

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT



DEAN MARTIN



JIMMY DAVIDSON



WILLIE NELSON



STAYLOR STANTON

EGAS-STYLE IMPRESSIONISM

Tom Stevens rides the surge in his art form's popularity, transforming himself as many as 53 times a night

By **Jerry Fink**
Las Vegas Sun

Tom Stevens channels Dean Martin. The talented impressionist does exceptional interpretations of more than 100 entertainers, from the usual suspects — Burt Lancaster, Kirk Douglas, Cary Grant, Walter Brennan, John Wayne, Jimmy Stewart, Humphrey Bogart, Jack Nicholson — to the surprises — Ray Romano, Cher, Carol Channing, Jean Stapleton. A personal favorite is Perry Como.

Stevens awes Riviera audiences with 53 voices from his repertoire.

But his best is Martin, hence the title of the one-man show.

When he sings "Ain't That a Kick in the Head" or any other Martin song, it's as if the crooner has been reincarnated. For nine years Stevens performed his tribute at the Dean Martin Festival in Steubenville, Ohio.

The room he's worked since January has only 160 seats, and early showtimes aren't ideal. But he's determined to stake his claim on the Strip. He's itching to bring back entertainment with a human face — or in his case, many faces — to the showrooms.

"I've dabbled in entertainment ever since I was a kid," says Stevens, a native of Long Island, N.Y.

He started imitating Crazy Guggenheim, Frank Fontaine's character in the "Joe the Bartender" skits on Jackie Gleason's TV variety show. "That made my parents laugh and I liked the attention," he says.

Stevens performed around New York but took another career track. He became a cosmetologist, moved to Florida and opened a beauty salon, which he owned for 25 years.

His wife at the time didn't approve of his entertainment ambitions. "She thought I was mediocre, at best," Stevens says.

After the divorce, he pursued entertainment with vigor.

He met Perla, a native of Argentina, in his

shop and they've been married a dozen years. They decided to sell the business and move to Las Vegas six years ago.

They have created a show that is waiting for the right break in the right venue.

"There is nothing better than to do what you love to do," Perla says. "If you have a dream, a passion, then pursue it."

They are confident the time will come when

Stevens won't be performing in the shadows of Danny Gans, the town's premiere impressionist, who recently announced he was jumping from the Mirage to Steve Wynn's new Encore.

Impressionists seem to be in vogue these days, with Gans selling out nightly and ventriloquist Terry Fator an unqualified hit at the Hilton. "I have to work harder than Terry," Stevens says. "I have to move my lips. He has it easy. He dummies does all the work."

Audiences are usually moved to standing ovations after Stevens finishes rolling out his cast of characters.

"It's just a matter of time before people discover where we are," Stevens says. "When they do, they'll bring their families here. I already have a huge fan base here in town. A lot of locals come to the Strip to see me."

He built his following in Summerlin, working for several years at the Suncoast. When the property was bought by Boyd Gaming, Stevens moved to the Rampart. His manager, Morton Reed, decided Stevens should be on the Strip and worked out a year's engagement at the Riviera.

Stevens says he was inspired by Rich Little, who came to see him at the Suncoast.

"I never break character in my act, but when I saw Rich Little in the audience I did," Stevens says. "I said to the audience, 'Everybody inspired by someone — Babe Ruth inspires some baseball players, van Gogh inspires some painters and Jack Nicholson inspires some actors.'"

"In the audience tonight is my Babe Ruth, my Jack Nicholson, my van Gogh: Rich Little."

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TERRY FATOR



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JERRY FINK



TOM STEVENS

IF YOU GO

What: "An Evening with Dean and Friends" starring Tom Stevens

When: 4 p.m. Wednesdays, Thursdays, 6 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, 4 p.m. Sundays

Where: Le Bistro Theater, Riviera

Tickets: \$50, 794-9433

ONLINE

See photos with audio clips of Tom Stevens doing impressions at www.lasvegassun.com.