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The Joint was Jumpin' at Harrah's

Show Reviews

Written by Dean M. Shapiro



Back in the 1950s and 1960s, when rhythm and blues and rock and roll were in their infancy, New Orleans rose to the occasion and made some priceless contributions to the budding new genres. Such now-legendary artists as Fats Domino, Little Richard, Lloyd Price, Smiley Lewis, Huey "Piano" Smith, Clarence "Frogman" Henry, Chris Kenner and many others – including a number of one-hit wonders – made their impacts and entertained a generation of teens in the booming post-World War II years.

Those great years were brought back to life again at Harrah's Casino Theater in "Joint's Jumpin'" a musical celebration of old New Orleans R&B/R&R. For two nights, May 1 and 2, sellout crowds came to hear an ensemble of local singers belting out standards from that era until they could sit still no longer. Before the end of the show they were dancing in the aisles, waving handkerchiefs and napkins, doing traditional New Orleans second lines and having a great, fun time.

The joint was truly jumpin', which was precisely the show's intent.

Bill Johnston, Harrah's New Orleans Entertainment Manager and the show's Executive Producer, deserves plaudits for teaming with Larry Sieberth, "Joint's Jumpin'" musical director and pianist, to bring this show to the stage. Sieberth was also responsible for assembling the talented cast of musicians and vocalists as well as writing all the musical arrangements for the live show.

Under Sieberth's leadership, the band and singers performed roughly thirty songs ranging from classics like Domino's "Blue Monday," "Ain't That a Shame," "I'm Walkin'" and "Blueberry Hill" to local standards that didn't make the national charts like Oliver Morgan's "Who Shot the La La," the Art Neville/Uniques sweet paean to love, "All These Things" and the catchy Mardi Gras Indian sing-alongs – "Iko Iko" and "Hey Pocky Way."

The singers for the show included Luther Kent, Johnny Vindigni, Tony Owens, Gina Brown, Tereasa Betts and Danon Smith, while the band consisted of, in addition to Sieberth, Anthony Brown on lead guitar, Donald Ramsey on bass, Bernard "Bunchy" Johnson on drums, Barney Floyd and Bobby Campo on trumpet, Rick Trolsen on trombone, Brian "Breeze" Cayole on tenor sax and Tony Dagradi filling in for Alonzo Bowens on baritone sax during the May 1 show.

An especially nice touch was added to the show's visuals when the three young women singers came onstage in wedding dresses with bouquets to sing the Dixie Cups' standard, "Chapel of Love." The Lloyd Price songbook came in for an extensive airing with Owens singing "Lawdy Miss Clawdy" with the women backing him, and Vindigni belting out "Stagger Lee" and "Personality," again with female backups. And our internationally renowned Mardi Gras celebration, which merits its own unique genre, had its night out as well, with Cayolle coming to the mike for Professor Longhair's "Go to the Mardi Gras" and Owens covering Al Johnson's quintessential Mardi Gras anthem, "Carnival Time." It was at this point that the audience began getting dance fever and the second lining began.

"Joint's Jumpin'" was a wonderful treat for those fortunate enough to catch the show and hopefully those who didn't will get their chances as well. The show is slated to return to Harrah's Theater this fall (more details to come later).