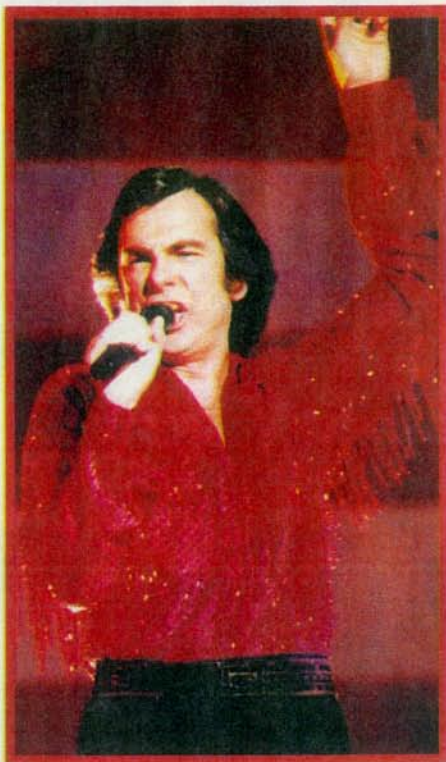


By Steve Darling

# A Diamond In The Rough

JAY WHITE SINGS NEIL DIAMOND HIS WAY



**H**ave you ever been asked to do something and then dragged your feet and kicked the dirt only to complete the task and end up wishing it would last longer? That happened to me one recent Friday night when my editor rang me up and asked me to hit the bricks to the Riviera Hotel & Casino to catch Jay White as Neil Diamond. Now being a late Seventies/early Eighties kinda guy I know of Mr. Diamond, but for as long as I can remember he has always drawn an older crowd. Well, after watching White as Diamond my outlook is very different. When White first appears onstage amid smoke and flashing lights, you really gasp at the resemblance he has to the great singer. Then he begins to sing. For a half-second I thought I had been placed just 3 feet from the great singer. White runs through perennial crowd favorites from "Sweet Caroline" (which as we all know is a huge audience participation song) to "Cracklin' Rose." Even White's stage gestures are right on target. He wraps up the 60-minute show with a rendition of "Coming to America" that will cause the hair to stand up on the back of your neck—but in a good way. White is from Detroit, and he's a small-framed guy with a brilliant smile and great personality. He shares my love of hockey and has been performing as Diamond for the past 20 years.

We had a little chat after he finished up his performance in the Riv's intimate Le Bistro Theatre.

**What's On:** How did portraying Neil Diamond come about?

**Jay White:** In 1981 I was singing in a Top 40 cover band at weddings and what not and after the shows people would come up to me

and ask me if I realized I looked and sounded a lot like Neil Diamond. At that time I had a mustache and wore my hair different, but the resemblance was there. So, I shaved off the stache and restyled the hair and in 1982 auditioned for a local impersonator show and was hired. Six months later I was able to quit my day job and have been performing around the country ever since.

**W.O.:** When did you move to Vegas?

**White:** Moved here at the end of '89 and was hired by "Legends In Concert" producer John Stuart for the Reno show. After finishing in Reno he moved my family and me to Las Vegas and I joined the cast here in Las Vegas [at the Imperial Palace] and have been here ever since.

**W.O.:** Did you do any time in the Biloxi, Miss. version?

**White:** No, I have played in Branson, Mo., Hawaii and in many conventions across the states.

**W.O.:** One thing that I'm impressed by is your ability to step in and out of caricature so quickly. I have seen a few impersonators around town who live like and believe they are the original performer.

**White:** Yeah, I get up onstage, do my show

and slip back into Jay. I feel I'm blessed to be able to perform as Mr. Diamond. But at the end of the day, I know who I am.

**W.O.:** Has Neil ever watched you perform as him?

**White:** No, no, but his mom came to a show once and afterwards she came up, shook my hand and said she was very honored at the job I was doing.

**W.O.:** Wow!

**White:** Yeah, I guess that's the most humbling compliment you can get.

**W.O.:** Have you ever been to a Diamond concert or did you learn to imitate his actions from video?

**White:** Actually, I did see him at the Forum in L.A. once. I met his brother, who stopped dead in his tracks, shook my hand and said, "Wow you're like one of the family."


**W.O.:** That must make you feel good.

**White:** Yes, it's something that stays with me always.

**W.O.:** Future plans?

**White:** To continue to pay tribute to Neil Diamond as long as the fans let me. Then...who knows? My passion is hockey and since we have a minor league team coming, I thought I might try out as the oldest goalie ever.

**W.O.:** Favorite team?

**White:** Red Wings, of course. 

- **SHOWTIME:** 7 p.m., Tue.-Sun.
- **SHOWROOM:** Riviera's Le Bistro Theatre
- **SHOW PRICE:** \$24.95, 702-794-9433

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