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Home for the holidays

Roch Voisine has spent much of the last three years in France, but he's home now and promoting a new CD, Christmas Is Calling, with TV specials and concerts

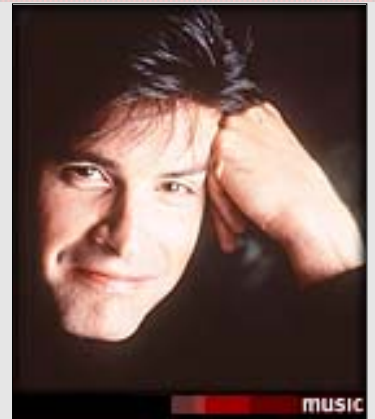
By JAMES REANEY -- London Free Press

■ If you think you're ready for Christmas because you've done a little shopping and bought a tree, meet Roch Voisine.

"You think (this is) early? We've been working on the album since summer," laughs the singer-songwriter.

Voisine has released his first Christmas record, L'Album de Noel, and its English-language counterpart, Christmas Is Calling (RV International/BMG), and now is in the middle of a flurry of activity surrounding both releases.

He has already filmed French and English holiday TV specials, he's been doing promotional work in Canada and in France and he's just getting ready to do a handful of Canadian concerts -- including a show at Centennial Hall tomorrow night -- that will keep him working until Dec. 23.



Roch Voisine's new CD, "Christmas is Calling", was released in time for the holiday season.

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"Since I haven't been on tour for a little while in English Canada . . . I'm my own opening act," says Voisine. "I walk on with a guitar and spend a half-hour with people singing old favourites and just chatting a bit and getting to know each other better."

The TV special airs Dec. 17 on CBC-TV at 7 p.m. It includes material shot at his grandmother's house in New Brunswick and the church where the young Voisine sang in the choir.

There is a visit to another childhood landmark, too. "We taped a few moments in the hockey rink where I started to play hockey when I was a kid."

Over the last three years, the Quebec-based Voisine has been in France re-connecting with the audience that made him so big. After *Kissing Rain*, the follow-up to his 1993 English-language breakthrough, *I'll Always Be There*, he recorded *Chaque feu* (*Every Fire*) in 1998 and took a hiatus from the English world.

He also had to pick up the pieces after his manager, Paul Vincent, died in 1997.

The Christmas album and cross-Canada tour -- and his role as a special representative for UNICEF Canada -- are just the things to get reacquainted with English fans.

Christmas Is Calling is a warm contemporary collection of 14 classics, including *Joy to the World* and *Little Drummer Boy*, as well as the title track of the album, which is a Voisine original.

The songwriter says that the four-month painstaking endeavour behind the CD was equal parts compiling the track list and equal parts recording those songs.

"If you look at the credits, we were probably as busy as Santa's elves."

He wanted to stay away from some of the Christmas CD cliches -- going with what he calls "a personalized house band" approach, instead of the

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floods of strings and other add-ons.

In feel, it's somewhat like Willie Nelson's classic Christmas CD, *Pretty Paper*, and that tune was one Voisine considered before settling on some personal favourites, including John Lennon's *Happy Christmas (War Is Over)*.

"It was a long process of screening and finding the right songs and the right keys. Musically speaking, I wanted to find fresh ideas for the songs, without losing the classic Christmas feel to it," he says.

"That's probably why some people make Christmas records in one or two weeks and some people make them in a day.

"But that's also why a lot of those Christmas records don't stand the test of time."

Voisine is hoping his CD, or at the very least his title song, will.

"Christmas Is Calling is a classic Christmas tune. It's a new one, but it's a classic way of writing one," he says.

"A lot of people have added it to their Christmas lists, so maybe next year it will still be played.

"That's really nice, because when you write a new Christmas song, you're standing on the edge of oblivion." ■

Thursday, November 30, 2000

Joyeux Voisine

Songwriter has a classic Christmas

By **MIKE BELL** -- Calgary Sun

■ Call me lazy, but I usually don't start planning Christmas until three days prior.

A month before? Way too early.

"You think (that's) early? We've been working on the album since summer," laughs well-known Quebecois singer-songwriter Roch Voisine.

Voisine has just released his first Christmas record, *L'Album de Noel*, and its English-language counterpart, *Christmas Is Calling*, and right now he's in the middle of a flurry of activity surrounding both releases: He's already filmed French and English holiday TV specials (the English show airs Dec. 17 on GJ), he's been doing promotional work in Canada and in France, and he's just getting ready to do a handful of Canadian concerts -- including a show tonight at the Jubilee Auditorium -- that will keep him working until Dec. 23.

Who knew Christmas was so much work?

"A regular record it's like, 'Oh, it's not ready? It doesn't matter, let's push it back a month,'" Voisine says.

"But Christmas is on the 25th of December, no matter what happens. So you've got to get yourself in line ... make sure that promotions are done right, the TV specials are ready. I'll be a happy puppy on the 26th of December.

"At least I'll get to enjoy Boxing Day."

Christmas Is Calling is a warm contemporary collection of 14 classics, including *Joy To The World* and *Little Drummer Boy*, as well as the title track of the album which is a Voisine original.

The songwriter reveals that the four-month painstaking endeavour behind the CD was equal parts compiling the track list and equal parts recording those songs.

"It was a long process of screening and finding the right songs and the right keys. Musically speaking, I wanted to find fresh ideas for the songs without losing the classic Christmas feel to it," he says.

"That's probably why some people make Christmas records in one or two weeks, and some people make them in a day.

"But that's also why a lot of those Christmas records don't stand the test of time."

Voisine is hoping his CD, or at the very least his song will.

The track is one that explores the true meaning of the holiday in a world that seems to have forgotten it, and it's a message he's sure people will embrace.

"Christmas Is Calling is a classic Christmas tune. It's a new one but it's a classic way of writing one," he says.

"A lot of people have added it their Christmas lists so maybe next year it will still be played.

"That's really nice because when you write a new Christmas song, you're standing on the edge of oblivion." ■

Thursday, November 30, 2000

A spirited return

Roch comes back just in time for Christmas

By **MIKE ROSS**
Edmonton Sun

■ Can you smell what the Roch is cooking?

That would be a sumptuous turkey dinner with all the fixings, sugar cookies and perhaps a good cigar and a snifter of brandy afterwards - or at least the musical equivalent of same on his new CD, Christmas is Calling.

That's Roch Voisine, by the way, who's back with holiday spirit in spades. For his first local appearance in three and a half years, he performs tomorrow night in the Jubilee Auditorium. If you're not in the

Christmas spirit already, this show ought to do it. Roch's been living and breathing Christmas since April.

Like a scene out of Tim Burton's *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, trapped in a land where every day is Christmas, Voisine spent his entire summer - April to September - holed up in a Montreal studio making sure the music came out just right. Unlike the usual horde of hastily recorded carol collections, *Christmas is Calling* is no knockoff. The singer expended tremendous effort to make it something special, eschewing the usual sleighbells and string sections in favour of more creative arrangements. Not only that, but he actually made two Christmas CDs - one in French (*L'Album de Noel*), one in English.

Poor weather in the spring helped the mood in the studio, he says - as did Christmas decorations, home-cooked Christmas dinners and regular appearances by Santa Claus. But while most Montrealers were outside enjoying their summer, how long could the illusion last?

"The last month was really hard," Voisine laughs.

But, he adds, making Christmas music when no one else could even imagine it really helped him focus.

Says he, "It helped us rediscover the Christmas tunes for what they are: Great melodies and some of those lyrics are really, really, really beautiful if you don't hide them behind complicated arrangements or cliches. We wanted to take a fresh approach."

If you're wondering where Voisine has been during the past three years, the answer lies in his curiously thick French accent. He's been in France, of course, re-connecting with the audience that made him so big to begin with. After *Kissing Rain*, the follow-up to his 1993 English language breakthrough, *I'll Always Be There*, he recorded *Chaque feu* ("Every Fire") in 1998 and took a hiatus from the English world.

He also had to pick up the pieces after his manager Paul Vincent died in 1997.

The Christmas album and cross-Canada tour are just the things to get reacquainted with English fans, he says.

"I've been in the French world," he explains. "Now I've got to get back into the English vibe."

Voisine promises another English pop record by the end of next year - and no, it won't be another Christmas album. He's probably had his fill. ■

Thursday, July 31, 1997

Roch Voisine tour continues -- without his manager

Despite death, Roch must roll

By **JANE STEVENSON**

Toronto Sun

The recent, sudden death of Roch Voisine's manager in May couldn't have come at a worse time for the popular Quebec singer.

Mind you, there's never a good time when it comes to death. But 46-year-old Paul Vincent died in his Montreal apartment just as Voisine was hoping his second English language album, *Kissing Rain*, might be his calling card into the hard-to-break American market.

Voisine, who has sold five million albums since 1989, has always been a more successful artist in French Canada and Europe than English Canada or the United States.

"We were stuck in a political battle in the record company and we were still trying to figure that out when he died," admits Voisine on a cellular car phone driving somewhere in Vermont.

"So I'm gonna have to re-negotiate certain things. It

might take another year, a good year in order to put something together. The album, *Kissing Rain*, was mostly put together for Canada."

The album has sold 165,000 copies here to date.

There was also Voisine's cross-Canada summer tour, the one that brings him to the Molson Amphitheatre tomorrow night.

"It's not easy," says Voisine, who says he lost "a very good friend" of 15 years when Vincent died.

"I had a limited choice. I figured I've got to go on. If I don't go on, I might just sit at home and never come back. So I decided to move on. It's not easy 'cause I have so much work with management, with the record company, with the publishing company. What I feel like is I have too much to take care of. It's crazy. The hour-and-a-half that I spend on stage is a vacation compared to what I have to do during the day."

Adding to Voisine's frustration has been inaccurate reports about him supposedly inheriting \$30 million from Vincent, including cash, apartments, land and a luxury boat.

"Oh, God," says Voisine with a heavy sigh, as his girlfriend, Kim, negotiates their car through some back road.

"That figure is totally wrong, and it came from somebody who has absolutely no clue. It comes from a journalist in Montreal who asked around and basically arrived at an average of what he heard and obviously he didn't ask my bank manager nor Paul's bank manager. I mean those figures are totally wrong. It's stupid."

Voisine says the popular perception now is that he's loaded.

"It's hard to deal with now. I can't go to the corner store without them trying to sell me a loaf of bread at twice the price. I'm exaggerating, but try to go buy a car or buy anything significant after something like

that. Even within family, within anything. All of a sudden your old buddies call you, they figure you're as rich as Midas. It's totally wrong, those figures are way out of the ballpark."

Voisine won't say how much he did inherit or talk about the discovery of cocaine, hash and narcotic cigarettes in a safe in Vincent's apartment at the time of his death.

"I'm not here to judge what he was doing, you're not going to get that out of me," says Voisine. "It's just unfortunate that he went through that."

Vincent pleaded guilty in April to charges of cocaine and hashish possession after drugs were seized from his home a year ago.

Voisine will say that he and Vincent had a good relationship until the end.

"It's impossible to replace somebody like that," says the singer.

Saturday, July 26, 1997

Schlock Voisine

By MIKE ROSS
Express Writer

The ladies sure love their Roch. Too bad he can't rock.

Volume and clutter make poor substitutes for the raw urgency of real rock music, as Roch Voisine demonstrated for 2,500 fans at the Convention Centre on Thursday night. And calling attention to "soul" - like bragging about modesty - pretty much cancels it out.

For example, the Francophone star introduced Stay With Me by saying he learned to "put a bit of soul into my productions" during his recent stay in L.A. It was a very little bit of soul, as it turned out. His Barry White impersonation was comical, and the

song came across like everything else Roch did during his 90 minute concert - overdramatic, personality-driven bombast. This guy wouldn't know soul if Sam Cooke came back from the dead and bit him on the nose.

Not that the majority of the fans cared one way or another. You see, at least 75% of the fans were women. From teeny boppers to married, middle-aged ladies, they all shared an almost frenzied adoration of this nice young man from New Brunswick. They screamed at his every word and move. Despite his pretensions, Voisine is a likable gent who seemed more at ease on stage than he ever has. He soaked up all the love in the room like a Las Vegas pro. Ladies, meet the future Tom Jones.

After a mercifully short opening set from the abrasive, shamelessly self-promoting Amy Sky, whose music ranged from maudlin ballads to bouncy, cliché-ridden fluff, squealing fans stormed out of their assigned seats and rushed the stage when the lights went down for Roch. Clutching bouquets of roses, they formed a "mush" pit (not to be confused with a "mosh" pit) that remained for the entire night. Security was helpless to prevent it.

Looking rather Elvis-like, Voisine opened with a solo a capella version of I'll Always Be There, with the faces of his fans just inches away. After tunes from two albums plus a sensitive version of Don McLean's Vincent (in honor of Voisine's recently deceased manager, Paul Vincent), he also closed the show with I'll Always Be There, this time with a full band. He even managed to sign autographs and touch the sea of outstretched hands as he sang. Can you say "fromage?"

Voisine certainly knew how to get the hormones stirring.

He said at one point, "I am 34 years old." (Eeeeeee!)

"I'm still not married." (Double Eeeeeee!)

"People ask me who I am waiting for." (Me! Me! Me!)

"When I see this many beautiful women, I know I'm not getting married soon ... maybe because I haven't found the right one yet." (Eeeeeee!)

This (obviously prepared) patter was the introduction to - you guessed it - a song called The Right One.

Roch can sing. He knows how to please a crowd of women. He's handsome. But if he thinks these traits make him a rock singer, or even a soul singer, he's got another thing coming.

Thursday, July 24, 1997

He's Roch solid

By **LISA WILTON**
Calgary Sun

He already knew women liked him, but it came as a bit of a shock when the critics started to.

"Yeah, critics are saying it's very good -- for the first time," says Quebec heartthrob Roch Voisine about the reaction to his latest CD, *Kissing Rain*.

The CD, which was released last November, treads the same ballad-heavy path as his earlier releases and features songwriting by well-known singers such as Richard Marx and fellow Canadian Amy Sky.

"I think in terms of production it's better. I think I sing better.... I don't know why critics like this album. It was quite surprising for me to see these pretty good reviews," he says.

It comes as no surprise to his legions of (mostly female) fans across Canada and Europe, who have bought nearly eight million of his albums since 1986.

It was in this year that Voisine released his first hit *Helene* -- from his debut album of the same name -- in Europe and making him an instant sex-symbol.

Until now he has not been able to copy this success in the U.S. and had hoped to change his luck with

Kissing Rain.

But in May, his dream was put on hold indefinitely when his manager and friend Paul Vincent died of a drug overdose, leaving to Voisine a reported \$30 million.

Voisine -- who now resides in Los Angeles -- doesn't confirm the figure or explain why he was the beneficiary.

He does say he hopes to have new management by Christmas.

"A relationship that lasted 15 years is hard to replace."

Voisine's 20-date Canadian tour -- which stops at the Jack Singer Concert Hall tomorrow night -- was booked before Vincent died.

Although Voisine is an accomplished musician, his Adonis-status had critics quickly dismissing him as a pretty boy.

"Cute lasts about 15 minutes," argues Voisine.

"People want to see the goods. At one point I won't be cute anymore, and if I'm still around making music than I've proved something."

Wednesday, July 23, 1997

I wanna Roch!

Voisine takes the art of marketing quite seriously

By MIKE ROSS
Express Writer

He easily conquered Quebec, stormed Europe and swept English Canada, but Roch Voisine's plans for American domination have been put on hold.

The sudden death of his manager Paul Vincent this spring was a devastating personal loss, Voisine admits, but it also took the steam out the Roch

Voisine juggernaut. They were a team, having in 15 years built the two-man company into a mini musical empire. Voisine had just released his second English language album, *Kissing Rain*, with high hopes to conquer the U.S. adult contemporary market, male division. But with the reins of the business left solely in Voisine's hands, it became apparent that it was time to pull back and regroup.

"You just can't build something for 15 years with somebody and then turn around and then give the keys to somebody else," Voisine says, on a cell phone from his boat on Lake Champlain in Vermont (he was on a scuba-diving vacation). "I need to rebuild and put a new team together, with strong management in America. On the American market side, I just have to put priorities first. If I don't have a team in management, there's no way, even if I have the greatest single in the world, I wouldn't be able to follow through with it."

Performing tomorrow in the Convention Centre, Voisine had a taste of how he'd do in America while he was making *Kissing Rain* in Los Angeles last year. Luckily for Roch, one of the morning anchormen on KTLA TV happened to be Canadian.

"It's amazing what they did," Voisine says. "People had no clue. They were showing clips and this guy was doing this little Roch Voisine corner every day. People probably thought it was an hoax. It went to the point where the owners told the producer that he'd better come up with something good. They pushed it so much.

"The last day, I came in and we made a whole thing of it. I just sat down with Amy Sky (Voisine's backup singer and opening act) and did an acoustic set. People were blown away."

The phones at KTLA "rang off the receiver," Voisine says, and even in a place like L.A., where you can't throw a stale doughnut without hitting a celebrity, the New Brunswick-born star was recognized and accosted on the street - "Hey, you're that guy on the KTLA news show."

Says Voisine, "It's just to show ourselves, hey, if I have half a chance, there's a humongous market out there. All I need is the right song down there and the right team behind me to make it come true."

As *Kissing Rain* came out late last year, Voisine expressed hopes that tastes would swing towards solo male artists. The charts didn't quite turn out that way, riddled with bubblegum like the Spice Girls and Hanson, but "that's closer than rap was to what I do," he points out.

"I think what America needs is somebody who will basically take what country has sort of seeped into, which is pop male image market. What we need is somebody in pop who can do it internationally and rekindle the main pop market. The last guys who really did it were probably George Michael and Michael Bolton in America. And there's nobody new now.

"There's lots of women, but there's no guys. I think we went all the way from rap and house music, and back through the grungiest, heavy bands, like Nirvana and Pearl Jam. It's softening a bit, and it'll probably keep on going until we reach more of a pure pop.

"That would be good for me or anybody that tapped into that market.

"And if we were going towards the heavy metal era, I would say I'll probably take four or five years off, because I'm not going to do that."

Nothing like being in the game for the right reason.

Some tickets remain for Roch Voisine's concert tomorrow night, for \$39.50 through all Ticketmaster outlets (451-8000).

Sunday, January 26, 1997

Voisine TV special may appeal to fans

By **BEN RAYNER**

Ottawa Sun

Sometimes you come across a piece of television so flaccid that it invites nothing more than the laconic commentary "Why bother?"

Viewers, may we present the latest lifeless entrant in this category: Tonight's up-close-and-personal peek at New Brunswick pop star Roch Voisine, the CBC special *Kissing Rain*.

Now, obviously, if you're not a fan of Voisine -- he of the chiselled features, well-moussed coif and dewy-eyed love ballads -- you'll be far better served if you tune into *The Simpsons* and avoid this 60-minute mix of concert and "interview" footage altogether.

If you are an admirer of the man and his music, *Kissing Rain* does offer some slick live takes on six or seven Voisine tunes -- the title track, *With These Eyes* and *St. Annie Of The Wild Blue Eyes*, to name a few -- all rendered with appropriately soulless restraint on a Montreal soundstage that looks like it was pilfered from the set of *MTV Unplugged*.

But I have a hard time imagining even the most ardent fan sitting through the special's interview portions -- conducted with all the wit and vigor of a late-night infomercial pitchman by talk-show host Sonia Benezra on the streets of Voisine's adopted home town of Los Angeles.

With unbearable unction, Benezra coaxes a steady stream of *Seventeen* magazine-grade fodder from the handsomely stubbled singer (who, to his credit, doesn't always seem entirely comfortable being on the receiving end of her inanities) and emotes painfully along with him as he sings and strums an acoustic guitar in his massive ski chalet of a home.

Here are some of the more earth-shaking revelations you'll encounter: Mother Voisine is "a great, cool chick." Roch has a special someone in his life, but he doesn't feel ready to put his career on the back burner to make a marriage work just yet. He has a dove

named Powder, respects his fans and recently snared a hole-in-one on a California golf course.

There. Do yourself a favor and flee into the kitchen between numbers.

SUN RATING: 2 OUT OF 5

December 26, 1996

Voisine proud of Roch-solid CD

By TIM GALLAGHER
Calgary Sun

Canadian Roch Voisine, dubbed a pop heart-throb by some, has switched gears for his latest CD, *Kissing Rain*.

According to Voisine, the album is less country-tinged and has more of a pop feel to it. He also thinks everything about the album is better than anything he has done in the past.

"It isn't drastically different, but it's better produced than the other albums," he says. "I hooked up with excellent writers. I just think there is better singing and better songs and there is a touch of R&B to it. It's quite interesting actually."

As on other albums, Voisine records both English and French versions of his songs. The new song *Chaque Jour De Ta Vie* features both languages and is co-written with '80s pop star Richard Marx.

"We did an English version and then the bilingual version and, after we finished mixing it, I preferred the bilingual one," he says.

"A lot of people really like songs with both English and French. It's a very powerful song."

For the last two years, the 33-year-old singer/songwriter has been living in Los Angeles because he felt he needed to be at the centre of show

business.

"It's a great place to work. Besides, the weather is great and the golfing is great, although I'm not sure I'd live there if it wasn't for work," says Voisine, who was formerly based in Quebec where he is a superstar.

December 21, 1996

Roch Voisine hopes new CD finally gets him noticed in U.S.

By **JANE STEVENSON**

Toronto Sun

Montreal singer Roch Voisine says in no way is he trying to follow in fellow Canadian Alanis Morissette's well-heeled footsteps.

Even though for his second English language album, the recently released *Kissing Rain*, Voisine decided to relocate to Los Angeles last year, where he rented a house in Beverly Hills and worked with different songwriters.

"It was extremely fruitful -- we ended up writing 52 songs in six months," says the model-like Voisine, relaxing his 6-foot-plus frame in a couch at the Four Seasons Hotel recently. "That's a lot of songs. I just went down there -- I had no expectations, I had absolutely no idea of what was going to happen. So I was pretty open about it and pretty loose, and I sat down and it just (he snaps his fingers) clicked so fast with everybody."

The same thing, more or less, happened to Morissette -- and look what happened to her. She now has no plans to move back to Canada after her fortuitous meeting with Jagged Little Pill producer-songwriting partner Glen Ballard.

"I don't pretend I will sell 12 million records (now over 15 million) in America like Alanis did," says

Voisine, who plans to tour Canada before the summer.

"That's sort of a one-in-a-lifetime-in-a-generation sort of thing. But I would certainly -- if I had any amount of success down there -- spend more time down there. But we'll see.

"I'm not pretentious. I don't go down there (thinking) if Celine and Alanis can do it, I will. Sorry, that's not the way it works. I would love to succeed in the States, but if this album doesn't make it, it's not over. I'm going to make more albums. I'm a singer-songwriter; I'll do that for the rest of my life."

Voisine, after all, is a proven commodity. He's sold over five million albums worldwide since 1989, after French Canada and Europe wholeheartedly embraced him. Which is why he bristles at the suggestion that he may still have anything left to prove in English Canada.

"I didn't put out any serious English albums before (1993's independently-made) I'll Always Be There. But we sold half a million records in Canada. English Canadian press is somehow reluctant to admit that."

Voisine also raised his profile with a stint hosting the 1994 Junos in Toronto, although he now says it wasn't an experience he entirely enjoyed.

"I was terrified. I lost 15 pounds. It's not really my cup of tea. I probably don't have much of an opinion of myself as somebody standing in front of millions of people and talking. It was an awkward feeling.

"I mean, you're hosting the Juno Awards but nobody knows you. They did, but I felt awkward. What are they going to say? They're probably all saying, 'What the hell is he doing there?' "

Hopefully, their opinions will have changed by now. Kissing Rain is currently in the Top 20 on the Canadian album charts, even if the title track isn't exactly racing up the singles charts. It sits at No. 68.

Meanwhile, the Kissing Rain video got airplay on the country music video channel, CMT, instead of MuchMusic.

"I've always had that folky-sometimes-country undertone to my music," says Voisine. "This album, I would say, is not as country as some of the tracks on the previous album. If there's anything organic about it, I'm using acoustic guitars a lot, but more in a folk-rock way than country.

"I'm still walking the line though. This whole album could have been produced in country just because of the melodies in the songs. But no, I went down to L.A. to get a little more pop than usual."

December 7, 1996

Voisine's not so clean

By MIKE ROSS

Edmonton Sun

Lurking beneath the quiet, well-mannered persona of Roch Voisine is a rock 'n' roll star crying to get out.

"Secretly, I wish I was Bryan Adams," the Quebec singing sensation revealed during an interview at the Hotel Macdonald yesterday.

"But I'm not," he added almost ruefully. "Love songs are what I do best."

At least now he knows his strength. While Voisine's 1993 English debut album, I'll Always Be There, was all over the map stylistically (which didn't prevent it from selling 500,000 copies in Canada), his latest, Los Angeles-produced offering, Kissing Rain, focuses on the slick, ballad-laden tradition of male crooners like Michael Bolton, George Michael and Elton John.

Since such solo male artists aren't selling like they used to, Voisine feels he has an opening to ascend into adult contemporary stardom.

PLAYED HOCKEY

Even so, the 33-year-old singer is quick to remind fans he's not necessarily the clean-cut choirboy he seems. He was, after all, being groomed for a career in the NHL before he wrecked his knee - and we all know how hockey players are.

"Remember," he said, rapping the table for emphasis. "Always remember - I'm a hockey player that sings.

"I'm just like any other hockey player. I cuss, I love women, I like to go in the bars. I don't drink that much because I don't like alcohol. But I like to get drunk sometimes with my friends and be obnoxious and loud, and I would probably pick a fight if I wasn't doing the life that I do. I miss the rough game."

Voisine is understandably concerned about his image. Rumors that he's gay have been swirling around - something that might, not that it should matter, jeopardize his massive popularity among women.

He says the media have been particularly hard on him.

"Because I was so clean, because they couldn't say anything of the way I looked, the way I sang, the way I wrote, the way I produced and they didn't know anything about my private life, they started digging. They've matched me with guys, they matched me with married women ... the only thing they haven't matched me with right now is probably animals and kids. It's pretty bad.

"As soon as they have one little thing, they blow it out of proportion, because they're uncomfortable with the fact that I'm so damn clean. I don't know why it bothers people."

The reason Voisine is so cagey about his personal life isn't out of concern for himself, but for his friends and family. He can protect himself against rampant gossip and intense media scrutiny - "I'm not indestructible, but close." The people close to him can't.

"People got an idea of who my girlfriend was," he recalled, "and all of the sudden she had maniacs sending letters, asking weird things, knocking on her door, following her home ...

"You can't sell millions of records and have that kind of influence and impression on people without attracting dangerous people. It takes one fan of John Lennon. It's not the government who got him; J. Edgar Hoover wanted to kick him out of the country. It took one poor schmuck walking down the street, waiting for him and shooting him.

SELLING WELL

"That's what's dangerous. That's what we, as public figures, have to be careful about. I don't talk about my private life too much - that's why.

"Any public figure, especially in show business, has to save himself. Most of the people that actually open their doors that wide, it's because they're at the end of their rope and have nothing else to sell - so they sell their lives."

Voisine does have something to sell. *Kissing Rain* has been out for only two weeks and it's already threatening to crack double platinum in Canada (200,000 copies sold). After successfully conquering English Canada, he has his sights set on the last huge stronghold: the U.S. market.

And if he thinks the media are nasty in Europe and Canada, wait until the Americans get hold of him.

December 3, 1996

Voisine ready to take Dion's superstar path

TORONTO (CP) -- When Roch Voisine released *I'll Always Be There* in 1993, he had his sights set on cracking the English-language market.

He did, selling 500,000 albums in Canada.

With his new recording, the ballad-heavy *Kissing Rain*, Voisine believes he's now positioned for another breakthrough, this time south of the border.

"They are running short of male singers in the States right now. There's noooooobody," said Voisine, 33.

Five years ago *Billboard* magazine picked Voisine and fellow Quebecer Celine Dion as the two great Canadian pop hopes.

The music industry bible recently rendered its verdict.

Dion has "crossed that elusive line into superstar status around much of the world." There was no mention of Voisine, who has built a following in Europe but has never had an album released in the U.S.

Last year he signed with BMG to distribute his music worldwide, though a U.S. release date is still up in the air.

Dion's career explosion, cultivated over years, hit in part because she filled a vacuum with this year's *Falling Into You*, said Voisine in a posh downtown hotel restaurant.

"Who else is there with those power-house vocals?" he asked, clad in rock-star black, two fleur-de-lis subtly stitched into the thighs of his smooth black leather pants.

"Mariah Carey is getting booted out of the business, nobody wants to hear her anymore. We saw that at the Grammy's," he says of the diva's shutout earlier this year.

"Whitney's (Houston) an actress now. Celine was right there waiting for her time and all of a sudden they all cleared the stage and she walked right on and took the whole place."

Similarly, Voisine sees a silver lining in the drought of male singers on U.S. and Canadian music charts.

Indeed, only 10 albums in Billboard's Top 100 for the week ending Dec. 7 are recordings by male solo singers, not including country or rap artists.

Billboard's Chuck Taylor, who recently chronicled Dion's phenomenal progress, says Voisine makes a valid point.

"Right now in the U.S., all of the '80s mainstays in terms of male solo artists, your Billy Joels, your Rod Stewarts, your Michael Boltons, have fallen from favor," he said Tuesday from New York.

"This is just a very barren time for male solo artists and if he has the right sound -- I know he certainly has the look and image -- if he can pull it all together with the right song then he should have a good shot."

Particularly since the pendulum is shifting back to pop music on radio, underscored by Dion's phenomenal rise to the top, Taylor added.

Nor will Dion's superstar status hurt a fellow Quebecer, though Voisine was born in New Brunswick. He now divides his time between Montreal and Los Angeles when he's not on tour.

"They won't say 'where the hell is this guy from, They're used to it now, Celine's walking all over that damn place," said Voisine.

QUOTABLE

Some quotes from Quebec pop star Roch Voisine:

On rumors about his private life, particularly in Quebec -- "It got pretty stupid at one point. That's why if it was going to go (on) like this I was going to move here (Toronto)."

On Canadian content rules -- "You discard your best assets because they're not living in your country anymore."

On an audience wanting to sing only in English -- "I told them 'Stop this nonsense.' I put them back in

their seats and I was very firm that I wasn't here to stir any political bullshit."

On critics -- "Somebody who wanted to go to that concert couldn't because we had to GIVE you the damn ticket for you to come and stab me in the back."

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