

ARTS

CONCERT REVIEW

What's Howie Day's Secret?

Cuddly Singer Croons About Women and Waking Up Next to Them

By Christine R. Fry
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Howie Day writes a lot of songs about waking up next to beautiful women. And it's no surprise that the singer, who played a two-hour set at the Orpheum last Wednesday, has probably had several women in his bed. With his poofy chipmunk cheeks and trademark spikey hair, he looks like a cuddly porcupine. Every woman wants a cutie like Howie to take home.

Opening for Howie Day were Stereophonics, a British emo-y group masquerading as a 70s throwback rock band. There's no question, though, that they could rock. The guitar and drums overpowered the lead vocals a bit, but overall they put on a good show, stalling for Howie Day, who, according to the lead singer of Stereophonics, was "upstairs with some blow and hookers."

Once the cocaine supply ran out, Howie Day dramatically took the stage, backed by a full band. He opened the concert playing "Sorry So Sorry" in complete darkness, except for a single spotlight behind him. The spotlight created a haunting silhouette traced by beams of white light. The effect was absolutely incredible and only a hint of the amazing lighting effects to come. I've never seen a concert where the lighting director was a serious contender for upstaging the main act.

The next song was "Perfect Time of Day," Howie's most recent radio hit from

his latest CD, "Stop All the World Now." The song has a beat that reminds me of a train speeding toward some faraway place; you really feel like you're going some where with this song. It's an appropriate sound for the lyrics: "It's the perfect time of day / It's the last day of your life / Don't let it drift away / While your heart is still racing." It's one of those songs that, when heard played live by an energetic singer and band, makes you feel happy to be young and alive.

As the concert continued, Howie cycled through songs from his two albums, "Australia" and "Stop All the World." For "Sunday Morning Song," a song about waking up after a "wild Saturday night," the keyboardist took the spotlight, breaking it down with an organ-like sound. Just the sight of the keyboardist, a strange looking man whose hair had bright red tips that matched the trim of his Western shirt and who was wearing too much make up, was entertaining. He played the keyboard like he was taming a wild animal.

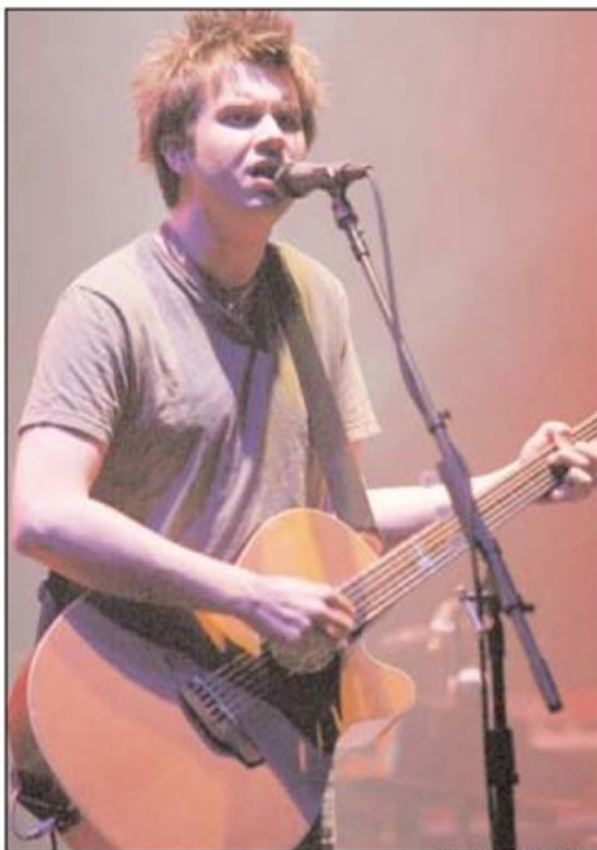
Soon after, Howie took weird guy's place at the keyboard and played a breathtaking rendition of "Ghost," one of the hits from "Australia." The song is a haunting tale of sorrow after a bad break up: "I know there's little use in crying / It's more wide awake and dying then I'm used to / I thought we'd walk these streets together / Now I'm hoping that I'll never have to meet you." It makes you want to strangle the bitch who made this adorable boy hurt so much. The depressing

mood that enveloped the audience was lifted by an intentional word slip that Howie made while singing the line, "Alive from the first / Now I'm denied by the ghost of you." The line became "Alive from the first / Now I'm denied by the pants of you," much to the delight of the somber audience.

One of the worst things that a performer can do during a concert is play every song exactly how it sounds on the album. The concert should be the musician's laboratory, where he can experiment and gauge the response of the crowd. If done properly, even diehard fans should have difficulty recognizing the openings of songs. Howie added a little something extra

to most of the songs on the setlist. For example during the chorus of "Secret," he had fun with the echo synthesizer, drawing out the word "secret" so it sounded like he had shouted the words in a cave. The effect, combined with the hazy blue and red back-lighting, made the concert feel even more intimate than it already did in the relatively tiny Orpheum Theatre. Another extra came during "She Says," when Howie taunted an imaginary lover's ex-boyfriend by bobbing his head back and forth and singing "And when she says she wants somebody else / I hope you know that she doesn't mean you." It reminded me of a little boy sticking his tongue out and saying, "Nan-a-nan-a-booboo."

The show was a pleasing sensory experience, combining impressive lighting effects with new twists on old favorite songs. The only disappointment was that Howie didn't showcase more new material or even old songs that aren't on either of his albums.



PETER R. RUSSO—THE TECH

Howie Day plays at the Orpheum, Wednesday, February 11. Day, from Bangor, ME, has built up much of his fan base in Boston.

The sole new song that he played was "So Goodbye," another heartbreaking song about "being misunderstood and then, like, saying 'fuck it.'" I guess he hasn't had much time to write about waking up in the morning or being betrayed by some horrible girl with the recent release of "Stop All the World" and his current tour.

I'm sure this lack of new material doesn't mean he's through with song-writing. He's young and has many more heartbreaks ahead of him to write about. But what happens when he settles down with that special someone? Just as car crashes and murders make the front page of a newspaper instead of girl scouts helping old people across the street, heartbreak and short-lived passion often make for better music than stable, loving relationships. At the risk of being selfish, I hope Howie sticks to the blow and hookers for a little while longer so we can see the full extent of this cute sensitive singer.



PETER R. RUSSO—THE TECH

A silhouetted Howie Day opens his show at the Orpheum Theater by singing "Sorry So Sorry."