

# MAGNET

Real Music Alternatives

## Josh Rouse: The American

April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2103



**Josh Rouse** diverts from his extended Spanish holiday with ***The Happiness Waltz***

“I hope it wasn’t too much of a left turn—maybe a bit of a surprise.”

Josh Rouse is trying to convince his interviewer—and perhaps himself—that his 2006 relocation to Spain didn’t completely alienate his American fan base. It hasn’t, really. But he can’t deny that life overseas has done a number on him.

“It’s different—the hours are different,” says Rouse, who was born in Nebraska and bounced around the country as an adolescent and young adult. “I won ‘musician of the year’ in Valencia, so they kind of consider me one

of their own, which is crazy. I did some songs in Spanish, and the press over here didn't like that. All the Spanish artists are singing in English, and they don't sound very good."

A failed first marriage prompted Rouse's move from Nashville to Spain, where a relationship with artist Paz Suay has led to a (mostly) blissful family life in the country's third largest city. "About every week, I get fed up with it and go, 'Pack your fuckin' bags, we're moving back to the States,'" he laughs. "Now, whenever anything goes wrong, I blame it on Spain."

Rouse returned to the U.S. briefly, living in Brooklyn with his wife and embarking an admittedly underwhelming tour behind 2007's *Country Mouse City House*. Then Suay became pregnant with their first child, and access to the in-laws and the prospect of a more stable life lured them back to Spain. Rouse is now the father of two young boys, and his frequent *This Is 40*-style befuddlement laid the thematic groundwork for *The Happiness Waltz* (Yep Roc).

His ninth proper solo album is an overdue return to the tastefully swinging and sophisticated folk/pop that elevated *1972* and *Nashville*, both recorded not long before his Spanish immersion. Producer Brad Jones was the common denominator on those albums, and he returns for *The Happiness Waltz*, which was recorded at Rouse's home studio in Valencia and finished at Jones' Alex The Great Recording in Nashville. "The idea was not to do jazzy, moody songs," says Rouse. "Although it's moody, it's also pretty poppy."

In the purest write-what-you-know fashion, *The Happiness Waltz*'s dozen tracks constitute a thorough mulling of Rouse's domesticated status, and the antsiness, boredom, astonishment and rapture that ensues, often within the span of 24 hours. When he's not making his point in rather obvious ways ("Simple Pleasure," "Our Love," "Start A Family"), Rouse turns coyly impressionistic, as on the immediately memorable "Julie (Come Out Of The Rain)," the subtle and profound "Purple And Beige" and modest, low-mood epic "The Ocean." Largely acoustic-based, but lush nonetheless, the instrumentation and arrangements feel effortless, belying an attention to detail that could've been suffocating—but rarely is. If anything, *The Happiness Waltz*—despite the internal battles waged in its lyrics—is a little too relaxed. It's Middle American daddy angst with a sleepy Spanish pulse. "I'm an only child, so I was used to everything being about me," says Rouse. "Then I had kids, and it wasn't about me anymore—and that's hard. I'm still trying to accept it. But I get better at it every day." —Hobart Rowland