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LI Pulse Singer-Songwriter Series @Cinema Arts Centre

May 2011 (High School Singer-Songwriter Showcase)

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Oscar Wilde knew it. Richie Havens swears by it. As do sound carpenters, mechanics, interior designers, and presidents of great nations. There is a tremendous importance in being earnest. No two ways about it.

When I initially had the idea about getting high school songwriters together for an installment of our series, I knew I wanted to showcase new talent and create a space in which these young artists might inspire and learn from each other. I didn't expect to see such an object lesson in sincerity.

They were different for sure, but the thread that ran through all six of our featured acts was an unbelievable humility and genuine love for music. Take Mark Greck, for instance – a bluesy, whispery songwriter who was called “an incredible human being” by his English teacher after the show. Or the astonishingly soulful Charlie Dane. At twelve years old (we made exceptions to the general organizing principle for the evening), she has a poised grace and delivery that rivals those of adult pop songstresses. 15 year-old Michael Lituchy reminds me of a young Ben Folds or Conor Oberst. His innate understanding of chord voicing and melodic composition might make older rockers green with envy. We have a lot to learn from this gifted student of indie goodness. Ryan Cassata – a senior at Bay Shore High School – is a seasoned performer who has toured the country, appeared on television, written for film, and done dozens of other amazing things as an advocate of equal rights who speaks publicly (and courageously) about transgender issues. When Ryan belts out a song, every note is infused with bravery and conviction.

Representatives from two bands – The Sheppard Brother and Aleyska – framed the night. Kenya and Camara of The Sheppard Brothers have been performing for pretty much their entire lives, and their short set of gospel-and-R & B-inspired music, complete with a slowed-down rendition of Prince's anthemic “Purple Rain,” felt true and realized. The same goes for Kevyn Dolan of Aleyska. He and his guitarist opened the night with a set of poetic, atmospheric, and haunting innovative alt rock. They played honestly and with an authentic love of the sounds they were creating. Earnest.

When I looked around the room and noted an audience comprised of friends, family members, and fans of music and the series, I realized that these kids were playing in front of new kind of extended family that is sure to grow larger and larger as they themselves grow up. And I think I need to add a whatever that means to that last sentence because I really believe we grown ups have a lot to learn from these artists. Big thanks to our own Nada Marjanovich and Jim Faith from the LI Hall of Fame and Great South Bay Music Festival for helping this night come together in the lovely way that it did. It was a true beauty.