



STEPHAN MOCCIO

A NEW DAY FOR

*Solo Piano*

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"I want to reinvent the solo piano," says songwriter/pianist Stephan Moccio. "I want people to like it again. A lot of people think solo piano is New Age and cheesy. I want to take them to a different place."

On his new solo record, *Exposure*, Moccio set out with a specific goal: to breathe fresh life into a genre not always known for innovation. "I felt like there hasn't been a great, accessible solo piano record for a long time," he says. "There are a lot of brilliant piano players, but there was a void for making something cinematic and sensual. People were always asking me, 'What's a great chill-out piano record?' And I couldn't think of one! So I shut down everything for a bit to do it and promote it properly."

*Exposure* aside, Moccio is best known as a top songwriter who's worked with such artists as Celine Dion, Josh Groban, and Sarah Brightman. "I've always been very passionate about songwriting," he says. "I graduated from the University of Ontario here in Canada, then got signed as a songwriter with Sony for eight or nine years." Eventually, Moccio found himself collaborating with gui-

tarist Aldo Nova on "A New Day Has Come," Celine Dion's 2002 comeback hit.

"It changed my life," Moccio reflects. "I wasn't necessarily doing anything different—it was just the right song at the right time. Since then, it's been out of control. Basically, I can write with anyone I want to now, based on the success I've had. I'm not necessarily a better songwriter than I was five or six years ago, but because you're associated with big artists, people think you are. It's weird!"

Though he prefers working with collaborators when songwriting, Moccio was invigorated by the solo experience of making *Exposure*. "I really enjoyed the solitude and isolation," he says. "But it was hard—I had to tie my hands and say, 'This is only going to be solo piano.' I couldn't add anything else to color it, and I didn't want to hide behind any technology. Life is so loud right now. There's so much stuff around us! I just knew I had to strip things back to the basics."

Stephan recorded the album in less than four weeks. "It was very refreshing," he says, "because it was a very organic process, as opposed to some of the mas-

sive productions I've done with Celine or Sarah Brightman, with 70- or 80-piece orchestras. There was something very exciting about doing something so basic. Some of the songs were literally one pass as I was writing them—something I'd never do in pop music. But I liked how raw and untainted this was."

Though he's a skilled pianist, Moccio deliberately chose to write in a simple, direct style. "I didn't want to do a virtuosic record," he explains. "I just want to create a mood. I don't buy a piano record to see how brilliantly and fast someone plays—I buy it because of the emotion it conveys, how it touches me. This is a very romantic record, influenced by everything from Philip Glass to Chopin to Nick Drake."

*Exposure* features Moccio's own 7'6" Yamaha C7 Concert Collection Grand Piano. "I love it," he enthuses. "I bought it brand-new in 1999, and I feel like it's been built for me. I've played it every day except when I'm out on tour, and after eight years, it's worked in beautifully. It has a gorgeous, round bottom end. It's well regulated. It just sings beautifully and consistently. Yamahas have a certain

brightness in the high register that I personally love. I favor the action over that of any other piano, and I like the shape of the keys as well."

When he's on tour, Moccio is always relieved to see a Yamaha piano onstage. "They're the most consistent pianos out there, which is hugely appreciated when you're a touring pianist," he says. "I've had disasters with some other name-brand pianos. But if it's a Yamaha, I always know I'll get a good piano."

Whether writing hit songs or performing solo, Moccio remains focused on one thing: musical honesty. "Sometimes," he says, "I get an inspiration and think, 'This would be great for Sarah Brightman or Josh Groban. But I promised myself I would only write for other people if I want to write for them, as opposed to just filling my catalog. My motive has always been to move people, not make money. And I think *Exposure* is the most honest creation I've done. More than any song, more than any massive success, it's the one I believe in the most, because I could see the ideas through."