

Lounging around

High caliber entertainment for a low price

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Entertainment and nightlife trends change constantly in Las Vegas, but one thing that has never gone out of style is the classic Las Vegas lounge act.

Free lounge acts have been a staple of the Las Vegas entertainment scene for decades. Hundreds of up-and-coming performers have graced the stages in casino lounges and some big-name stars like Wayne Newton and Don Rickles started their careers as lounge acts.

While Las Vegas' main showrooms may be filled with amazing entertainment options, lounges have always provided a more economical alternative to the higher-priced performances. Most lounge entertainment is free, although some charge a minimal cover or require the purchase of a drink or two.

No matter what kind of music you like, there's a lounge somewhere in Vegas that will cater to your taste. The lounges are filled with talented performers showcasing everything from jazz to piano to rock and '80s music. Tribute bands are another popular lounge fixture and you'll find everything from the Prince tribute Purple Reign to the classic rock tribute Yellow Brick Road playing in Las Vegas.

Whether you're hoping to catch a performance by the next big thing or you want to go hear the familiar sounds of an old favorite, the tradition of great lounge entertainment lives on nightly at many Las Vegas resorts.

Lounge Legend: Cook E. Jarr

Longtime lounge singer Cook E. Jarr has developed a cult following in Las Vegas. He's so popular that the former Continental hotel, which he called home for many years, and Harrah's hotel, where he currently plays, both had casino chips created with his image on them. He also counts Tom Jones, Robin Williams and Jimmy Kimmel among his fans.

Cook E. Jarr is known for his high-energy performances, creating a party atmosphere and getting the crowds involved in his show. He's also known for his quintessential Vegas lounge look—plenty of gold chains and a shag haircut. His show at Carnival Court, which he describes as "a controlled slide," comes complete with a disco ball, multi-colored strobe lights and special effects.

"I just go out—I don't have anything prepared as far as what I'm going to play. When I go out there you really don't know—it could be an older crowd or a younger crowd," he said.

"Once a person hears a song, you've got them—you hit one of their favorite songs and they're there—they'll just stay and listen to everything."

Cook E. Jarr first hit the Las Vegas Strip in 1970, performing in Nero's Nook at Caesars Palace.

"Being a kid from south Philly I just always wanted to be a lounge singer in Vegas. I actually came out here with a nine-piece band when I opened Caesars in 1970. I really didn't dig the town that much because I was more into dancing and stuff like that and playing dance music and so I went back to Philadelphia," he said.

After playing in Atlantic City for awhile, Cook E. Jarr was invited by the owners of the Sands hotel to come back to Vegas.

"That was June 2, 1982 and I came for two weeks and I never went home. I love it here—died and went to heaven," he said.

Cook E. Jarr said he's seen many changes in the entertainment scene and Las Vegas over the years.

"There were the greatest lounges. I remember when I first came here you could see Fats Domino, Frankie Valli—they were all in the lounges."

"I love the changes—all the good food, all the good restaurants that are in the hotels now. Every hotel is like a little city."

Cook E. Jarr has been entertaining fans at Harrah's for nine years and says Carnival Court is his favorite venue to perform in.

"It's quite different because it's outside. It's so roomy—so big. Everybody on the east side of the Strip has to cross in front of you and hear you so there's no way of getting away from it," he said.

Rising stars: Zowie Bowie

Another of the most popular acts in Las Vegas among locals and tourists is Zowie Bowie. Walk by the Rocks Lounge at Red Rock Casino Resort & Spa on a



Photos courtesy of Zowie Bowie and Harrah's
Zowie Bowie's Chris Phillips and Marley Taylor perform at Red Rock Casino Resort & Spa Friday and Saturday from 11 p.m. and at Green Valley Ranch Sunday at 6 p.m. Longtime lounge singer Cook E. Jarr (inset) performs at the Carnival Court at Harrah's Friday and Saturday from 6 to 8 p.m.

Some of the cool places to lounge in Las Vegas

Fontana Bar & Lounge

Bellagio
5 p.m. - 2 a.m. daily
Whether inside the lounge or out on the patio at the Fontana Bar & Lounge, you'll find one of the best views in town of the Bellagio's spectacular fountain show. The Fontana features live entertainment, a large dance floor and an extensive drink menu.

Cleopatra's Barge

Caesars Palace
10:30 p.m. - 3 a.m. daily
Cleopatra's Barge is an ornate replica of the craft that transported the royalty of Egypt on the Nile

River in the times of Julius Caesar. This floating lounge showcases live music, DJs, an extensive cocktail list and a dance floor that literally rocks.

Indigo Lounge

Bally's
7 p.m. - 2 a.m. Saturday - Thursday; 7 p.m. - 3 a.m. Friday
Decorated with plush fabrics and blue tones, Indigo Lounge at Bally's features live piano music and premium liquors. Indigo Lounge is an escape to the glamorous gaming days of old. Resident performers include Rick Michel, whose show, "Drinkin', Singin', Swingin'," is a salute to the Rat Pack.

Friday or Saturday night and you'll hear their high-energy performance going on inside and see a line of people outside trying to get in.

Zowie Bowie features Chris Phillips and his fiancée Marley Taylor. Both had been entertaining in one form or another for many years until they met and decided to team up.

"When I met Marley seven years ago, I said ...why don't we go for it and let's put together a show that can hopefully lead us to Las Vegas and pursue our dreams," said Phillips.

For Phillips, his goals always included playing in Las Vegas.

"We both had this passion for entertaining and to be quite honest, I always had this dream since I was about 12 years old to come to Las Vegas and be essentially the next Wayne Newton," said Phillips. "I idolized not only the entertainers here but the Las Vegas lifestyle and the glitz and the glamour that I used to remember so vividly from the '70s. There was a certain feeling and

a vibration that I got from going in the casinos back in those days. And even as a young child I remember not wanting to be a pro football player or a doctor or lawyer—I wanted to be an overly-tanned, fake teeth, flamboyant entertainer that wore a bunch of gaudy rings. My heroes were Sammy Davis Jr. and Elvis."

Zowie Bowie came to Las Vegas from Scottsdale, Ariz. in 2006. Phillips said the duo had created a "high-energy Top 40 nightclub concert thing" there and were bringing in 4,000 people a week to the club they were playing at, which caught the attention of Station Casinos executives.

"The Fertitta family caught wind of that and they were building their new hotel out here—Red Rock—and they approached us and they were kind enough and gracious enough to have us climb aboard and become their show there and we have been there since they opened," said Phillips.

While Zowie Bowie keeps audiences entertained with their Top 40 and dance

music on Fridays and Saturdays, Phillips said the move to Vegas also allowed him to create what he's most passionate about—the duo's 13-piece vintage Vegas big band show, which they perform on Sundays at Green Valley Ranch Station.

"I had something of an agenda and a mission by coming to Las Vegas and that is to try to restore and to keep alive what I refer to as the 'spirit of Las Vegas,' which is to me something that seems to be kind of a dying art around here and that is a show that's based primarily around what I call vintage Vegas standards that were made famous by Sinatra and Bobby Darrin and the Rat Pack and Keely Smith and my hero Sammy Davis, Jr.," said Phillips. "I remember coming here in the '70s and seeing these kind of entertainers where it was nothing more than a single person with a big orchestra behind them and a spotlight and that was it."

"When I think of Vegas I think of that type of entertainment... and I don't think there's quite enough of that left. There's of course Bette Midler and some other people that are keeping that going but I very much have a mission and an agenda to keep that alive in the city and I think that's very important for the image of the city," said Phillips.

One of the reasons Zowie Bowie is so popular is that they entertain people of all musical tastes. Phillips said the duo's fans don't fall into a particular demographic.

"What's so cool is that we have the most universal, diverse appeal of any show I think I've ever seen in the sense that literally in front of us any night you've got eighteen year olds in there with fake IDs dancing next to eighty

year olds who are having the same night," said Phillips.

"Certainly we get a little older, more sophisticated crowd for the big band thing and two cocktails later we turn around and go from Sinatra to Snoop Dogg."

Given Zowie Bowie's success so far in Vegas it's not surprising that their hopes for the future include a show on the Strip someday.

"Ultimately we would like to think that our future certainly is to do like a showroom type of environment down on the Strip at some point and if I had my druthers I would like to think that we could bridge the gap between the vintage flavor of what was with what's going on with today's music and today's energy and I think there's a very strong possibility that we could marry the two entities together into one kind of Zowie Bowie super show of some sort," said Phillips.

Phillips said the best part about entertaining the crowds at Rocks Lounge is the ability to create a diversion for people while offering an economical night out.

"Without question the most satisfaction Marley and I get is just to see the people that may have had a tough week or may have been going through some tough times... and being able to create an escape for them where they can come and kind of forget their problems and have the time of their life and to do it very affordably on top of that," said Phillips. "We insisted when we came here that we don't charge anything to get into our show and that way you can come in there with ten bucks in your pocket and have the best night of your life."