

LIGHTS. **VEGAS** ACTION.

# Q&A with Donny Osmond

*Interviewed by Kristine McKenzie*

Donny Osmond's life in the entertainment business began at the age of 5 when he first appeared on "The Andy Williams Show" with his brothers' singing group.

During the 1970s, Donny stood out as the heartthrob of the bunch and he soon found himself in the center of "Osmondmania."

His sister Marie joined him in the spotlight on "The Donny and Marie Show," a popular variety program that aired on ABC from 1976 to 1979. Donny (at age 18) and Marie (at age 16) made television history by becoming the youngest hosts of a weekly prime-time TV musical/variety show. When the show ended, they continued to perform together up until 1986 and they each went on to pursue solo careers. Donny and Marie reunited in 1998 to co-host "Donny & Marie," a talk show that ran for two seasons.

Over the years, Donny has released 55 albums and has enjoyed a diverse career encompassing theater, television and the big screen. He has hosted the game show "Pyramid," he's a best-selling author (his autobiography debuted at No. 1 on the UK bestseller list) and an accomplished theater performer (over 2,000 performances starring in Andrew Lloyd Weber's "Joseph and The Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat" and most recently on Broadway in Disney's "Beauty and the Beast").

Donny also recently co-starred in the Disney film "College Road Trip" and he can currently be found appearing with Marie in their new variety show at the Flamingo five nights a week.

**Q: You have a lot of history performing in Las Vegas – you've been working here since you were a kid. How have you seen the city change over the years – has entertainment changed?**

**A:** "It's gotten bigger – that's for sure. Entertainment is entertainment. Obviously the production value has gotten huge and I think a lot of people have learned that, yes, we've raised the bar. But what Marie and I have tried to accomplish here is bring back a little bit of traditional Vegas where it's not just production, but there's personality – and that's what we've tried to create here at the Flamingo. Yeah, we give them a lot of the dancing and the lights and the multimedia and sound and everything, but there are times where we just sit down and sing and try to give them what we were raised on – and that is variety."

**Do you have any memories that stand out from your days performing here back in the '70s? Ever hang out with the Rat Pack or anything like that?**

**A:** "My first memory is opening up for Shirley Bassey at Sahara and Mickey Rooney would come by every so often and join in the show. I remember Elvis coming back stage when we were playing the International, when the Hilton was the International, and talking to us back in his dressing room. He closed and then we opened the next night and he stayed to watch our opening show. Then I remember working at Caesars and Frank was out in the audience when we were opening up for Nancy."

**Speaking of Elvis, there's some footage of you in your show in Elvis-like jumpsuits. Was that just the style or were you a big fan?**

**A:** "It's interesting to note that we had the same designer and when Elvis went into that high collar, flare bellbottom kind of a look, it's about the same time that Bill Belew started designing for us, which was around 1970. Obviously Elvis had it maybe slightly before us, but we had the same designer, Bill Belew."

**It's been 29 years since you did a long-term engagement in Las Vegas. What made you want to come back and do that?**

**A:** "We always knew we'd be back. We knew it would be inevitable for Donny and Marie to do something ... We wanted to pursue our own careers after 'The Donny and Marie Show' ended and we did that and we thought, you know it's time to bring back some nostalgia and bring back our individual careers. When Chip Lightman and Danny Gans contacted us, they said 'we think Donny and Marie is right for Vegas right now and I know you guys have been thinking about it.' So we looked at a lot of different showrooms and then he introduced us to Don (Marrandino, president of the Flamingo). I was the first one to come here to the Flamingo and I saw the showroom and I said 'that's it.' The booths, the old traditional Vegas – it's not the concert seating. It's intimate enough, it's small enough yet large enough to support a larger show. It was a perfect fit."

**You've been performing together for more than 30 years and you're still selling out shows. How have you managed to maintain that popularity?**

**A:** "It's unbelievable what's going on. You never really know what's going to happen... You can throw millions of dollars at a show and you just don't know if the audience is going to take to it. We're no exception to the rule, but the word of mouth has been fantastic. Granted, Marie and I have put forth a lot of work... but you just never know, so we're really lucky, really blessed right now to have a wave to ride – especially in these economic times."

**In the show you joke about the fact that you're a grandfather, yet you do some pretty strenuous dancing. Where do you get all the energy for that?**

**A:** "I have no idea. I really don't know. I'm pretty tired at the end of the week. This grandpa goes home and plays with the grandkids."

**But that takes a lot of energy too.**

**A:** "It's different though. It recharges my batteries so to speak. I still have young children at home. My youngest is ten and I have a seventeen-year-old in high school and three older than that – twenty-three, twenty-seven and twenty-nine."

**You've got your hands full.**

**A:** "Yeah I do, but I'm pretty lucky in that respect too. I get to have my cake and eat it too as they say. I get to play Vegas and do the star role and then I go home and play the dad role."

**You sing a lot of greatest hits in your show – any plans to release new music?**

**A:** "We do actually. There's talk of doing a Donny and Marie album but again, we still have our own separate careers. Marie's working on an album right now and so the plans are there but ...to add any more on the plate would be kind of dangerous right now, but there are plans for me to start my solo project after the first of the year."

**Would you ever want to go back to TV or do you prefer a live audience?**

**A:** "There is a show in the works right now – can't really release the information yet – but a network show that Marie and I are looking at doing... Vegas is looking like exactly the way I wanted it to be a few years ago – the home base for both of us. Because when you get right down to it, let's call it the way it is – Vegas has become the entertainment capital of the world. Everybody comes here and to have a huge presence here is just a good move."

**Have you gone to see anyone else's shows in town?**

**A:** "No I haven't. I wish I could but we all do shows at the same time. Although, the night before last I was in my dressing room late and George Wallace came on and I walk out on stage, so I was part of George's show and sang with Mosaic. They said they want to do it again. They're coming up with an arrangement to involve me in one of their songs. So really that's the only thing I can do since all of our shows are at the same time and I go home Sundays and Mondays."

**You have done television, Broadway – is there anything you haven't done yet that you'd like to do? Would you like to go back to Broadway?**

**A:** "Yeah – That's obviously a really nice feather in your cap to say you've been to Broadway – it's a long commitment because you have to do at least 5 – 6 months...it's going to be easier for me to do stuff like that once my children are raised, but right now Vegas is the ideal situation for me. I did something last August that was so much fun. I did a Disney film with Martin Lawrence and Raven Symone. I played the dorkiest guy though but I had so much fun so I'd kind of like to do some more cameo spots in films. I like to jump around. I like to do it all. It keeps me from getting bored so to speak. Here again, I guess it's that variety in me – I like to do a lot of different kinds of things."

