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## Review | Rawness of 'The Rose' a virtue

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"The Rose" is everything a Ron Megee show usually is: raw, loud, in your face, sometimes very funny, occasionally poignant and ultimately exhausting.

This is a stage adaptation of the 1979 Bette Midler movie about a self-destructive rock star written by Spencer Brown, a 25-year-old actor who plays Midler playing The Rose (the fictional rock star's professional name).

Brown also sings the hell out of the blues, soul ballads and rock tunes that make up the score with a live band led by Cody Wyoming. The music was so deafening Friday night I thought I had entered a time warp and was reviewing a band at the old Grand Emporium.

Director Megee achieves what he often does — a sort of theatrical grandeur that should be impossible in such a low-tech show. The crudity of the presentation becomes a virtue and the rawness of the performance becomes an artistic declaration.



My chief criticism is that Megee seems to have little interest in modulation. There are few quiet moments as the show roars to its inevitable conclusion. The audience never gets a breather.

The performance space at La Esquina, an adjunct of the Charlotte Street Foundation, provides an intimate setting that Megee makes good use of. And he's assembled an interesting cast.

David Wayne Reed, wearing a Barry Gibb wig, plays it straight, so to speak, as The Rose's exploitative and infinitely patient manager. Kipp Simmons struggles to project the quiet masculinity of Houston, who's man enough to fill a void in the singer's life but unwilling to put up with her verbal and sometimes physical abuse. (I lost count of how many liquor bottles Brown smashes.)

Corrie Van Ausdal cruises through the show in multiple roles with a succession of crazy wigs and, ultimately, a beard. Dana Nicholson, also playing several roles, is very effective as a country songwriter who disapproves of The Rose's drugged out lifestyle.

Kimberely Queen, always a welcome addition to a Ron Megee cast, is spread fairly thin among a number of roles and never makes the impact she's capable of. Areli Gil and Emma Taylor prove to be terrific backup singers.

Brown looks the part, thanks largely to makeup artist Andy Chambers and wig designer Alan Dunham. And it's fair to say that Brown is the heart of the show. His full-out commitment carries the day even when you'd like to see a bit more finesse in the performance.

Ultimately, you have to accept "The Rose" for what it is — a noisy bit of alternative theater designed to satisfy its intended audience.

*"The Rose" runs through Aug. 10 at La Esquina, 1000 W. 25th St. Tickets cost \$15 and are available at [www.brownpapertickets.com/event/71885](http://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/71885).*

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