

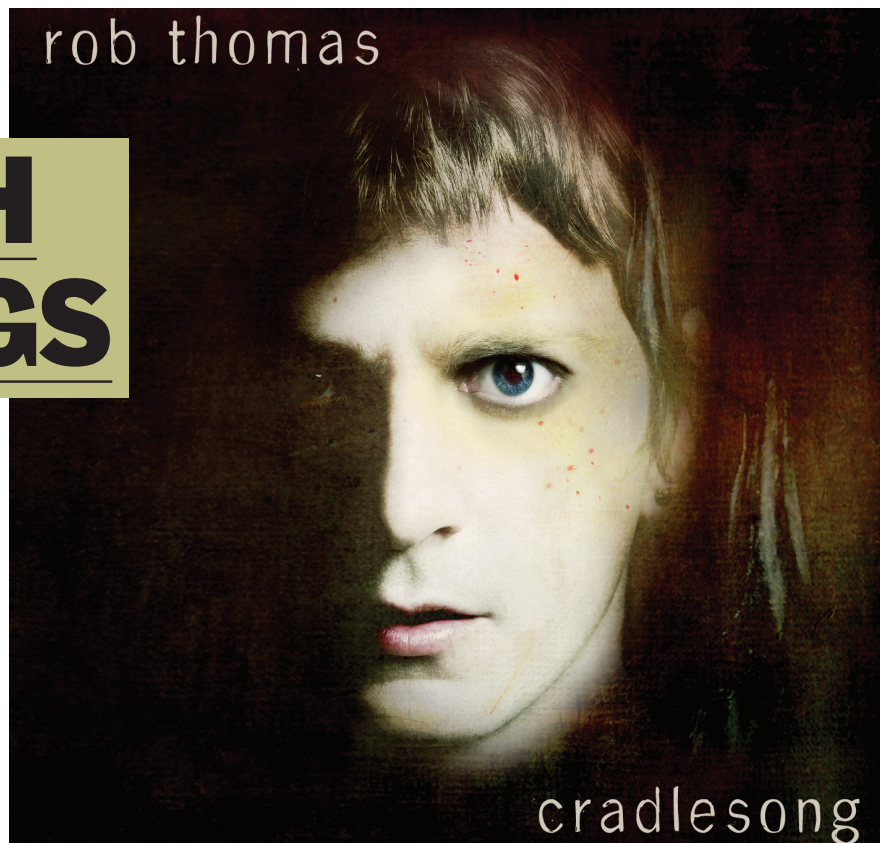


rob thomas

## SMOOTH STYLINGS

Whether Rob Thomas is performing with his band, with famous collaborators, or by himself, his distinctive sound makes him a multiplatinum success.

By Kevin Raub



**ROB THOMAS** the man has remained shockingly under the radar since he broke onto the music scene more than a decade ago. But Rob Thomas the voice is unknown by no one. The former front man of hugely successful band Matchbox Twenty, Santana collaborator (who could forget their Grammy-winning duet, "Smooth"?), and now solo artist has commanded hit after hit and has contributed to the sale of 80 million records — all thanks to his distinctive voice.

On his second solo album, *Cradlesong* (Emblem/Atlantic, \$19), Thomas has greased the wheels of the hit machine again. We spoke with him about his latest effort and his guilty-pleasure appeal.

**HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE STATE OF MUSIC DURING THIS RECESSION?** Not to sound glib, but it feels like the music-industry recession started about six years ago. Last year, there was this report that said the only industry that didn't tank was the concert industry. People want a little escapism — movies, concerts. At the end of the day, if it were just me in a recession, I'd be upset. But it's across the board. Everybody except for Kanye West. Kanye West is not in a recession.

**ISN'T IT ILLEGAL FOR AN ARTIST TO WRITE A SECOND SONG WITH THE SAME TITLE AS A PREVIOUS SONG, AS YOU'VE NOW DONE WITH "REAL WORLD"?** It is *not*. And I didn't! The new song is called "Real World '09," which is very different from "Real World"! Originally, when I wrote it, I was going to call it "Welcome to the Real World," but then I thought it would just look like I was pretending I didn't write a song called "Real World" on my first record. So I figured the best thing to do was look it straight in the eye and just call it "Real World '09," as if it's the new version.

**THE THEME OF THE ALBUM SEEMS TO BE TROUBLED RELATIONSHIPS. HOW'S THE MARRIAGE GOING?** The marriage is going fine. We're pretty self-actualized because of all this stuff! I think most people in relationships have these horrible fights and blowups. If you're a good couple, you move on and evolve from that moment. But as a writer, your job is to stay in that moment a little bit longer and think about what would have happened if life had turned out differently from that moment on.

**MANY PEOPLE CONSIDER YOU A GUILTY PLEASURE. WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THAT?** That's definitely some sort of a slam for someone to say you are a guilty pleasure. My guilty pleasures are the things that give me exactly what they promised me — but they promised me absolutely nothing, and I appreciate it. I guess it depends. [Matchbox Twenty] has always been in the middle of the road. If you're Britney Spears, then the music I make is Soundgarden. But if you're Soundgarden, we're Britney Spears.

**YOU'VE MANAGED TO MAINTAIN A CERTAIN LEVEL OF ANONYMITY NOT USUALLY AFFORDED FOLKS AS SUCCESSFUL AS YOU. IS IT A BLESSING OR A CURSE?** It's a blessing! You have to work at being that person. When I'm in Los Angeles, every restaurant that's worth going to has paparazzi out front. If I lived in L.A., I would probably have a much higher profile. But I live in Westchester, up in horse country. If you don't know who I am but you know my songs and I can sell out Madison Square Garden and the Staples Center *and* I can still go to the grocery store, then I've won.