

The Behrend Beacon

System of a Down, P.O.D. unleash top-notch cds

by Mike Bello
sports editor

System of a Down frontman Serj Tankian grew up in America, but finds musical inspiration from his Armenian heritage and the perils of today's world. P.O.D. vocalist Sonny grew up in a town near the California-Mexico border, and is driven by his belief in spiritual adventure and how it makes

you" - a strong message that we have to recognize our similarities in order to survive.

Tankian even puts some humor into the album. He sings "Bounce" with the lyrics "I brought my pogo stick, just to show her a trick. She had so many friends, gliding through my hands. Jump pogo... bounce pogo, down pogo, up pogo."

The album's one weakness is how

refer to it as "Southtown") as well as the death of Sonny's mom. On the cover track, "Satellite," Sonny dedicates everything to his mother, who molded him into the person he is today. "As I look up to the sky today, well I can see you looking down on me, it brings a smile to my face again, Satellite," he says, referring to her as a satellite that watches them from above. P.O.D. even combines some reggae elements in "Ridiculous," which basically blasts other bands for not respecting the past and bands that have come before them.

P.O.D. is capable of slowing it down as well, such as the Mexican-style "Guitarras de Amor," a non-lyrical composition, as well as "Ghetto"; Sonny sings that although the world is full of pain, it still believes in love.

The band, which formed in 1993 and released four independent records before signing with Atlantic in 1998, brings heart and soul to their music, something almost unheard of in today's this-pain-inside-of-me rock style that many bands adopt (Staind, Linkin' Park.) They aren't just a show, but a group that keeps its content real.

P.O.D. brings a strong spiritual background to songs like "Portrait," a track that is both soft and hard-rock at the same time, and is solely about God: "Some people call you father. Maybe you could set me free. These people hate each other. But you've always been there for me." On "Alive," the group's first single, P.O.D. mixes pure rock with lyrics that celebrate being alive.

The group saves its best lyrics for "Youth of the Nation," a candidate for Song of the Year, even though it debuted in April. The band wrote "Youth" after watching the news of a school shooting near San Diego, not far from their studio. The band strung together a powerful tune about the troubles of youth. "Instead of taking the test I took two to the chest...It's kind of hard when you ain't got no friends. He put his life to an end. They might



P.O.D.'s cd 'Satellite' is a mix of modern rock and spirituality.

him and his bandmates feel.

Despite their different backgrounds, what both men have in common is their emotionally charged, socially conscious lyrics which provide a strong backdrop for their sophomore albums - two of the best albums to come out in more than a year.

The content of "Toxicity," System's follow-up to its self-titled debut album, contains a diverse set of ideals, which is ironic considering how alike the members are. From police brutality to drugs and suicide to science, Tankian hits upon a wide range of topics, both political and spiritual.

System doesn't waste any time getting in your face, as "Toxicity" opens with "Prison Song," a serious look at the overcrowding prison system: "They're trying to build a prison (for you and me to live in)."

In "Science" (perhaps the weakest song on the album) Tankian, a strong believer that humans tend to think too much and rely too little on instincts, sings about how science has failed to see the basic element of human life - faith ("spirit moves through all things.")

Although listening to the spoken messages from Tankian are like looking deep into his soul, it's his voice that steals the show. In the song "Toxicity" - their second single - Tankian starts off very cool and calm, but immediately turns into what sounds like a raving lunatic. Normally this wouldn't have an effect, but the material is so strong and important, and his voice is so multi-faceted, that Tankian pulls it off nearly flawlessly.

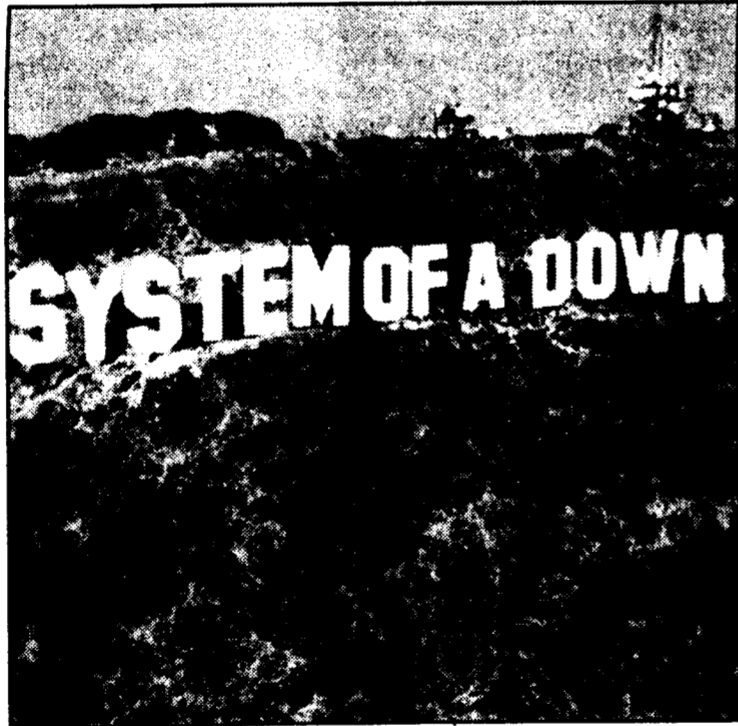
On track No. 5, "X," Tankian tells the listener to "show your people how we died," a possible reference to the Armenian genocide of 1915 that his grandfather survived.

System, rivaling Rage Against the Machine as the most politically charged group around, is also made up of Daron Malakian on guitar, John Dolmayan on drums, and Shavo Doadjian on bass.

Doadjian was born and raised in Armenia, while Dolmayan was born in Lebanon, making it clear why they chant on the track entitled "Forest," to "Tell everyone in the world that I'm

difficult it is to understand what Tankian is actually singing and to understand the hidden messages behind the lyrics. To say the least, they are open-ended, and the listener is free to draw conclusions about their meaning. You'll understand why this is true when you listen to "Chop Suey!," their hard-hitting first single and a prime example of the richness of Tankian's voice changes.

P.O.D., which stands for Payable On Death, follows up its hit first Atlantic album "The Fundamental Elements of Southtown" with "Satellite." This record's spiritual journey combines elements of rock, hip-hop, reggae, hardcore, and, just like "Toxicity," has emotional lyrics that show the soul of



Spin magazine named System of a Down's 'Toxicity' the 2001 Album of the Year.

the band.

The group opens the album with "Set it Off," a loud, pumping rock track with a strong message of truth to the self, and not to let others push you around. "RISE - Let your spirit fly. RISE - Stand up for yourself. RISE - Hold your head up high."

Sonny and his bandmates get a lot of inspiration from their past, including where they grew up in California (they

remember him then."

It's nice to know there are some bands out there that still care about others.

"Toxicity" - **Lyrical Clarity:** C+ **Nu-Metal Sound:** A- **Political Awareness:** A++ **Overall:** A
 "Satellite" - **Social Importance:** A+ **Rock Sound:** B+ **Spiritual Message:** A++ **Overall:** A-

CRITIC'S CRITIQUE BY DANIEL J. STASIEWSKI

Don't get into 'Big Trouble'

Right now, the average film lasts about two hours. So it's rare to find any movie that lasts only an hour and a half.

"Big Trouble" has a run time of an hour and 25 minutes, which would cause any reasonable audience member to expect fast-paced, non-stop laughs. Unfortunately, the less-than-entertaining characters and tedious humor in "Big Trouble" makes an extraordinarily short comedy feel longer than the average Hollywood film.

After losing his job at the Miami Herald and suffering through a messy divorce, Eliot Arnold (Tim Allen) makes a living as a mediocre advertising agent. The only connection to his previous life is an almost nonexistent relationship with his frustrated son Matt (Ben Foster). When Matt unsuccessfully attempts to pull a prank on classmate Jenny Herk (Zooey Deschanel), the police call Eliot to the Herk home. There he meets Jenny's extremely edgy stepfather, Arthur Herk (Stanley Tucci) and her attractive mother, Anna Herk (Rene Russo). Anna and Eliot hit it off immediately, but they aren't the only people to meet that night.

Elsewhere in Miami, gun runners, assassins, two-bit thugs, law enforcement officers, and Puggy (Jason Lee), a guy who looks a lot like Jesus, all run into each other. When their lives and the lives of Eliot and Anna collide, the unfortunate group faces a

series of catastrophes and miserable situations that only lead to "Big Trouble."

From the overly dry introduction by one of the films more tepid characters, Puggy, "Big Trouble" suffers one pitfall after another. When Puggy's introduction is done, Tim Allen's character comes on to continue a plot summary that lasts the entire film. The characters are nicely introduced, as nicely as a bunch of idiots can be introduced. After a short meeting of the mindless, the film concludes with the explosiveness similar of a wet firecracker.

There's no doubt that the short run time has something to do with the film's headfirst dive into nothingness. There are too many characters to have sufficient screen time; they end up remaining distant. Worse, every character has a need to talk, walk, and act as if they're constipated. Tucci has one of the more vibrant characters as Arthur. However, Tucci spends most of the second half of the film either absent or hallucinating as a result of the film's tedious running gags.

Actually, running gag may not be the right way to describe the film's main source of humor. Most of these jokes pop up twice and are never heard from again. The gags that do show up more than once, like the death of a TV or certain pokes at Florida Gators fans, are floored by anticipation. To counter the predictable

gags, innuendos - which are limited to "How do you...Like IT?" - attempt to get a laugh when the rest of the movie can't.

If "Big Trouble" didn't have enough problems with its general structure, the continuity errors erase any remaining entertainment value. Putting aside the numerous times arms go from up to a person's sides and back again, there are also several blatant errors. One scene in particular involves Tucci throwing the contents of his pockets at a thug. Though whatever he throws always bounces off the thug's face to the left, the items always land on the suitcase to the right. With these conspicuous mistakes, director Barry Sonnenfeld displays a form of carelessness I would only expect from someone who didn't like the project in the first place.

I can't say I didn't chuckle at a few moments, but the small laughs are quickly quieted by the scores of follies in this short film. Repressed and repetitive, "Big Trouble" needed to loosen up a bit to get the laughs of even a mediocre comedy. It's not really surprising; after all, what's to be expected from a movie titled "Big Trouble"?

★ 1/2 out of 4

'A New Day Has Come' for Celine Dion

by Megan McNamara
staff writer

A slim, trim, and energetic Celine Dion took center stage Sunday night for her CBS concert special "A New Day Has Come."

Whether it's from her CD's No. 1 Billboard position or from the huge bills that rarely left her face, it seems her mood agrees with Dion.

The concert was her first since she took a two-year sabbatical to focus on her two other jobs as a wife and a mother. During that time she cared for husband/manager Rene Angelil as he recovered from cancer surgery and Dion also gave birth to their son, Rene-Charles.

She seemed excited about her return to singing and confessed that even as a seasoned performer, she still got butterflies before the performance.

"Well, I guess you've all heard the news. I've got a new boss," Dion said, while delivering a comedy bit about the arrival of her son. "Young guy, really young. Typical boss. You know, wants me to start working early, can't do anything for himself, can't even tie his own shoe laces...and no matter how hard I work he still [dumps] on me... every chance he gets."

In addition to performing several new songs and the title cut from "A New Day Has Come," Dion included a medley

of songs from several movies, a cover of Nat King Cole's "Nature Boy" with pianist Jorge Calandrelli, the dance number "I'm Alive," and the theme song from "Titanic," "My Heart Will Go On." Brian McKnight joined Dion for a duet from "Beauty and the Beast," along with Destiny's Child to perform "Emotion" and "When the Wrong One Loves You Right." She joked with the audience during the show and the devoted fans of her music were in good luck. Her fans was so evident that it seemed to reverberate against the walls of the Kodak Theater. She sang many songs through tearful eyes and ended the evening by thanking the audience for making "this special so special." You could also see the pride she feels in parenting as she sang her last song with giant pictures of Rene-Charles in the background. The contentment that she has found through loving her husband and son translates into music that has deeper meaning.

Although Dion's concert did not feature elaborate stage designs, choreography, or special effects, it did feature her greatest strength: an amazing voice. For those fans that would prefer to see a more visually stunning concert, they can see Dion in the spring at her new live show in Las Vegas at Caesar's Palace. She has signed a three-year contract to appear in the show which she hopes will be similar to Cirque de Soleil's "O."

It's not hard to see that a new day and a new life spells out success for Celine Dion and her growing family.

'Superstar' concert at Playhouse

"Superstar" is the next performance in the Composer/Lyricist Concert Series at the Erie Playhouse.

Concert creator David Matthews has selected the music of Andrew Lloyd Webber for this performance. Along with his many collaborators, Webber has written a plethora of other musicals.

Familiar and not-so-familiar melodies will be sung by Playhouse performers. Included in the concert are selections from "Jesus

Christ Superstar," "Cats," "Phantom of the Opera," "Starlight Express," "Aspects of Love," and others.

Matthews (who is also the Playhouse managing director) acts as host and pianist for the concert. Audiences have come to enjoy Matthews' spontaneity, as he shares backstage gossip about the creators and stars of various Broadway shows.

Joining Matthews are Playhouse talents John Burton, Brenda Evans,

Kevin Feyas, Diane Hardner, Jeff Lipiec, Karen and Mike Nasca, Rae Jean and Paul Urbanowicz, and Trisha Yates.

Show Dates & Times:
April 16 & 17
7:30 p.m.
Ticket Prices:
\$10
-no reserved seating
-tickets available at door
-no advance reservations

New Releases

<p>Movies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'Changing Lines' - 'Frailty' - 'The Sweetest Thing' 	<p>Video*</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'Mulholland Drive' - 'No Man's Land' - 'Serendipity' - 'Spy Game' 	<p>Music*</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'Goo Goo Dolls' - 'DJ Mike Rizzo' - 'Bonnie Raitt' - 'Rusted Root' 	<p>DVD*</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'Mulholland Drive' - 'No Man's Land' - 'Serendipity' - 'Spy Game'
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*Release Date: 4/9

'Promises, Promises' opens at Playhouse

"Promises, Promises" is the Broadway musical that ran for 1,281 performances and combines the talents of Neil Simon and Burt Bacharach. The play is based on the award-winning movie "The Apartment."

Set in the corporate world of New York City, a junior executive named Chuck Baxter (Charles Corritore) carries favors from the higher-ranking executives by lending them the keys to his apartment for their clandestine liaisons. The arrangement is blown apart when complications arise with one of the big executive's plaything, Fran Kubelik (Karen Brennan), and Chuck comes to her aid. Brennan has previously performed as Fanny Brice in "Funny Girl."

Rich Tryzbiak plays the high-powered and misguided executive Sheldrake. The cast also includes Bill Kemp and Michael

Weiss, plus a large cast of dancers and singers.

David Matthews directs "Promises, Promises" with stage manager John Burton and assistant director Karen Sloan. Sean Baley steps off stage for this show and conducts the orchestra with vocals handled by Andrew Rainbow.

The musical opened in 1968 and includes the popular song, "I'll Never Fall in Love Again."

Show Dates & Times:
April 12-14, 18-20
Thurs. - 7:30 p.m., Fri. and Sat. - 8 p.m., Sun. - 2 p.m.
Ticket Prices:
Thurs. and Sun. - Adults \$17, Seniors \$16, Students \$9
Fri. and Sat. - Adults \$19, Seniors \$18, Students \$9