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Review: Newdow tests the musical waters

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Published 2:15 am PST Wednesday, November 23, 2005

Story appeared in Metro section, Page B3

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Atheist Michael Newdow and four students perform on Tuesday night at Sheldon High School. The show drew an audience of 77 people and, outside the theater, a dozen protesters. Sacramento Bee/Carl Costas

Michael Newdow is a smart man. He's a doctor, a lawyer, a crusader and provocateur trying, through the courts, to remove God from the Pledge of Allegiance and our currency.

To some, he has become a folk hero, to many others a villain and a pain in the neck.

But his budding musical career, which he put on display in a one-man show before a sparse audience Tuesday night, may be cut short by, of all things, lack of God-given talent.

Admirers and detractors can unite on at least one thing - the performance was, ahem, god-awful.

His singing was so-so, his lyrics inane, his rapping just plain ridiculous, his stage presence saved only by a brightly colored shirt. He rushed his lecture. And his lecture, essentially about the history of civilization, was way too long by biblical proportions.

As a performer, Newdow committed his first sin by showing up late to the theater at Sheldon High School. Sure he's a busy guy, but a one-man show can't go on when that one man is stuck in traffic. A woman at the microphone announced as much to the audience members, all 77 of them seated by the 7 p.m. scheduled start time.

Everyone knows the afternoon rush hour from Sacramento to Elk Grove is ungodly bad. Yet, true talents can win back a disgruntled audience with energy and enthusiasm. Newdow took it in another direction. In his first number, a song about equality, the recorded music drowned out his singing voice, prompting one helpful heckler to shout: "We can't hear you. The music's too loud."

Newdow, who at times was likable and self-effacing, tried to put some enthusiasm into it with hand gestures, a dipsy-do or two with his feet, raised eyebrows even.

When he started the song over, some of the lyrics were decipherable, which may not have been a good thing: "A constitution is a great solution to retribution and tyrannical abuse" and "No matter what your choice, just respect each other's voice."

To be fair, singing about an unpopular position revolving around the establishment clause may not be the inspiration for timeless music.

Thus, it was a long, long night. Despite the dozen or so protesters outside with placards, the event went off without incident.

Those who attended the performance seemed to support Newdow, given their charitable applause.

Outside it was a different story.

"What is he? A lawyer, a doctor, an atheist and now he's a singer?" said protester James Musgrave. "What is he going to do next, remodel bathrooms?"

Indeed, grout work might have been more entertaining, given Newdow's second song, about dinosaurs. Newdow and four students did a dinosaur song-and-dance. Only a man who paid \$1,700 to rent the theater could get away with such a thing.

What little musical momentum there was ground to a halt with Newdow's lecture. He spoke too quickly, tried to cover too much and wound up saying very little.

It said something about his speaking skills when this listener wondered when the next song would begin. It eventually did.

Which leads to the big question many believers and nonbelievers might pose after seeing this one-man disaster: If there really is a merciful God, how could he have stood by and allowed this to happen?

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