

# A Day out of time

## Spencer Day in concert at NCTC

Bay Area Reporter

by Mark Mardon

He seems to come from another era — the Golden Age of American songwriters — but San Francisco's Spencer Day is very much of our time, and he's shaping a fresh new jazz/pop consciousness. Precision, smoothness, a light, easy style, and sultry, sexy confidence marked the opening night of *An Evening with Spencer Day* at New Conservatory Theatre Center last Saturday night.

Day and his band of first-rate musicians rendered Day's original compositions interspersed with nods to inspiring predecessors, and the audience sat enraptured, completely won over. The brightly handsome, hugely gifted 26-year-old vocalist/songwriter pianist/bandleader captured our hearts, not for the first time.

Of course, he's the creator of the wild-and-crazy *Crimson Club* cabaret, and has played formal gigs at various plush venues hereabouts. This latest concert marks Day's best performance yet, in part because he's gained poise and self-assurance through ceaseless hard work, but also because the intimacy of NCTC's small theater lets every note ring crisp and clear. On opening night, each vocal in-



Day (left) with cellist Yair Evnine

lection could be heard down to a whisper, and you could see the wrinkles at Day's eyes as he smiled, and the veins on his neck when he laughed.

Now back on his home turf after hit shows in New York City, Day was joined in concert by his longtime collaborator, the darkly handsome, supremely talented cellist/guitarist Yair Evnine, and by virtuoso keyboardist Jerome Rossen on the Hammond organ, accordion and piano, and the masterful Chuck Bennett on stand-up bass.

Even as the audience swooned over Day's clean-cut, boy-next-door good looks, we could feel his genuine warmth and charm. He's personable and completely unpretentious, with the songwriting skills of Cole Porter or Paul Simon. One of the surprise numbers of the night was a cover of Simon's powerful, brooding "American Tune," so apt for our time ("Still, when I think of the road we're traveling on, I wonder what's gone wrong.") Another surprise cover was Tori Amos' "Little Amsterdam," a Southern Gothic tale Day rendered with soul, as though born in the Deep

South and not Utah.

Day's own compositions made the night shine. His songwriting prowess was evident in "The Movie of Your Life" ("If your life had been a movie, how much would you enjoy it?"), "The Garden of Eden," and a hilarious song about the fear of flying, "Fly-aphobia (Don't Want to Fly)," inspired by a harrowing episode on an airline Day wouldn't name — but it's American, and it flies West.

I had to wait until the encore to hear "Arizona Blue," off the new album *Introducing Spencer Day* ([www.yonasty.com](http://www.yonasty.com)). It's a gorgeous Country-Western ballad inspired by an Arizona road trip Day took with his brother and mother. But my favorite piece of the night was the Gershwin-inspired composition "Midtown Meditation." Rather than imitating Gershwin, Day composed an intricate, multifaceted piece about the bustle of Manhattan, capturing the town's energy, but with the noise and jitteriness kept in bounds. The number was distinctively Day, yet possessed the grace and verve of Gershwin's "An American in Paris."

The band proved a tight ensemble, with precise phrasing and timing, and a keen sense of cool, without being self-conscious or show-offy. Rossen on keyboards showed huge flair, and his versatility on multiple instruments was a huge plus for the show. Day himself on keyboards was no slouch, and at times we got Day and Rossen flailing away at keyboards simultaneously. Bassist Bennett served the band well, and it would be nice if he were let loose to solo more. Dreamy Evnine couldn't have hit a wrong note if he tried, so completely in tune was he with Day's vibe. ▼

**An Evening with Spencer Day**  
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