

EVERYONE'S INVITED

BY PAGE LEGGETT

When musician John Tosco's music party outgrew his living room, the Fayetteville native found a bigger venue.

Each Tosco Music Party — an outgrowth of the song circles Tosco used to host at his home — features an eclectic mix of performances by more than a dozen musicians of all ages and genres. Whether it's the annual Beatles tribute, a songwriter showcase, or the holiday music party (coming up Dec. 9), one thing remains the same: All are welcome. We caught up with Tosco, 59, to discuss how one of the area's top family musical events evolved from a living-room gathering to fill 1,200 seats in the Knight Theater.

HOW DID THE TOSCO MUSIC PARTY START?

We moved to Charlotte 30 years ago to raise a family. I quit playing in a band, which had been my full-time job, because it demanded late nights and too much travel. But I missed the music. As I began meeting other musicians, I'd invite them to my house. I'd tell them: "Bring a six-pack. I'll have chips and salsa, and we'll just play music all night."

WHEN DID THE PARTY OUTGROW YOUR LIVING ROOM?

We became a 501(c)(3) nonprofit in 1999; it was a few years before that. We moved from my house to someone else's house, to an apartment clubhouse, to a VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars) hall, and eventually to the Knight Theater.

TELL ME ABOUT YOUR HOLIDAY PARTY ON DEC. 9 AT MCGLOHON THEATER.

We'll have about 15 acts, and they'll



John Tosco

represent every genre — classical, bluegrass, singer/songwriter, jazz, blues, Americana. Each musician or group will play one or two songs, but they'll all be holiday songs, mostly Christmas music. But Hanukkah and Kwanzaa songs are part of it, too.

DESCRIBE A TOSCO MUSIC PARTY.

Our mission is to foster a sense of community among listeners and musicians. We connect professionals and talented amateurs, and everyone just inspires each other. It's casual and comfortable. Our concerts still have a living-room feel.

Every show begins with us asking people in the audience to introduce themselves to the person next to them. Then our house band, which I play in, leads a singalong. We always

begin and end with a singalong.

HOW ELSE DO YOU SPREAD YOUR LOVE OF MUSIC?

We've been doing a monthly open-mic night at the Evening Muse for 16 years. It's very family friendly. Even young kids are there. We give three scholarships every year to the summer camp at the Community School of the Arts and three more scholarships to The Swannanoa Gathering at Warren Wilson College. We also give a block of tickets to another nonprofit, like Urban Ministries and the Children's Home Society of North Carolina. At every show, we've given away between 20 and 50 tickets.

And every month, we'll go to a retirement center and have "Senior Singalong Parties," where we play music from the 1930s, '40s and '50s.

HOW HAS CHARLOTTE'S MUSIC SCENE CHANGED SINCE YOU MOVED HERE?

It's grown so much. We have more venues, more acts. Now, you might hear someone say: "Wow. There are two or three things going on tonight, and I can't decide which one to go to." That didn't used to happen.

WHAT'S YOUR PHILOSOPHY ON ENTERTAINING?

Our motto: It's all about the music.

Tosco Music Parties happen five times a year. The Tosco Music Holiday Party is Dec. 9 at 7:30 p.m. at McGlohon Theater at Spirit Square. Tickets range from \$14-\$24, and all ages are welcome. toscomusic.org.