

SXSW review: Alyssa Suede

John T. Davis

Austin-American Statesman, March 22, 2009

(9 p.m. Saturday, live.create.lounge)

Alyssa Suede is Beck's sister.

OK, that's out of the way. She is also a young singer-songwriter from Los Angeles who made her South By Southwest debut on Saturday night at the live.create.lounge, an art gallery on Neches Street that was pressed into service as an SXSW venue.

On the one hand, combining art and music is a great idea. On the other hand, the space was an abysmal acoustic space, tall and boxy with a metal ceiling. One might as well try to sing in a silo or an oil tank.

Oh, well. Suede was a gamer, performing an eight-song acoustic set accompanied by her father, David Campbell, on violin.

One thing that struck this listener was how fast the young 23-year-old is progressing musically. According to her bio, she only began her career two years ago. One of her earliest songs, "A Thousand Times," was full of earnest and overdone imagery, the sort of thing many fledgling songwriters begin with.

But the song that followed, "Anybody Out There," which she was performing for the first time, was more melodically sophisticated and more mature and fully realized lyrically. The two songs, she said after her set, were written only 15 months apart.

"Everywhere you go in Austin," she said at one point, "people are making music in the street and ... and ... in elevators." That was as charming a summation of SXSW as yours truly heard all week.

Suede's set was drawn for the most part from her debut album, "Black and White In Color." Singing in a jewel-like voice (some might say a Jewel-like voice, but that's neither here nor there), she moved with assurance between the upbeat pop of "Ferris Wheel" to the floating, dreamy "Jack and Jill" to the somber, contemplative "Hollow."

One hopes she will return soon, perhaps with a band, definitely to a more forgiving performance space. On the other hand, there are always those elevators ...