

# ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

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## STRIKE A MATCH FOR THOMAS' SOLO ACT

Kevin C. Johnson, Pop Music Critic of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch  
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Group lead singers who burst out with stabs at solo careers have met with varying degrees of success the last several years, from the staggering heights of Beyoncé and Justin Timberlake to the flops that Nick Carter and Nick Lachey offered.

Rob Thomas, lead singer of matchbox twenty, is the latest to try his hand at it, and the deck is stacked in his favor. Matchbox twenty racked up big numbers on the sales charts, despite a hugely blandish sound. Santana's "Supernatural" comeback was fueled by the success of "Smooth," the Grammy-winning song featuring Thomas. And the top 10 success of Thomas' solo single "Lonely No More" from the ". . . Something to Be" CD bodes well for him.

Thomas' new tour, which came to the renovated **Roberts Orpheum** Theater Friday night, looked like further proof Thomas will succeed as a solo star.

Though not as magnetic as say, Timberlake, Thomas is personable and real as a frontman, something matchbox twenty fans already know. And he was aided by his new material, which is more colorfully layered than matchbox twenty songs.

It's risky revolving a show around a majority of new tunes fans have had only a few days to get used to, but songs such as "I Am An Illusion," "Problem Girl," and "This is How a Heart Breaks" speak for themselves as colorful pop-rock future hits. Only a couple of songs, "Fallin' to Pieces" and "Ever the Same," failed to come off as textured as they do on the new CD.

Thomas described a new song, "When the Heartache Ends," as being so personal it almost wasn't included on the CD, and said there was nothing personal at all about "Lonely No More," created "for the purpose of moving your ass."

"Streetcorner Symphony" took an unfortunate detour into Lionel Richie's "Easy." A couple of songs, "Not Just a Woman" and "You Know Me," came from a special disc only available at Target. And Thomas thanked "the good folks at Target" (something he thought he'd never say) for giving his music an additional outlet.

But it wasn't all about the new songs. Thomas knew he had other ground to cover. He gave a slower, jazzier spin to "Smooth," and sat at a stool in front of a set of keyboards for matchbox twenty's "3 A.M.," which he spiced up by interloping it with Steve Miller's "The Joker."

"Push" and "Real World" also came from matchbox twenty's first CD, and he performed them solo on acoustic guitar. But the oldest song of all was a credible cover of Bill Withers' "Ain't No Sunshine."

Thomas, impressed with his surroundings at the recently reopened and renovated **Roberts Orpheum**, told the crowd "this is a beautiful place to come and see a show."

Passionate singer-songwriter Beth Hart opened with her blunt storytelling style and between-song chatter that referred to everything from her psychiatrist to the night she beat up her boyfriend and his girl on the side before burning down his house.

Hart, on acoustic guitar and occasional keyboard and accompanied by a guitarist, performed songs such as "L.A. Song" and "Learning to Live."