

Stargazing Unplugged

Aug 2, 2015 Blog Entry

Stargazing: Unplugged

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Composite Image of Perseid Meteors Aug 2008 ©John Hlynialuk

Is it any coincidence that Clapton's 1992 six-grammy-award-winning album *Unplugged* included the hit, "Tears in Heaven"?

Perhaps Clapton is aware that this month's biggest astronomical hit, the Perseid meteor shower, also harkens back to tears in heaven. Historically, the Perseids have been dubbed "the tears of St. Lawrence," after a martyred archdeacon of Rome, dating back to August, A.D. 258.

But the Perseid meteor shower will bring not sorrow, but tears of joy: they're one of the most spectacular sights you'll see in the night sky, perhaps the highlight of the year. Plus, you won't need a private backyard observatory. You won't need a telescope. Or binoculars. You don't even need a ticket. All you need is to look up, starting any time in August.

At its peak (August 13), you'll see about 50 meteors an hour (or more) flash in the moonless night sky, from around midnight to the wee hours of the morning.

If you're looking for quality, not quantity, check out nightfall and early evening skies. If you're lucky, you'll see one of astronomy's jaw-dropping sights: a rare, colourful earthgrazer meteor – one of the loooooong, slow ones that moves horizontally across the horizon. Earthgrazers are unforgettable, but you'll have to be vigilant: there may only be one or two an hour before 10 p.m., and then the main event begins. But they're worth the wait: Earthgrazers are the meteors people talk about for the rest of their lives.

So this August, especially around the night of the 13th, find an open, dark sky, grab a blanket or reclining lawnchair, look north, and get ready for a spectacular unplugged evening. And it's all for much less than the price of a concert ticket.

Coming up:

While the Perseids are an event to be viewed au naturel, don't miss our monthly meeting on August 5 where we'll learn all about telescope eyepieces (a make-or-break component of your stargazing experience). The meeting (moved forward from July) will be at E.S. Fox Observatory starting at 7 p.m., with webinar presenter Brian Dernesch of KW Telescope. For more details, check out our COMING EVENTS page.