

Female impersonators rival real stars



Carnival Cabaret is nightly at the Horizon casino at Stateline. Photo/Provided by Dan Gore

By Kathryn Reed

The face of Carnival Cabaret lives on even though his voice has been silenced.

Hunter – his legal and stage name – did such an incredible rendition of Cher that it was hard to know it wasn't her, let alone it was a man in those outrageous costumes. Hunter's image was initially used to advertise Carnival Cabaret when it returned to the Horizon on Labor Day weekend 2008. Hunter died in 2005 from a head injury after a fall during a rehearsal in Southern California.

"Hunter was a special act, a special person," said Dan Gore, producer of the female impersonation show

Carnival Cabaret returned to the Horizon hotel-casino after

going dark in 2004. The first nearly four-year stint at Stateline still makes it the longest running show on the South Shore. The casino has extended the current gig indefinitely.

Many people also associate this show with Gypsy (aka James Haake) the 77-year-old grandfather who emcees the event all but Fridays. Even if you don't want to hear the music of Reba McEntire, Dolly Parton, Judy Garland, Barbra Streisand, or Bette Midler, Gypsy is worth the \$26.95.

His routine is part drag queen, part comedy, part interaction with the audience.

Anyone who has seen Cher live will agree Gypsy rivals her in the number of wardrobe changes. His attire is full of Versace gowns and Jimmy Choo shoes. (That's the same footwear the "Sex and the City" gals wore.) He credits Barbara Parina at Side Street Boutique for keeping him so well attired.

His humor crosses the line a bit, so best to leave the kids at home. Talking about how the seam in nylons hits male body parts is just an example.

Self-deprecation is the norm – such as needing to shop at Home Depot for makeup and saying, "The only reason to dress like this as an old man is for the money."

Gypsy's humor is timely, with some political jokes. In between each of the musical acts Gypsy converses with the audience. Insecure men should not sit near the stage.

"There are endless possibilities. We are always working on something else," Gore said. "We'll be constantly changing."

A recent change is going to seven days a week. Show time is 8pm. To allow cast members to have a night off, the show is always different.

Patrick Ross, who is Streisand and Midler, was in the original cast. He is the guest host on Fridays. Frankie Kein transforms

into Liza Minnelli and Marilyn Monroe; Andrew Raymer does Cher and Celine Dion; and Kevin Wiley is McEntire, Parton and Judy Garland.

Gore said his contract with the current management at Horizon gives him more control over the show. Last go-around one of the performers was in transition – that's something Gore won't allow now that he calls all the shots.

With the diversity of impersonations, the show provides a little bit of something for everyone, as evident by a table of four locals who all had different favorites. Some liked Parton strutting in from the back of the room with a buxom out to there, another liked Midler – why pay Vegas prices to see her for real?

The finale will make you think twice about gay men dressing as women, but more important, about accepting each others differences.

For more information, go to www.carnivalcabaret.com.