

Our Reviews

Demi Lovato in concert is just like cheering for your best friend

By MIKE CHAIKEN  
EDITIONS EDITOR

After watching pop star Demi Lovato (star of Disney's "Sonny With A Chance") kick off her North American Tour at the XL Center in Hartford on June 21, I can understand her appeal to the bevy of teenage girls filling the arena.

★★★  
Concert

She is the girl you want as your best friend. She's cool, because she swings a guitar and sings rock music that's just loud enough to annoy your parents. But, she's not one of those musicians who scare you with her fierceness. She's constantly smiling, letting you know she's approachable

and not stuck-up. And she genuinely seems surprised, as well as pleased, that she finds herself standing on stage, headlining her own tour, performing in front of a couple thousand girls.

Demi demonstrated a lot of energy in her show (which was rehearsed right here in Connecticut). Moving from one side of the stage to the other, she constantly encouraged the audience to cheer for her and say hello. She sang songs from her new album, such as the new single "Here We Go Again" and songs from her last album "Don't Forget" (where she teamed up with those other pop sensations, The Jonas Brothers) such as the title track and "La La Land." The audience cheered every time they heard one of their

Demi Lovato favorites.

Demi has a pleasing raspy voice that follows a grand tradition of female vocalists. She put it to especially good use when she sat at her grand piano and offered her young fans a classic 1960s soul song, Aretha Franklin's "Natural Woman." Although she admitted to being nervous, she acquitted herself quite well on that soulful nugget.

Demi did a good job in Hartford at exposing her young audiences to a little bit of pop music history throughout her performance. There were the explicit lessons, like "Natural Woman." However, some lessons were more subtle and might have been missed by her younger fans. But if you listened carefully to the guitar riffs in her



COURTESY OF DISNEY

Demi Lovato

music, you could hear a little bit of Alice Cooper and touch of The Beatles. And if you paid attention to the little bit of rock and roll attitude worked by her band and herself, you could see a smattering of Joan Jett in the mix.

In this respect, Demi is following in the footsteps of

her peers, and mentors, The Jonas Brothers. If you listen carefully to the Jonas Brothers, you can tell their roots are deeper than just today's top 40. Demi Lovato also shows she's a fan of music and not just a television star on a working holiday.

In this respect, she really is a good friend to her fans.

David Archuleta, the runner-up singer for the seventh season of "American Idol," was in fine voice at the XL Center June 21.

Sometimes, you have to wonder how the "American Idol" singers will translate their talents to an arena setting. But David's voice soared to the back reaches of the XL Center and he beautifully recreat-

ed his hits, "Crush" and "A Little Too Not Over You." And his solo version of One Republic's "Apologize" was gorgeous.

On stage, David was a charmer. Like Demi, he just seemed amazed that anyone would pay to hear him sing. His delight over his success was endearing.

The first group on the bill, KSM, had a brief set. But the all-female group rocked hard with an energetic set as soon as they hit the stage. Like Demi, they demonstrated their knowledge of music history. You could hear a touch of The Runways (one of the first all-girl rock bands) in their sound. Their pop smarts were best demonstrated by their cover version of the old 1970s Cheap Trick song, "I Want You To Want Me."

'Speech and Debate' leaves you wanting more

By KRISTIN SANTA MARIA  
CORRESPONDENT

"Speech and Debate" written by Stephen Karam showcases where theater should be heading in the future. Everything about the production at TheaterWorks was spot on from the casting to the direction of Henry Wishcamper and, finally, down to the visual aspects of the show.

★★★★  
Theater

The play focuses on three high school students in Salem, Oregon who uncover a secret about the drama teacher. These three unlikely students form a debate team as a means of getting this information out to the school board. The secret is only the tip of the iceberg in this hilarious and touching story. Just when you think you know what is

going on, Karam adds another layer to the story that takes you by surprise.

Part of the appeal of this production was that each actor seemed born to play their role. Ben Diskant plays Solomon, who is a bit of a nerd and works for the school newspaper where he is continually thwarted by not being allowed to write the controversial topics he wants to write. Diskant immediately makes you feel something for this kid who is really trying too hard to be normal.

Jee Young Han plays Diwata, who is obsessed with her inability to get cast in the school musicals. She thinks and acts like a diva. Some of the most hilarious moments on stage come when Diwata is singing in her blog. Han has a beautiful voice and I found myself looking forward to the

instances when she showcased it on stage. She perfectly personifies the angry musical diva that is just looking for recognition.

Carl Holder plays Howie, a new student who manages to get wrapped up in a cyberspace sex scandal. Howie is gay and has been out since he was eight years old. Holder creates, in Howie, a kid who is at once sure of himself and frightened that his personal secrets will come out. He successfully juggles that line between being happy with who you are and scared that you are making a huge mistake.

In fact, all three actors are good at bringing out the angst and excitement that goes along with being a teenager. They each capture perfectly that moment in time when you are still trying to decide who you

want to be-when your conscience tells you one thing and popular opinion tells you something else.

These three actors work so well together on stage that you cannot help but be there with their characters in the moment and root for them to do well. They bring the characters alive in a way that is refreshingly honest and relatable.

The characters in the play could easily have become clichés. However, through Henry Wishcamper's direction,

they move beyond clichés and become human beings trying to figure out their lives.

The smart use of projectors and the sleek look of the stage that transformed before your very eyes in to a very authentic looking high school added another layer to "Speech and Debate." Instant messaging conversations between the characters were projected on stage. The design of the stage and use of projections made this play seem even more real and modern.

"Speech and Debate"

was a joy to watch from the beginning to the end. By the end of the play, I was left wanting more of this touching and hilarious play that beautifully captures the feelings of the youth generation today.

I give this play four out of four stars.

"Speech and Debate" runs through July 26 at TheaterWorks in Hartford. For more information, go to [www.theaterworkshartford.org](http://www.theaterworkshartford.org).

Kids' listings

**MONDAY, JULY 6**  
**BRISTOL**  
**NUTMEG LUNCH BUNCH BOOK CLUB.** 1 p.m. For grades 4, 5, 6. Bring your lunch. Manross Memorial Library, 260 Central St., Forestville. (860) 584-7790.

747-0659.  
**OTHER**  
**VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL.** 9 a.m. to noon. Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, 8 Maple St., Terryville. Ages 3 to 12. Free. (860) 582-0723.

**JULY 6 to 10**  
**BRISTOL**  
**BRISTOL BIBLE CHAPEL VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL.** 9 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. "Exploring a Life of Honor." Page Park, Bristol. Register by calling (860)

**TUESDAY, JULY 7.**  
**BRISTOL**  
**THE SUNSHINE ROAD.** 10:30 a.m. Family music show. All ages. Manross Memorial Library, 260 Central St., Forestville. (860) 584-7790.

**WEDNESDAY, JULY 8**  
**BRISTOL**  
**SCRUNCHY'S PLAY HOUSE with Karen.** 10 a.m. Stories, crafts, and snacks. Sponsored by Shop Rite of Bristol. Manross Memorial Library, 260 Central St., Forestville. (860) 584-7790.

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