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CULTURE

Sam's sophomore season

ROBERTS TAKES HIS MUSE
AROUND THE WORLD

T'CHA DUNLEVY
GAZETTE MUSIC CRITIC

Sam Roberts sits alone in an empty bar, working on a pint of Guinness. It's not what I expected, but it's quintessential Roberts.

I expected handlers – label reps hovering about as he finished one interview and started the next; I expected time limits, some sort of industry structure.

Instead I find Sam Roberts and a pint of beer: I laugh, order one of what he's having, and settle in.

Roberts is a dude, if not *the* dude. He's a regular guy, with an aura of calm, cool and charisma – aura being the operative word. It's his aura that is most tangible, not its qualifiers. He emanates goodness, knows not of pretension. He has confidence, but seemingly no ego. He just is.

And he is back. Montreal's – Canada's – great rock hope has returned. His new album, *Chemical City* (out Tuesday), finds the artist and his band picking up where they left off, even as they turn the page.

Roberts burst into the national consciousness in 2002 with a little ditty called *Brother Down*. Released on an EP called *The Inhuman Condition*, the song got sent to radio, and radio began to play it. A lot. There were No. 1 hits, and there were Junos.

"I think our rise to prominence in Canada was based on the fact that we were doing something that wasn't being done," Roberts will say, later in our interview.

"The fact that it got on the radio has absolutely nothing to do with me whatsoever. I didn't do it. I didn't even send it out to the radio station. But we're very fortunate to have had that happen, as a band."

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