

MODERN

Josh Groban – crooner 3.0

The telephone rings. We hear a pleasant “Hi this is Josh!” The voice of the *Hear The World* ambassador seems relaxed. Is that really the same voice we can hear on his albums? That classically trained voice with which he has hitherto sold way over 25 million CDs? Now that’s hard to believe. His fifth album, *Illuminations*, has just been released. What is remarkable about it, on the one hand, is that for the first time he has written almost all the songs, and on the other, his collaboration with legendary producer Rick Rubin. Rubin was responsible for Johnny Cash’s comeback in 1994 and has produced several heavy metal bands. Josh Groban and Rick Rubin – what a team!

Josh Groban already has an impressive career behind him. He was 17 when he performed for the first time – alongside Céline Dion, filling in for sick Andrea Bocelli. Not a bad start for a teenager. More prestigious gigs alongside big stars followed, as did numerous charity events. He soon became known to a wider public, primarily in the USA. Now Josh Groban has set about conquering the rest of the world. With *Illuminations*, he might well succeed.

The album features, among other tracks, three cover versions that Groban picked out together with Rubin, namely, a song by Nick Cave, one by Rufus Wainwright and the wonderful *Galileo* by Irish singer Declan O’Rourke. It was O’Rourke’s voice which fascinated both of them, and the song of course, about the uncertainties of love, seen through the eyes of the rationalist and scientist Galileo Galilei. I found the choice of the Cave song particularly surprising. Now, Josh Groban is a big fan of Nick Cave. Which is also surprising in a way, if we listen to what he has done so far. So how do they fit together, Cave and Groban?

First up: It’s a great fit! Although the song produced is not brand new, Groban’s voice is sufficient to lend the song its typical operatic character. Rubin’s production and the orchestration also add to the whole. Opulence is nothing extraordinary for Groban and is evident on his previous albums. What is new is that he has clearly taken a larger role in his new album. We can see this in his choice of producer and selection of cover songs. The 29-year-old singer is following an interesting path.

It is clear that there is more to Josh Groban than the gentle crooner who brings tears to the eyes of soccer moms. We wait with bated breath – for Josh Groban, crooner 3.0.

Matthias Westerweller

Photo: Bryan Adams



Interview with Josh Groban

What was it like shooting with Bryan Adams?

It was a wonderful session and the photos were beautiful. I was very happy to be part of it. My fans' favourite photo is that photo. It's a great photo (see page 57).

Why did you choose to support *Hear the World* by posing for an image by Bryan Adams?

It's a wonderful organisation. You're saving a lot of ears. Keep up the great work!

Why is the ability to hear well so important to you?

My hearing is extraordinary important to me. My ears are my life. I value my good ear for everything that I have in this music business.

Do you have any personal experience with hearing loss?

Not in my family. And not among my immediate friends. But I do know a lot of rockers and I know a lot of people who have been around before the in-ear monitors were available. And those folks didn't have the benefit of having a way to protect their hearing on stage. They just kept cranking the monitors louder and louder and louder and louder. And now you don't want to be on stage with them during a soundcheck as they crank up the volume so much.

Do you worry when you see how young people treat their hearing today?

I do. I also think that young people at least in the performing world are conscious of it. A lot of them are wearing in-ears or ear plugs now. It's important that young people pay attention to it.

Do you think hearing devices could ever be "cool"?

Well, you say to yourself you don't want to wear that before you're 80 years old: Start now, turn down the volume! Of course hearing "turn down the volume" from Josh Groban probably isn't the most inspiring thing. Get Axl Rose to say turn down the volume. My volume's already low.

What sounds do you love?

I love the sounds that my dog makes when he's dreaming. He's a very active dreamer and kind of doing these half-barks. I can hear them all the way across the house and I know that he's dreaming because I can hear these little barks. That's a real favourite noise of mine.

What sounds do you hate?

When I'm on the sidewalk and a group of 20 speed bikers like those Kawasaki Ninja guys all zoom by you at the same time. I find that noise pretty annoying.

Do you protect your hearing?

I do. I'm very careful about everything from volume to making sure that my in-ear monitors are sealed properly. Sometimes you get 50,000 high-pitched screams that can do it – there are a lot of loud decibels when you are on tour. When I play drums I never do it without ear plugs. I get my hearing checked regularly.

“MY EARS ARE MY LIFE. I VALUE MY GOOD EAR FOR EVERYTHING THAT I HAVE IN THIS MUSIC BUSINESS.”