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## A dark flair for the dramatic

**Koster loves the Kingston music scene despite feeling like an outsider**

BY EMILY WHALEN, CONTRIBUTOR

If you saw Chris Koster's latest album *Sex, Love and Morality* in a record store you probably wouldn't think he was a Kingston musician. On the cover, Koster is clad in a black with a white tie, various instruments in hand. Behind him stands a band composed of sinister-looking wolves in tuxedos. His album cover seems like a very dramatic statement coming from a musician hailing from such a low-key city.

"I love Kingston," Koster said. "A lot of people move because it's tough to get inspired." But a lack of inspiration isn't a problem for Koster. He lives in Kingston and hasn't been tempted to move to a larger, more stimulating urban centre for motivation to write songs. "I wrote about a hundred songs for this album," Koster said.

But he doesn't take complete credit for his prolific songwriting abilities.

"They just have a way of showing themselves," he said. "I don't feel in control. It's a weird mental state, a meditative state. I get deeply engrossed in it." Since he started writing songs at 13 years old, Koster claims to have written some 600-odd songs—an exceptional feat for such a young artist.

But even though Koster has no problem writing songs in Kingston, he doesn't feel like an insider of the town's music scene.

"I feel very detached from the Kingston music scene," he said. "I'm that weird drama kid in class that sticks out." It seems fitting that Koster would refer to himself as "that weird drama kid" because he places a heavy focus on the theatrical with his latest album. A concept album, each song falls under the themes indicated in its title and the tensions these three issues create.

"This [album] is more theatrical—telling a story with a beginning, middle and an end," Koster said.

Koster's first album, *Secrets of Lonely*, was what he calls "a living-room record"—something to be played in the comforts of one's home. But *Sex, Love and Morality* isn't a disc that stays home on a Friday night. It echoes his live shows, which are a more theatrical, operatic rock 'n' roll spectacle comparable to the live shows of Prince and bands such as Nine Inch Nails. But Koster doesn't exactly love these comparisons to other musicians.

"It's a necessary evil," he said of these comparisons to.

"It's a way of explaining something that can't be explained. So I see how it's completely necessary." Koster was able to evoke inspiration from a very original source, however, by making use of a well-known character within children's stories, the wolf. He uses the wolf, an icon, for inspiration and as an alter ego to write songs through.

"The wolf represents a duality—the dark side in everybody," he said. "I adopted that persona—saying and doing things I couldn't get away with."

Koster also received some help from the legendary Canadian music producer Bob Ezrin, best known for his work producing Pink Floyd's *The Wall*. Koster sent Ezrin more than 180 songs; in return, Ezrin sent back notes for each.

"I have no idea who I am. I don't know what kind of artist I am," Koster said.

"He was the first person I let in. Bob was the first person I was able to listen to. This album is the result of him turning the mirror on me." Ezrin also had Koster do some assignments to figure out what kind of artist he was. One of the tasks was for Koster to find the 10 best songs ever written—a daunting task for an artist, who tends to "over-think," as he puts it.

But he ended up coming up with his 10 best. Among them was The Rolling Stones' "Angie," an acoustic guitar-driven ballad that details the end of a romance. Koster ended up recording a cover of the song and Ezrin was eager to send a copy to Mick.

"I asked, 'I assume we're talking about Mick Jagger?' and I said 'Absolutely not,'" Koster recalled.

Koster may not be ready for Mick Jagger to hear his music but he's ready to show Queen's students what he's about. Koster hopes to break into the Queen's bubble even though he jokingly refers to himself as "the token townie." "I've always regretted not being part of the Queen's community. We don't do the Queen's gigs," he said "Queen's is almost a city within a city. There doesn't need to be this divide." Chris Koster's Kingston CD release party will take place tonight at the Ale House. Tickets are \$10 in advance at the Ale House, the Brass Pub, 403 Princess St., Sunrise Records in the Catarauqui Town Centre and Destinations.

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Local rocker Chris Koster releases his new album, *Sex, Love and Morality*, tonight at Ale House. (Supplied)