

Stage show brings Elvis Presley to life

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent
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More than 700 see Elvis impersonator shake, rattle, roll

Elvis Presley didn't die, he simply went on tour.

That's the feeling that most in the capacity crowd got at a March 25 show in which Elvis impersonator Lonnie Yanes of Albuquerque performed tribute songs at the Gallup High School Auditorium. The near 90-minute show also featured a Beatles tribute segment called, "Twist and Shout."

Yanes is considered an Elvis tribute artist and impersonator.

"This was a very good show – very well done," Sammy Chioda, a Gallup-based promoter of the show, said. "I've seen a lot of Elvis impersonators in my life. But nobody does it like this guy."

Getting into the Elvis impersonation gig happened by accident, Yanes admits. It wasn't something that he pre-planned or mapped out.

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"I have always liked rock 'n roll and country music and I have always been an Elvis fan," Yanes said. "About 25 years ago I started a little four-piece band. We would perform some country and western, oldies and good 'ole rock 'n roll music in different night clubs. Being that I looked like Elvis, and performing on stage, people would come up to the stage and ask me to do an Elvis song and each and every time I sang an Elvis song people would love it," Yanes explained.

"Yanes continued, "I saw the reaction of the audience and it was fantastic, so I had someone make me a Elvis jump suit costume and I extended my band to a 16-piece band."

At the Gallup High performance, Yanes got into a "*2001 Space Odyssey*," which segued into "*Cee Cee Rider*." He covered "Don't Be Cruel," "*It's Now or Never*" and "*Johnny Be Good*." Each show is a unique experience, Yanes admits.

"I try and sing the songs that people recognize," Yanes said. "I have a lot of fun doing this every time I perform."

The Gallup High auditorium was packed for Yanes' performance. Chioda estimated the audience to be around 750, most from around greater McKinley County.

When Yanes walked on stage, some in the audience were already standing just to get a look at him.

"He almost looks exactly like Elvis," Mariam Cureton of Window Rock said. "I see a resemblance. He sings like Elvis, too."

Although Yanes enhances his appearance to look more like Elvis during a show, he said a passing illusion to Elvis is at least required to pull off such a show. That, and your heart has to be in it, he said.

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“There’s a time to be in character and a time to be yourself,” Yanes said. “I try and do an honorable tribute to what is a music superstar.”

A Memphis native and one of the most significant icons of the 20th century, Elvis Presley died in 1977. He is remembered as the “King of Rock ‘n Roll,” or simply as “The King.”

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