

LAS VEGAS

SHOWCASE

Bill Willard's VEGASTARS

Stars Gone By Department : Back in 1952, the national showbiz rage was JOHNNIE RAY, the pop singer who cried and rolled on the floor during his emotional warbles. Here is an item from my Las Vegas Sun daily column of August 26, 1952, titled "HOO RAY" and I quote - "HAL BRAUDIS, who produces shows at the Thunderbird, spent most of his time in New York with TOM ROCKWELL of General Amusement Corp., angling for a JOHNNIE RAY date in Las Vegas. However - and this is very unusual - HAL put forth a 'fair play deal' where each hotel on the Strip would have the biggest showbiz plum in years singing for one night. In other words, should RAY consent, and the hotels agree as to price, the singer would cry his tunes in all seven spots early in November. Hotels would draw straws as to what night RAY would warble. BRAUDIS conceived the plan because every hotel had been bidding hot and heavy for MR. EMOTION. Rather than have him bypass Vegas altogether, during the dickering, the Thunderbird's impresario would give each spot a chance to have RAY headline"...The seven hotels on the Strip in August 1952 were the Thunderbird, El Rancho Vegas, Last Frontier, Wilbur Clark's Desert Inn,

Flamingo, Sahara and the seventh, the Sands, did not open until December. Who got JOHNNIE RAY? The Desert Inn. FRANK SENNES, now retired, was the D.I.'s entertainment chief, who outbid HAL BRAUDIS who, not so incidentally, was one of the most daring entertainment bookers on the Strip in the glory years of the Thunderbird from 1948 through the mid'50s. What happened to the Thunderbird, newcomers may ask. It became the Silverbird and is now ED TORRES' El Rancho...Who would be the JOHNNIE RAY of today, a blazing sensation causing every hotel booker on the Strip to jack up bids and grab the person, male or female? Can't think of anyone unless it might be not so new mammoth attractions WHITNEY HOUSTON, NEIL DIAMOND, BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN, but no overnight sensation comes to mind...JULIO IGLESIAS, who has created a certain mystique, caused no booking panic a few years ago when he inched upon the scene. But the Caesars Place star is certainly up there in the galaxy of names that have brought extra attention when in town, but never like the years of FRANK SINATRA magnetism, or the few years of ELVIS PRESLEY.




Recently Las Vegas Sun publisher HANK GREENSPUN in his influential front page column "Where I Stand" took aim at what he called "Target U.S.A.," noting that "The White House and the Justice Department have secretly agreed to target Las Vegas and Hollywood entertainers for drug busts and jail." That major drug suppliers from Colombia and other countries are

not being cast in the Washington web in favor of "high profile users like stage and screen stars, athletes and performers in Las Vegas" smacks of special attention. "Las Vegas has always been a principal target of the federal government for any kind of special attention," Greenspun wrote. "We have been high on the hit list of the IRS, Justice Department, FBI and the Organized Crime Strike Force. A Justice Department official said that the arrest of entertainers, movie, TV and nightclub celebrities who are forced to serve prison terms will cause the department's new policy to be noticed"...On another uneasy front at Caesars Place where 11 craps dealers have been targeted by the IRS for nonpayment of taxes, other dealers feel they have been placed in an unfair position by the resort. About 95 craps dealers have filed a motion in District Court to stop Caesars from pooling their tips on a 24-hour basis. The dealers insist that the hotel's actions are designed to play footsie with the IRS, which is attempting to seize the tips or tokens of the 11 dealers who reportedly owe back taxes. JUDGE DEL GUY brushed off their motion, so now it's on to a higher court.



"Cats" marathon ticket box office session at Aladdin Theater for the Performing Arts from 8 a.m. to midnight on "kick-off" Monday garnered almost \$204,000 with sale of 5726 tickets. To sell out the 7000-seater in its "Cats" run April 26 through May 1, including two matinees, entertainment director STEPHANIE NIELSON pegs a total of 56,000 ducats must be snapped up.



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