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FINE TUNING

Singer/Songwriter Eric Hutchinson Opens Up About Performing for AIDS Charities, Rescuing America's Beaches, and Putting the Finishing Touches on his New Album.

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Fine Tuning

SINGER/SONGWRITER **ERIC HUTCHINSON** OPENS UP ABOUT PERFORMING FOR AIDS CHARITIES, RESCUING AMERICA'S BEACHES, AND PUTTING THE FINISHING TOUCHES ON HIS NEW ALBUM

by Chip Alfred

PHOTOGRAPHY BY AUTUMN DE WILDE

You may not know his name, but chances are you've heard his music, and it probably made you smile. Up-and-coming recording artist Eric Hutchinson, who just turned thirty, has been paying his dues playing clubs across America for nearly a decade. "There were a lot of years of struggle," he says, before his first full-length album, *Sounds Like This*, started making waves in the music industry.

Sounds Like This is an album that almost didn't get made. In 2006, Hutchinson signed with Madonna's Maverick Records, but the label folded before the album was produced. Hutchinson, who plays guitar, keyboard and writes all of his music and lyrics, wasn't giving up that easily. "There's a lot of music being made out there. In the end it's all about persistence," he says. Hutchinson produced the album on his own and credits celebrity blogger Perez Hilton with giving his music the mass exposure it needed.

"The album made its way to Hilton who really enjoyed it and put this big spotlight on it," says Hutchinson. *Sounds Like This* debuted at number one on Billboard's Heatseekers chart and peaked at number five on iTunes' album chart, becoming the highest-charting album by an unsigned act in iTunes history. Lead single "Rock & Roll," a number-one hit in four countries, is featured on the soundtrack of *Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants 2* and was performed on the ninth season premiere of *American Idol*. Warner Brothers Records signed him, and since then, life for "E-Hutch"—as Hilton calls him—has been a whirlwind.

A second hit single, "OK, It's Alright With Me," emerged from the album. The song was a top-five hit at Triple A radio and was performed by season-nine finalist Casey James on *American Idol*. Next came major tours with recording artists like One Republic and Kelly Clarkson, followed by a frenzy of media, with one critic after another trying to pigeonhole Hutchinson into a musical genre. *The Santa Barbara Observer* hit the nail on the head. "Eric Hutchinson breaks the mold."

A self-described creator of "pop music for smart people," Hutchinson has a distinctive sound and a musical style all his own. His vocals can be smooth, soulful—even gritty. His lyrics are always thought-provoking, and usually inspired by real-life situations. With his upbeat melodies and catchy choruses, he writes the kind of tunes that, once you've heard them, you can't



seem to get them out of your head!

"It's an old Paul McCartney trick," admits Hutchinson. "If you make the melody a little fluffy, you can talk about searching for happiness or trying to find your place in the world." When he's feeling down, he sometimes writes the most uplifting songs. "The main thing I hear from people is how my music makes them feel happy. If they feel bad, it makes them feel good. If they're in a good mood, it makes them feel better. That's a powerful thing and I don't take that lightly."

Eric Hutchinson is without a doubt an artist who's all about the music. "I consider myself a songwriter first. That's the part I love the most—the writing and the crafting. I want the song to feel different than anything you've heard before—something worth spending your time

with." When his album was making its way to the top, Hutchinson responded modestly, "I felt grateful and not entitled."

Hutchinson also devotes his time and talent giving back to the community and the causes he embraces. Last summer, he joined the Beach Rescue Project, restoring dunes, cleaning up America's beaches and performing free concerts for the project's volunteers. Hutchinson performed at the kickoff at Rockaway Beach, New York, followed by stops in Austin, Portland, and Miami, Florida.

Last fall, he joined Grammy-winner Macy Gray to perform for the Macy's Passport Presents Glamorama Tour, a four-city event benefiting a number of charities, including several HIV/AIDS organizations. Tour cities included Minneapolis, Chicago, Los Angeles and San Francisco.

Macy's Passport began in 1982 at the

San Francisco store as a vehicle for the company and its employees to raise funds for the emerging AIDS epidemic. Eventually, it grew into a major annual AIDS fundraising event for the public. In 2010, Macy's Passport joined forces with Macy's Glamorama, adding the two Midwest tour cities and including headline entertainers for the first time.

Both West Coast shows of the tour benefit AIDS charities exclusively. In Los Angeles, recipient organizations included AIDS Project Los Angeles and Project Angel Food. In San Francisco, AIDS Emergency Fund, Glide Foundation, and Project Open Hand were the beneficiaries. In 2010, Macy's Passport raised \$1.1 million dollars for HIV/AIDS charities, according to president of media relations and cause marketing Milinda Martin, making it the most successful year yet

for the tour, selling out both the Los Angeles and San Francisco Orpheum Theaters.

The West Coast beneficiaries have long track records of serving their communities.

AIDS Project Los Angeles provides bilingual direct services such as food, medical and dental care, and housing help to thousands of Angelenos, plus prevention education and leadership on HIV/AIDS-related policy and legislation.

Project Angel Food cooks and delivers more than 13,000 free and nutritious meals per week to men, women, and children affected by HIV/AIDS, cancer, and other life-threatening illnesses.

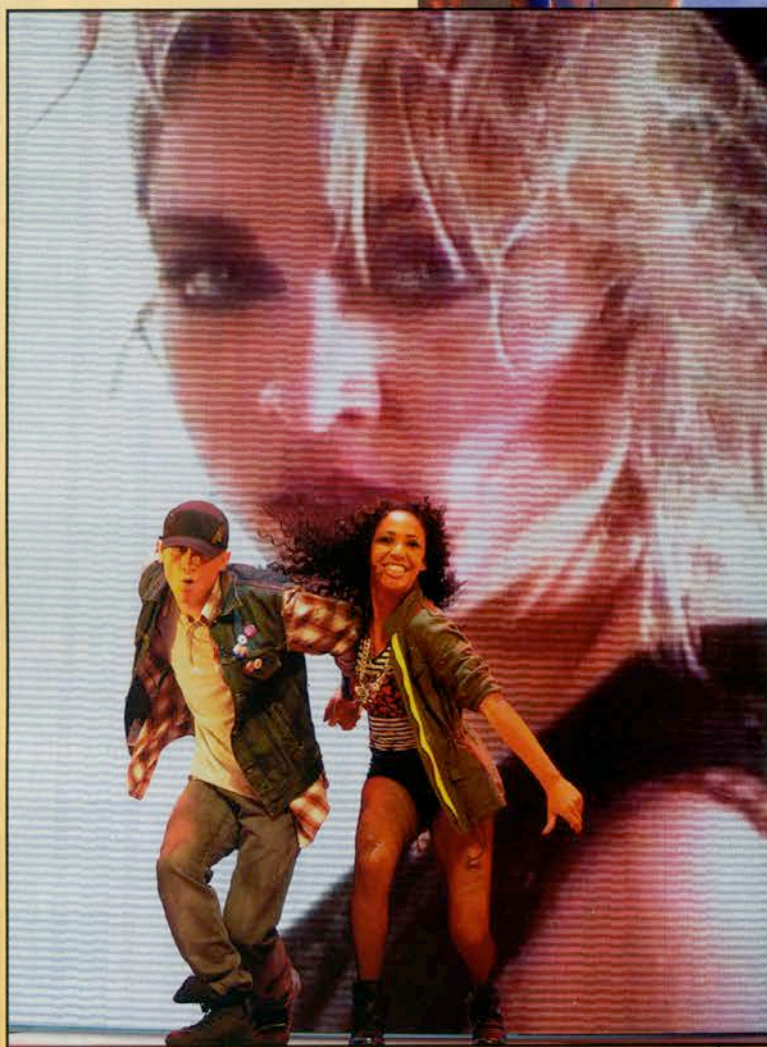
AIDS Emergency Services has provided over \$28 million in emergency financial assistance to people battling HIV/AIDS since 1982, providing assistance to maintain housing and utility services, make medical co-payments, and meet other critical expenses.

Glide Foundation provides meals and helps thousands of disenfranchised and low-income people get back on their feet and find their way to jobs, housing and spiritual fulfillment.

Project Open Hand offers daily, dependable meal and nutrition services to people living with HIV/AIDS and other serious illnesses and to seniors in need.

"We like to refer to the show as fashion theater," says Martin. "It combines the best of the fashion industry with a very theatrical production—lots of mixed media, music, dancing, and special effects." This year's show featured 3-D

Video stars: Along-side performances by Eric Hutchinson and Macy Gray, Macy's Passport Presents Glamorama offered plenty of fashion from featured designers Tracy Reese, Marc by Marc Jacobs, Just Cavalli (right), Material Girl (below), Calvin Klein, Tommy Hilfiger, INC, Felina/Jezebel, and 2(x)ist.



Hutchinson "simply sat on stage with his keyboard and sang very simply and beautifully," says Martin, but what impressed her even more was his unassuming manner. "His humility really touched the audience and just his straightforward, we're-here-to-share-a-special-moment attitude really did something for the people who were sitting there."

"Macy's Passport Presents Glamorama is the company's largest iconic fashion event," says vice president of media relations and cause marketing for Macy's Northwest Betsy Nelson, who is based in San Francisco. "The Macy's Passport Fund has supported organizations providing services to those affected by HIV/AIDS in all the markets we serve. For the past twenty-seven years, with the support of the Macy's Foundation and our Macy's associates, the fund has granted more than \$28 million to organizations providing much-needed education,

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holographs set against a giant LED video wall. Featured designers were Tracy Reese, Marc by Marc Jacobs, Just Cavalli, Material Girl, Calvin Klein, Tommy Hilfiger, INC, Felina/Jezebel and 2(x)ist.

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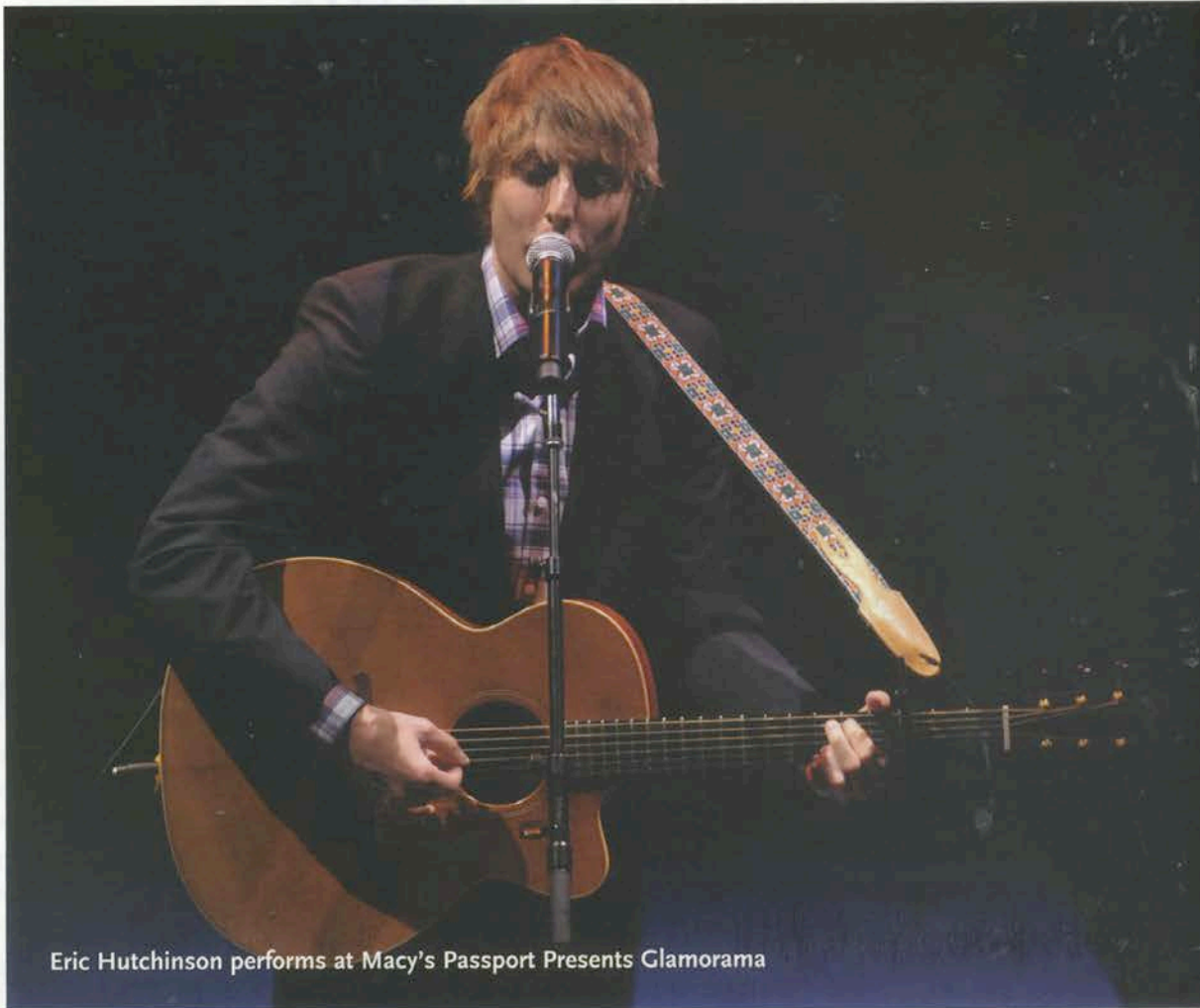
research, services, and programs for people affected by and infected with HIV and AIDS.

"The funding we provide to local organizations goes to a variety of services, depending on what type of organization it is—food, emergency services, testing, to name a few," says Nelson. "We are particularly proud of the funding we have been able to give over the years to San Francisco schools, enabling them to provide HIV/AIDS education and awareness and programs that provide services to youth affected by HIV/AIDS such as Huckleberry Youth Programs and Larkin Street."

"The best part for me is being able to see my music doing something positive," says Hutchinson. "It's all for a great cause and I was excited to be involved. I guess I was the first generation to grow up with education on AIDS from an early age in school. The more education that can go out to people to really understand what's going on—the better."

A musician who thrives on connecting with his fans one-on-one, Hutchinson enjoys talking to audience members individually after his shows. He solicits their feedback about his music on Facebook and Twitter. He even wrote and recorded a song just for one of his fans, then posted the video on YouTube.

His fans call themselves "Hutheads" and one of them, Jeff Chesnut of San Antonio, runs the Huthead.com fansite. "I first heard Eric's music after my wife downloaded *Sounds Like This*. There is not a throw-away track on the album. Every song is great," says Chesnut. "Eric's personality really shines when you see him live. He is funny, in touch with the audience, and he likes to make up songs on the spot just for that show. I thought 'Why does no one know about this guy?' He is so talented. He will be a huge star someday."



Eric Hutchinson performs at Macy's Passport Presents Glamorama

Chesnut just may be right. Hutchinson was selected as a VH1 "You Oughta Know" Artist and has performed on numerous television shows, including *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*, *Late Night with Conan O'Brien*, and *The Late Late Show with Craig Ferguson*. *USA Today* praised Eric's "knack for hooks and melody." *The Washington Post* called him "undeniably charismatic."

In 2010, Eric Hutchinson made his debut performance on NBC's live broadcast of the 84th Annual Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade from New York riding on the parade's first float. Hutchinson premiered "Best Days," a track from his forthcoming album *Moving Up, Living Down*. He recorded the new album with Mike Elizondo (Fiona Apple, Eminem, Regina Spektor) in California and Martin Terefe (James Morrison, Jason Mraz) in London.

So far, Hutchinson has written more than one hundred songs for an album that will likely be whittled down to ten, after the "road test," where he tries out

new material on live audiences first. "I did 500 shows for *Sounds Like This*, and it gave me a ton of ideas for new material and what I wanted to do on the next record," he recalls. "I got a new writing space in New York City and I would hole up there writing nonstop during the week, then play the new songs live on the weekend. If they felt right, they made the cut."

"Now I feel a certain responsibility to create music that's going to continue to inspire others," he says. The one thing Hutchinson never wants to become is predictable. "I just want to stay challenged and keep surprising myself."

For more information about Eric Hutchinson or to purchase his recordings, visit www.eric Hutchinson.com. For more information about Macy's Passport Presents Glamorama, visit www.macys.com/glamorama.

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GLAMORAMA PHOTO BY LESTER COHEN