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The languages of rock

Roch Voisine finds he must sing in both French and English

GRANT KERR

Telegraph-Journal

It's not easy being a Roch star.

Roch Voisine knows this first hand. Every time the Edmundston native releases a new album, he has to rebuild his career.

It's not that his (mostly female) fans forget about the dashing pop star between albums. Far from it. It's just that Voisine has always had to balance two careers: the one in Quebec and France where he is a superstar and the one in the rest of Canada and the world where he hasn't quite reached that status.

But with a hot new single, *By Myself*, and a forthcoming English language album, the Roch machine is getting geared up to change all that.

"This is long overdue," Voisine said over the phone from his home in Montreal, recently. "It's too long. Way too long."

What's long overdue is an English-language album. The last one he released, not counting a Christmas record he did a couple of years ago, was *Kissing Rain* six years ago. The new one, entitled *Higher*, will hit store shelves on Nov. 5.

Despite his success, Voisine is still looking for that huge hit that will put him over the top on the English pop charts.

Juggling both languages means Voisine's life never lets up. But he wouldn't change anything.

"I am from New Brunswick. I learned to speak English very young, so I can do both languages. It would probably make my life a bit simpler if I did just one language. I could take a couple of years off between records but I can't. This is my 13th record in 14 years."

Could it be? As hard as it is to believe it's true. His rise from unknown to superstar took place in 1989 with the release of *Helene*, the French album that went on to sell three million copies. The title track went on to become a huge hit for the handsome singer as well. Nine albums followed, three of them in English. (Voisine recorded two English-language albums before *Helene*, which have been largely forgotten.)

In all he has sold eight million albums. Not bad for a kid from St-Basile, who relocated to



(FILE)

Roch Voisine plays Fredericton, Saint John, Moncton and Halifax next week.

Montreal with his family at age nine.

The fact he was a bigger star in the French speaking world has had an affect on how he was viewed and even how he performed.

"In French I was a pop idol. In English I had a song that was played at weddings. People remember that years and years after. It did tend to tint performances. Now with time - that was 15 years ago now - it's pretty much the same everywhere."

Voisine sounds bright and chipper, considering the early hour. It's a little after 8 a.m. Montreal time, hours before most rockers see the light of day. But Voisine, 39, is not your typical pop star.

"I am a record producer," Voisine says, cheerfully. "We have to rehearse this morning at nine o'clock and we're finishing the (album) mixes today. We are right in the final crunch for this record."

Not surprisingly, Voisine is pumped about his new music. But based on the strength of *By Myself*, he should be. If the whole CD is as strong as this first single, it should be a killer.

"I think this one should open up a lot of doors. If there is that magic on the record it will open up all the doors in the English market worldwide. But it's not like we're going to war and were going to conquer the world and carry the flag.

"Definitely our goal is to re-establish some of the European market that we have neglected over the last four years."

It also means trying to get a foothold in the lucrative American market, a place he has yet to conquer.

"If I can, I will. I'll try. The American market is important."

Of course, despite the title of his new single, Voisine is no longer, "By Myself." Voisine broke the news recently that he is getting married in December to a woman he met early this past summer.

But don't despair, he'll still croon his greatest hits for all the ladies during his Maritime tour later this month.

However, Voisine is insistent a lot of guys go to his shows, too. And not just the ones who get dragged along by their wives and girlfriends who want to get close to the chiseled hunk.

"We don't do a concert for a female audience. That's why every husband, or boyfriend who comes to our show with their partners, like it. It rocks. We don't only sing for the girls."

Voisine will perform a few of his new tunes but he will perform mostly the hits in an intimate setting that focuses on the music with just Roch, his guitar and a five-piece band.

"Being born in pop you want to do the fire bombs but it's really about music and voices. The vocals will blow your mind. It's really, really good."

And just listen to the way Voisine describes the stripped-down musical format. It will

certainly have the first few rows of fans on the edge of their seats, even though he is only speaking metaphorically.

"I'll go out there a little more naked than usual."

Roch Voisine will tour New Brunswick next week with four concerts slated: Oct. 21, Fredericton Playhouse; Oct. 22, Imperial Theatre, Saint John; Oct. 23, Capitol Theatre, Moncton (two shows). He also plays the Rebecca Cohen Auditorium in Halifax on Oct. 24.

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