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**Roch pleases light rock crowd**

Now-married handsome singer still delivers for fans

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Times Colonist

*Thursday, April 17, 2003*

For his fans -- such as the two women who stood waving their upheld arms gently -- it was likely Roch Voisine's first encore that yanked the heartstrings most tightly.

**Roch Voisine: Pleasing fans**

The offering was his monster hit *H?l?ne*, sung mostly in French, with the English refrain, "H?l?ne, things you do, make me crazy about you." Voisine -- dressed plainly in matching black T-shirt and trousers -- played it solo, cradling his acoustic guitar like a baby. Tuesday's McPherson Playhouse crowd, mostly aged between 30 and 50, loved it *tr?s bien*.

Sometimes Voisine sounds like one of the TV ads for adult contemporary radio stations.

He can replicate the vocal cadences of Elton John, Murray McLauchlan and James Taylor (he played a pretty version of Taylor's somewhat obscure *Frozen Man*.)

Whether Voisine has forged a distinctive style of his own -- vocally or instrumentally -- is a matter of debate.

On the other hand, who can resist a movie-star handsome guy singing do-or-die ballads about ocean-deep love?

To cap his 100-minute show, Voisine dealt out another couple of bodice-rippers: *Deliver Me* (it's 2 a.m. and I'm still awake, etc.) and *I'll Always be There* ("Just how much I care/You don't know"), which boasts tremulous, heart-throbbing verses and a bombastic big-chorus finish.

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One suspects this is the kind of ?nale Voisine has been dispensing for years. But look closer and there are a few changes afoot.

For one thing, Roch is a married man now.

He's still a heart-throb, but he's a mature heart-throb. And so (?ttingly for an artist who, lyrically, conveys his feelings in a very literal manner) he sang Myriam's Song -- the tune he used to propose to his wife in real life. The audience loved this, too. And it was moving, sung almost a cappella with choir-like harmonies.

For this tour, the no-longer-single, 40ish Roch has dispensed with the huge splashy bands and ?ashy light shows of yore.

His expert four-piece combo -- guitarists (one wearing a kilt!), a keyboardist and a percussionist -- is standard by rock standards, but boldly pared down by Roch standards.

It is true the music sometimes had a dated circa 1980s feel, as though Voisine's CD collection contains too many discs by Tom Cochrane and Phil Collins. On the plus side, the ensemble's crystalline, Eagles-like vocal harmonies are nearly impossible to resist.

Plus, these guys can really play.

The evening commenced with By Myself. The tune, from his new album, Higher, is pleasant, albeit unremarkable, with Roch's high tenor calling to mind Neil "Crowded House" Finn.

Other tunes from the disc, including the title song, Don't Give Up, and Virtual Cowboys, were performed; however, Voisine was careful to give his admirers the career-spanning retrospective they wanted.

Lyrically, Voisine says he's now making a conscious move to shift away from the anguished love balladry that is his trademark. Perhaps it's a nod to early middle age. Certainly, such transitions are never easy.

His latest recording gives little evidence of a bold new direction. On the other hand, at least as far as retaining a fan base, it's probably true Voisine has little need to explore radically different terrain.

In concert, he displays a canny knack for covering all bases -- playing what a cynic might dub "pop-rock for your mom." His songs range from medium rock to folk-pop to French-pop with even the odd country song tossed in.

He has a talent for sounding like a mix of every artist played on adult contemporary radio, with a hint of European exoticism sprinkled in.

It seems he's giving the people what they want.

It also appears, at least at this crossroads in his career, that Voisine remains a craftsman rather than an artiste.