

'Star Search' contestant wants to sing on own terms

By Chad Jones

STAFF WRITER

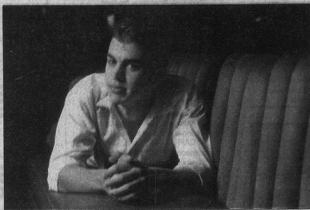
IF you saw Spencer Day on the most recent incarnation of "Star Search," you didn't see the real Spencer Day.

Sure, you saw the 24-year-old San Francisco resident make it to the January semifinals 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, audi-



MATHEW SUMNER — Staff

SINGER SPENCER DAY, who was a finalist on the most recent "Star Search" series, is performing around the Bay Area.

ences 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 2½ 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. Although 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.

See **STAR**, Living 8