

'Legends' lives on

Long-running Vegas impersonator show moving to new home

By Caroline Fontein
Vegas.com

If you missed seeing Elvis when he was still alive or another favorite headliner the last time they were in Las Vegas, "Legends in Concert" is the next best thing. With more than 15,000 performances and an audience of almost six million people over the years, "Legends in Concert," produced by On Stage Entertainment, is the longest-running independently-owned production show on the Las Vegas Strip.

It all started with an idea generated from a celebrity look-alike contest in Southern California. In 1983 "Legends in Concert" opened at Imperial Palace for a six-week trial run with tribute artists Buddy Holly, Janis Joplin, Marilyn Monroe and Bobby Darin.

After more than 25 years of success on the Las Vegas Strip at Imperial Palace, the show is moving down the street to Harrah's in January of 2009.

Before "Legends in Concert" moves to the new location, it is transforming into a holiday celebration with specially-produced musical arrangements through Dec. 30, 2008. The performers will combine their signature songs with a few holiday classics for a seasonal spectacular.

Once the show moves to Harrah's it will feature a brand new set designed by Andy Walmsley, the same set designer

"Legends In Concert"

Where: Imperial Palace, 3535 S. Las Vegas Blvd. Las Vegas, NV 89109

Time: 7:30 and 10 p.m. Monday - Saturday.

for "American Idol" and numerous other notable television shows and theatrical productions around the world.

One of the factors that has made "Legends in Concert" so endearing is that it's the only place where you can see some of the entertainers impersonated in the show.

"Think of the best concert you've ever seen and then think of seeing all five of them in the same night. It's almost like the concert that never was," said Brian Brigner, CEO for On Stage Entertainment.

Originally, the show only portrayed artists who were not alive, but it has since evolved into featuring performers from all eras. Another thing that makes the show popular is people's fascination with tribute artists.

"I think that people are intrigued that there are actually people out there that truly look and sound like these people," said Brigner.

When you watch the show it truly is amazing to see the performers' uncanny resemblance to the entertainers that they portray. Every element is emulated to perfection, from how they look to how they talk, move, dance and sing.

Marcel Forestieri, who portrays Jay Leno, explained that being able to transform into his character is an innate talent.

"Everybody has a gift that comes natural to them that they can't take credit for. You can hone that gift, and that's your responsibility. For me it's always been I'm a mimic," said Forestieri.

He has been doing Leno impersonations for almost 13 years and has even been invited to perform alongside the real Leno on "The Tonight Show with Jay Leno."

Forestieri is a unique part of the Vegas show. After performing with the show for a few temporary runs, he was signed on as a permanent addition in February 2008, and being a part of "Legends in Concert" has been an amazing experience for him.

"It still has not really hit me yet, where I am and what I am doing. I'm the host of a twenty-five year run show on the Strip in Las Vegas, the entertainment capital of the world. It's surreal," said Forestieri.

The show opens with the theme song from "The Tonight Show with Jay Leno" and Forestieri comes on stage to tell a few jokes inspired by current events. After warming the crowd up he announces the first performer and acts as a host and emcee during the show.

"Legends in Concert" features a rotating cast of 75 of the top tributes artists in the world who sing everything

live. The current line-up is Ann Margret, Donna Summer, Jay Leno, Madonna, Justin Timberlake and Elvis.

While the line-up changes every few months, Elvis and Leno remain in house for every show. When some of the entertainers are not headlining in Vegas they perform at one of the show's other locations in the United States.

Matt Lewis, who portrays Elvis, said the constant renewal of energy from the rotating cast has also contributed to the success of "Legends in Concert."

"When you're changing acts out every three or four months, you're getting new people that are coming in that have not had the opportunity to get stale. They are giving 110 percent every performance," said Lewis.

Both he and Forestieri also explained that apart from their time on stage, much of the joy experienced from being in the show comes from what goes on behind the scenes.

"We go out on stage and do our set, but the chemistry backstage and the camaraderie from all levels, that really keeps us going. It really is like a family back there," said Lewis.

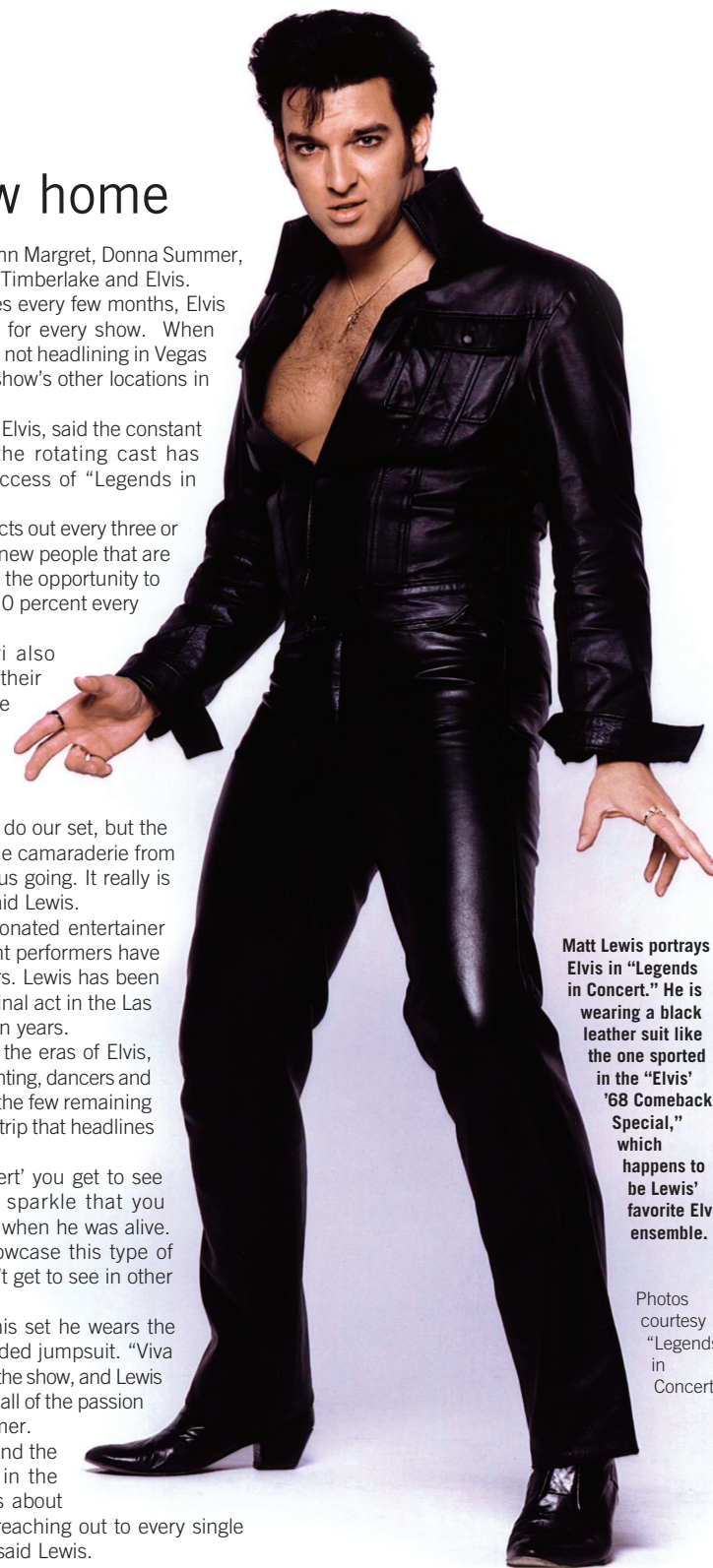
Elvis is the most impersonated entertainer in the show, and 17 different performers have portrayed him over the years. Lewis has been performing as Elvis for the final act in the Las Vegas show for almost seven years.

His set encompasses all the eras of Elvis, accented with a live band, lighting, dancers and multimedia. Lewis is one of the few remaining Elvis impersonators on the Strip that headlines in a production show.

"With 'Legends in Concert' you get to see Elvis in all the glam and sparkle that you would expect to see him in when he was alive. It is a unique place to showcase this type of entertainment that you don't get to see in other shows," said Lewis.

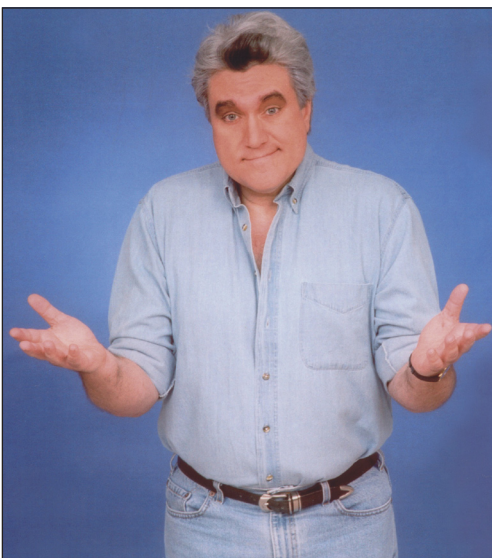
For the final portion of his set he wears the iconic white and jewel-studded jumpsuit. "Viva Las Vegas" is the last song in the show, and Lewis really cuts loose, embracing all of the passion and vigor of the real performer.

"I try to find the smiles and the different personalities out in the crowd that I can touch. It's about being in the moment and reaching out to every single member of the audience," said Lewis.



Matt Lewis portrays Elvis in "Legends in Concert." He is wearing a black leather suit like the one sported in the "Elvis '68 Comeback Special," which happens to be Lewis' favorite Elvis ensemble.

Photos courtesy "Legends in Concert"



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