

Title: Rachel Deschaine's Dark Room performance proves that the local St. Louis artist is not one to miss this summer

Before her show at The Dark Room on May 25th, I had seen Rachel Deschaine's music live four times. Twice, I saw her perform on a massive stage with a full band at the Belleville Chili Cook-Off. Another time, she performed acoustic versions of her songs at a smaller, more intimate show at Tim and Joe's. Last summer, she blew the roof off of The Blueberry Hill's Duck Room, where I got to join in on an entire crowd of people jumping and raving in unison with her upbeat songs.

But to say that her most recent performance at The Dark Room was her best performance yet would be an understatement. After several years and multiple venues, Deschaine has truly shown that her greatest skill isn't just her stellar voice, but her incredible songwriting skills. With a full set of almost entirely new music, Deschaine's confidence, prowess, and on-stage presence prove that she has both excelled and matured into an artist deserving of a full album.

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Breaking out of your comfort zone is stressful for any artist. As a writer, I've always struggled with initially diving into and practicing new formats or

genres. For a singer/songwriter, that pressure is tenfold. You always want to carve out a section of the ever-expansive music industry for yourself, but you never want to become too niche and repetitive. If you change up your music and try something new, there's always the fear of losing the fanbase of your old music or performing to too wide of an audience and losing touch with your initial inspiration.

Despite the pressure, Deschaine has truly broken out of any potential conformity, and her new music proves that. The setlist performed at The Dark Room was diverse, to say the least. In the opening minutes, Deschaine seamlessly changed from a fun, Dua Lipa-esque performance of her fan-favorite song "Sweater" into a laid-back but powerful performance of "Puttin' on the Ritz," with a guitar and vocal harmonization that Amy Winehouse would envy. It's transitions like these that have always kept Deschaine from being stale. Like a really good playlist, each song has something unique to set itself aside from the one before. Her songs have always maintained either a lyrical or vocal similarity, acting as a throughline that never makes a song's inclusion jarring. To me, this proves time and time again that each song in her setlists pair perfectly together, and that her diverse array of songs is an example of her pure songwriting skill.

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As I mentioned before, Deschaine's lyrics are superb. As someone that is constantly finding new ways to stitch words together in meaningful and impactful ways, I wish that my writing had a fraction of the impact and weight that Deschaine's do. Usually, when listening to a song or an album for the first time, I have to look up the lyrics and read them line by line to understand a song's true message. Deschaine, along with Pink Floyd and Caamp, is one of the few artists whose songs really stick with me after first listen, which is rare, but especially for live music. The amount of times I have seen a lead singer be drowned out or overshadowed by their supporting instruments is insurmountable. But at The Dark Room, Deschaine's voice and lyrics were center stage, and there wasn't a single song where I wished the sound mixing could've been fixed or the band could've turned down their amps.

I've met and talked with Deschaine's friend and guitarist Matt "The Rattlesnake" Lesch many times, and he's as talented as he is kind. Their collaboration and synchronicity on stage is truly something to enjoy in awe. Neither one overshadows the other, and they both provide ample opportunities for each to shine and take focus during songs. Similar to this spot on harmonization was Deschaine's work with a backup singer that night, who gave her performance even more of a foundation to shine. Like watching a movie with the subtitles on, each of Deschaine's songs were fully supported and showcased by her band and fellow singer, allowing for not only complete

understanding of her lyrics, but a platform for her voice and stage presence to be seen by all.

It was a perfect storm of band and singer, sound mixing, and performance that allowed for two new songs in particular to stand out: “Me Against Myself,” and “Kim K.” Both of these songs touched upon real, honest experiences felt by not only Deschaine, but the entire world. It’s easy for songs with messages about social issues and social media to become preachy, too on the nose, or downright annoying. But, by painting a vivid picture with her lyrics and giving a real, emotional weight to them through her powerful voice, these songs discuss social anxiety and self image in a way that feels honest instead of awkward.

It feels fitting that an artist who is dedicated to local performances and a local fanbase, who are experiencing both her and her music as real and tangible rather than simply audible, is able to stand-out and out-do the songs on the radio with real depictions and even realer images. In a way, Deschaine is a storyteller, and has already mastered the one skill that all storytellers so desperately aspire to have: creating something both personal and new from the experiences and insights you gain from everyday life. These two new songs, and all of Deschaine’s songs, work so well because they are equally relatable and intimate, never broad or generalized. I’ve said it once but I will continue to say it again and again: Deschaine’s lyrics and word choice are the crown jewel

of her performances. They're like poetry, simultaneously beautiful with artistic flow, and insightful with either hidden or open meanings and intention. Each word has a weight to it, and you can tell that they were tirelessly reviewed and perfected before every performance.

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The show ended with a performance of my favorite song by Deschaine to date: "Get Out of Soho." This song has always felt distinctly unique to her and her style of music, and after every show, it was the one that I ended up humming along to days after. At the end of her show at The Dark Room, this was still the case, but after following a setlist of new and stellar music, for once, it wasn't the only song that felt "authentically Rachel Deschaine," because all of them did. Maybe it was the spirit of the then-recently passed Tina Turner, or maybe there was something in the speakers that night, but the confidence and self-assurance emanating off of Deschaine and her show that night was more tangible than ever. This felt like the start of something new, different, and better for the local artist, and that it will be the foundation of a long future of great performances and personal, powerful songwriting.

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There are a lot of musical artists performing in St. Louis this summer: Declan McKenna, Cavetown, The Old 97s, and Ween to name a few. But to miss one of the many upcoming Rachel Deschaine performances would be a massive

mistake. In particular, I would like to highlight her upcoming shows at the Chesterfield Amphitheatre on July 22nd, which will be her biggest and hopefully best venue yet, and her return to The Blueberry Hill's Duck Room on August 5th, which, if similar to her first performance there, will surely be another standout night of great music in a fun, friendly, and intimate venue.