



Nov. 8, 2006

## **50th Anniversary of Famous Liberace-Elvis Photo** *Tribute Artists Re-Crete Photo to Celebrate Entertainers*

**LAS VEGAS** – It was 50 years ago Tuesday when a popular piano player and a young up-and-coming rock ‘n’ roller posed for a publicity photo in Las Vegas. Who could have predicted then that both performers not only would become worldwide legends but would continue to attract thousands of devoted fans decades after their respective deaths.

On Nov. 14, 1956, Liberace and Elvis Presley posed for a publicity photo taken by the Las Vegas News Bureau in which they switched jackets and instruments. To commemorate the golden anniversary of this picture seen around the world, tribute artists Wes Winter as Liberace and Matt Lewis as Elvis re-created the famous photo at the Liberace Museum.

When Wladziu Valentino “Lee” Liberace opened the Riviera in April 1955, he was the city’s highest paid entertainer, earning \$50,000 per week. It was also the first time he wore a gold lame jacket, the first of hundreds of extravagant costumes that became his signature trademark. The following April, Elvis performed in Las Vegas for the first time when he was 21. He received a lukewarm reception from an audience of adult gamblers, despite being on his way to becoming an international singing sensation and silver screen heartthrob.

The story goes that seven months later, Elvis went to see Liberace’s show and afterward was introduced backstage to Mr. Showmanship by Liberace’s agent. As the agent and photographer waited onstage by the piano, Liberace told Elvis he needed more glitz in his wardrobe if he wanted to make it in Vegas and suggested they ham it up by switching jackets and instruments. Both emerged onstage, Elvis sat at the piano, Liberace strummed The King’s guitar – and the News Bureau snapped the picture that would forever have its place in the entertainment history of Las Vegas.

To re-create the famous photo for *Nevada Magazine*, the Las Vegas News Bureau began with the Liberace Foundation and Museum where one of Liberace’s favorite pianos is on display. The seven-foot Baldwin is covered in about 150,000 two and one-half carat Swarovski rhinestones, made in 1976 to match Liberace’s rhinestone costume and car. Liberace last performed on this piano in 1986 in the finale of his appearance at Radio City Music Hall.

To sit in for Liberace, who better than tribute artist Wes Winters, who won the Liberace Museum's 2003 "Liberace Play-a-Like Competition" and since has performed "A Musical Tribute to Liberace – the Showmanship Years" Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Saturdays at 1 p.m. at the museum. Wearing costumes and jewelry that would make Liberace smile, Winters keeps his spirit alive through song and fantastic tickling of the ivories – even though Winters plays piano by ear and performs his tribute based on watching televised Liberace performances.

Completing the photo re-creation is Matt Lewis as Elvis. Lewis is the featured performer of "Legends in Concert®," the full-production celebrity tribute spectacular in its 24th year at the Imperial Palace Hotel & Casino. Lewis first impersonated Elvis for a school talent show when he was 12 years old. Now, six nights every week, two shows per night, Lewis leaves the ladies swooning in the aisles with his boyish good looks, commanding voice and dead-ringer compelling impersonation of the truck driver from Tupelo who would become the King of Rock 'n' Roll.

Although their careers traveled different musical paths, according to the Liberace Museum, Liberace and Elvis Presley remained friend over the years. The museum still has several stuffed and ceramic hound dogs that were gifts from Elvis to Liberace. 2006 also marks the 30th anniversary of the Liberace Foundation for the Performing and Creative Arts, created by Liberace out of gratitude for the scholarship he had received to go to the Wisconsin Conservatory of Music. His program has distributed more than \$5 million in scholarships to more than 2,200 students at 110 colleges, universities and art organizations.

The Imperial Palace is home to the Dealertainers™, celebrity impersonators who deal blackjack. The hotel also hosts The Auto Collections®, the world's largest classic car showroom with \$100 million worth of inventory for sale. Imperial Palace is the most central stop on the Las Vegas Monorail. The resort is famous for "Five-Star-Friendly Service" and includes The Karaoke Club, a race and sports book, 2,640 rooms and suites, world-class gaming and amenities, a seasonal poolside luau, 40,000 square feet of meeting and banquet space, nine specialty restaurants, 10 bars and lounges, state-of-the-art spa and fitness center, business center, concierge service, medical center, wedding chapel and reception facilities.

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Photo Notes:

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