes at UW Oshkosh.

His UWO family

Steinhardt said the UWO music department felt like its own community. "When I went to Oshkosh, I grew up in four years, knowing the entire faculty," Steinhardt said. "They treated you as family."

For his senior recital, Steinhardt recorded an original rock oratorio entitled "Faustus," complete with rock band, vocalists, choir and string orchestra. He graduated in 1977 with a degree in music education.

"To this day, the opportunity, the camaraderie, the friendship and family at UWO still stick with me, and sometimes I still miss it," he said.

The birth of "Schizoid Johnny"

After graduating, Steinhardt toured around the world with various bands. Traveling throughout the U.S., Europe and Asia, he performed in places like Kyoto, Japan, with his band Night Flight.

"The opportunities just opened up," Steinhardt said.

In 1981, he toured with the Sweet Lips Theater Co. and strayed a little from his music to perform in the one-act play "Epiphany."

For the next 22 years, Steinhardt toured the world as "Schizoid Johnny" in his one-man show.

The origins of Schizoid Johnny began when his audience started calling him “schizoid,” because of his various outfit changes and different characters during his shows. Steinhardt said society and culture also inspired him to take on the persona.

Of his 4,600 performances, Steinhardt has performed at extraordinary locations, such as the demilitarized zone in Panmunjom, North Korea, where a Chinese guard blew on his ponytail to intimidate him, Steinhardt said.

After 20 years of touring and lending his musical talents to 28 bands, Steinhardt went on to teach at schools in California, Texas and Montana.

“Schizoid Johnny is the artist,” Steinhardt said. “Being a band instructor is a great job to have to support that artist.”

His message

Settling down to teach gave Steinhardt time to work on “Samadhi,” a multimedia show based metaphorically on his spiritual life. Using various instruments, multimedia projections, special-effect lighting and fog, Steinhardt tells the story of his alien persona falling to earth and battling evil in order to ascend back into the heavens.

Through storytelling, Steinhardt said he hopes to unite people regardless of their differences.

His “Samadhi” album, which took more than four years to write and record, has received airplay on public and college radio stations in the U.S., Europe and Australia.

Steinhardt’s most recent project, “The Rock ‘n’ Roll Experience,” is a musical presentation with an underlying message of respect and tolerance for diversity.

“The show I do is essentially a unique blend of rock, folk and classical music,” Steinhardt said. “It is a style reminiscent of progressive rock.”

Similar to the “Samadhi” concert, “The Rock ‘n’ Roll Experience” is a one-man show using several instruments and multimedia projections.

Steinhardt’s goal is to spread a positive message, but he said that as an artist, he has to be honest with himself and understand that his message won’t always get through 100 percent.

“It almost seems that the teaching of love, respect and tolerance of diversity is alien to the human structure,” Steinhardt said. “It’s a hard nut to crack, a hard bridge to blow up and a hard wall to bring down; but once it starts, it goes into motions and it will work with an audience.”

When he is not writing, recording or touring, Steinhardt said he enjoys hiking, fishing and hunting in Montana, where he lives. He also spends a lot of his time with his fiancée and her family in Missouri. Steinhardt said he will be hitting the classroom instead of the road next year to teach again, and he hopes that will give him the chance to record new music.

[More about Schizoid Johnny.](#)