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# Death-defying ACT

After a health scare, Josh Homme and Queens of the Stone Age explore the dark side of life in '... Like Clockwork'



BY MAC RANDALL  
Special to Newsday

**W**hen Queens of the Stone Age takes the stage at Brooklyn's Barclays Center on Saturday, it will be one more chapter in what you could literally call a second life story for the band's leader, singer and guitarist Josh Homme.

Three years ago, Homme developed a staph infection in

his leg that was resistant to antibiotics and eventually required surgery to correct. In the hospital, as doctors were putting an oxygen tube down his throat, he lost all vital functions. The loss was brief, and he was revived with no apparent complications, but something major had changed.

"It started with me waking up, being defibrillated," he said in a recent interview with British music magazine Mojo. "Then, I couldn't get out of bed for four months. I was exhausted. Could I play

guitar? I did not want to do that. In fact, I wanted to break them all. I didn't want to play music any more."

Luckily for us, that lack of desire wasn't permanent. But Homme's hospital experience and its depressive aftermath clearly had a lasting effect. Not that his work has ever been lighthearted — even poppier numbers like 2002's "No One Knows," the Queens' biggest hit to date, have a grim undercurrent — but the songs on "... Like Clockwork," the band's sixth album, are

**WHO** Queens of the Stone Age  
**WHEN | WHERE** 8 p.m. Saturday, Barclays Center, Brooklyn  
**TICKETS** \$29.50-\$59.50; 800-745-3000; [ticketmaster.com](http://ticketmaster.com)

preoccupied with death to an unusual degree.

"I want God to come and take me home," Homme croons at the beginning of the mournful piano-led meditation





Homme, at left and above at center, with his road band for Queens of the Stone Age: Troy Van Leeuwen, Jon Theodore, Michael Shuman and Dean Fertita. ■ Video: [newsday.com/music](http://newsday.com/music)

"The Vampyre of Time and Memory," before going on to sing, "I'm alive, hooray," with a sarcasm so bitter you can practically catch it on your tongue.

The darkness in those lyrics gets further fleshed out in the song's striking interactive video, which premiered in November and was produced in association with the online art collective The Creators Project. It's a haunted-house tour with all the trimmings: creepy maids with syringes for high heels, a whole zoo's

worth of taxidermized animals, and a piano with a red velvet-lined lid that just might be doubling as Homme's coffin.

What makes all this more than ponderous doom mongering is the creative vitality that is, as always, at the core of the Queens' music. Ever since their formation in the mid-'90s — following the breakup of Homme's previous, ultraheavy band Kyuss — Queens of the Stone Age have been making punchy hard rock that's not afraid to be tuneful, sensitive or epic.

"... Like Clockwork" further expands their range. "I Sat by the Ocean" is slide guitar-enhanced power pop, while "Keep Your Eyes Peeled" delves into psychedelia. The verses of "Kalopsia" even suggest a prime '70s Stevie Wonder ballad before morphing into a crushing metal chorus. Speaking of range, Homme spends a good portion of the album singing falsetto, which brings out an appealing vulnerability in his voice. (A new live EP, "... Like Cologne," streaming exclusively on Spotify, features intriguing

acoustic versions of "I Sat by the Ocean," "The Vampyre of Time and Memory" and "Long Slow Goodbye" from 2005's "Lullabies to Paralyze.")

At times, it seems questionable to call the Queens an actual band. The group has never had a lineup that remained the same from one album to the next, and the only consistent member has been Homme. However, you could argue that this fluidity is all part of the plan, lending the music a greater sense of diversity over time. It helps that Homme's

AP/WIDEWORLD



## Homme has a lot of irons in the fire

Josh Homme is the kind of guy who isn't satisfied with life unless he's got multiple musical projects going at the same time:

- His pre-Queens band **Kyuss** had a huge influence on the so-called "nü-metal" and "stoner rock" subgenres of the past decade; 1992's "Blues for the Red Sun" is an excellent introduction.
- "**The Desert Sessions**," a series of 10 (so far) wide-ranging discs feature an ever-shifting assemblage of contributors, including P.J. Harvey and former Screaming Trees singer Mark Lanegan.
- Homme also plays with pal Jesse Hughes in the **Eagles of Death Metal**, but don't let that tongue-in-cheek name fool you: The band's music could more aptly be called a mashup of punk, rockabilly and Rolling Stones-style boogie.
- **Them Crooked Vultures**, a power trio par excellence with Dave Grohl and Led Zeppelin's John Paul Jones. They cut a superb self-titled album in 2009 that we can only hope wasn't a one-off.

— MAC RANDALL



Homme also plays with Jesse Hughes, above, in the band **Eagles of Death Metal**.

popular with lots of musicians, many of whom are rather famous — for example, Dave Grohl of Nirvana and Foo Fighters fame played drums on "No One Knows" — and that he prefers being collaborative to feeding his own ego. As he put it on comedian Marc Maron's WTF podcast in October, "I want to be part of something great, and I don't care if I have to make tea for it. I don't care if it's an hour long, and I'm five seconds of it."

In keeping with Homme's standard mode of operations, the cameo appearances on "... Like Clockwork" are many. Grohl reappears on several tracks, joined by two especially high-profile guests: Elton John and Nine Inch Nails' Trent Reznor. The latter became friendly with Homme after his fateful hospital visit, while the former, a longtime fan, got involved with the recording sessions after calling Homme and telling him, according to his Mojo interview, "the only thing missing from my band was an actual queen."

Don't expect to see any of the aforementioned players onstage at Barclays Center. But do expect the current road band — drummer Jon Theodore, guitarist Troy Van Leeuwen, bassist Michael Shuman and keyboardist-guitarist Dean Fertita — to take Homme's scintillating songs to a new level of intensity.