

ENTERTAINMENT

A new Day is dawning at popular SF cabaret

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Every so often a young singer with talent to burn graduates from the chatty restaurant lounges to a cabaret room where people actually come to listen.

Such is the case with a 24-year-old native of Ogden, Utah, who, by way of Phoenix and Los Angeles, has taken up residence in the City by the Bay.

The second eldest of seven children, Spencer Day has been studying the great American songbook since he was a tyke, listening to interpretations of classics by such noted singers as Ella Fitzgerald and Billie Holiday.

Last Monday night, Day displayed the lessons he learned, opening a week-long run in what many consider one of the best cabaret venues in the nation: the Plush Room in San Francisco's York Hotel.

While his show needs shaping and his vocals and presentation a bit more polish, there's little doubt that this is a young man with amazing talent.

Day admits to stage fright. In fact, he's written a song to address just that. But by the time

he's playing coy with Cole Porter, bending the gender of "The Laziest Gal in Town," Day is solidly in control. And his audience is eating it up.

The tall, lanky, handsome lad doesn't do this all by himself. Day has sought out four musicians as proficient with their instruments as he is with his. Finn Kelly is a classy jazz pianist and debonair bassist Daniel Fabricant contributes significantly to the bottom line. Percussionist Brian Carmody is equally adept with sticks or brushes and Yair Evnine provides beautiful melody and harmony whether playing guitar or cello.

At times, Day reminds the listener of a heartbroken Chet Baker, his baritone dripping with melancholy, minus Baker's desperate air. With a fresh cello-driven arrangement, "Out of My Dreams" from Rodgers and Hammerstein's "Oklahoma" clearly demonstrated the singer's ability to tug at the heart strings. Brilliant, too, was Day's arrangement



Day

of "Rainy Night in Georgia," the singer accompanying himself on the piano, singing of the life of a lonely man on the road. This is a work Day should include in every show.

The same could be said of "Goodbye Porkpie Hat," where Day demonstrated his grasp of the art of jazz scatting. This tribute to Charlie Mingus showed Day is as schooled in jazz as he is in Tin Pan Alley classics.

That brings us to the problems with his show. Day tries to be all things to all people, encompassing a very broad range of musical tastes. He puts on a cowboy hat to sing an obscure Marty Robbins tune, "San Francisco Teardrops," and trades it for a top hat to dress up his own lyric about "Lifestyles of the Tragically Hip." The latter — as well as a lame encore taking critical aim at '80s Top 10 hits — involved friend and vocalist Trixie Carr. The routines might have worked in the noisy restaurant lounge where people didn't pay that much attention, but under the glare of the intimate cabaret spotlight they seemed sophomoric. Blame it on his youth.

The important point is talent, and Day's got it. His warm, rich

baritone is music to the ears. He sings all the right notes, providing his own interpretation for a number of welcome standards ("I Got It Bad and That Ain't Good" and "Do Nothin' Till You Hear From Me"). With a bit more effort, and coaching from some outstanding Bay Area professionals, Day will soon be wrapping that velvety, chocolate voice around those notes, making the world sit up and take notice.

Some make comparisons to a young Harry Connick Jr. It's true, there are similarities. But Day is developing his own unique style and, most importantly, he's genuine, a nice guy with a song in his heart. And, thankfully, there's no attitude.

This is an opportunity to check out the next young jazz/cabaret singer slated to make it big — before his name goes up on that marquee along the Great White Way.

Day is performing in the Plush Room this week only, tonight through Saturday at 8, with a Sunday matinee at 3. The cover is \$20. For reservations, call 415-885-2800. The York Hotel is located at 940 Sutter St.