

“Menagerie” In New Haven, Johnny Cash in Bridgeport

Pity the poor folks who missed the all-too-brief recent run of “The Man in Black” at Bridgeport ’s Downtown Cabaret Theatre. This loving tribute to the words and music of the legendary Johnny Cash was a solid hit for the theatre – one that deserves a prompt return engagement.

Standing in for the man in black was Scott Keeton, an accomplished performer who states early on, “I am not Johnny Cash” – a refreshing example of stating the obvious. Nonetheless, Keeton’s beautiful base held surprising emotion as he performed more than two dozen Cash classics. These are songs with real stories, real pathos and you may be surprised as how moved you are doing several of them. Among the standouts were a mournful “Sunday Morning Coming Down”, a nearly 15-minute rendition of “Ghost Riders in the Sky” and a moving, haunting “Rusty Cage”.

Joining Keeton for some joyful duets was the talented (and adorable) Ashley DePascale who more than held her own on “Will the Circle”, “Daddy Sang Bass”, “It Ain’t Me Babe”, “Jackson” and “I’ve Been Everywhere”. A rambunctious encore featuring back-to-back hits “Ring of Fire” and “Folsom Prison Blues” had the audience on their feet and in a state of non-stop exhilaration.

Craig Wetz on bass, James Keys on drums and, in particular, Jack Heilaman on lead guitar provided superb support to Mr. Keeton and the Cabaret produced an excellent venue for this tribute complete with an effective collection of video projections throughout. It’s singularly unfair for a concert this entertaining to keep us waiting too much longer until it returns to Bridgeport .

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