

... and Jumpsuits

"It's very gratifying to have a job you love and even more gratifying to share that passionate experience with people every night. Thank you Las Vegas for helping to make my dreams come true."

JAY WHITE
Neil Diamond impersonator

Go behind the scenes with Henderson's own Jay White — a husband and father in disguise as Neil Diamond

By TARA MARAS

From Marilyn and Madonna to Sinatra and Sammy, look-alike sightings in Southern Nevada are as common as sunny days. The AIM and the YMCA.

But just who are these impersonators? What lures them to this holy land of incognito? Where do they learn their trade? How much does a jumpsuit run these days?

This week, Panorama gets personal with Neil Diamond impersonator Jay White.

Jay White as Neil Diamond

It's amazing what a good hair day can do for a career.

In 1981, Henderson's Jay White was the lead singer in a Detroit band. Fans said he sounded like Neil Diamond. A year later, he had an equally convincing hairstyle.

"I styled my hair like Neil to audition for an impersonation show in Detroit," says White. "There was enough of a physical and vocal resemblance to land a job with the show. Six months later I quit my day job and never looked back."

In 1989, White was booked for the hit Las Vegas show "Legends in Concert." The Neil Diamond look-alike, sound-alike had arrived, officially.

"After all, Las Vegas is to impersonators what Madison Avenue is to fashion.

After nine years with "Legends," White was crowned Imperial Palace's longest running act.

What's the toughest part of the job? For White, the hardest part is not knowing how long he'll be in demand.

"Every year I think 'This could be the last year,' and every year a new opportunity presents itself," he says.

With a three-year gig booked at Riviera's LeBistro Theater, it looks like things might go a little longer.

One thing White doesn't worry about is his act. With over 6,000 performances under his "beads," a quick brush up on Neil Diamond's performance gestures is all the impersonator needs to make believers out of ogling audiences.

"Originally I watched Neil's videos very closely to imitate his body language, facial expressions, speaking voice and his interaction with the audience," explains White.

Evidently, the training paid off.

At a recent event at The Mirage, security had to hold back fans who rushed the stage.

"At a Princeton reunion last year, 1500 audience members reacted in the same manner," says White. "After the show, I was astounded when people told me they loved my show at Madison Square Garden a few years ago."

Truth be told, it was the real Neil who

played Madison Square Garden.

White says he heart to come clean with excited fans, so he politely thanks them, leaving the illusion intact.

But there is one rule that White will never break — pretending to be Neil Diamond while out in public.

"Neil is my stage persona only," he says. "I like who Jay White is — father of three terrific kids and husband to Pam, a nursing supervisor, without whose love and support and willingness to take risks, this would never have been possible."

Just how good is White's act? Even Neil Diamond is impressed. White says he's met his muse twice.

"He's been very complimentary, even signing a photo we took together," says White.

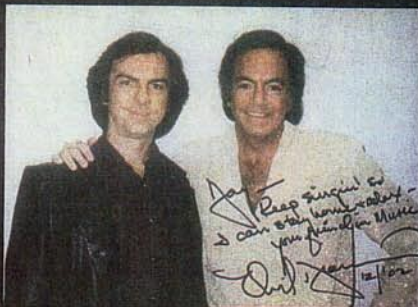
Turns out, Neil Diamond is looking to quit his day job too.

The inscription... Jay, keep singing so I can stay home and relax. Your friend in music, Neil Diamond.

"Jay White Portrays America's Neil Diamond" is at 7 p.m. Sunday through Thursday at the Riviera Hotel and Casino.

Ticket are \$49.95. Local discounts are available.

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COURTESY PHOTO

Jay and Neil share, among other things, similar hairstyles.

NEXT WEEK: Elvis impersonator Jay Stanulis reveals the secret behind his jumpsuit.