

Rousing Start for Holmes' Play

The following review of the debut performance of "My Own Song," Clint Holmes' production that tells the story of the Las Vegas entertainer's life, appeared in the Hendersonville (North Carolina) Times-News and on BlueRidgeNow.com.

By Denise Ward

The audience at Friday night's performance of "My Own Song" starring Clint Holmes at the Flat Rock Playhouse witnessed something unusual by today's standards -- a spontaneous, thunderous standing ovation, complete with cheers and whistles.

It wasn't one of those automatic standing ovations where one or two

people stand and others dutifully follow. No, this was different. The audience shot up as one as the final note of the last song hung in the air, applauding until our hands and arms hurt.

It was the first time the cast of eight, including Holmes, a four-time Las Vegas Entertainer of the Year, had performed the brand new show

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Clint Holmes is starring "My Own Song," based on his life story, at the Flat Rock Playhouse in North Carolina. Photo by Treadshots.com.

Las Vegas ISRAELITE Entertainment

Girl's Night An Evening Of Tumult

By Frank H. Lieberman

There was a time that hotels were the risk takers when it came to entertainment. The marquee attractions were considered "lost leaders," nothing more than a tool to bring patrons into the property. It was considered a bonus if the performer/show made money for the hotel, but ending up in the "red" was fine.

Today, with corporations in control, things have changed with every aspect of the hotel operation -- in the majority of situations -- having to be on the plus-side of the ledger, including entertainment. So the onus, or risk, is with the name on the marquee and main

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Las Vegas Pool Scene Competition Sizzles

By Frank H. Lieberman

Home to the hottest hotels and attractions across the globe, it's no surprise the Las Vegas pool scene out-sizzles the competition. With the growing popularity of the city's pool destinations rivaling the lure of its nightclubs, thousands are finding that Las Vegas' "daylife" is as hot as its nightlife. This summer promises to be bigger and better than ever with the debut of three new pools all within CityCenter. Whether visitors want to soak up the scene at the newest pools on The Strip, go all-in at a beachside casino or dare to be bare at an adults-only retreat, daytime is the right time to dive into Las Vegas summer fun.

ARIA Resort & Casino —

Guests of ARIA Resort & Casino at CityCenter, are invited to escape to a paradise offered by its three distinctive pools. Shielded by a landscape of yucca, acacia and palm trees, guests also can enjoy unique water features which arc gracefully overhead as well as three hot tubs. Dozens of umbrellas fill the expansive 215,000-square-foot pool deck, providing a cool break from the sun.

For a pampering experience, ARIA's cabanas pair superior service with such high-tech indulgences as 42" LCD televisions, iPod docks and Wi-Fi Internet access. The open-air Breeze Café or Pool Bar allow for al fresco dining. Pools are

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The poolscape of Bellagio transports guests to Italy without the jet lag. With five Mediterranean-inspired pools, guests can enjoy everything from carefree lounging to a cooling workout. Set amidst elegant citrus trees and landscaped gardens, the complex features hand-carved Italianesque stone fountains and Mediterranean-designed tile.

VEGASTARS

By

Frank H.
Lieberman



Burton Departing Monte Carlo: In a case where a surprise rumor became almost instant reality, magician **Lance Burton** is closing his show at the **Monte Carlo** on Sept. 4. Burton, who opened the specifically designed theater in June 1996, says the decision to leave was his and didn't offer any exact explanations of why.

"About three weeks ago I had a moment of clarity when it just all became clear to me that I'm not on the same page as the hotel," he said. Burton likened the decision to "a couple getting divorced. You can stay in the marriage for the sake of the children and be miserable, or you can say 'You know what? This isn't working and nobody's at fault, we're just going in different directions.'"

The September closing certainly shows no animosity towards each other and gives Burton one more summer to perform a show long cited as one of the best for families in **Las Vegas**, and gives the Monte Carlo time to line up a replacement. Burton says he doesn't plan to badmouth the hotel where he spent "at least a third of my career" and still has "a deep emotional connection" after performing about 15,000 shows.

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Torme Talks Baseball, Dad

By Frank H. Lieberman

Steve March Tormé is an avid baseball fan. Growing up in Westchester County, New York, the Yankees are his team. He had dreams of playing shortstop for them. He did travel to Israel twice as the starting shortstop on the United States Macabi team.

Today his link is a two-hour drive from his Appleton, Wisconsin, home to sing the National Anthem at an Eau Claire Express Northwoods League game that also includes taking batting and infield practice. The league has more teams,

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The Palms Offers New Pool Fun

As the desert heat rolls into Las Vegas, the Palms makes a splash with the addition of three new reasons to celebrate poolside. N9Group continues to raise the bar by offering revelers a pool lounge every Friday and Saturday night, a monthly nighttime event known as Skinny Dip and Sun Dance, a party Sunday afternoons. The poolside playground known as Ditch Fridays also returns with its action-packed parties.

Ditch Fridays —

Known for making Las Vegas a hotbed of truancy for the summer months, Ditch Fridays arrives May 7 for its fourth season featuring

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REHAB Returns To Hard Rock

Poolside glamour rules as the preeminent "daylife" experience, REHAB, the world famous Sunday pool party, returns to the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino for an unprecedented seventh season.

The 2010 season of REHAB opened with A-list celebrities and some of the music industry's biggest acts including a performance by Wyclef

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VEGASTARS

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VIP seating...

Easter Seals Southern Nevada teams up with **Vons** to make donating as easy as going to the grocery store. Through May 2, Vons is hosting its annual fundraising effort to benefit Easter Seals and the services it provides to local residents with disabilities. Vons' customers are given the opportunity to make a contribution at the check-out counter at any of the 16 locations across the valley. Their generosity raised \$212,757.79 in 2009. Each dollar donated directly supports Easter Seals and its mission to help people with disabilities or special needs become self-sufficient through direct services, education and community partnerships...

Virgin America's newest sale cuts nonstop fares from **Los Angeles, San Diego and Las Vegas** to as low as \$49 each way. This is up to \$100 off regular prices on the airline. The sale is valid through June 20, when flying on a Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday. Travel on other days for \$20 more each direction...

A new rapid commuter bus terminal in north-

west **Las Vegas** will serve as a key part of a regional mass transit system. Local, state and federal officials christened the \$11 million terminal last week. It was funded with federal support as part of a transit system dubbed **ACEXpress**. **Southern Nevada Regional Transportation Commission** chief **Jacob Snow** says diesel hybrid electric buses are using dedicated bus-only lanes on surface streets and high-occupancy lanes on freeways. He says riders paying \$2 fares should be able to get from the **Centennial Hills Transit Center to the Strip** in about 20 minutes. Future ACEXpress lines are planned for **Las Vegas Boulevard, Boulder Highway, Sahara Avenue and Flamingo Road**...

Cirque du Soleil is again trying to show its appreciation for **Las Vegas** residents. **Cirque** is offering tickets for \$49 (plus taxes and fees) for four of its shows: **KÁ, Mystere, Zumanity and Believe**. The offer is valid on all performance days except for Saturdays. Seating with the \$49 deal varies by show. Locals can either call the hotel box offices and mention "Appreciation \$49" or order online with the code given on the Web site. A valid Nevada driver's license must be presented at the

time of pick up. The locals offer is valid through April 30...

Fans of comedian and impressionist **Frank Caliendo** can now listen to his impersonations at the touch of a button with the unveiling of the Caliendo "**Knuckleheads**" bobblehead application available on **iTunes**. Featuring some of Caliendo's famous lines like, "Oh no, this is gonna be turrble" as **Charles Barkley**, Caliendo enthusiasts will get to hear the jokes and the voices rolled into a fun and interactive bobblehead application. Download the free version to get impressions of **George Bush** and **John Madden** or the full version for \$2.99 to get impressions of **Dr. Phil, Bill Clinton, Barkley, Bush and Madden** at your fingertips 24/7...

Comedian **Craig Ferguson**, host of **CBS's The Late Late Show with Craig Ferguson**, will join the lineup of entertainers for a series of limited engagements this year at the **Venetian Showroom**. He'll appear May 21-22 and June 4-5 at 9 p.m. with tickets priced at \$47.75, \$67.75, and \$87.75 inclusive of tax and handling fees. A limited number of VIP packages, which include front row

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Rousing Start for Holmes' Play

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in front of an audience. But you would never know it. Each performer appeared completely comfortable on stage.

The show opens with Holmes alone on stage. He is backstage at a nightclub, tense and anxious. His powerful baritone launches into the first number, "I Sing," and we get a foreshadowing from the lyric, "Music heals my soul."

The stage manager suddenly appears and tells Holmes he doesn't have to perform tonight.

But Holmes insists he will be fine and the other singers and the band must not know that something has happened until the show is over. (The Playhouse audience doesn't find out either until the powerful climax.)

As the show within a show opens, the audience is transported back and forth from the stage at Harrah's in Las Vegas to the path that have brought Holmes, the star of "My Own Song," and Holmes the man, to the place where he now finds himself.

Mostly autobiographical, the show is an amazing journey, full of emotional highs and lows, some painful for the audience to witness, especially knowing that Holmes has actually lived them.

"My Own Song" is brilliantly cast. Each member steps out of the ensemble to portray a key character in Holmes' past. We first meet Audrey and Eddie, Holmes' parents. Audrey is a white classically trained British opera singer. Eddie is a black American jazz-singer father. They meet, fall in love and marry in 1944 while Eddie is stationed in England during World War II.

Jennifer Evans' portrayal of Audrey is superb. Her clear soprano shines, especially while teaching young Clint the finer points of singing. It's easy to believe the pain she feels as she witnesses the men she loves be shunned by society. She advises young Clint to "just be nice." No matter what.

David Jennings as Eddie does an excellent job portraying a man trying to do the best he can to provide for his family and live with the choices he's made. He clearly loves his wife but feels guilty and helpless to change the hardships their bi-racial marriage have created for their son – half black, half white, not fitting into either world.

The couple's pain comes to light when Clint tells more of his mother's story: One week she sang with the Covent Garden singers in London; the next she lived with Eddie in a housing proj-

ect in Buffalo, N.Y., the only white person in the neighborhood. As she and Eddie walk down the street hand in hand, a man mugs Eddie. Audrey finds a policeman and as they approach the melee, she explains that the black man is her husband. Disgusted, the policeman turns and walks away. That's when Eddie decides to "move someplace safe" – the little town of Farnham, N.Y.

In their new town, young Clint and his sister are the only children of color in the school, and the song "Did You Ever Feel?" tells of his plight. He continues to follow his mother's advice – "Be nice."

Next we meet Lenore, Holmes' first love, played by Mara Davi. She is the sweet, strong teenager who doesn't care what others think and dates Clint anyway. We root for the young couple and hope their dream of the perfect prom night comes true. The blissful scene fades when Heather Parcels enters as Mrs. Ferguson (Lenore's mother). She spews such venom when she discovers Clint's background that Friday night's audience audibly gasped. We hurt for the young couple.

As Clint's bumpy path continues, he meets Roz, a strong, proud black woman who tries to nurture the African-American part of Holmes' soul. Reva Rice gives a powerful performance. She loves this confused man and wants him to stand up for himself and embrace his blackness. Her voice is strong and nimble in the song "Bein' Black" as she shows Clint what it is to "sit down like Rosa and rise up like Martin Luther King."

Patti LaBelle's voice has nothing on Rice, who has starred on Broadway in "Starlight Express," "Fosse" and "Chicago."

Holmes gets his big break when he meets the slick-talking record producer Paul Vance, portrayed by Randy Glass. Vance persuades Holmes to record "Playground in My Mind," the song that became his one hit and sold over one million copies. Glass is convincing as the "do it my way or no way" producer and we wish Clint would listen to Roz and stand up for himself a little.

Rounding out the cast is Christopher Linger, who is excellent in his limited time on stage dancing, singing and playing incidental character roles.

Music in the show runs the gamut from classical to bebop. One highly charged scene includes a tribute to Harry Belafonte, whose music influenced Holmes' early development. The ensemble performs a high-energy calypso dance number and at one point, the audience gets to sing along.

The colors in the lighting and costumes are a feast for the eyes. Dennis Maulden, a Flat Rock

Playhouse veteran, has hit a solid home run with the set design. A nine-piece band is on stage during most of the performance, appearing and disappearing behind sliding panels. Sven Ortell, projection designer, casts scenes onto the panels throughout the show and the mood is enhanced by creative lighting designed by Chris Lee.

Director Vincent Marini keeps the action moving throughout the performance. He and Holmes wrote the book for the show and have created a story with a theme that resonates with members of the audience: Where do I fit in?

During the first talk-back session after the preview show, audience members complained that the volume was a little loud for the size at the venue and the lighting was distracting at times. Those factors are hard to avoid in a house configured like the Playhouse, Marini explained. If this show goes on to Broadway, as it is hoped, those distractions will no longer exist.

Preview night also presented technical difficulties. At one point during the first act, the microphone Holmes wore sputtered and stopped working, affected by the singer's sweat. A stage hand presented him with a hand-held microphone and the show continued seamlessly. He performed the rest of the act with the hand-held mic and the problem was resolved by Act II.

The Flat Rock Playhouse's 2010 season opener – the first for executive director Marini – is a strong, powerful show, one that any theater-lover would do well to see. If this is an example of what to expect this season, the Flat Rock audience is in for a fantastic run of shows. If the cast sustains Friday night's high energy, "My Own Song" truly appears destined for bigger stages.

"My Own Song" continues through April 25 at Flat Rock Playhouse. Performances are at 8 p.m. Wednesdays through Saturdays and at 2 p.m. Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday. Tickets are \$40 with discounts for seniors, students and groups. For information, call 693-0731, 866-732-8008 or visit www.flatrockplayhouse.org.

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