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The Buzz

Review: Blue Room rocks a nerve with 'Hollywood Outsider'

**By JASON CASSIDY - Special to The
Buzz**

I wish that all performing musicians in Chico could have the Blue Room Theatre direct their performances.

In its latest offering, "Hollywood Outsider," the Blue Room hands the reigns over to director Jeremy Votava and songwriter/musician Aaron Lyon. Using Lyon's song cycle about a small-town boy's pursuit of - and tragic fall from - rock 'n' roll stardom, Votava crafted live-action dramatic accompaniment to the music's story line.

From the first scene, the effectiveness of this marriage was showcased in an appropriately simple yet moving presentation. With the band's sparse and sparkly atmosphere as a backdrop, Lyon (lead vocalist and guitarist for the live band) sings a hushed lullaby, "When the bright night falls/ and the stars begin to

sing," as the young Sky, played by Beau Hirshfield, basks in the snuggling warmth of his blanket and stuffed animal in the soft light at foot of the stage.

This setup, with the band bearing witness and punctuating the action, is a perfect formula for a dramatic presentation, and Hirshfield really plays it up. With a natural charisma he confidently launches himself into his character's doomed life. From the wide-eyed innocence of the small-town boy, to the passionate excitement of the young man pursuing his dreams, to the spectacle of an out-of-control and self-destructive drug addict, Hirshfield had the audience on his side as he matched the band's power with gusto and charm.

And, for its part, the band was perfect. The sound control alone deserves an award. Almost without exception, the un-amplified actors got their points and their lines across without being drowned out by the fully electrified rockers, the most impressive being lead guitarist Maurice Spencer. Spencer's control was not limited to volume. The range of emotion he exorcised from his guitar and effects boxes was the performance of the night - eerie and quiet feedback created an undertow of tension that would release into noise and quickly shift into funk-ed-up rhythms of the next part of the song.

And Lyon played off his guitarist beautifully, playfully punching the action along and impressively belting out his soaring songs of discovery and loss.

Special mention also has go to Votava for his touching and hilarious portrayal of the gruff King - the father of Sky's love interest Val (played by Michelle L. Smith) - who takes Sky under his wing while he defiantly battles cancer.

For its part, the Blue Room has done an

outstanding job of bringing together many diverse elements for a successful play that is fun and moving, and also rocks out better and is more emotionally touching than most rock shows can hope to be.

The Blue Room Theatre presents "Hollywood Outsider" through Sept. 28. Performances are at 7:30 p.m. Thursday through Saturday, with one Sunday evening performance on Sept. 22. Tickets are \$10 general and \$8 for students and seniors on Fridays and Saturdays. On Thursdays all seats are \$5. Call 895-3749 or visit www.blueroomtheatre.com.

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