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A Crooner and a Belter All in One

As Cheyenne Jackson closed his eyes and crooned “Falling Slowly” with an unwavering intensity on Tuesday evening at Café Carlyle, this great ballad from “Once” never sounded more profound and mysterious. For a moment, Mr. Jackson, who was joined on harmony vocal by his excellent

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musical director, Willy Beaman, transcended his wholesome image of a handsome, genial all-American boy from northeast Washington State who once played Elvis Presley on Broadway and went deep.

Mr. Jackson arrived at Café Carlyle with some heavy baggage that he seemed eager to unload: This 39-year-old star recently married a man he said he met in a 12-step program. It is his second

marriage. Even today, when more and more gay male stars are revealing their orientation, Mr. Jackson stands out as a remarkably upbeat, forthright voice of gay liberation. Rejoicing in his two-year sobriety, he looked back on his previous behavior, which he characterized as “not pretty.”

His show, “Eyes Wide Open,” began with a robust rendition of “Stand by Me.” Mr. Jackson at full volume has a strong, slightly nasal voice whose timbre smooths out when he sings more quietly. For a modern matinee idol, he projects surprisingly little sensuality. His renditions of Presley favorites like “Can’t Help Falling in Love” and “(Let Me Be Your)

Cheyenne Jackson performs through Jan. 24 at Café Carlyle, 35 East 76th Street, Manhattan, 212-744-1600.

Teddy Bear” were devoid of insinuation and the hubba-hubba inflections that lent Presley’s most innocuous recordings an overlay of “bedroom eyes” suggestiveness. The same absence of seductiveness infused his clean-cut rendition of “Besame Mucho.”

Mr. Jackson seemed more emotionally engaged with contemporary songs like George Michael’s “Kissing a Fool” and Lady Gaga’s “The Edge of Glory” than with standards like “A Foggy Day” and “Don’t Get Around Much Anymore.” Not many men have taken on Joni Mitchell’s classic “A Case of You,” but Mr. Jackson gave it a whirl in a performance he said was based on Diana Krall’s recording. It was a penetrating, wholehearted rendition of a rock-era classic that like “Falling Slowly” reverberated with sorrowful wisdom.



MICHELLE V. AGINS/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Cheyenne Jackson, accompanied by Willy Beaman on piano, at Café Carlyle in Manhattan.