

## Colepaugh gets ready to roch

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### Metro jack-of-all-trades musician to hit the road with Roch Voisine next month

Perhaps more than anything, Chris Colepaugh is looking forward to being able to play music without all the hassle of dealing with booking hotels, driving his band's van, loading and unloading gear and so on.



For once, Chris isn't in charge.

"I'm usually that guy," Chris says with a laugh. "Who's going to tear down the stuff and load it in the van, and it's -40C and it's snowing, and drive to the next gig? That would be me."

This time, Chris can sit in the background. All he has to do is wake up, show up on time and play his heart out for legions of Roch Voisine fans.

Chris, a Riverview native who has toured Canada well over a dozen times in the last decade with his band the Cosmic Crew, was hired late last year to be sort of "utility guy" for Roch's two tours of France, Switzerland and Belgium next month.

A jack-of-all-trades musician, Chris will play pedal steel, mandolin and perhaps even more instruments on Roch's tour, which starts at the end of May.

The tour runs through June and then picks up again in November and December.

When Chris got the call for the gig late last year he thought it was a prank from a friend at first. He soon found out that he was really being offered the chance to audition for Roch's band.

As it turns out, Chris's sometime drummer Shawn Sasyniuk, who has drummed for Roch Voisine in the past, threw Chris's name out there when it looked like Roch would need a new guitarist.

Chris got the call and e-mailed Roch's crew samples of his work, but Roch's regular guitarist decided he would stick around for another tour.

So Chris was asked what else he could play.

"Pedal steel, mandolin, guitar, bass, drums, whatever they needed," Chris says.

Roch's band said they'd like him to audition to play pedal steel, but that was a little trickier.

"I didn't really have (recordings) with pedal steel on it," Chris says, "So I sort of had to play along with Patsy Cline's 'Crazy' and mix it into the song and say, 'That's what I sound like, is that OK?' And they said, 'Yup, that's beautiful. That's all we needed to know.'"

Chris will also play mandolin, guitar and maybe harmonica on the tour.

The multi-instrumentalist is excited about the tour. Not only is it a large, full-scale tour of theatres and arenas that are a little different to the bars and festival venues Chris is used to, but on this tour, Chris doesn't have to worry about anything more than playing music.

"My job will be to get up and play music the best that I can for them," he said this week. "That's what's expected. And that, for me, will be a totally different element."

As frontman of the Cosmic Crew (which features bassist Lynn Daigle and whoever is hired to play drums on any given night), Chris also has to be part-businessman -- budgeting, planning tours, repairing his van and so on.

It's rare Chris doesn't have to think about dozens of things at once while touring.

On top of that, when he's not working on his own material, Chris does session work as a guitarist for Melanie Keith and The Strombachs, Samantha Robichaud, Kolin Barley & The Durt and Darcy Mazerolle.

He can be found playing covers at weekly gigs at St. James Gate and Kramer's Corner in downtown Moncton as well.

"I've been a musician for the last 10 years," Chris says. "That's what I do. When I go to the border and they ask what I do for a living, I'm not ashamed to say I'm a musician. I look them square in the eye; that's what I do."

"And I'm proud to say that because it's not an easy job. You have to do a little bit of slip-sliding sometimes to make it all work out but, in the end, I'm playing music for a living. That's ecstatic news for me."

And while the Cosmic Crew has made a name for itself across Canada and into the United States with its blues and folk-based southern rock sound and blistering live shows, Chris is mindful of the fact that touring with Roch is a whole new level for him as a musician.

"It's huge. It's a good feather in my cap to put on a resume. Roch Voisine is a huge, huge star. He's not messing around. For me to get this, it pulls me into another category."

"I do what I do with Chris Colepaugh and the Cosmic Crew, but I also enjoy doing a lot of session work. I enjoy playing with other people because it adds to my experience as far as when I go to do songwriting and everything else."

"I'm learning these songs, I'm learning other parts and lots of other things with other people. As a musician, I'm a big melting pot of everything I listen to, all those things. It's a big part of what I am. This gig is just sort of an extra level."

Chris will meet Roch for the first time when rehearsals start in Montreal on May 11. On May 27, Chris will take the stage, as part of Roch's band, in Tours, France.

Travel plans aren't written in stone yet. Chris says Roch's camp may use trains for most of its travel as it did on a previous European tour. Chris and the other musicians will be escorted to and from each concert.

In total, Chris will be on the road with Roch for about three months this year, a big dent in the Moncton musician's typically busy schedule. But Chris says the timing of the shows actually works out for him.

In July and August, the Cosmic Crew will play festival dates in Canada and the U.S. and, in the fall, Chris says a full-scale Canadian tour will take place.

Adding to his workload is the fact that Chris is currently in the middle of building a professional recording studio in his garage in Riverview.

Once complete, he plans to record the follow-up to 2006's *In Your Backyard*, his sixth album in a decade.

Three or four years is an unusually long gap between Cosmic Crew albums, but the delay could be a blessing in disguise, Chris says.

"I'm actually anxious about doing this (tour) because, for me, I'm often inspired by my surroundings and, for instance, our last record, *In Your Backyard*, the majority of the songs were written and finished in California when I spent some time down there.

"So I'm kind of looking forward to this to see what comes out of it for me as far as songs, you know what I mean?"

The Roch Voisine tour and the European culture Chris will be steeped in could impact his next album. He carries a handheld digital recorder with him at all times to record notes or song ideas.

Asked if hitting the road overseas for several months will impact his life in other ways, Chris says it simply comes with the territory of being a musician.

"When you take on this job, you have to be prepared to miss weddings, funerals, Bar Mitzvahs, whatever," he says. "Because when the phone rings, you've got to answer the phone. And that's like anything, any self-employed business person -- you have to be on call 24-hours a day, seven days a week. And it may sound crazy, but it's true, because the moment you start saying no to this stuff is when the phone stops ringing."

Chris will be in good company for the tour as his friend and sometime bandmate Shawn Sasyniuk was hired on as Roch's drummer. Chris also knows Roch's bass player, Nova Scotia native Bruce Dixon, who has played with Oakley and Rita MacNeil.

"This is the thrill of a lifetime," Chris says of the upcoming tour. "I've always said I wanted to do it on this kind of level. I enjoy what we do and we continue to work on it, but this is like a weird kind of ... I'm cutting into something that's already done.

"This guy has hits. I'm going to be singing and playing backup on these hits and we'll be playing and people will be singing along to these hits. It's kind of a ready-made fairytale."

\* For more on Chris Colepaugh & The Cosmic Crew, visit their new website at [www.colepaugh.com](http://www.colepaugh.com).

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