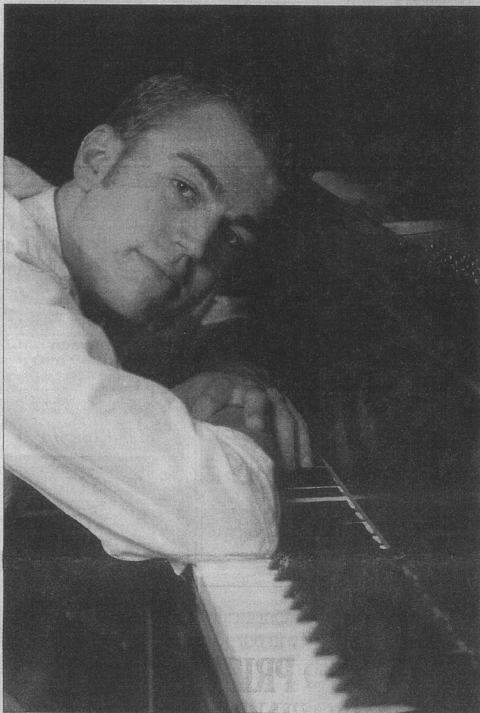


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Back to reality

After a stint on 'Star Search,' Spencer Day is happy to return to the real world of music



MediaNews Group photo

By Chad Jones
MediaNews Group

IF YOU SAW SPENCER DAY on the most recent incarnation of "Star Search," you didn't see the real Spencer Day.

Sure, you saw the 24-year-old San Francisco resident make it to the January semi-finals of CBS' "American Idol" wannabe series. But the handsome young man you saw singing Norah Jones' "Turn Me On," Duke Ellington's "Don't Get Around Much Anymore" and Louis Armstrong's "What a Wonderful World" was only a nervous TV version of Day.

"I really kind of sucked on 'Star Search,'" Day says with a laugh. "My pitch was bad, and I was thinking too much about everything that was going on. I never wanted to win. I wanted to say I did it, then go back to the real world."

When Jake Simpson won in the best male vocalist category, Day recalls skipping off stage after his final performance, then joining friends for a "Hooray for not winning on 'Star Search'" party.

Last week, when Day had his first week-long gig at the Plush Room, the Bay Area's premiere cabaret, audiences saw a much more authentic version of Day than the one on TV.

With his five-piece band crowding the small Plush Room stage, Day was so eager to show the world what he can do that his opening-night show lasted nearly 2 1/2 hours — more than an hour longer than most cabaret shows.

Standing in the spotlight, Day began his show with one of his own songs, "On the Stage," in which he talks about coming alive on stage and about how he doesn't want to be just "another bee in the hive."

There's not much chance of that. Though young and still growing into his performance style, Day demonstrates a charismatic stage presence and a startlingly diverse musical palate.

He tackles serious jazz such as Charles Mingus' vocalese "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat" and standards such as Ellington's "Caravan" and Cole Porter's "It's All Right with Me."

He does originals, like the clever "Lifestyles of the Tragically Hip," and then surprises his audience by giving familiar tunes a fresh spin. His arrangement for Rodgers and Hammerstein's "Out of My Dreams" from "Oklahoma!" gives the song a lush Debussy feel, and his Tex-Mex treatment of "Another Suitcase in Another Hall" from "Evita" wouldn't be out of place on a country-western radio station.

On opening night, after singing "Another Suitcase," Day had a hard time shaking the song.

"I'm feeling what I'm singing," he said. "I haven't had a permanent home in a while."

Sitting in the empty Plush Room the day after his big opening night, Day stretches his lanky frame across a big banquette and relaxes before his evening performance.

IF YOU GO

Spencer Day performs at 8:30 p.m. Wednesdays at Mecca, 2029 Market St.; 8 p.m. Thursdays at the Cosmopolitan Cafe, 121 Spear St.; and 8 p.m. Sundays at Enrico's, 504 Broadway; all venues in San Francisco. Visit www.spencerday.com for information.

KEYS TO SUCCESS: Singer Spencer Day of San Francisco, who was a finalist on the most recent Star Search series, is back to performing the local club circuit, just finishing up a week-long run at the Plush Room in San Francisco.