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## Live review: Nick Rosen & We Love L.A. at the Blue Whale, June 22.



It was plain on entering that there'd been some adjustments. The show was advertised as a duo of young old friends Nick Rosen (bass) and Joey Dosik (sax). No sax behind the microphones as the musicians were warming up, though, and there were four: skinny Rosen in V-tee and geek specs, a disgruntled-looking pianist in a little straw hat, an aloof drummer in plaid short sleeves and a ball cap, and a dark-haired looker squeezed into a styly dress singing lyrics off a web tablet.

"Yeah, Joey couldn't make it," Rosen told me, walking over to the bar for a pre-set snackdown. "He plays keyboards too, and he's got all these funky soul chords. So he's out on tour doing that with Nikka Costa."

I first saw Rosen in 2003, onstage with Dosik and an all-star L.A. band gathered to support the long-disappeared avant bassist Henry Grimes. Still teenagers then, Rosen and Dosik had acted as prime movers behind Grimes' comeback; they went on to study at CalArts and Michigan and do what career musicians do -- starve and build skill.

And make contacts. For this forced opportunity, Rosen called up some musicians from back East he'd run into who had recently relocated to SoCal, and dubbed the instant quartet

## We Love L.A.

First impressions proved wrongsville. For one thing, you wouldn't have guessed these semi-random four would have locked together so smoothly, a synchronicity partly due to the looker and the keysman sharing an established act. She was Jesse Palter, winner of every vocal prize according to Rosen; her impassive demeanor complemented warm freshness of tone, perfect pitch and supercharged Schoenbergian scatting -- when she chose blue notes, she knew exactly what and why. The piano guy, Sam Barsh, got his gruntle back once the action started, kicking out a leg, throwing back his head, even jumping up to boogie around like Stevie Wonder on a melodica whose mouthpiece snaked at the end of a crinkled footlong hose. Drummer James Williams' visual disconnect sure didn't extend to the music: Sitting on four sticks for maximum accessibility or alertness, he spattered strokes around a toy-size kit to generate a loose groove so open that we wanted to shuck our shoes; a tambourine shaken out of sight made our toe-tap impulse seem like a command from beyond.

Bassists love drummers who make it easy, and Rosen took full advantage down and up the upright's neck, putting a lid on the beat or blocking out evenly spaced statements of melodic concentration. That's why musicians and audiences love HIM: He's a communicator, not a juggler.

I'd speculate that the gently bouncing first tune belonged to Rosen, since Barsh was reading the chords off a single page ripped from a spiral notebook. But a substantial hunk of the material showcased the pianist, whose soft touch poured out waterfalls of spontaneous romance with subflavors of suburban blues and strangely wistful funk.

Palter, meanwhile, coolly mined multiple traditions -- "It Could Happen to You," Radiohead and Jobim -- without earning the stigma of eclecticism. And I can't figure how she knew that "Never Can Say Goodbye," with its lurking pitfall changes, ranks as one of my favorite pieces of songcraft.

Nice call, Nick. Made accident seem like good luck.

\* \* \*

PHOTO OF NICK ROSEN'S ARM AND JESSE PALTER BY D.D. DARKE.

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