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He will Roch you

Montreal's Roch Voisine is bringing a less-is-more approach to his Canadian tour in an attempt to provide a more intimate musical experience

Adrian Chamberlain

Times Colonist

Tuesday, April 15, 2003

ON STAGE

What: Roch Voisine

When: Tonight, 8 p.m.

Where: McPherson Playhouse

Tickets: \$45 (386-6121)



Canadian Press / French-Canadian heart-throb Roch Voisine performs tonight at the McPherson Playhouse. He promises to sing the song he used to propose to his wife. The couple married in December.

In Victoria, Montreal heart-throb Roch Voisine will croon the song he used to propose to his new wife.

He married Myriam St-Jean, a Montreal accounts manager, in December.

The 40-year-old singer-songwriter promises tonight's McPherson Playhouse concert will include Myriam's Song. The tune ends with the words, "Will you be my wife?"

"I was really nervous when I sang it to her," said Voisine. "Let's put it this way. It was the most wonderful and toughest gig that I've ever done in my life."

If there are any lingering rumours of the singer's sexual orientation, one would think marriage and an ultra-hetero ditty might dispel them. For a decade there were whispers that the handsome Voisine -

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- he of the high cheekbones and matinee idol chin -- was gay. One of the most outrageous fabrications paired him off in a romantic relationship with former Montreal Canadiens right-winger Stephane Richer.

Such talk never really goes away, said Voisine. Two-and-half years ago, after steadfastly refusing to comment on his sexuality for years, he told the National Post he is straight.

"I don't really give a hoot," he told the Times Colonist last week. "I have a beautiful, wonderful wife. And we'll have a great family, kids and dogs and a white picket fence. And the rest of the world, if they want to stick to old wives' tales, they can go to hell."

The singer would much rather talk about his latest pop-rock disc, *Higher*, released on BMG. He says the album, which contains *Myriam's Song*, is a move away from the tear-jerking ballads that made New Brunswick-born Voisine famous in Quebec and the rest of Canada. Songs such as *Higher*, *Don't Give Up* and *Life's a Beach* reflect a conscious effort to write "more positive songs with happy titles."

Adds Voisine: " I was tired of doing just sad songs. At some point, you're gone through your extended teenage crisis long enough and you go, 'OK, I guess I'm just going to grow up now and move on to things that are a little more positive in my life.' "

Getting married influenced on his shift in perspective.

"It does change your life. You can't stand in front of thousands of people every night and sing, 'Boo-hoo-hoo, she left me' every time.

"The reasons I want to do this (career in music) are changing -- what I want to do, what I want to say, how I want to do it, how far and how much I want to put into this," said Voisine. "All of that does change a lot. It's in constant evolution. My work used to be my life, now there's a world out there and there's family."

Although the singer has no announcements to make, he says he and his new bride definitely plan to have children.

Voisine -- who divides his time between homes in Montreal and London -- had early ambitions to be a professional hockey player and a physiotherapist before he hit the big time with his 1989 album, *H?l?ne*. The title song went No. 1 in France, and the disc sold more than three million copies worldwide. His first English album, *I'll Always be There* (co-written with David Foster in 1994) sold more than a million copies, and won Voisine a Juno Award for best male vocalist that year. To date, he has sold more than eight millions albums worldwide.

For his current tour, Voisine, who's performed for stadium crowds in the past, is playing smaller venues with a five-piece group -- his smallest band ever. It may seem the teeny-bopper audience that once screamed at his concerts has ebbed, but the less-is-more move is being touted as a deliberate attempt to provide a more intimate musical experience. Voisine will play tunes from his new album as well as sampling songs from his entire career.

As for those old rumours, well, the singer concedes he may have fostered speculation by refusing to deny them. It's what his management at the time advised him to do.


"I played the game, and I got hurt. I paid the price, and I am still paying the price," said Voisine.

"But no one should be judged by the colour of their skin, their sexual orientation, political views, talents, ability to do or not do certain sports, intelligence or anything like that."

Interview with Roch Voisine.

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