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Russian Bard Music, Klezmer, the Passover Seder, Little Odessa in Brighton Beach and Other Jewish Elements/Imagery Infuse Debut CD of Singer-Songwriter Robins

A 'Jewish Kid From the Bronx' Now Lives in Moscow; Music is Reminiscent of Early Shlomo Carlebach

Jewish imagery and musical reference points infuse the debut of singer-songwriter **Gregg Robins**. Instrumentation ranging from klezmer/clarinet to strings, lyrical references to the Passover Seder, a direct and indirect connection to Little Odessa in Brighton Beach, an affinity for Russian Bard Music and more come to life on Robins' critically-acclaimed 'Everything That Matters.'

Robins, a Bronx native now living in Moscow, mines his Russian Jewish roots on two songs in particular, the beautiful track 'Pages of My Life' (presented in both English and Russian-language versions on the new CD,) and the lush standout 'If I Could Be There'. Many have said the music is reminiscent of early **Shlomo Carlebach**.

On 'Pages of My Life', Robins pays homage to his grandfather (who was from Odessa in Ukraine,) and makes lyrical reference to the Passover Seder in a song that has a distinctly Eastern European Jewish texture (highlighted by its string section). Robins notes that 'Pages' was "*written when I became very aware of the extent to which loved ones were leaving my life and that generations were changing. The structure of the song derives from Russian "Bard" music and oscillates between reality and fantasy.*" As mentioned above, there is a Russian-language version of the song on the album, and its flavor and feel are distinct from the original English version. Robins, who considers musician **Alexander Rozenbaum** to be one of his Russian Bard influences, feels the Odessa lineage extends from recollections of his grandfather to his current life in Moscow to New York's Russian Jewish community in Little Odessa/Brighton Beach, Brooklyn. On 'If I Could Be There,' clarinets and violins evoke klezmer music, as Robins delivers a winning track about being half a world away from a loved one.

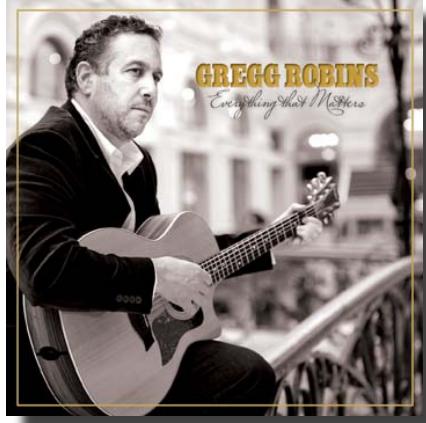
Robins, who is fluent in Russian, Spanish, and French, and also speaks a bit of German, was Bar Mitzvah in the Bronx (and even played clarinet with the band at his celebration party). Prior to his move to Moscow, Robins recalls, *"I was a Trustee on the board of the Pleasantville Community Synagogue for several years. I was initially drawn to the synagogue by its rich and warm musical atmosphere. Sometimes I would play my clarinet with Rabbi Mark Sameth on the piano and others during certain services, like during Simchah Torah when we would play klezmer music as congregants joyfully danced through the aisles with the torah. The Rabbi is a former professional songwriter and a fine musician."*

More about the new album, in notes by Gregg Robins:

"I'm drawing on a range of musical styles and influences from classical to jazz, and Russian and American folk-rock, with songs that range from ballads to sing-out-loud, clap-along tunes. While the songs vary musically, for me the common thread is the lyrics that I try to make honest, forthright, and hopeful."

"I began as a classical clarinetist, performing a broad classical repertoire at an early age. As a teenager, I added alto saxophone and ventured beyond the classical stage into jazz improvisation, a passion extended more recently to klezmer, which harks back to my East European roots. My roots have led me to spend decades traveling in and working with Russia. I am a native of the Bronx, New York, who has traveled a journey from high school dropout to Oxford Phd."

With plain-spoken, emotive lyrics and unexpected instrumentation, Robins has crafted a heartfelt debut CD dedicated to his three daughters. He builds engaging songs that are direct and conversational in tone, many driven by the pain of a broken marriage, the estrangement from and ultimate reconciliation with his daughters, and the hope of finding new love. Robins' understated delivery is often juxtaposed by lush instrumentation, ranging from strings to klezmer-infused solos to songs that suggest a Native American rhythmic undertone, and more. Visit www.greggrobins.com for audio samples and additional information.



There's an emotional integrity to the music that is reflective of the subject matter. Early reviews have praised the CD as evoking the music of **Cat Stevens**, and as "*an album with a musical underpinning that keeps providing these small bursts of sunlight and surprise. Taken*

together, they make this one of the most uncommon of delights — an exploration amongst very familiar landmarks that somehow feels brand new.”

Listen to Robins discussing the evolution of the CD, via this expansive podcast: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZDgWTc58Rjc>



SOMETHING ELSE REVIEWS

By Nick DeRiso 10/19/11

<http://somethingelsereviews.com/2011/10/19/egg-robins-everything-that-matters-2011/>

Gregg Robins' debut album, and this is quite a feat, speaks to the idea of loss — loss of family, loss of country — without ever descending into a shivery gloaming.

A Bronx transplant living in Russia, he was separated not just from his home but also from his children after suffering through a broken marriage, and that space between Robins and everything he so desperately loves couldn't, at times, be any wider on the appropriately titled *Everything That Matters*.

Yet, the album's intriguing instrumentation, and Robins' dogged determination to find purchase in this new and uncertain world, keeps the project aloft. For all that he seems to have lost at first, there is something gained for Robins through the telling — and, through sheer force of will, it seems, things begin to turn for him.

Like most singer-songwriter projects, this is, on its face, an autobiographical, deeply personal journey. But, along the way, *Everything That Matters* transforms into something more universal, beginning with the way Robins transforms the album's base of stark acoustic instrumentation — so reflective of the hard truths associated with divorce — with these richly expressive local textures. At times, you hear something in his soloing approaching klezmer; at others, there's an angular Eastern European feel to the strings, as well.

By the time this trip is concluded, Robins has done much to reconcile things. There is a touching, ex-pat sentiment to tracks like "Morning In America" and "Heroes," but at the same time Robins slips into an unmannered, folksy Russian dialect for the tune "Pages of My Life." He moves from a desolate loneliness in his family life ("Sounds of the Day," "So Many Ways" and, in particular, the shattering "Memories & Yesterdays") toward the hill-topping vistas of "Just What I Needed" and the title track — songs that provide a detailed roadmap as Robins rediscovers love and ultimately reconnects with his long-lost daughters.

There arrives this particular resonance. For all of its specificity, *Everything That Matters* ends up dealing with some very universal things, delving into meaningful thoughts on loss and on what's important. Just as particularly, Robins has crafted an album with a musical underpinning that keeps providing these small bursts of sunlight and surprise. Taken together, they make this one of the most uncommon of delights — an exploration amongst very familiar landmarks that somehow feels brand new. *Everything That Matters*, a crisp, spacious sounding set scheduled to be issued Oct. 25, was mixed by Yvan Bing, who has worked with Phil Collins. The record was mastered by Greg Calbi, who did similar work for Bruce Springsteen's *Born to Run* and Paul Simon's *Graceland*. David Hadzis was producer, along with Robins.



Robins was recently interviewed by THE MOSCOW TIMES:
The Moscow Times 12/2/11, BY Alli Rath

Gregg Robins is an American expat living in Moscow...Robins grew up in the Bronx, New York, and eventually found his way to Oxford University where he earned a doctorate in management and a masters of philosophy in East European studies. Robins, a classically

trained clarinet player turned singer-songwriter, recently released an album entitled "Everything That Matters." Part of the proceeds from this album will be donated to HonorVet, an organization that provides support for past and present U.S. soldiers. Robins spoke with The Moscow Times about his experience with charity work and what makes this cause so special for him.

Q: What is the first charity you gave money to?

A: Growing up in a modest middle-class family in the Bronx, New York, I do not recall giving money to charities in my youth, though as I got older and began to make my own living, I certainly did. Over the years, I also learned that giving one's time can be as valuable as giving one's money. One example, when I was turning 20 I was in India and spent my Christmas Day serving lunch to the people at Mother Theresa's Home for the Destitute and Dying. I also made a cash donation to them, but the time spent and interaction there was most meaningful. Another example is the hours and hours of volunteer work I did over a number of years as the treasurer and also president of my synagogue in New York.

Q: Did you volunteer as a teenager back home?

A: Not as a teenager, but in my early college years I did so with pleasure. One experience I remember in particular was reading books to make tape recordings for the blind. My grandmother suffered from deteriorating vision, and this was a cause close to my heart.

Q: Which charity is closest to your heart?

A: Supporting our troops returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. I am a singer-songwriter, and using my song, "Heroes," I have teamed up with the organization HonorVet to raise awareness and funds for returning soldiers. What is often not understood is that for many soldiers, the return home is more difficult than the time they spend serving overseas. HonorVet is an organization that provides them with resources, support and a community.

Q: Does it feel strange to be supporting an American charity while living in Russia?

A: Not at all. I think the cause of honoring our soldiers who return from battle is a universal one, and that everyone should be aware of the tremendous challenges they encounter.

Q: What is the biggest difference between charity-giving in America and in Russia?

A: Charitable giving has long been a part of American culture. What's more, it is institutionalized through the Tax Code and charitable deductions. In Russia, charitable giving is at a much earlier stage, though it is clearly developing quite rapidly through a variety of activities and causes.

Q: What other charities are you involved in?

A: I have been involved with the Rotary organization, which channels funds to various charities. In fact, I myself benefited from a Rotary scholarship as a student, and over the years I have been a speaker for Rotary club events in a number of different countries. I have also supported both cancer research and diabetes research. Diabetes is a major health problem and one that has greatly affected my own family, as my late father suffered from it. So, it is a very personal cause for me.

Q: Do you give money to panhandlers you see on the street?

A: Yes. It is hard to imagine not doing this. But apart from money, I have always made an effort to offer food and meals where possible. I see this as a more direct way to provide support than by giving money, and perhaps stems from the fact that I was partially raised by my Depression-era Jewish grandparents: For them, wasting food was a sin and sharing it a blessing.



THE RECORD-JOURNAL

By Jim Pasinski, 10/20/11

<http://jpsmusicblog.blogspot.com/2011/10/cd-review-gregg-robins-gives-us.html>

CD Review: Gregg Robins Gives Us "Everything That Matters"

Classical trained musician, Gregg Robins is releasing his debut album "Everything That Matters" on October 25. Robins started out as a classical clarinetist, he then moved on to alto saxophone. His passion now lies in American folk music, which is showcased on his new album as he tells of his journey of human emotions and experiences.

The gentleness of his sound is noticed right from the beginning with the opening song "Sounds Of The Day." His song-writing style draws similarities to Cat Stevens, where each artist would only use the minimal instrumentation to convey the song's meaning. Robins' song "Heroes" tells the story of soldiers returning home. He does it masterfully and with such heart and passion, which is hard to capture in song. Robins' songwriting rarely strays from the mellow acoustic background that only enhances his vocals on the songs "Pages Of My Life" and "If I Could Be There." Robins' does plug-in for a couple

songs, the up-tempo rocker "Walk Away" and the patriotic "Morning In America." But, his strength lies in his folk-style storytelling as in "Just What I Needed" and "Angel."

Listen to Robins' recent interview with radio host Aaron Myers in Washington, D.C.: <http://greggrobins.com/news/audio-interview/>

During Thanksgiving week, Robins released the following video for his song 'Heroes,' referenced in the Moscow Times Q&A, above. The video draws attention to the challenges faced by soldiers returning home, and aims to raise awareness and drive funds to the non-profit organization HonorVet: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZqhLPfFzNQ>. Robins' "Helping our Heroes at Home" initiative donates 100% of the proceeds from sales/downloads of the song 'Heroes' to HonorVet. The song, which was written on the eve of Robins' visit to the Landstuhl Medical facility in Germany, may be purchased here: <http://greggrobins.com/heroes/>

The Production Team for the album includes: **David Hadzis** of Arthanor is the Producer, with Gregg Robins as co-Producer. Since the mid-80's, Hadzis has been involved in the production of over one hundred record releases in Europe, the U.S., Canada and Australia. **Yvan Bing** of Kitchen Studio is the Mixing Engineer. He studied audio engineering at Berklee Music College in New York and was the main engineer at Dinemec Studios in Geneva. He has worked with **Phil Collins**, including on his last album. **Greg Calbi** of Sterling Sound is the Mastering Engineer. He has mastered at the highest level for decades, including **Bruce Springsteen's** "Born to Run" and **Paul Simon's** "Graceland."

For more information about Gregg Robins, to set an interview, or for a review copy of his debut CD, contact sethcohenpr@earthlink.net.