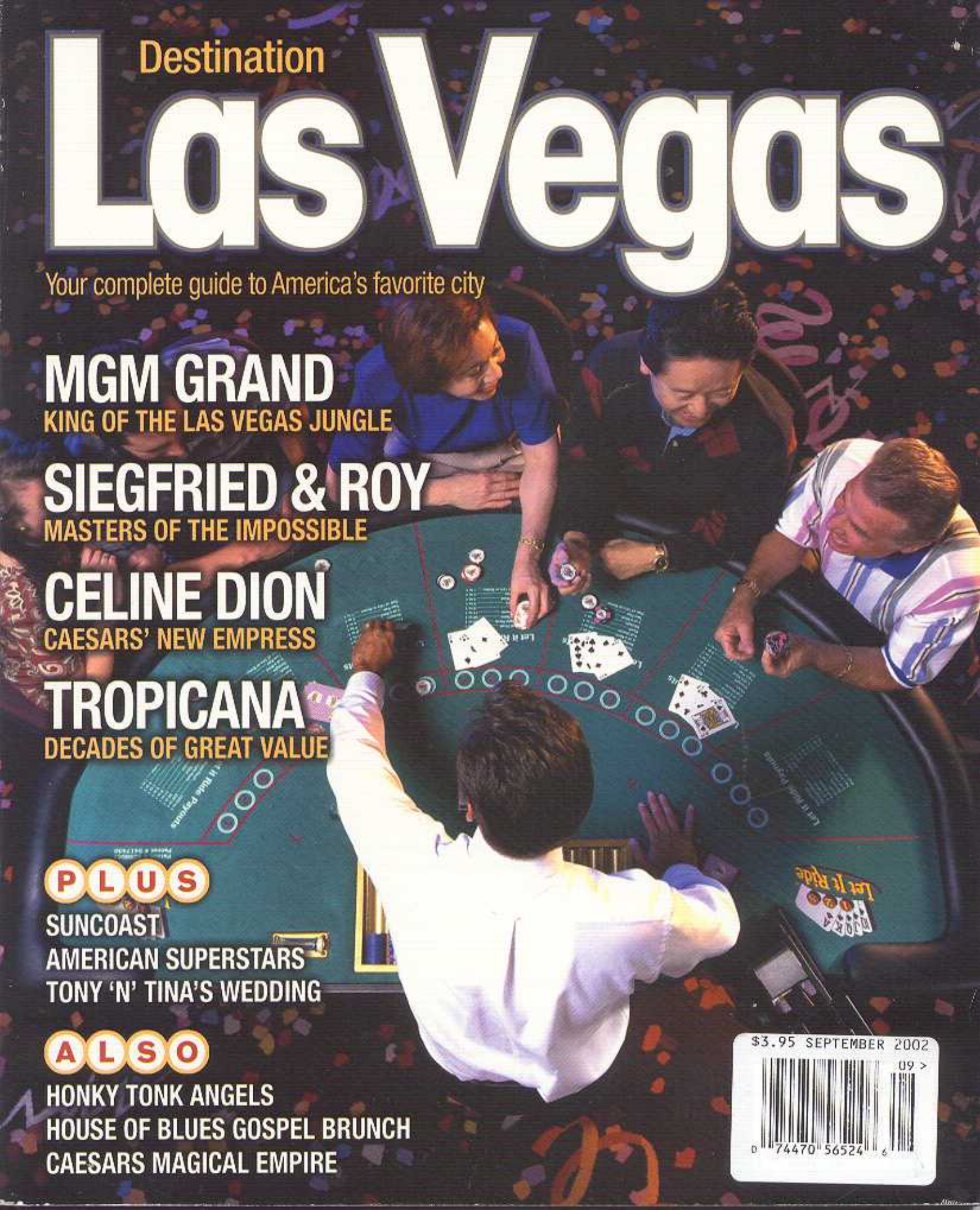
Destination

# Las Vegas

Your complete guide to America's favorite city



## MGM GRAND
KING OF THE LAS VEGAS JUNGLE

## SIEGFRIED & ROY
MASTERS OF THE IMPOSSIBLE

## CELINE DION
CAESARS' NEW EMPRESS

## TROPICANA
DECADES OF GREAT VALUE

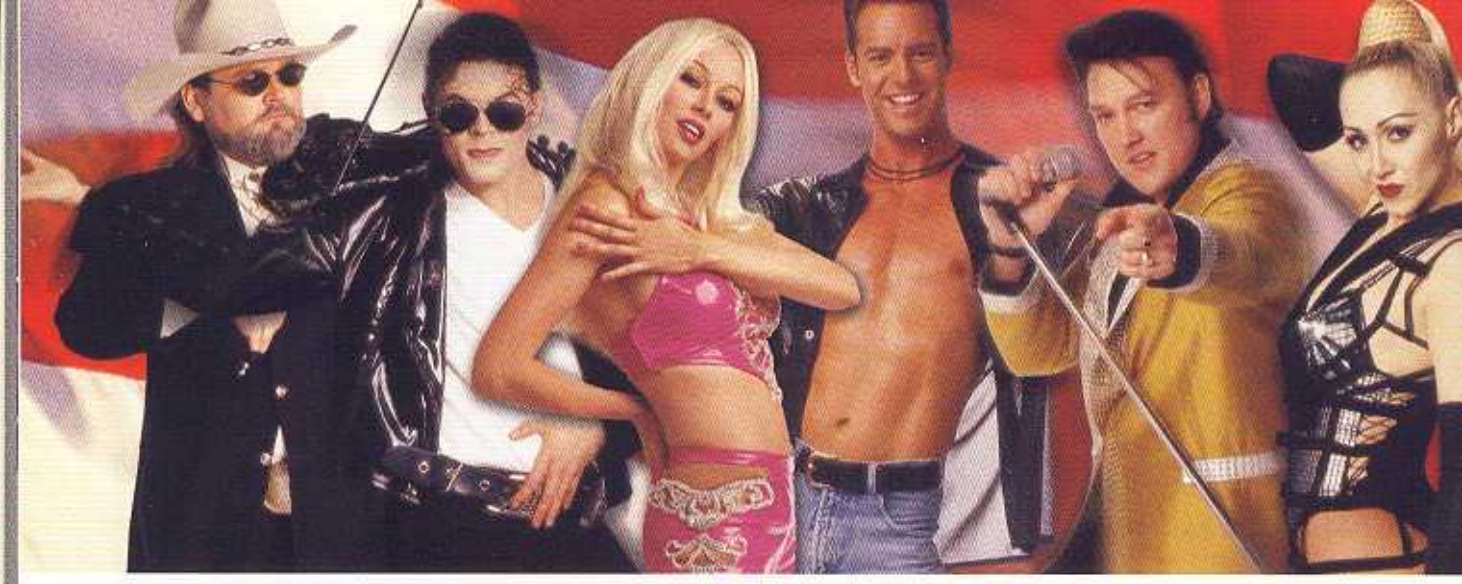
**PLUS**

SUNCOAST
AMERICAN SUPERSTARS
TONY 'N' TINA'S WEDDING

**ALSO**

HONKY TONK ANGELS
HOUSE OF BLUES GOSPEL BRUNCH
CAESARS MAGICAL EMPIRE

$3.95 SEPTEMBER 2002
09 >
0 74470 56524 6



# AMERICAN SUPERSTARS

## AN ALL-STAR REVUE

BY DAVID HOFSTEDE

They've got a pretty good tag line on the posters that promote "American Superstars", the celebrity impersonation show that recently celebrated its sixth anniversary at Stratosphere's Broadway Showroom: *It's all here, from country to pop, from the fifties to today. The hottest singing sensations brought to you live and in your face.*

That works, but I've got a better one: *90 minutes. No ballads.*

Simply put, this isn't the show for romantic cuddling. This is "American Bandstand" without the Spotlight Dance. It's a KISS concert without "Beth". It's a swingin' hotspot where the drummer is the hardest workin' man in the room.

Each of the six featured performers maintains the high-energy level established early on, that slows only once (briefly) for a mid-show cover of "God Bless the USA". But here, the number fits in well with the most recent revamp of the show by producers Mark Callas and Donnie Moore.

"American Superstars" has been updated often since opening in April of 1996. Perhaps a little too often; I kinda liked knowing there was still a place I could go to see the Spice Girls back with Ginger again. The latest version places as much emphasis on the "American" as it does on its superstars. "Right now, there is a heightened sense of patriotism in America," Callas observed. "Many other shows have added a patriotic component. We are merely doing what we have always done, celebrate the greatness of American music and the broad array of American performers."

Longtime fans may also notice that the set decor has take new dimension with extensive enhancements, including a sta and a cyclorama. The star drop is a specially made black c containing hundreds of fiber optic lights. Fully lit, it gives illusion of a star lit night sky. The cyclorama is a color scre behind the star drop that absorbs light and gives off bea vibrant colors that bathe the stage.

A video introduction featuring Michael "Let's get rea rumble" Buffer gives way to the first display of red, white an which never looked better than it does on the abbreviated cos of the five Superstars Dancers, who make their entrance throu audience. First on the bill is Elvis, a bold move in a city w performance by the King has long been synonymous with the event. Darren Lee, who beat out 400 Presley impersonators World Elvis Competition at Graceland in 1997, sets the ba with hip-swivelling covers of "Viva Las Vegas", "Blue Suede S and "All Shook Up".

Unfortunately, Lee's performance is routinely missed b many ticket-holders, who take the path to the Broadway Show through the entire Stratosphere shopping arcade. To save time, take the escalator located at the north end of the casino to the theater from the ticket counter.

A seductive Latin beat heralds the arrival of Ricky Martin, played by Michael Colby. Colby is a dead ringer for Martin, and if he doesn't have the voice quite right, he certainly has the moves down. Dressed in tight leather pants and an open shirt, he delivers high-octane covers of "Livin' La Vida Loca", "Shake Your Bon Bon" and "She Bangs". Colby draws screams from ladies in the audience, but the guys have something to look at too, as he is joined on stage by a sexy Superstars dancer, who shimmies in a fringed halter top fast enough to shift the Richter scale.

Next, Coty Alexander takes the stage as Madonna. She may be the closest among the current cast in precisely recreating both the look and the sound of her superstar. Time restrictions prevent Alexander from wandering too much into the various phases of the Material Girl's career, so she wisely stays with the early '80s model, making her entrance in a variation on the bridal lingerie worn by Madonna at her famous MTV Video Awards appearance. She performs dead-on renditions of "Like A Virgin", "Material Girl", and after a costume change from white satin to black leather, finishes with "Vogue" and "Express Yourself".

As Charlie Daniels, Johnny Potash scores with a southern rock set that includes a fine instrumental cover of "The Orange Blossom Special". Daniels' signature song, "The Devil Went Down to Georgia", draws applause from the opening notes of the fiddle, which Potash saws so hard that most of the hair on his bow is waving in the breeze by the time he's done.

The most unexpected segment features Naomi Rodriguez as Christina Aguilera, a performer well-known only to the current MTV generation. Songs like "Genie in a Bottle" and "Mi Reflejo" didn't clear up any confusion among the over-40s who weren't sure who was being portrayed, though Rodriguez ultimately wins them over with a sultry *Moulin Rouge*-style cover of "Lady Marmalade."

The final spot on the bill belongs to Damien Brantley as Michael Jackson. These aren't the best of times for guys in Brantley's line of work, and it's pretty strange to hear Jackson's old songs performed with his new face. "Beat It" and "Billie Jean" still sound pretty good, and the enthusiastic crowd response proves that Jackson fans haven't forgotten when the King of Pop was in his prime (that would be when he didn't demand to be called somethng silly like the King of Pop).

The "Livin' in America" finale brings the entire cast back on stage. Each of the six featured performers is garbed in the colors of Old Glory, and the Superstars Dancers add lavish red, white and blue ostrich feathers to their costumes. Melissa Williams, who choreographed the number, danced with "American Superstars" in Lake Tahoe in the early nineties, and went on to dance and star in the films *Showgirls*, *Batman & Robin* and *That Thing You Do*.

A chance to meet the cast and the dancers after the show brings the night to a happy close. Where else but Stratosphere can you spend a few moments chatting with Michael, Madonna, and Ricky? !!