

Entertainment

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In his first local appearance in seven years, Sammy Davis wows 'em

By Ivan Crosbie, Staff Writer

The scene outside the Wilshire Theatre Wednesday night — where dozens of newspaper, television, radio reporters, and celebrity fans blocked the entrance anxiously awaiting the arrival of Sammy Davis Jr. for his opening night performance — was reflective of the furor created each year at the Academy Awards.

Hours prior to Davis' arrival, these fans and media representatives were there, at the entrance, trying to catch a glimpse of the legendary singer-dancer-actor before he could be ushered onto the backstage of the theatre.

But before they saw him, they were given a glimpse of some of Hollywood's greats, superstars and demistars. Among them were Lucille Ball of the television series "I Love Lucy," Angie Dickenson of "Police Woman," comic-actor Richard Pryor, Loni Anderson of the television series "WKRP," and, of course, Sammy Davis, Sr.

Indeed, Hollywood turned out Wednesday night to welcome back one of its favorite sons, who had not performed in Los Angeles in nearly a decade.

To Davis, the welcoming throng of media representatives and fans outside, along with the repeated energetic applause he received from the ever-active audience within were more than mere gestures of appreciation, but rather "expressions of love and admiration."

During his performance, he paused to convey this feeling to the audience, saying, "I've never felt so much love from an audience as I'm feeling from you tonight."

Surprisingly, after spending 54 of his 57 years in show biz, the pitch and quality of Davis' singing voice show no sign of deterioration. Listening to him vocalize a song now and comparing it to one of his records a decade ago would surface little or no contrast.

But one aspect of Davis' performance, which appears to be at an ebbing stage, is his dancing. Throughout his one-and-a-half hour performance Wednesday night, he performed only one complete tap dance session. Legs don't last as long as vocal chords, apparently.

In the past, Davis, like his protege Ben Vereen, was like water on hot grease when it came to dancing. His dancing ability was equal only to his singing.

This unique combination had earned him the coveted title "Best Entertainer in the World," a decade or so ago.

But Davis is a realistic entertainer. One who knows his limitations and is willing to tell his audience about them.

He told the audience that it shouldn't expect him to dance like Rick James, or any contemporary rock artist. "I wouldn't do it," he added.

Emphasizing more of his singing and intermittent recitation of his life's career rather than dancing, Davis left the audience with little or nothing to be desired.

Before he appeared on stage, however, Billy Preston, a dynamic, versatile singer and organist stimulated the audience's mood and energy through a number of vocals and musical numbers.

Preston performed several of his hit records including "Space Race," "Nothing from Nothing," "Fancy Lady," and concluded with a duet "Come to Me."

This prepared the stage for Davis and from the moment he walked on, he was greeted with rousing applause. At first, he eased into his performance cautiously, as if to get a better feeling of the audience, singing "It Only Takes a Moment to Be Loved."

Then, as he warmed up, he began to vocalize favorites like "I Write the Songs," "I Gotta Be Me," and "New York, New York."

After these, he moved into singing a medley of old



SAMMY DAVIS, JR.

... Still hoofin' at 57

favorites, such as "Be Wise, Be Smart," "The Look of You," "What Kind of Fool Am I," and "Gonna Build Me a Mountain."

Three of his better known numbers were "Candy Man," a chart-topping hit for which he won a gold record; "Mr Bojangles," another gold record; and Gene Kelly's title number from the musical "Singing in the Rain."

From the medley, he made a transition into impressions. Davis, a surprisingly accomplished impressionist, imitated singers Tony Bennett, Dean Martin, Nat King Cole, Louis Armstrong, and actor Humphrey Bogart.

But his most energetically performed number was a song by Jennifer Holliday, star of the Dreamgirls, "You're Gonna Love Me."

At the conclusion of this number, Davis received his first standing ovation, which somehow left the emotionally drained audience longing for more.

Davis will continue his performances nightly for the rest of the week at the Wilshire Theatre, 8440 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles. Tickets can be obtained by calling (213) 467-5121.

Artists plan exhibit in deserted area

Almost ten years have passed now since the inhabitants of dozens of houses on Fernwood Avenue, Lynwood, in the area known as the Century Freeway Corridor — have left, leaving their former dwellings empty and untended either for nature to decay or man to demolish.

It's an area deserted of human liveliness, except for the frequent sounds of passing automobiles on the Long Beach Freeway, or of a solitary motorist driving through the area toward his destination.

Yet in this place where man no longer resides, where the evidence of his tampering with nature remains conspicuous, where dwellings, which once glowed with life, stand slowly decaying — other forms of life seem to dominate.

It's here that the birds of the air freely roam both in the air and on the ground, flying to and fro, enlivening the area with their sounds.

It's here that other earth creatures, the ant, the worm, the roach and even the mouse, undaunted by the lack of human presence, could be easily seen.

What would it take to enliven this fading scene? What would it take to draw humans once again to this desolate area?

Soon, the answers to these questions might be known when a group

of Los Angeles-based artists attempt to draw at least 3,000 spectators to this area to view their exhibit on "Transitional Use" artwork.

The exhibition, set for Sept. 4-30, will involve the works of eight artists who will combine their talents for the first time to express the social problems associated with the Lynwood Century Freeway Corridor.

"An exhibit like this manifests the social problems of the community and addresses the public on its impact," said Laura Hayes, a member of the Foundation for Art Resources' (FAR) Board of Directors.

The main objective of the exhibit, according to Hayes, is to present ideas to the public, which are not normally accessible to them.

"It's an experimental project, which takes the art out of the gallery and brings it to the people.

"Each artwork in the exhibition, would interact with the area's environment," she said, "inviting diverse and provocative perspective on the freeway's construction."

Ten different sites have been selected to bear the artists' works: six of these are houses, two side walks, and two alleys.

The eight artists, who have individually installed artwork in public places throughout the county are: Candy Lewis, Maren Hass-

inger, Jon Peterson, Ann Preston, Judy Simonian, Mark Williams, Megan Williams, and Melvin Ziegler.

Lewis's project will be called a "chain-link." It would consist of a house constructed on chain-link fencing. The center of the house will be occupied by a picket fence made of "mirror-plex."

The fence will be situated so that the image reflected in it will match the ground behind thus making the fence appear invisible.

Her second project will be a metaphorical "House Beautiful." It would be furnished with objects which surrealistically parallel ordinary household objects.

Outside of the house, including the boarded up windows, will be whitewashed and an architectural rendering of an ideal house will be painted over its real features in black paint.

Having earned a Master of Fine Arts degree from the California Institute of the Arts in 1980, Lewis has exhibited in outdoor situations both locally and nationally.

Currently, she works as a freelance artist in the film industry.

Hassinger proposes to connect the path of the abandoned neighborhood to the surrounding viable neighborhoods, which would testify to the liveliness that does exist in the area.

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She proposes to color four paths, located in the corridor area, in pink with nontoxic pigment or concrete paint.

The first path (southwest quadrant) runs between Lewis and Bullis; the second, (southeast quadrant) lies on the south side of Fernwood tracks between Atlantic Boulevard and the freeway; the third (northwest quadrant) runs between Bullis and Long Beach Boulevard on Fernwood; and the fourth (northeast quadrant) leads to an abandoned home on the northwest corner of the intersection of Pope and Fernwood.

A Los Angeles native, Hassinger received a Master of Fine Arts degree from UCLA. She has performed extensively in Los Angeles and New York.

The work of the third artist, Simonian, will be an exhibit of one of the houses destined for demolition in the area. In one of its small rooms, he will construct a large, classically shaped vessel, which will appear to fill the room.