

Louis and Keely Live at the Sahara Review – Much More than Just a Good Show!

By Joe Wehinger

The most popular show in town right now, “Louis and Keely Live at the Sahara”, starring Vanessa Claire Smith and Jake Broder is being performed at West Hollywood’s Matrix Theatre. Just days ago it was announced that the show is nominated for four Ovation Awards – making it a must-see.



We arrived minutes before showtime to a nearly sold-out house. When you hear the show is popular, you have no idea until you see Leonard Maltin sitting front and center and Famke Janssen (from X-Men and Nip/Tuck fame) seated one row in front of you. There is a demand. People want to see this show.

It’s a Show

A spotlight on snapping fingers. From moment one, the air is thick with confidence. Coming from Sacred Fools Theater, this show did something extraordinary, it outgrew itself. It was so beloved, that it needed a reprise. And a bigger, badder location for its growing audience.

Jake Broder plays the iconic showman Louis Prima, a lounge singer and big band frontman. Vanessa Claire Smith portrays Keely Smith, his 1950s Vegas partner and eventual fourth wife.

It's Alive

Early on, for one of Broder's first stage shows, he stumbles out, pauses himself and seems to break character for a moment. You see it, but you don't wanna believe it. You want him to perform better. He casually walks back to his mark and arrives again, pauses, still doesn't like it. Puzzled glances are exchanged. As he makes his way back, once again to his start mark, a member of the band makes a gesture. Louis wants a reaction. This time as Broder arrives, the audience instinctively cheers for him. He bathes in the love and starts his show.

That is how you know this is no ordinary show. It's alive. It's pulsing. This is no projected screen. No cardboard cut-outs. When you breathe, they breathe. And if you're not breathing, it ain't alive. The audience participation only grows through the evening.

The Fabulous Mr. Broder



Jake Broder is unstoppable here as Louis Prima. Dare I say, he seems to control the copyright – he owns it. Back and forth for 98 minutes he delivers a tour de force performance that is unlikely to be matched by anyone.

He has a Will Ferrell feel to him. High energy and affable. A goofy ball of fun. But slowly he takes his audience to a dark, dark place. Something that Mr. Ferrell has not yet been brave enough to do.

The amount of energy, love and passion he exudes is that of nearly a freight train on full speed. You don't want to get in his way, merely stand along side and cheer as it passes by. Throughout the evening, he gives off over a decade and a half of life's journey and you feel it with him.

That's maybe Mr. Broder's gift to us. He allows every adoring fan to take this trip and watch him. Bathe in his love, thrill in his excitement and ultimately wallow in his own hell, the one that he built for himself. And yet, the last words of the evening, he leaves us feeling optimistic. He's still got a chance.

There's Something About Vanessa



Vanessa Claire Smith's name may be too long for a marquee, but it certainly belongs there. It's a name you should know already, but you probably don't. It's okay, though. You'll know her very soon. She has an uncanny resemblance to Sandra Bullock, a smile from Julia Roberts via "Pretty Woman" and the formidable presence of Glenn Close.

Honestly, yeah, she's that good. A rare range of talents. She's under complete control of her body, every move and mannerism is tuned (we'll touch back on this soon.) Her eyes provoke you. Her singing voice is a deep sultry drink of wine; tasty and full.

From her starring turn in the microbudgeted "Chase The Slut", you see what is ultimately one of her strongest assets. She's incredibly likeable and watchable. You can't take your eyes off her.

In 'Louis and Keely', Broder has the marathon performance, but Keely brings so many pieces to the puzzle. Watching her work and manipulate herself and everything she touches is a master's class on subtlety. Her face as she stiffly and shyly sings in the beginning. Her fingers flexing a flask as she watches Louis seduce

an audience member, the tight brace she holds of her dress while Louis flits with her at one moment on stage. Ms. Smith is keenly aware of every inch and she's done her homework.

Their chemistry is remarkable. Two lightning bolts on Kansas farmland. Bold and vibrant alone, but when they hit together, sparks enough to fill acres of dark sky.



During “That Old Black Magic” Broder grabs her and together sing while holding each other. It’s enough of a moment to see the whole show again just to experience. When you’re that good. Well, we should just thank you.

“Autumn Leaves” is a declaration of independence and Smith plays it well. See, that stiff little girl no longer needs the boisterous man. She understands energy and presence and, while maybe influenced by him, she holds her own just fine. And it leaves Broder with one more juicy moment as he watches his own star slowly lose a bit of its shine.

Who Shines the Spotlight

Jeremy Aldridge. The last few paragraphs have been a testament to his work. While Broder and Smith garner the glory, Aldridge makes sure the light is just right on them. And he does a truly exemplary job.

For aspiring actors and actresses, find this guy and beg to be in his next show. Why? 'Cuz he won't lead you astray. He works a stage, he works his performers and he delivers. What more can you ask for?

Them Pesky Ovations

So, yes, "**Louis and Keely Live at the Sahara**" is nominated for **four Ovation Awards**. Lead Actor for Jake Broder. Lead Actress for Vanessa Claire Smith. **Direction, Jeremy Aldridge**. And Musical in an Intimate Theater.

I've seen several of the other shows nominated in these categories, but not all. As of this moment, and politics notwithstanding, all four votes would be cast in honor of 'Louis and Keely', yes it's that good. Without a doubt it should be honored with the Franklin Levy, musical in an intimate theater award. You present me the last show that fills a room so substantially, that earns your emotion so grandly and that satisfies so thoroughly.

Until then... **Ms. Smith, Mr. Broder, Mr. Aldridge**, your awards are waiting for you.

"Louis and Keely Live at the Sahara" plays through October 26 at the Matrix Theatre.

For more information, visit:

<http://www.louiskeelyshow.com>

<http://www.matrixtheatre.com>

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