

SUSTO returns to TACAW on Saturday with message of struggle and redemption

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SUSTO frontman Justin Osbourne found that through life's trials and triumphs, music has been a place where he can find his center.

"I've always loved music and would turn to music whenever I was in emotional need," he said. "I took to getting out my feelings through songs immediately. I feel very fortunate to get to do this for a living and travel around and play, see all these places and make records. It's really a privilege."

On Saturday, he'll return to the Roaring Fork Valley with his band SUSTO for their sophomore performance at The Arts Campus at Willits (TACAW) in support of their fifth full-length album, "My Entire Life."

The album documents a tumultuous time in his life in which he went through a divorce, lost his father, had to rebuild his band after the pandemic, and watched family members struggle with mental-health issues and addiction. But he also comes out on the other side with new love and optimism.

"I still have a lot of joy in my life,



SUSTO returns to TACAW on Saturday. Paul King/Courtesy photo

and I chase joy and appreciate it, but I've gone through a lot of challenging stuff," he said. "The record is kind of like a mosaic of a lot of those moments, distilled into songs. Coming out of those challenges, finding love and remarrying and her becoming my songwriting partner, my life has just shifted a lot."

Osborne started writing songs at the age of 14 when he would sneak time with his grandfather's vintage parlor guitar that his parents forbade him to touch.

From then on, he formed and played in bands throughout high school, military school, and college. Though he enjoyed some early success, he came to a crossroads where he found

himself confused and burnt out.

"My band got a development deal with Atlantic Records. I dropped out of college and was touring, but nothing panned out with it," he said. "I felt like I was spinning my wheels. I wasn't really making any connections in the industry. I made the decision to leave my old band and go back to school."

He thought he was leaving music behind for a career in anthropology when he joined a study abroad program in Cuba. He noted that though he is not Latin American, he was always drawn to the politics and culture of the region.

But instead of the trip changing his career path, he fell in with a group of Cuban musicians who helped him realize his privilege and encouraged him to not give up on the thing he loved.

"I fell in with a lot of great musicians in Havana and started writing songs and recording there," he said. "My friends there encouraged me to take advantage of the fact that I was an American. They were these folks that played music just for the pure joy of it. And that was inspiring. They're like, 'Hey, I know you got burned out on this but give it another try. You have opportunities that we don't have.'"

When he returned to the U.S., he formed a new band that he named "susto", a Spanish word that means "fright" or "terror," but also refers to the folk interpretation of it as an illness that is caused by a traumatic event that is believed to cause the soul to leave the body.

"I came back, and I started to work really hard and was inspired by my collaborators and friends there and encouraged by their belief in me," he said. "It was something I needed. I needed to fall in love with playing music again. For music's sake."