

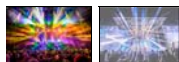
The Register-Guard

ENTERTAINMENT HOME

MUSIC

STS9 captures the 'magic of being in the moment'

The instrumental electronic rock band stops at McDonald Theatre on Friday, Jan. 22



1/2 - STS9 plays McDonald Theatre on Friday, Jan. 22, 2016.

BY JOANNA BARTLETT

For The Register-Guard

JAN. 22, 2016

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Musicians say they can reach a state of music-induced Zen while playing — when the groove is right, it's more like the music plays them than they play it. Time disappears and the present moment is all that exists.

Instrumental electronic rock band STS9 experiences that Zen all the time. To produce their psychedelic improvisational sound, they have to live in the now, feeling their way through each song.

VIDEO

☰ STTS9 - "Wika Chikana" - Red Rocks - 09.06.14



"We've struck a chord of balance between structures of songs and improvisation," says percussionist Jeffrey Lerner. "It's an equal mix of the two. Each song has the potential for improvisation. We're deciding that each night: which songs to open up and where to take them. It's an interpretation of the energy, the people in the room, the place we're at, what's going on in the news, being in the now."

Improvisational music in front of an audience takes guts and the willingness to be vulnerable. Formed nearly 18 years ago in Atlanta, the band — made up of Hunter Brown (guitar/sequences), Lerner (percussion), David Phipps (keyboards/synths), Zach Velmer (drums) and Alana Rocklin (bass) — has had time to gel.

"We can count on each other as a band to have each other's back," Lerner says. "The music is a metaphor for a really great relationship between the people creating that music — it needs trust, communication and compassion."

The audience is part of the process as well. The energy and support the band gets from their fans allows them to take risks, Lerner says. "Through those risks comes some great stuff from the magic of being in the moment. Every night's a new story."

Sometimes the story goes in a direction they don't expect. Their music — described as a fusion of electronica, funk, jazz and hip hop — often uses electronic samples. During one performance of a song using a lot of sample tracks, the computer crashed "and the foundation of the song went away," Lerner says. "We stepped up and played the song without the samples — and we created a whole new part to the song which we still use now."

If a psychedelic, improvisational melodic fusion music show doesn't sound entertaining enough, there's a light show to go along with it. STTS9's winter tour includes its biggest production rig to date, to create a visually stunning show.

"Music is a sensory experience. You're hearing the sounds through your ears. Another representation of the music is through the lights. It adds to the whole environment and scene," Lerner says.

"We're excited to get up to the Northwest," he says. "We've been spending a lot of time going over our catalog, revamping old songs and adding new life to them. We have some new music to play, and our song catalog is more varied than ever before."

The band is also excited to release a new album, as yet untitled, due out this year. It will be their 12th release, and the first since

their 2011 release of "When the Dust Settles."

STS9, which stands for Sound Tribe Sector 9, brings their improvisational electronic rock to the McDonald Theatre on Friday, the second stop of a 19-date tour.

Shows also are available online, after the concert, through STS9's subscription-based Drip account at drip.com/STS9 . "It's a really cool way for people to stay connected," Lerner says.

Plus, as the band is like a DJ, taking elements of their own music, remixing and combining them, "It could be different next week when we play them again."

Joanna Bartlett has been a freelance writer for more than 15 years. She lives in Eugene and can be reached at joanna.y.bartlett@gmail.com.

CONCERT PREVIEW

STS9

When: 9 p.m. Friday, Jan. 22

Where: McDonald Theatre, 1010 Willamette St.

Tickets: \$35, \$30 advance (TicketsWest)

Learn more and listen: <http://sts9.com>

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