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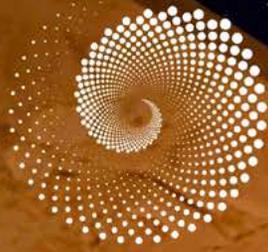
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“Wondrous Journeys” at the Disneyland Resort’s 70th Celebration will be enhanced with sparkling fireworks on select nights. (Richard Harbaugh/Disneyland Resort)

# CHIC

C O M P A S S

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# From the Editor

---

Strength isn't always loud. Sometimes, it's in the quiet persistence of those who refuse to give up, the grace of resilience after loss or the courage to carve a path where none existed. In this issue of *Chic Compass*, we celebrate the power of perseverance with the theme: Only the Strong Survive.

This issue is a tribute to individuals who embody strength in its truest form—physical, emotional, spiritual and visionary. Meet our cover star, Tony Pearson, a Las Vegas bodybuilder who transformed personal trials into triumphs. His story isn't just about relentless discipline and mental grit but also about the transformative power of believing in yourself—especially when life throws its hardest punches. As you read his story, you'll be inspired by the fact that he doesn't just lift weights; he lifts the spirits of those around him.

In a different key, we turn to the entertainment world with singer-songwriter A.J. Croce, whose name carries a legacy and a personal resilience journey. As the son of music legend Jim Croce, he has forged his own path in the music industry, rising above early tragedy and vision challenges to become a powerful voice and an incredible storyteller in his own right.

In this issue, you'll learn about motivational speaker, author, business coach and entrepreneur Jamar "J Haleem" Washington. His message is simple yet profound: your past doesn't define your potential. From adversity to advocacy, his story reminds us that strength often comes from choosing purpose over pain and using your platform to elevate others.

We also spotlight Linda Smith, founder of the Down Syndrome Organization of Southern Nevada and the Christopher Smith Foundation. Her journey is rooted in love, advocacy and a mother's will. Throughout her life and career, she has changed the landscape for families across the state, proving that strength is measured in compassion, vision and service.

Each story touches on what it means to endure, rise and inspire. After all, survival isn't just about getting through the

challenging moments—it's about growing stronger because of them. Growing stronger comes from overcoming challenges and having a sense of hope and optimism.

You'll also read about organizations like the Hospitality Charitable Foundation (formerly known as the Epicurean Charitable Foundation), which empowers and transforms the lives of hospitality students through scholarships, mentorships and various programs, providing them with the tools and support they need to succeed in the competitive hospitality industry. We also highlight The LGBTQ Center of Southern Nevada, which provides critical services and a safe space to one of the region's most vulnerable populations through counseling, support groups and advocacy services.

You can always count on *Chic Compass* to take you into a world of fashion and style, and we made every effort to do so with the stunning fashions of David Tupaz Couture. We have features on Will Roger, Alisha Kerlin, Hal Savar, Desert Roots Rising Stars and Valerie Perri; take you inside the Disneyland Resort 70th Celebration, the Las Vegas Jazz Society's 50th Anniversary, this year's Academy Awards, as well as local restaurants such as Zio's Italian Steakhouse and Panevino. Our compass also took us to Lyon, France, to cheer on the chefs of the Bocuse d'Or competition. Plus, we've introduced a new column on health and wellness. For a touch of history, we also explore the evolution of tariffs in the United States, from their role in early American economic policy to their continued impact on trade and industry today.

I hope you enjoy reading this issue as much as we enjoyed creating it. As always, thank you for joining us on this journey. We're excited to continue exploring, discovering and sharing the stories that inspire and connect us all.

*Chanelle Hayes*



## OUR MISSION

Forgotten Song Foundation, Inc., a registered 501c3 organization, is dedicated to recognizing, remembering, and sustaining the visual artists and performance artistry of live music for future generations.

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# DRIVEN TO PERFECTION

## PROFESSIONAL BODYBUILDER TONY PEARSON

---

By Stacey Gualandi

*P*rofessional bodybuilding champion Tony Pearson's life reads like a Hollywood script.

An abused child from Memphis, Tennessee, meets his hero Muhammad Ali; buys a one-way bus ticket to Muscle Beach; gets discovered by seven-time Mr. Olympia Arnold Schwarzenegger; perfects the famous stomach vacuum pose; earns multiple bodybuilding titles, including Mr. America in 1978 and the Pro Mr. Universe; adopts the nickname "Michael Jackson of Bodybuilding;" retires for the second time at 63; becomes a Las Vegas-based personal trainer—and remains a bodybuilding legend.

"God was with me the whole time, and I really believe that now because of everything that happened and is still happening," Pearson says. "I say Hollywood couldn't script this."

Pearson, now 68, affirms bodybuilding saved his life. But he says this is not a bodybuilding story.

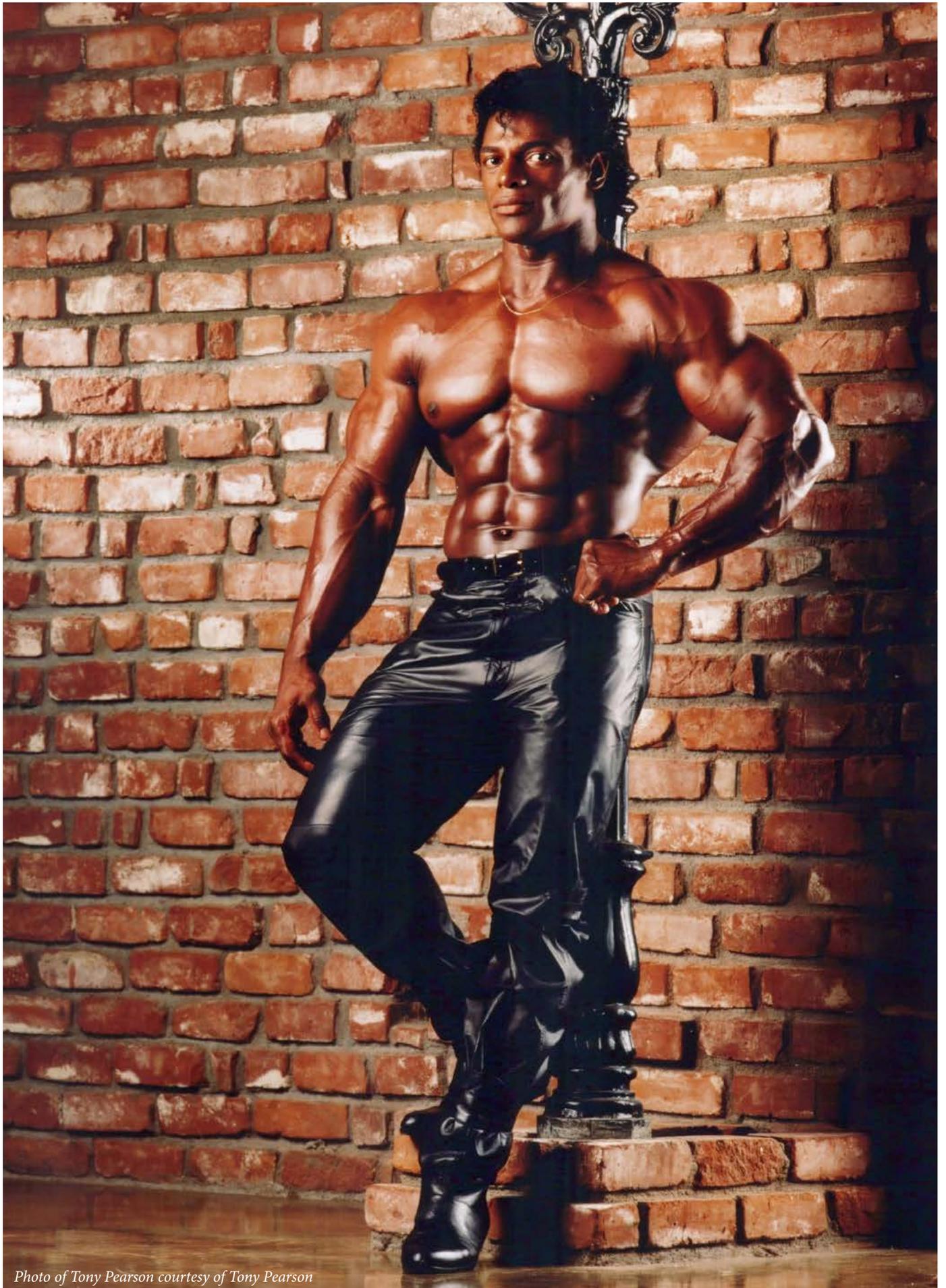
"Everyone makes that mistake, and some are turned off by it, but it's more of a life story," he says. "It's a real story that people can relate to."

Well, let me tell you, it is a real page-turner.

Pearson waited decades to reveal in the book "Driven: My Secret Untold Story," the hidden emotional turmoil that has weighed on him since childhood. Now, he says that weight has been lifted.



*Above: Photo of Tony Pearson by Cashman Photo*



*Photo of Tony Pearson courtesy of Tony Pearson*

Right: Photo of Tony Pearson by Cashman Photo

"Bodybuilding gave me hope to believe in myself because there was a lot of negativity around me that made me think, 'You're never gonna be anything,'" he admits.

Pearson grew up in the Deep South during the 1960s, the second youngest of four children. "My dad was an alcoholic; he was evil and treated my mom so badly," Pearson says.

He was just a toddler when his mother ran away and divorced her husband. His dad, incapable of raising him, forced Pearson's great aunt to take him in.

"Auntie Bettie was mean, and everyone was afraid of her," he says.

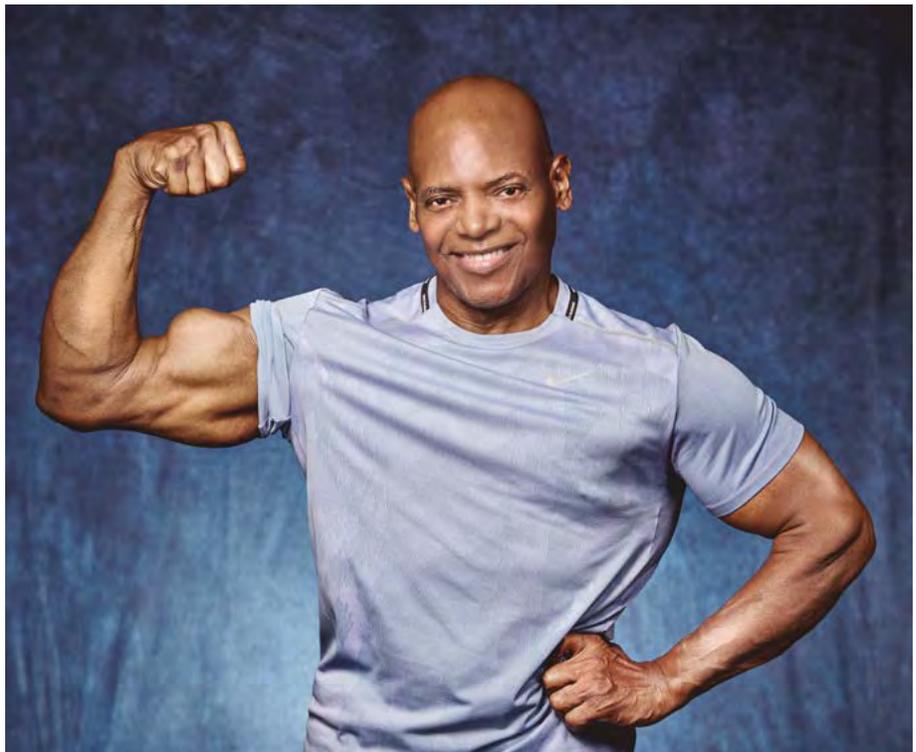
Pearson describes in "Driven" one particularly harrowing story about his auntie holding him above the stove while flames burned beneath him. He was just 3 years old.

"I was this close to being a statistic," Pearson says. "I was never a child again."

For years, he and Auntie Bettie lived in abject poverty, in a shack with no indoor plumbing or electricity. At age 8, he was taken out of school and forced to do hard labor picking cotton. Beatings and torture became a way of life for Pearson.

"I just thought that everyone was being beaten every day or picking cotton daily or had no food," he says. "Oh man, I used to starve. It was so painful. She was extremely poor, and I get that, but she was able to buy alcohol, so I'm sure she could have fed me. Knowing her, it was another form of torture."

Auntie Bettie abruptly moved them to St. Louis, Missouri, where Pearson's world began to open up after a chance encounter with Muhammad Ali, the then-world heavyweight champion.



"I'm looking up at him like, 'Oh my God!' The champ is standing in front of me. He was the man. He was like the most beautiful man I've ever seen," Pearson says. "What an inspiration for me because I had never heard the word 'sports' with the childhood I had. But when I saw him, I wanted to do sports. I didn't know what sport ... but my friend said to me, 'Man, you're really strong.'"

A knee injury cut short his spot on the high school wrestling team, but that led to meeting another influential figure during his formative years: (in)famous St. Louis gym owner and old-school bodybuilder George Turner.

"He called me into his office, and he says, 'I'm going to train you,' and that was like heaven to my ears," Pearson says. "Training was really hard ... but I loved every second of it because it was like an escape from my miserable existence. Then you watch your body change. It was unbelievable."

Pearson wanted to leave and go far away, so he decided to move to California—the only place he could pursue his dream of being a professional bodybuilder.

"There was an urgency to get to L.A. I don't know what it was, but I knew I had to go," Pearson says.

At 19, with only \$75 in his pocket, he bought a one-way bus ticket to California, vowing never to return.

"The last thing [George Turner] said to me: 'If you don't commit a crime, you'll make it. In other words, keep your nose clean,'" Pearson says. "So, that stuck in my head."

Pearson could easily have gone down a dark path after surviving such a painful adolescence, but he chose not to follow in his family's footsteps.

"That's not who I am," he says. "My great auntie put fear in your soul. 'You better not do anything wrong; you don't lie; you don't steal; you earn it! You do the work, 'cause no one gonna give you nothing!'"

After months in Los Angeles, Pearson struggled to earn a living.

He was homeless, but the Venice Beach "weight pen" became his home.

Little did he know that Arnold Schwarzenegger—his idol and retired seven-time Mr. Olympia—had been watching his disciplined and dedicated daily workouts for months.

"When I got to Los Angeles, I said, 'I want to be a bodybuilding champion,' but I had no clue where to start. 'How am I going to do this?' But [Arnold] gave me the light."

One fateful day, Schwarzenegger offered to take Pearson through a personal workout, gave him the number for Joe Weider—the co-founder of the International Federation of Bodybuilding

and Fitness—and told Pearson he had the potential to be a champion.

"If any other bodybuilder had told me that I would be a champion, I wouldn't believe them. But when Arnold said it, I believed it and I took it to heart," Pearson says. "Without him, I don't think I would've made it."

In no time, Pearson won his first contest, the 1976 Mr. Venice Beach. He told the crowd he would win Mr. America in two years.

"Everyone laughed, of course. But I did! That's when I knew I was hooked," says

Pearson, after he beat the 1978 favorite, Ron Teufel. "At 19, I wasn't cocky, I was just trying to motivate myself."

Years later, Schwarzenegger would feature Pearson in the first edition of his book "The Encyclopedia of Modern Bodybuilding." Of the young Pearson, Schwarzenegger wrote: "I remember a few years ago seeing a skinny Black kid training at the weight pen on Venice Beach. I watched him doing endless sets of squats, with very heavy weight, torturing himself with rep after rep. After a while, his thighs began to grow, and soon they were huge, separated and beautifully defined, and only a year and a half later he entered and won the 1978 Mr. America contest."

Hard work and intense focus paid off.

"I lost Mr. Universe in '79. I had one year to think about it. I had a whole year to say I lost. It tore me up inside, but I went back to London the following year and won."

Pearson went on to win world singles and doubles titles and perform at exhibitions and seminars all over the world.

Early on, he was dubbed the "Rocky of Bodybuilding," and because he resembled the King of Pop, he adopted the moniker "Michael Jackson with Muscles."

Pearson's dream had come true: Bodybuilding was now his full-time job—and a gift.

"God gave me the gift to have the structure, the height, small waist, small hips, small bones, all those things together," he says. "To me, bodybuilding is like art. It inspired me because I don't know where I would be without it. It just changed my whole outlook on life, and it was mentally and physically healing in a way."

Pearson continued to compete for 20 years, until his retirement in 1994. In 2007, he was inducted into the Muscle



*Left: Photo of Tony Pearson by Robert Reiff courtesy of Tony Pearson*



*Above: Photo of Tony Pearson courtesy of Tony Pearson*

Beach Bodybuilding Hall of Fame, where his career began.

During his career, he was on the cover of bodybuilding magazines worldwide. But despite all the titles and success, it seems he didn't receive all the recognition he deserves.

Perhaps it's because no one really understood the tremendous odds he overcame to reach the potential Schwarzenegger once predicted.

"I've known people for 30, 40 years, and they never knew any of [my story],"

he admits. "I was with friends and said, 'I used to pick cotton,' and they started laughing. I thought, 'I'll never tell this story. No way. I would take it to my grave.'"

But in 2017, Pearson had a change of heart.

"I was depressed, more than usual, and feeling like my career was over because you live for bodybuilding, it's everything, and when the phone stopped ringing, it was brutal," he says.

"I was used to traveling, appearing at

events and always being on the move. Then all of a sudden, there's nothing, complete silence. I gained weight and trained less, but then I had lunch with a client and started telling her a little bit about my life—don't ask me why. That's when she looked at me and said, 'You need to write a book!'"

He was pumped up and spent the next two years writing "Driven," his untold story.

"I said, 'I'm going to do this myself.' I was in bodybuilding mode again. I will not quit. I'm gonna tell this story if it kills me. Which it almost did."

Pearson says he ended up in the emergency room at 3 a.m. from exhaustion and reliving painful memories from his past. But ultimately, telling his truth was cathartic.

He then wrote a children's book, "The Story of Baby Herc," also based on his life, for kids who like to read and look at drawings.

"That's an inspiration for kids. They might look at my book and want to be like that guy," Pearson says.

In 2020, he came out of retirement one last time to win the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) Masters Mr. Universe in Las Vegas, where he now lives.

"I was 63. That was my last competition because my body was telling me to quit."

Now, he trains himself—and a long list of clients—to stay in shape and healthy.

"Everything is about form," Pearson says. "You're in your 60s and have all these aches and pains, and I say, 'Don't worry. We'll fix it.'"

After working out with Pearson, many clients have successfully overcome injuries and gained strength in their later years, like Karen, 75, and Monty, 68, who made a choice last year to improve their fitness, balance, strength and quality of life.



Above: Photo of Karen, Tony Pearson and Monty courtesy of Tony Pearson



Above: Photo of Karen and Monty in Antarctica

Pearson says Monty was severely overweight.

"... and [Karen] couldn't get through an airport without a wheelchair because she couldn't walk to the plane and couldn't put the bag in the overhead compartment."

Their "couples' goal" was to travel to Antarctica, ride in Zodiac boats, hike and kayak. Pearson designed special programs to improve their balance and build strength for these activities.

They worked out with Pearson three times a week, and one year later, Monty lost more than 100 pounds,

and Karen can now travel easily, has no need for wheelchairs, and can carry her own bags. The freedom and sense of accomplishment, they say, is amazing. Now, he's keeping them active and able to enjoy life.

"It's hard work and it takes time," Pearson says.

Pearson knows that journey all too well.

But to fully accept his remarkable past, he did something he once vowed never to do. He returned to St. Louis 10 years after leaving to make an appearance as a favor to his original bodybuilding mentor, George Turner.

But one morning, he woke up and knew he had to come face to face one last time with his former abuser, Auntie Bettie.

"Glancing around [her] room, I saw this picture on the wall. [Auntie] says, 'That's you on the wall. You've done so much,' and she's giving me all this praise," Pearson says. "That's when I said, 'OK. She didn't know any better.' I forgave her, but I had to do it for myself too. I know this sounds weird—it was a hell of a childhood—but it taught me a lot about work discipline. I'm a perfectionist. It taught me that, because with [Auntie Bettie], you better be perfection."

Pearson returned home again three years ago to film a documentary called "Driven: The Tony Pearson Story."

"I had to go back to the places where it all happened. You're really reliving it, and I got physically sick for months after," Pearson admits. "My stomach was a mess standing on that Memphis bridge where the shack used to stand."

Now, Pearson says he's at peace and hopes to turn his life story into a Hollywood movie, starring Samuel L. Jackson as his dad, Halle Berry as his mom and perhaps Oprah Winfrey as Auntie Bettie.

If anyone can do it, Tony Pearson can. All you have to do, he says, is "believe in yourself."

"So many people are always telling you that you're never going to be anything, but I always took that negative energy and converted it into my training regimen. In my mind, I thought, 'I'll show you,'" he says.

"I did what I wanted to do, and I have no regrets."

[Additional reporting by Debbie Hall in Chic Compass - Issue 20]

For more information, check out [tonypearsonpersonaltrainer.com](http://tonypearsonpersonaltrainer.com).

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*Photo by Virginia Trudeau.*

# faith

## LAS VEGAS ICON SHARES KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE LINDA SMITH: AN ADVOCATE FOR PEOPLE WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

By Debbie Hall / Photography courtesy of Linda Smith and Cashman Photo

Linda Smith is a Las Vegas icon known for her fierce devotion as a mother to Christopher, who was born with Down syndrome, and for paving the way for people of all ages with disabilities, as well as their families and friends. Linda is also a wife, philanthropist, author, fundraiser, public speaker, disability advocate and storyteller.

Born in England, Linda eventually settled in Las Vegas through a series of circumstances.

"My mother was very clever, entrepreneurial and creative, and was capable of doing just about anything. My father was a gambler, a womanizer, and other horrible things," she explained. "When I was 11, my mother, sister, brother and I escaped to Canada. As a gold medalist ballroom dancer, my mother started her own dance studio there."

Linda's father eventually found them in Canada, locating them in a friend's basement. Arriving with a gun and intending great harm, he was intercepted by the police, deported back to England, and never seen by the family again.



Above: Linda Smith



*Left: Linda Smith*

"It was probably the best thing that ever happened to me," she said. "Her disrespect and disregard empowered me."

With newfound confidence, Linda discovered hidden talents in dancing, singing, skating and acting. At 17, she became the lead dancer on the Canadian variety show "It's Happening." Her career led her into the Canadian movie industry, television appearances, and a successful modeling and dancing career. Reflecting on her early work, she humbly admits she wasn't always the best actor, but her determination and growth are evident in her journey.

"Life was great! I was on track to go to Hollywood, following in my sister's successful footsteps, when I married the Canadian Entertainer of the Year," she said. "I was married to the most talented guy in the world, and it was a glamorous life. We moved to Las Vegas, and everything was perfect."

After settling in Las Vegas, Linda continued her career as a spokesmodel at various conventions and events, representing brands and interacting with attendees.

Three years into their marriage, Linda became pregnant, marking a significant turning point in her life.

While she was eight months pregnant, her husband, Glenn, had a show scheduled at the O'Keefe Centre for the Performing Arts in Toronto on her due date. Since they had family in Canada, they decided that she would travel ahead to arrange a doctor and hospital, with him joining her before the baby's arrival. Their longtime friend Wayne Newton arranged for her to fly to Toronto on a medical junket flight.

She went into labor mid-flight. With 70 doctors, nurses and hospital administrators aboard, the pilot suggested an emergency landing in Chicago or continuing to Toronto. They flew to Toronto, where Christopher was born.

This traumatic event deeply affected her. While her mother and sister showcased their talents, Linda sat in the back of the classroom, afraid, embarrassed and ashamed.

Her sister, a self-taught ice skater, was hired to perform with the Ice Follies, a touring ice skating show, and eventually became a lead skater.

"I was just this kid in the shadow of my mother's and sister's talents. I believed I had no distinguishing abilities. I wanted

to skate like my sister and dance like my mother, but I floundered with low self-esteem."

At 14, a pivotal moment changed Linda's life. After saving money, she excitedly set out to buy her first tube of lipstick at a department store, only to be met with cold, dismissive treatment from the saleswoman due to her unkempt appearance. This incident fueled her determination to defy expectations and judgments, instilling resilience and independence that shaped her future.



*Above: Linda Smith with Christopher*

"Had he been born in Chicago, my life would be much different today. Chris was born with Down syndrome in Canada, which led to a 17-year fight to get him legal status in the United States," she explained.

"No one is ever prepared to give birth to a profoundly disabled child. We were expecting a healthy baby, so we assumed that our baby would be healthy as well. However, Chris was born with an extra chromosome, resulting in Down syndrome, which is a condition unrelated to overall health."

According to the Centers for Disease Control, approximately 1 in 700 to 800 babies are born with Down syndrome (trisomy 21).

Linda was told that her newborn also had a heart condition and respiratory issues, and he was not going to live very long. Meanwhile, Glenn, performing at the Flamingo Hotel with Fats Domino, handed out cigars celebrating his son's birth.

Not wanting to break the news over the



*Above: Ribbon cutting ceremony for the DSOSN Christopher Smith Learning Center*

phone, she left her newborn with her sister and mother, flying to Las Vegas four days later to tell him in person.

"I was told to forget about Chris, have another baby and move on," she recalled. "But then a caseworker for people with intellectual disabilities told me, 'He's your child!' She was his only advocate at the time."

Arriving in Las Vegas, Glenn was shocked to see her home early. He cried upon hearing the diagnosis, then packed up his equipment and, alongside his bandmates, drove 2,300 miles to Toronto to meet Christopher.

"When we arrived, Glenn saw Christopher and said, 'He looks just like me, let's get him out of here.' That acceptance by Glenn was powerful. Every time I think about it, I choke up.

"We had no idea that we were facing even bigger hurdles in terms of getting him into the United States. We didn't consider for one moment that he would not be welcomed in the U.S."

With Vice President Hubert Humphrey as his sponsor, Christopher entered the U.S. on a temporary visa. After a 17-year legal battle, he was granted American status.

Even when their son was a baby, the couple still had to work and could not find qualified childcare. Linda left show business and, being the mother of invention, founded the first chapter of the Down Syndrome Organization of Southern Nevada (DSOSN).

On meeting other parents of disabled children, she found that parents of special needs children were given the same advice when their child was born and diagnosed with a disability—"throw your child away" like they never existed.

"We thought the best thing we could do is talk to doctors and hospitals. We wanted them to know that our kids are fabulous, cool, special and unique. We love them just like you love any child. We would like to be able to come to the hospital when a baby is born with Down syndrome and talk to the new parents. The children who lived their



lives in state institutions are a tragedy. Geraldo Romero [former newscaster] exposed those horrific places where thousands of people were housed.

"As a newly minted disability advocate and married to an entertainer, I soon heard of a group called the Vanguard's comprised of celebrity wives."

The group was supporting a then-little-known organization called Opportunity Village. The first time she visited their building, she was shocked. Opportunity Village at the time was called the Clark County Association for Retarded Citizens and housed in a small, drafty

warehouse in downtown Las Vegas. It was winter when she paid her first visit, and she noted that everyone was bundled up due to the lack of heating in the building.

Linda witnessed adults with intellectual disabilities participating in what could be her son's future as an adult. She immediately got involved, volunteered and served on the board of Opportunity Village. After seven years, they hired her as their first fundraiser.

Inspired by their son, the couple produced and performed in Concert of Love, an annual fundraiser event that



*Above: Linda and Christopher Smith*

*Left: Linda Smith*

helped Opportunity Village grow to become an innovative, thriving organization. Her showbiz background served the organization well, as she raised over half a billion dollars during her career there and created signature events like the Magical Forest, Camelot, the Great Santa Run and HalloVeen.

DSOSN became dormant after she left to help Opportunity Village grow to become one of the most respected disability organizations in the country. After many ups and downs over 30 years, in 2023, Peter Whittingham, the father of a Down syndrome child, revitalized the organization.

*[Editor's note: Read the article about Whittingham and the DSOSN in Chic Compass - Issue 21]*

Linda praises DSOSN, describing it as a remarkable organization. The origins of the Festival of Trees and Lights event, which was initiated by a young parent over 30 years ago, evolved into a highly anticipated and glamorous occasion. The organization's board expressed their desire to acknowledge Linda's longstanding contributions to the disability community and announced their intention to honor her in 2024.

Her involvement culminated in receiving

the Governor's Lifetime Achievement Award, with many of her supportive friends in attendance. She viewed this recognition as a fitting conclusion to her journey from struggling mother to founding the organization, which is now acknowledged over 40 years later.

"I was very honored to receive that prestigious award from the governor," she said. "The next day, the Association of Fundraising Professionals gave me a lifetime achievement award."

Three days later, Opportunity Village named the campus on Oakey Boulevard, home of the Magical Forest, the Linda Smith and Christopher Smith family campus of Opportunity Village. The DSOSN also recently named its building the Christopher Smith Learning Center. Even with his passing in 2019, Christopher continues to impact the world.

"Although no longer here in the physical sense, my Christopher visits me. I feel, hear and see him often. For a child that was at first considered not worthy of life, he was a powerful human being," she stated.

Linda and Glenn divorced many years ago but remained dedicated co-parents over time.

She is married to John Wasserburger, whom she met while seeking a beer donation for an event—she jokes that she got both a husband and the beer.

"I have a wonderful husband who is content to stand quietly, lovingly and supportive in the background. Together with my son Jason, Christopher's adoring brother, we created the Christopher Smith Foundation to support caregivers. Sales from my books and family and friends' donations fund the foundation. The organization gives out rewards and cash gifts at our annual caregiver appreciation luncheon."

Linda has authored two books, "Unwanted: How a Mother Learned to Turn Shame, Grief and Fear into Purpose, Passion and Empowerment" and "Confessions of a Sin City Fundraiser," the proceeds of which benefit the Christopher Smith Foundation.

For more information, visit [lindaslife.com](http://lindaslife.com) or [christophersmithfoundation.org](http://christophersmithfoundation.org).



Above: Linda Smith

Below: Linda Smith at Opportunity Village



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# VALERIE PERRI

## FOR 45 YEARS, HER WORLD'S BEEN A STAGE

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By Sheryl Aronson

Listening to Valerie Perri recall stories of how she landed roles as two of the most iconic female characters in musical theater: Eva Perón ("Evita") and Golde ("Fiddler on the Roof"), and how she snagged one of the coveted spots as a dancer in the classic musical film "Grease," it's as if Perri was destined to be onstage. She has the stellar talent and chutzpah to succeed, as her versatile acting career spans 45 years. Whether it be singing and dancing in musical theater, performing on concert stages and in recording studios or appearing on television shows like "Who's the Boss," "Another World" and "ER," or acting in films like "The Out-of-Towners," "Dickie Roberts" and "George of the Jungle," this actress has proven she's a creative force, entertaining audiences worldwide.

Her other major credits include portraying Norma Desmond in "Sunset Boulevard," Dolly Levi in "Hello, Dolly!" and Emma Goldman in "Ragtime." She also starred in "If I Forget" at the Fountain Theatre, directed by Jason Alexander, and as Genie Klein in "Beautiful" for McCoy Rigby Entertainment and the Cape Playhouse. She also recently filmed roles in "Monsters: The Lyle and Erik Menendez Story," "Truth Be Told" and "Criminal Minds."

As a fledgling actress trying to make



*Above: Photo of Valerie Perri at her home in Sherman Oaks by Sherman Alford (Sasaphotos)*

her way in the lustrous world of entertainment in Los Angeles, Perri captured the eye of legendary producer and director Hal Prince when she auditioned for Eva Perón in the first national tour of the Broadway production of "Evita." Due to a scheduling mix-up at the audition, the then-22-year-old actress talked her way past the man admitting actors, then wowed musical supervisor

Paul Gemignani with her vocal prowess, earning her a callback. Her success was hers alone due to a brilliant costume change that completely bewildered Prince, who thought she was two different actors: first singing as young Eva, then tackling the title song "Don't Cry for Me Argentina" as the First Lady of Argentina.



Above: Valerie Perri and Jason Alexander in "Fiddler on the Roof." Photo by Jason Niedle

This past October, I sat in the "Fiddler on the Roof" audience at the La Mirada Theatre as she transformed into Golde, opposite Jason Alexander's Tevye. Embodying the sharp tongue and wit of Golde, Perri's fine-tuned voice belted out sarcastic responses to Tevye's "Do You Love Me?" Going from her Yiddish/Russian accent to a German accent, Perri also played Fraulein Schneider in "Cabaret" at the Scherr Forum Theatre at the Bank of America Performing Arts Center in March this year.

I sat down with her at her home in Sherman Oaks to talk about her award-winning acting career.

**Chic Compass: Valerie Perri is an actress in theater, television and film. Tell me, is your passion musical theater?**

**Valerie Perri:** Yes! As a child I was very enamored with Broadway musicals, and I was a big Shirley Temple junkie. As a young girl, I was glued to the TV screen every Saturday morning when her films were broadcast on our local station. My mom was a pianist, and she would play all the Broadway scores in our house and bought me Broadway show albums from the local five-and-dime store.

**Chic Compass: Did you grow up in New York?**

**Valerie Perri:** No, I grew up in a small town in rural Pennsylvania called Dallas. I didn't get to New York until my senior year in high school when my prom date took me to see my first Broadway show, "Pippin." Upon graduation, I wanted warmer weather, so I went to college at the University of Miami in Coral Gables, Florida. I was immediately cast in a production of "Cabaret" as a Kit Kat Girl. Only two freshmen got into the production that year, my pal, Ray Lolita, and I. From then on, I had the theater bug and dropped my second major in speech pathology.

**Chic Compass: How did you develop your theatrical voice?**

**Valerie Perri:** I started singing for pure enjoyment, and because my mother played piano, I enjoyed singing with her at the piano. But I never had formal voice training until I was cast in the role of Eva in "Evita." I realized then I needed to train my voice, knowing I had a rigorous score to sing. I wanted to make sure during the run I was singing correctly so I didn't lose or damage my voice.

**Chic Compass: In Miami, you studied theater and graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts. After that?**

**Valerie Perri:** It was my dream to move to L.A. Again, it was all about the weather, and despite Broadway being on the East Coast, the word "Hollywood" held such magic for me as a kid. At first, I got work as a receptionist at ABC Studios. I also performed in a small theater company called the Young Actors Company, and we did a musical revue at the Zephyr Theatre on Melrose Avenue called "A 5-6-7-8." Without an agent, I would go to open calls until I landed a plum role and was cast in "Evita." I didn't have my Actors' Equity card yet, so like Eva herself, it was truly a Cinderella story!

**Chic Compass: How did you land the part?**

**Valerie Perri:** When I first got the call to go in, they asked me to prepare both the roles of Evita and the Mistress because they thought, age-wise, I fell in the cracks. I wasn't old enough to play Evita and a little old to play the Mistress.

There was a mix-up when I went to the audition, and my name wasn't on the list. Even though they couldn't find my name, I was still able to audition. I waited and finally was told to go downstairs to the stage. I walked onto the Shubert stage in Century City, and there were two people there, the pianist and Paul Gemignani, the musical supervisor.

He asked me, "What are you going to sing?" and I said, "I've prepared the material for Evita and the Mistress." He told me I could only sing one of them. I thought to myself, "Welcome to the big leagues." So I took a big breath and said, "Evita!"

After I finished, he came up to the stage and said, "You're quite marvelous. You're the first person who came in today that I wasn't afraid was going to lose her voice singing this material." He told me to work on the score and that he was calling me back next week to sing for Hal Prince.

The following week, I sang for him, and he asked me to come back again the following day. I thought, my goodness, how long will I have to go through all these auditions?

I didn't know that there were two Evita cast members—one who heads the company for all the evening performances and one who performs at the matinees. He wasn't sure which actress he would assign to which schedule. Only two of us were called back to sing for the role the following day.

The night before the second callback, I went home and thought, how can I stand out? I saw the girls who had been there that day; they'd been on Broadway or in a television series.

The next day, I brought a change of clothes with me. When I first walked out there to sing "What's New, Buenos Aires?" I wore a black leotard and a dance skirt, and my hair was down. I finished the song, and Hal came up and said, "That's great, honey ... can you sing 'Don't Cry for Me Argentina?'" I told him of course, but did he mind if I changed my clothes?

He said, "Sure, go ahead." I ducked into a quick-change dressing room on stage right. I wore a white Dior suit, red lipstick, high heels and earrings. I looked different. I walked back out onto the stage and stood there.

He asked, "Who is that? What happened to that Perri girl?" His assistant, Ruth Mitchell, said, "Hal, that is the Perri girl." He said, "I'm sorry, honey, I didn't recognize you." I thought, bingo. That's what I was hoping for.

I sang "Don't Cry for Me Argentina," then took off my suit jacket and sang "Rainbow High." He asked me to wait backstage. He returned and told me and another wonderful Broadway actress, Loni Ackerman, that we both got the part. She would do the evening shows, and I would be her alternate and do the matinees, plus any evening performances she couldn't do. It was a wonderful pairing, as Loni is still one of

my best friends today.

I had been in L.A. for six months when Hal came back and said he wanted me to head my own company in Chicago. I was flown to New York

City and put up at the famous Plaza Hotel on 5th Avenue and Central Park. Designer Barbara Matera fitted me for costumes, shoes were custom-made for my feet and my head was measured for wigs. I was to meet Patti LuPone after



Right: Photo of Valerie Perri at her home in Sherman Oaks by Sherman Alford (Sasaphotos)



Above: Valerie Perri and Jason Alexander in "Fiddler on the Roof." Photo by Ronnie Slavin

her Broadway show for an Associated Press photo shoot. It was absolutely thrilling!

**Chic Compass: Quite a story! You certainly got your big break early on! How did this opportunity change your career?**

**Valerie Perri:** Hal once said doing "Evita" is both a blessing and a curse. It's a magnificent role, but where do you go from there? I started auditioning for other shows, but nothing matched the magnitude of "Evita." Also, playing such a strong character made certain casting directors pigeonhole me. They wouldn't see me for softer, more vulnerable roles.

I stayed in New York City and did some off-Broadway shows, industrials

and the daytime series "Another World." I was doing the musical "Diamonds" at Circle in the Square, also directed by Hal, when I met my future husband, Cliff Lipson. We married in 1988 after a matinee of a production of "Gypsy" I did at the San Jose Civic Light Opera, playing the title character of Gypsy Rose Lee.

I then got an offer to do two shows in repertory at the Pasadena Playhouse in California, "Lies and Legends: The Musical Stories of Harry Chapin" and "Jacques Brel" with Amanda McBroom and George Ball. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, it was "Jacques Brel," and Wednesdays and Fridays, it was "Lies and Legends." We alternated on weekends.

I kept getting work in television and

theater. When I was cast in "Jerome Robbins' Broadway" national tour, we played the Shubert Theatre in Century City for nine months, and I decided L.A. would be home. I wanted more than work. I wanted a family.

Six weeks after my twins were born, I did another national tour of "Evita," bringing my husband, a nanny and our boys. We toured for a year until they started walking. Around then, my husband was hired as a staff photographer for the publicity department for CBS Studios, and I stepped back from theater to raise our sons.

I later did some TV acting on "Who's the Boss," then "Criminal Minds" and recently "Truth Be Told" with Octavia Spencer, a series on Apple TV+. I also did "Monsters," a Netflix series. Now that my sons are grown, I go back and forth from the West Coast to the East Coast, depending on available work.

**Chic Compass: How did the role in "Grease" come about?**

**Valerie Perri:** When I was in college at the University of Miami, I met Pat Birch, the choreographer for "Grease." She came to Miami to direct a "Diamond Studs" production at the Coconut Grove Playhouse. She called the university looking for dancers. My professor asked me and another student to audition. We got the job.

Two years later, I'm in California and see a casting notice for "Grease." I went to an open call at Paramount Studios, wearing a poodle skirt and bobby socks. She was the choreographer. I told her I'd danced in "Diamond Studs," and I got two weeks of work on "Grease."

**Chic Compass: And when did you finally get an agent?**

**Valerie Perri:** After I left "Evita." I interviewed at The Gage Group in New York and signed with them. I met Martin Gage later when I moved to L.A. I stayed with them until he merged the agency. Two L.A. agents, Arthur

Right: Valerie Perri as Fraulein Schneider in "Cabaret." Photo by Ronnie Slavin

Toretzky and Gerry Koch, formed AMT Artists, and I stayed with them.

**Chic Compass: Let's talk about Jason Alexander.**

**Valerie Perri:** During the pandemic, I saw "If I Forget" being cast at the Fountain Theatre, directed by him. They weren't seeing people in person, so I submitted a self-tape and got a callback to read for him. It was a powerful play and a beautiful experience. He is always the smartest guy in the room. As a director, he brings things out of you with kindness and space.

**Chic Compass: Talk more about working with him. You got to play Golde to his Tevye in "Fiddler on the Roof" at the La Mirada Theatre this past fall.**

**Valerie Perri:** It's funny how TV makes you a celebrity. He was a Tony Award winner before "Seinfeld." What makes him special is that he's what we call in Yiddish, a mensch. No ego. Whether it's Broadway or the La Mirada Theatre, he's focused on creating good work.

When he decided to do "Fiddler on the Roof," I was determined to audition to play Golde. I already knew him as a director and wanted to share the stage with him.

**Chic Compass: How did you get the role?**

**Valerie Perri:** A year after we did "If I Forget," I performed in "Beautiful" at the La Mirada Theatre. Tom McCoy stopped by and said, "I want to do a production of 'Fiddler on the Roof.' You're friends with Jason Alexander?" I said, "Yes," and he said, "Tell him that he needs to do it!" Later, I saw a casting notice confirming Jason was starring.

I emailed him and asked to audition. He said Lonny Price was directing and would be handling casting. I contacted Lonny and told him I'd been called back



for his projects before and that I was rehearsing "Beautiful" in New York. He graciously made time to see me. We met at his apartment, and I felt like I'd known him forever.

We read the role, and he said, "You know this woman." I replied, "Yeah, it's my mother and every one of my ancestors." He said auditions were still happening in L.A., but I'd hear by the end of July. I got the part!

We started rehearsals in October 2024. It felt like a long wait, but it was worth it.

**Chic Compass: What are you working on now?**

**Valerie Perri:** This summer, I'll play

the Dowager Empress in "Anastasia" at the Moonlight Amphitheatre in Vista, California. I also perform a cabaret show, "All in the Family," with my twin sons. Jack is the music director and pianist, and Benny plays bass. It's been such a joy to share the stage with them.

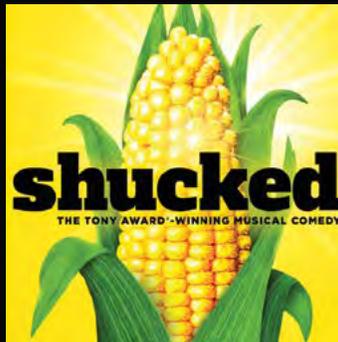
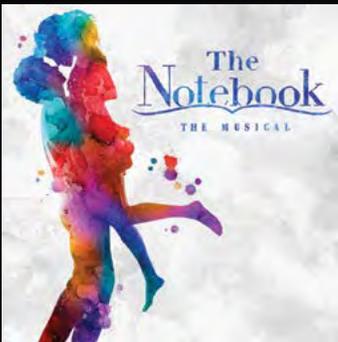
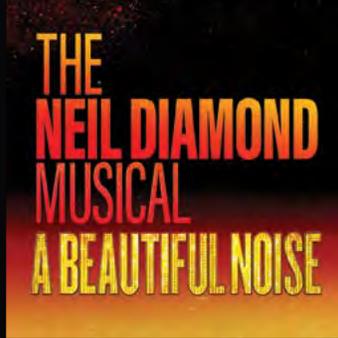
**Chic Compass: Such an incredible career. Who else would you like to play in a musical role?**

**Valerie Perri:** I was obsessed with "Gypsy" as a kid and once dreamed of playing Rose. But now, it's not about what I'm doing but who I'm doing it with. I want to work with good, talented people who care deeply. Theater is magical. I feel like I'm entering a new time in life, playing older character roles, and to that I say, "Bring it on!"



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# 'HEART OF THE ETERNAL' OPENS THE SECOND CHAPTER FOR A.J. CROCE

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By Sheryl Aronson

With the release of his 11th studio album, "Heart of the Eternal," Adrian James "A.J." Croce compiles a delicious recipe of eclectic songs that highlight his aptitude for fusing rock, blues, gospel and soul. In addition to exploring diverse musical roadways, Croce delves deep into psychological and spiritual themes with curiosity, humor and homegrown wisdom earned along life's painful paths.

Writing lyrics like these: Inside a rear-view mirror, I see my life defined. I feel the love and fear. I feel a peace of mind. Is there a state of grace along the finest line?

Croce's self-reflection graciously offers listeners hope, questioning and care.

At an early age, he found refuge in music and journeyed inwardly, developing a unique worldview through songwriting and crazy-good piano chops. That passion opened the door to a successful career in music. At just 15, Croce wrote "I Found Faith," exploring themes of love, faith, death and loss. Before the age of 2, he lost his father, Jim Croce. He also lost his sight at 4 and his family's home burned down when he was 15.

Self-taught on the piano, Croce played his first gig at 12 and performed in San Diego nightclubs by 16. A few years later, he hit the road as a sideman for legends like B.B. King and Taj Mahal.



*Above: Photo of A.J. Croce by Jim Shea*



*Above: Photo of A.J. Croce by Jim Shea*

Working with producers T Bone Burnett and John Simon, Croce recorded his 1993 debut "A.J. Croce," followed by "That's Me in the Bar," with Jim Keltner and featuring Ry Cooder and David Hidalgo (of Los Lobos). He went on to release "Fit to Serve," "Transit," "Adrian James Croce" (winner of Best Pop Album at the San Diego Music Awards), "Cantos," "Cage of Muses" and "Twelve Tales."

I spoke with Croce by phone as he traveled by tour bus to a show in Massachusetts. Following the March 7 release of "Heart of the Eternal," he's been touring the country and parts of Canada—and loving every moment. He expressed his surprise that fans already knew songs from the album and requested that he play them.

This project marks Croce's first release

of original music since 2017. He released a well-received cover album, "By Request," in 2021.

"I'm always writing, but I haven't been ready to tour due to the unexpected loss of my wife and then the isolation of the pandemic," he told me.

Over the course of our conversation, Croce sounded relaxed—even joyful—as he expressed gratitude for a new chapter in his life: new love, new music and a readiness to honor his father's legacy with a new show, "Croce Plays Croce."

"What I needed to do was figure out how to write a show that would incorporate my father and myself—and the influences that shaped us both as artists."

**Chic Compass: Congratulations on your newest album, "Heart of the Eternal." How is the tour going?**

**A.J. Croce:** Thank you very much. It's going amazingly well. The reaction to the new songs is shocking to me. The album came out recently, and people are already requesting songs from the new album at the concerts. That's a great sign.

**Chic Compass: You have a big following. People are excited about the new music, which is lovely for you.**

**A.J. Croce:** I've had the opposite reaction too. (He laughs.) I'll take it when people pay attention to my new music.

**Chic Compass: You became an artist at a very young age. What are your earliest recollections of wanting to be a musician?**

**A.J. Croce:** I wanted to be an artist and create music early on as a child. It was a calling. I'm a piano player first and foremost. I was blind for six years

during my childhood, and that played a big role in my evolution as an artist and as a composer. It shaped how I hear music and how I think about music.

When I was about 12, I played at a friend's party and was paid \$20. I thought if I kept practicing and working hard, I could play music well. I had other interests besides music, but music was the most powerful, inspiring and the greatest refuge.

**Chic Compass: How was music a refuge for you?**

**A.J. Croce:** I don't know how deep you'd like me to go.

**Chic Compass: Please, go as deep as you feel comfortable.**

**A.J. Croce:** I was less than 2 years old when my father died. When I was 4, I lost my sight. I was in the hospital for six months. From the ages of 4 to 10, I was completely blind but have since regained sight in one of my eyes. The piano was a solitary and beautiful place to reflect and feel emotions. I didn't feel safe as a kid, and music allowed me to feel safe.

**Chic Compass: It's extremely important as a child to know you have that aspect of safety. It sounds like you created a whole world for yourself at the piano, and that's inspirational—and probably healing. Maybe you were able to express anger, sadness or hurt—emotions that you couldn't verbalize.**

**A.J. Croce:** I think all humans do that regardless of their surroundings. We're constantly trying to understand where we are at the moment and where we want to go from here. It's universal.

Playing music was my way of connecting with others, and music still holds that power. Music is a wonderful way to communicate, and when you tap into the universal truths of any story, you see the outcome and the response from the audience. It's palpable and very emotional. Music has the power to stop

time, and that is magical.

**Chic Compass: What influences were you pulling from as you matured as a piano player and artist?**

**A.J. Croce:** Ray Charles and Stevie Wonder were my gateway and inspiration because I'd lost my sight. I also listened to the old blind blues piano players and guitarists like Blind Blake and Blind Willie McTell from the '20s, '30s and '40s. As a kid, I avidly listened to this music and the rock 'n' roll playing on the radio, plus my father's diverse record collection—soul music, lots of R&B, country, great jazz and blues—was a big influence. When I was 15, I played with a rock 'n' roll garage band. We covered '60s-style rock and R&B, Etta James or Jimmy Reed.

I also played solo in piano bars, jazz bars and blues clubs. I was learning the American Songbook and refining my chops. At 16, Floyd Dixon asked if I would travel with him. Floyd wrote the famous drinking songs like "Hey Bartender" and "Wine, Wine, Wine." I would go out on weekends and open for him. Then, at 17, I met Mae Boren Axton, who invited me to Nashville to record with Jack Clement. In my first session, I filled in for Jerry Lee Lewis. He walked out as I walked in. It was overwhelming.

That was the moment I realized I would be making and playing music as a career, even though the music might not be mainstream and would be a lot of work. Initially, I was hired in these settings as a piano player, not as a singer, but I continued developing my singing and composing skills. These skills didn't develop equally at the same time. I was a stronger piano player before I was a singer or songwriter. I didn't pick up the guitar until my 30s. As a guitarist, I'm starting to become good at it, whereas with piano, I have great confidence.

**Chic Compass: Your mother gave you your father's guitar. Was that the reason you started to play?**

**A.J. Croce:** There were a lot of factors,

that being one of them. As a songwriter, I saw thousands of options on the piano when I composed, and that could get in the way of storytelling. I discovered that if I could simplify things, the story would be easier to hear. On the guitar, I only knew four or five chords initially, which helped me simplify my songwriting.

On the same trip to Nashville, I decided to get a venue to play a concert. There was a brand-new club called the Bluebird, and the manager said, "We'd love to have you. Come back tomorrow and we'll give you an upright piano." I was performing for a lot of songwriters there and people were curious about me. At 17, I was young, but the songs I performed resonated with the audience. Also, having the legendary Steve Cropper come up to me after the show and encourage me greatly boosted my confidence.

At 18, I started touring with many musicians. At 15, I wrote "I Found Faith," which ended up on my first album. To me, this was a breakthrough. Here's a perspective: This is a piece of who I am, and it resonated with me.

**Chic Compass: When did you put out your first album?**

**A.J. Croce:** The first project had its roots in soul, rock 'n' roll and jazz. When I started touring with B.B. King, I didn't have a manager or an agent. I had just signed a publishing deal but didn't have a record label.

As we went from Vancouver down the West Coast, it seemed like every day there was a new connection to someone who wanted to be involved in the future of my career. It took a couple of years before everything fell into place. My first record didn't come out until I was 19. I was on tour with a lot of artists such as Taj Mahal and the Neville's, which brought me a real connection to New Orleans. I was learning and writing every day.

**Chic Compass: I know you were always thinking about being your**



*Above: Photo of A.J. Croce by Jim Shea*

**own person, not living under your father's fame. You've played many genres of music and have had extensive exposure. How did you carve out your own voice?**

**A.J. Croce:** The process or idea of myself as an artist has not changed much. I'm as open as ever and interested in learning and progressing. I will never rest on what I've already done. I will always push myself to create something new and different. When someone knows I have a famous relative, I feel that maybe I'll never be an individual again. I will never be interviewed by

someone who doesn't think about my father, or I'll never meet anyone who knows that we have that connection and doesn't think of him when they think of me. He was so much a part of their popular culture. It's not that I'm angry about it. The reality of celebrity and renown is incredibly unusual, and the idea that you can be an individual when you are related to someone well-known is not the case. I know who I am and am confident in my identity.

**Chic Compass:** **I'm very interested in you as an individual artist. Your career has been amazing; you've played with many incredible people. In 2017, you last wrote your own individual songs. What**

**happened between then and this new album, "Heart of the Eternal?"**

**A.J. Croce:** First, I write every day. It's not that there was a lack of material. But after "Just Like Medicine" was released, I went on tour. During that time, everything was going well. In the summer of 2018, however, my wife suddenly passed away. This event completely changed my life. My children were grown up at the time—my son was 21 and my daughter was 28—and it was extremely hard for me. She was the person who knew me better than anyone else and was my sounding board for ideas. She was my best friend. I stopped touring to regroup.

I started touring again in 2019, and then the pandemic hit in early 2020. I realized then that I wasn't ready to be that vulnerable to write new songs. I decided to play cover songs by other people. It was an effective way to share the music I had been playing at home from friend requests. I needed that kind of community, especially during the lockdown.

It was during this time that I met my girlfriend, who had experienced a similar loss with her late husband. He was a musician I had known for 25 years but hadn't seen very often. As I was starting a new relationship and falling in love, I noticed a second chapter unfolding. I had a lot to write about again.

**Chic Compass:** **Let's talk about some of the songs on your new album, "Heart of the Eternal." There are songs about relationships and love. Is "I Got a Feeling" a nod to your father's "I Got a Name?"**

**A.J. Croce:** This song had nothing to do with that. Charlie Fox wrote it. The song came from a psychedelic soul feeling, like Shuggie Otis, the Chambers Brothers, and Sly and the Family Stone. The lyrics became conversational, and I wanted it to represent a more esoteric side of lyric writing.

When I returned to Nashville, I had been thinking about working with

Tommy Sims, a great bass player and songwriter. He's written for Eric Clapton and worked with Toni Braxton and Babyface. He and I got together, and I played him the music. We took the lyrics that I had added, and it became a song.

**Chic Compass:** I love the way you play the keys. It sounds so cool.

**A.J. Croce:** I also get to play lead guitar, and that's fun.

**Chic Compass:** How was it working on the song "Reunion" with John Oates? That's a lovely song—very spiritual—and deals with how people move toward the end of their lives.

**A.J. Croce:** The song came about because John had just gone to see his father, who was 100 years old. He told John that he was ready to have his reunion with the people he loved and the people he'd lost. The first time John played it for me, he was playing it in 4/4 time. I said it feels like it could be a gospel song. I put it in 6/8 and played it like that. John's such a wonderful collaborator. He recorded his way for his LP, and I recorded the song my way. I loved this song so much that I also wanted to share it.

**Chic Compass:** "The Complications of Love." Here's what I found interesting because of my work with couples as a relationship therapist—I understood the lyrics very well. I call it the intimacy dance, where somebody wants to get close to their partner, but the partner feels scared, so they pull away. Then you go, well, if you pull away, I will pull away. "The Complications of Love" explains the dilemma beautifully.

**A.J. Croce:** I wrote the song on guitar, which was a good way to practice my diminished scales, that sort of Django Reinhardt sound. The song is a three-chord pop song, and it's very moody and yet playful. There's a certain amount of tongue-in-cheek aspect

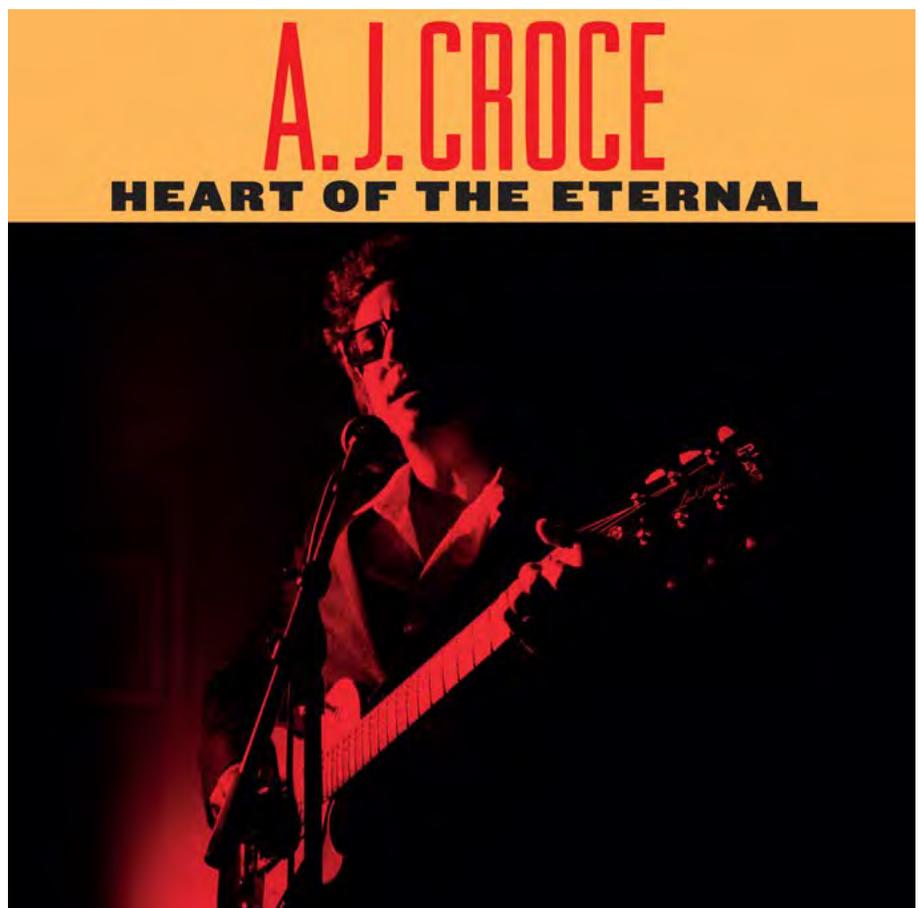
too. Dysfunctional is exactly what a relationship can be at times.

**Chic Compass:** On the song "The Finest Line," you're dealing with death again. I love the lyrics: Inside a rear-view mirror, I see my life defined. I feel the love and fear. I feel a peace of mind. Is there a state of grace along the finest line? That's a great question; it also helps us think about life and how we can attain that state of grace. As an artist, have you found a state of grace?

**A.J. Croce:** I've had it for a long time. It's about being open and curious, maintaining an interest in life and being open to new experiences. Also, I embrace having a sense of humor and being able to laugh at myself. Being forgiving is a huge part of being an adult and a happy human being. In forgiveness, there's an acceptance of certain things in life. This has played a part in defining the person I am.

**Chic Compass:** I can hear in your voice that you're excited and interested in everything you're doing and having a great time. I know this is a cliché question, but I must ask: What has been your experience of putting together a show where you play your father's songs? Finally, at the age of 50, you decided it was time. What caused you to create this show?

**A.J. Croce:** The experience was different than I expected. First, it took a long time for me to get there. First, I wanted my own identity. Second, I was constantly compared to my father, and I didn't want to give the public another reason to compare us. However, behind the scenes for 30 years, I've been promoting my father's music, celebrating his legacy as a publisher and ensuring that new generations hear his music. So as someone making sure that his music is archived and his legacy is protected and cherished, I've played a big role.





*Above: Photo of A.J. Croce by Jim Shea*

I heard some recordings of my father's that particularly resonated—they were not his big hits—it was his music before he could make a living. He would play other people's songs, and there was one recording where he played obscure music from mostly the '20s, '30s and '40s. Strangely enough, these were the songs I had played since I was 13. I realized we had this musical connection, this love of the old music. We chose the same songs from the same obscure artists. These are the deep cuts, and I realized we had that connection.

As his 70th birthday approached, I decided to play a small show as a tribute. I played a bunch of his music, and the reaction from the audience was powerful, beautiful and emotional. I realized the sweetness of playing some of his songs, and I also discovered that if I were going to perform his music, it would be time to create an entire show. I needed to figure out how to write a show that would incorporate my father and myself and the influences that we both had that make us who we are as artists.

I use that in the present tense because his music is just as alive. A beautiful

thing about art is that if people enjoy the music, then no artist truly dies. I put a show together, wrote introductions and ensured people knew the songs' history. My father was a storyteller. He could play a two-hour show and only four or five songs because he talked so much. People loved it. Storytelling was an important part of his artistry.

Then, as an artist, who grew up playing improvisational music and not ever wanting to play the same thing, I had to create a skeleton for this piece—a framework for everything to fit in that had a beginning, a middle and an end. But also, one that was very flexible and allowed me to be creative night after night. I discovered that I didn't want to perform his music because of a comparison, but what ended up happening was that people fell in love with what I do, and I gained a bigger audience through that concert than I could have ever imagined. I played to more packed houses than ever, and it was not just his music. It was not just my music; it was the celebration of two generations—a father and a son—and the circumstances in which we met and became intertwined as artists.

**Chic Compass: You wrote a song for your children on your newest**

**album. What does being a father mean to you and passing along that love and generational wisdom?**

**A.J. Croce:** I mean, they never want to listen to it. (He laughs.) It's important that my children learn things for themselves, in their own way, in their own time. I feel grateful that my children love me and call me all the time. We can laugh and talk about anything.

**Chic Compass: San Diego was your home for many years, and of course, your family-owned Croce's was in the Gaslamp Quarter. Ingrid Croce's vision of creating a space to celebrate Jim Croce's memory has been fully realized since the restaurant was opened in 1985. You still have people who love you, and I know you will be playing at Humphreys as one of your tour stops.**

**A.J. Croce:** It's a beautiful place, and my daughter still lives there. My mother and stepfather also live there, so I visit often. My son lives in Los Angeles. Even though I haven't lived there in many years, I love going back to Southern California.

**Chic Compass: Is there anything you've always wanted to say in an interview but have never been asked?**

**A.J. Croce:** We touched on the subject a little bit. When I do interviews, I think there's a natural inclination for people to be fascinated by the tragedies in my life: my father dying when I was young, losing most of my sight as a kid, my house burning down at 15 and my wife dying prematurely. Not often enough am I able to talk about the fact that there's a second chapter. I'm in love. Out of those experiences of loss and pain, there's something more. We get to choose how we deal with our tragedies. We get to choose how we want our dreams to end. I've opened up a new chapter in my life, and I'm very happy!



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## FROM DESERT ROOTS TO RISING STARS

By Kendall Hardin | Photography courtesy of Bill Thomas

The Desert Roots Rising Stars Festival—featuring a week-long musical extravaganza—returns after its spectacular summer debut last year.

Concerts boast a dazzling repertoire of beloved classical masterpieces, contemporary favorites and even a colorful splash of pop-rock composers.

What makes this festival unique is the integration of six professional artists from today's new wave of classical superstars—musicians who have roots in Las Vegas and return to perform shoulder to shoulder with the next generation of aspiring artists in Southern Nevada.

Concertizing again in this year's star lineup are violinist Liam Mansfield, violinist Scott Jackson, violist Omar Shelley and cellist Jeremy Russo, joined by newcomers violinist Alex Gonzalez and bassist-orchestra conductor Tyler Gordon.

In addition to performing in concert with Rising Stars students, these accomplished musicians mentor and inspire young musicians both on and off stage through workshops, master classes and



one-on-one coaching during a week of intense rehearsals.

"Desert Roots Rising Stars was created to support aspiring students through the extraordinary challenges they encounter as they develop their careers on the world stage," said Shakeh Ghoukasian, founder and executive director of the Desert Roots Rising Stars Festival.

"The festival encourages talented string players to learn directly from

*Above: Rising Stars performers at the festival's debut in 2024*

professional artists who are in demand as top orchestral members and touring artists.

"Young artists must learn to master their technical skills and enhance their knowledge of musical interpretation and concert protocol. They welcome expert advice and practical strategies from artists they admire and trust, who can help them advance their careers."



In a city where ticket prices for live entertainment keep skyrocketing, it is astounding that admission to the festival is free, with performances throughout the valley at a variety of accessible venues, making them the perfect family-friendly entertainment for audiences of all ages.

This year's festival performances will light up the following venues:

- **Rita Deanin Abbey Museum:** Tuesday, June 10, at 7 p.m.; 5850 N. Park St. (off Northwest Ann Road)
- **FreyBoy Art Salon:** Thursday, June 12, at 7 p.m.; 4044 Dean Martin Drive
- **Christ Church Episcopal:** Friday, June 13, at 2 p.m. (Student Chamber Music Concert), Saturday, June 14, at 2 p.m. (Student Chamber Orchestra Concert Finale); 2000 S. Maryland Parkway



In addition to offering free entertainment for the local community, the festival supports affordable, scholarship-driven training for young musicians throughout Southern Nevada, ensuring that young talent, regardless of financial background, has access to the highest-caliber training and performance opportunities.

Businesses and individuals can underwrite scholarships, sponsor festival concerts, adopt a young musician, become valued volunteers, or join as a Friend of the Festival—all ways to engage new audiences and prepare the next generation of Rising Stars in the Vegas Valley.

**Desert Roots Rising Stars**  
[info@desertrootsrisingstars.org](mailto:info@desertrootsrisingstars.org)  
 702-580-9086

*Top Left: Rehearsing behind the scenes is a lot of work but worth it!*

*Middle Left: Ninna Wang marking up the score next to Damon Hernandez Jr.*

*Left: Kelly Jo Poulsen performing alongside guest artist Liam Mansfield*





## Shakeh's 10,000-Mile Musical Journey

Accomplished violinist Shakeh Ghoukasian—the creative dynamo behind the Desert Roots Rising Stars Festival—started her musical studies when she was just 6 years old at the prestigious Tchaikovsky Music School in Armenia, a country at that time "behind the Iron Curtain."

As a teenager, she immigrated with her parents and younger sister to Los Angeles in 1979, where she mastered English while attending public school. She remembers her father buying a piano for his daughters before the family bought their first car in America.

Fast forward to 1991, when she graduated from UNLV with a bachelor's and master's degree in music. Since 1998, she has held the position of principal second violinist of the Las Vegas Philharmonic and performs with the Phil's Principals Quartet to present educational outreach and chamber music concerts.

She also regularly plays in orchestras

supporting ballet and opera performances, as well as in countless recording sessions and concerts with classical, jazz, rock, and pop stars on and off the Strip.

For 14 years, she was the driving force behind the Nevada School of the Arts, where she launched programs such as:

- **Musical Crossroads:** Showcasing classical guest artists crossing over into Latin and jazz genres for Clark County schools
- **Kids2Kids:** Concerts performed by students for students, wildly embraced by students and administrators alike
- **Jazz Initiative:** Modeled on the groundbreaking prototype spearheaded by Wynton Marsalis at Lincoln Center
- In 2021, she founded **The String Connection** and **The String Connection Virtual Violin Festival**, providing transformational training for advanced violin and viola students ages 15-20. She also established a Suzuki Talent Education Program for very young budding musicians.

*Above: Shakeh Ghoukasian with cellist Jeremy Russo and violinists Scott Jackson and Liam Mansfield*

Last year, she single-handedly pulled together the first Desert Roots Rising Stars Festival, which was embraced by the community.

Concert artist, orchestra principal, master teacher and respected adjudicator throughout the country—she continues to be a major player not only in classical music but in all genres.

Perhaps her greatest accomplishment of all is reflected in her extraordinary students, who have garnered top awards at national competitions and now perform at prestigious camps, festivals and major orchestras across the country.

With her as their guide, they have blossomed into accomplished professional musicians and, most importantly, beautiful human beings on the world stage.

And her journey continues!



# DESERT ROOTS

## RISING STARS

Music Festival and Summer Academy

### FREE CONCERTS

**TUE** 10  
7:00PM

**RITA DEANIN ABBEY ART MUSEUM**

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LAS VEGAS, NV 89149

**THU** 12  
7:00PM

**FREYBOY ART SALON**

4044 DEAN MARTIN DR  
LAS VEGAS, NV 89103

**FRI** 13  
2:00PM

**CHRIST CHURCH EPISCOPAL**

2000 S MARYLAND PKWY  
LAS VEGAS, NV 89104  
STUDENT CHAMBER MUSIC CONCERT

**SAT** 14  
2:00PM

CHAMBER ORCHESTRA  
CONCERT FINALE



**W**  
**N** 9-14  
**J**  
**U** 2025

### MEET — OUR — ARTISTS

**SHAKEH GHOUKASIAN**  
violin, Executive Director

**LIAM MANSFIELD**  
violin, Creative Director

**SCOTT JACKSON**, violin

**ALEX GONZALEZ**, violin

**OMAR SHELLY**, viola

**JEREMY RUSSO**, cello

**TYLER GORDON**, conductor

**DESERTROOTSRISINGSTARS.ORG**

# WILL ROGER: ARTIST, ACTIVIST AND VISIONARY LEADING THE ECOLOGICAL AWAKENING

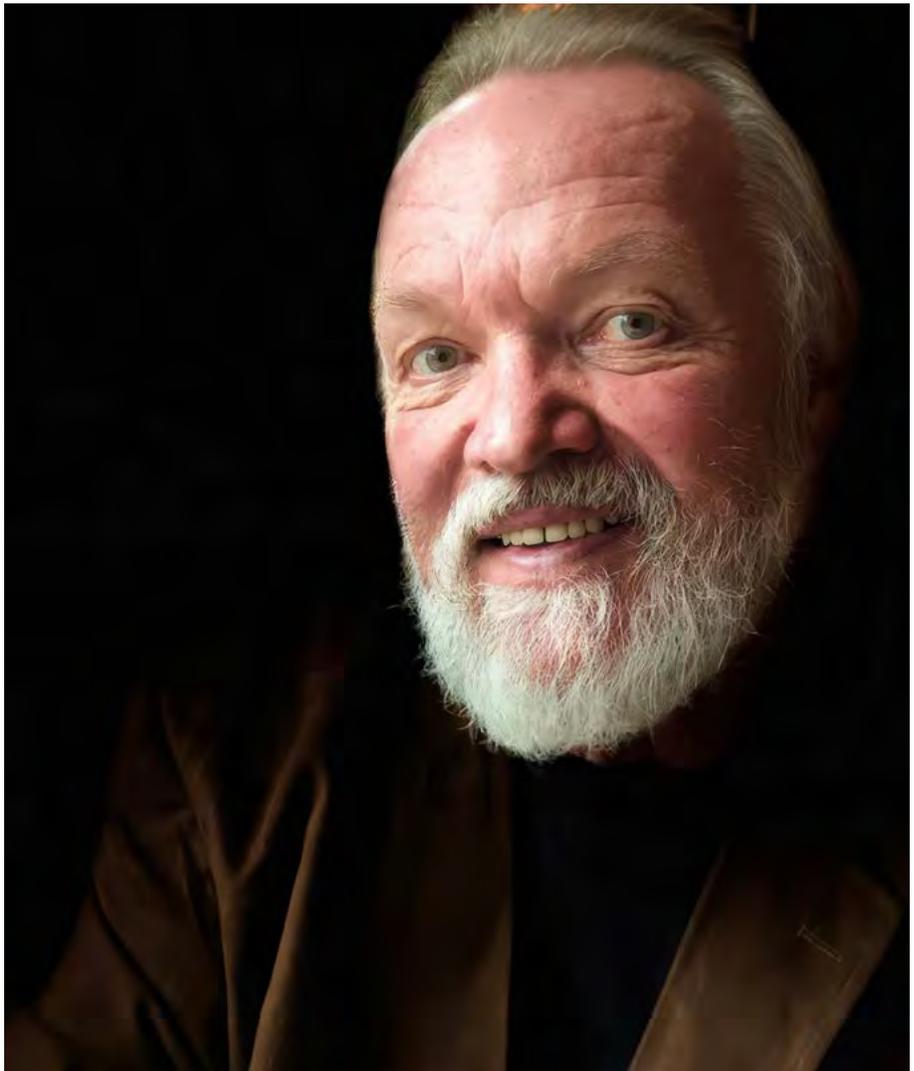
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By Laura Henkel

*W*ill Roger's life has been shaped by his wisdom, compassion and boundless courage. With a deep reverence for the feminine and the natural world, he blends his strength with intuitive reflection, forging a path that seamlessly merges art, activism and a profound connection to the environment.

In the vibrant chaos of the 1960s counterculture, Will Roger's journey began—performing with Theater in the Streets in New York and rallying with the Students for a Democratic Society to bring change to a world in turmoil. After teaching photography at the Rochester Institute of Technology, he embarked on a transformative hike along the Sierra Nevada Pacific Crest Trail with his first wife. Upon returning, he taught aerial photography—focusing on ancient cultural sites—to his second wife. This journey eventually led him to Burning Man, which he co-founded with his third wife, Crimson Rose, solidifying his role as a visionary leader at the intersection of art, activism and community.

Throughout his life, Will's inspiration has consistently come from the feminine and the natural world. His path has been deeply intertwined with his lifelong spiritual connection to nature. He has called the great outdoors his home for half his



*Above: Photo of Will Roger by Crimson Rose*



life, with monumental backdrops shaping his spiritual journey.

Ten years ago, Will Roger and Crimson Rose began creating Casa El Rancho in Gerlach, Nevada—a project they call home. The stars shine brightly there, and the only traffic jam, except for the Burning Man event itself, is caused by ranchers moving sheep across the two-lane highway. Their home is as much a spiritual refuge as it is a physical one.

### **Sunset Rituals and Desert Magic: Embracing Nature for Ecological Healing**

Every evening in Gerlach, as the sun dips below the horizon, Will Roger walks the labyrinth Crimson Rose designed at their home. More than a path, it's a meditation carved into the earth, inviting stillness and connecting all who walk it to the land's pulse. As the sky turns amber and rises, Will moves deliberately, feeling the cool earth beneath his feet and the fresh desert air filling his lungs. The stars emerge, and the Milky Way unfurls—a reminder of the vast interconnectedness of existence.

What began as a personal ritual of mindfulness has transformed into a

portal of magic that Will Roger believes is not just his experience but is available to everyone willing to slow down and reconnect with the planet. For Will and Crimson, this practice is no mere ceremony; it is a way of being, a tangible embodiment of living fully alive on a planet that still offers wonder to those willing to seek it.

Every solstice, they make the sacred sunrise pilgrimage to the labyrinth they created at Fly Ranch, a 3,800-acre expanse of pristine wetlands, artisan hot springs and an extreme, arid landscape with expansive playa areas. Fly Ranch serves as a cultural and ecological hub, offering nature tours, rustic retreats and the opportunity to study Fly Geyser. This remarkable geothermal feature has formed colorful, otherworldly formations, making it a fascinating and unique natural landmark.

The labyrinth is just one of the art installations at Fly Ranch, showcasing the site's commitment to conservation, education and land stewardship, available by special permission. Each Sunday afternoon, Will and Crimson continue their tradition of walking through the labyrinth, welcoming others to join them in this shared journey of reconnection to

*Above: Labyrinth created by Crimson Rose at Casa El Rancho in Gerlach, Nevada*

the land and each other.

### **Habitat Annihilation: A Cultural Shift Toward Ecological Responsibility**

As global movements like Fridays for Future and Extinction Rebellion call on world leaders to take bold action against climate change, "Habitat Annihilation: Humans Have Changed the Earth, Now the Earth Will Change Humans," published by Norfolk Press, offers a deeper perspective rooted in personal connections to the land. This isn't just about politics or technology, it critiques the systems that have driven us to this ecological crisis, pushing for more than just political or technological solutions. Will Roger's message demands a seismic shift in how we think about Earth, and this is where true transformation begins: a profound cultural and spiritual awakening.

This isn't merely about climate change—it's about confronting the more immediate and destructive issue of habitat destruction. "Habitat Annihilation" serves

**WILL ROGER**  
**HABITAT  
ANNIHILATION**

**Humans have changed the Earth  
Now the Earth will change Humans**



**With curated essays from:**

*Rosalie Fay Barnes, Christopher  
Breedlove, Zac Cirivello, Laura Day,  
Susan Clark, Laura Fallon, Rosie von Lila,  
Crimson Rose, David Shearer,  
SunRose IronShell, Fred Sigman,  
and Matt Sundquist*

*Above: "Habitat Annihilation" by Will Roger, published by Norfolk Press. Cover art: The Human Heart Floral, by SunRose IronShell, honoring traditional Dakota and Lakota visualization through the lens of nature*

as a rallying cry—a call for humanity to awaken, rediscover Earth's awe and magic, and act with urgency. This visionary work blends bold analysis, personal storytelling and essays that urge readers to break free from apathy and actively participate in a cultural and ecological renaissance.

The term "habitat annihilation" might

initially feel jarring, but Will Roger chose it to reflect the severity of our environmental crisis more accurately. He defines it as:

1. The complete and irreversible destruction of the natural environment, including ecosystems, plant and animal life, primarily caused by human activities like industrialization,

resource extraction and unsustainable agricultural practices.

2. The ongoing degradation of Earth's habitats due to overconsumption, fossil fuel dependence and harmful societal structures, leading to the loss of biodiversity and the planet's diminished ability to support life.

By focusing on habitat annihilation, he challenges the traditional framework of climate change, urging readers to confront the full consequences of human activity—not just climate shifts but the systematic destruction of the habitats that sustain all life.

In his view, this destruction isn't just an unfortunate side effect—it's the outcome of a cultural mindset that exploits Earth rather than reveres it. The book calls for us to reconsider the systems of growth, consumption and extraction at the heart of this crisis.

But "Habitat Annihilation" doesn't stop at critique—it offers a vision for change. Will Roger's call for cultural transformation includes actionable insights, from redesigning urban environments to challenging "colonial capitalism," a system built on infinite growth on a finite planet. These ideas resonate with global movements like Extinction Rebellion but offer a practical and spiritual approach that empowers individuals, communities and organizations to reframe their environmental responsibility and take meaningful action.

### **An Artistic Evolution and Environmental Leadership**

Will Roger's evolution into a visionary leader began long before his move to Gerlach. Rooted in his ability to bridge vastly different worlds, his journey took him from an academic career to owning a photography studio in the Bay Area. Later, he worked as a contractor by day and a performance artist by night during the transition from analog to digital. Fate ultimately led him to the Black Rock Desert to attend an event in the middle of nowhere.

To provide more context, imagine

rural Nevada in the 1990s—wide-open spaces, generations of ranchers and nearby mining towns. Picture the town of Gerlach, home to only about 120 residents and five watering holes. Then add the Cacophony Society, an underground collective of anarchists, artists and pranksters known for its subversive intellect and experimental approach to art and life.

When a group of "hippies" descended upon Gerlach to create what would become Burning Man, Will Roger found himself in the unlikely role of director of operations for the city slickers while also becoming a quasi-resident of the area for much of the year. In many ways, the collision of two worlds—one urban, one rural—over the past 30+ years formed a surprisingly harmonious and mutually rewarding relationship.

Will respected the locals and their deep connection to the land throughout it all, including the Indigenous peoples whose presence and wisdom have long shaped the region. This respect for the land and its history became central to the shared journey that continues to evolve today.

Now, living in Gerlach full-time, Will Roger and Crimson Rose find the town a peaceful haven, the perfect setting for their stewardship of the land and their mission to heal the Earth and its inhabitants.

### **A Respected Elder: Leading the Change Toward a Sustainable Future**

Having come full circle from adventurer to artist to visionary leader, Will Roger today stands as a respected elder, guiding others with the wisdom and experience he has accumulated over decades of transformative work. His ability to blend action with reflection, creativity with practicality, has positioned him as a mentor and a spiritual guide—a role he embraces with deep commitment.

In the same way, he has transformed the cultural landscape. "Habitat Annihilation"



*Above: Will Roger reflected in a gazing orb*

urges readers to reconsider their place within the larger ecological narrative. It is both a call to action and a challenge to reflect on our collective impact and the legacy we leave behind.

His book reflects a profound understanding of Earth's fragile beauty while calling upon future generations to awaken and reconnect with the natural world. Through this work, Will Roger challenges us to reimagine our relationship with the planet, urging action that transcends mere awareness and leads to meaningful change.

### **Diverse Voices on Ecological Transformation and Social Change**

What energizes "Habitat Annihilation" is its symphony of diverse voices curated by Will Roger. Each contributor brings a unique perspective, enriching the book's message of ecological responsibility and cultural transformation.

This book is not just a read—it's an experience. It's a call to action that also invites profound reflection, urging readers to dive deeper into the complexities of the ecological crisis. Will's insights are seamlessly interwoven with powerful

contributions from each essayist, including an introduction by David Shearer, which sets the stage for the following discussions. Each chapter unfolds as a dynamic exploration:

- SunRose IronShell and Rosie von Lila's "Practicing Honorably with Indigenous Wisdom" explores the integration of Indigenous wisdom into modern environmental practices and how to restore your Indigenous connection to the Earth.
- Laura Fallon's "Rewilding the Feminine" maps a liberatory path amidst interlocking systems of oppression.
- Susan Clark's "Human Population Control" examines how population dynamics contribute to the ecological crisis.
- Rosalie Fay Barnes' "Sexual Education, Drag and the Divine Feminine" weaves themes of gender, sexuality and environmentalism in the context of personal empowerment.
- Fred Sigman's "The Three Fires That Consume the Earth" explores Buddhist perspectives on greed—literal, metaphorical and

cultural—that define the cause of our habitat annihilation.

- Laura Day's "The Overview Effect" discusses the evolutionary impacts that contributed to humankind's departure from the natural world and the epigenetic experiences that can shift our perceptions and responsibilities toward the Earth.
- Zac Cirivello's "The History and Future of Trees" examines the role of forests in our planetary survival.
- Matt Sundquist's "Alternatives to Universalism and the White Male Settler Contract" proposes interconnected models of justice and interconnectedness that better serve the planet and humanity.
- Christopher Breedlove's "Building Our Future" explores sustainable and regenerative technologies.
- Crimson Rose's "Earth Art ~ Creation Myth" offers a poetic meditation on transformation through art.

Will Roger's writings—"10 Points of Deconstruction-Construction, Awakening: Reimagining Humanity's Role on Earth" and "Manifesto for a Burning Age"—form the philosophical backbone of the work.

## Reframing the Narrative

Will critiques mainstream terminology, asserting, "You know the idea that in the mainstream culture we call it climate change or global warming, so I looked at those terms and thought they're missing the point. The point is that there are millions of species of plants and animals on Earth, and humans are one of them, and we're the only ones destroying our home. So that's habitat annihilation, and that's what we're doing."

His book also confronts the underpinnings of what he now calls "colonial capitalism"—a system that demands infinite growth on a planet with finite resources. "I don't like looking at the Earth as a resource—the Earth is our home," he explains. "The idea of the book is that through these other authors, I was able to look at what we have in our toolkit right now to make the change that we need to make. We have all the

tools; we just ... ultimately, it's a consciousness change that we need to go through, and if we're going to live into the future as a species, we need to do this now."

## Magic, Intention, Empowerment: A Call to Action

Yet this isn't a book mired in gloom. It's an electrifying blueprint for change. Will believes the chaos we face is also an unprecedented opportunity for reinvention. "It's easy to get depressed about where we're at and where we're going; on the other hand, this is truly the most exciting time to be a human on the planet, and there's an empowerment that's happening that needs to happen. I hope my book and the contributors in the book help empower the reader to begin to see the change that we need to make and help facilitate that change. And I want everyone to begin to see the magic again."

Magic, indeed, is what threads through the pages of "Habitat Annihilation." Will urges us to reclaim our sense of awe—to reject soulless systems that exploit and divide and to champion sustainability, equity and reverence for all living things. His words don't just inform; they uplift, challenge and ultimately transform. While his approach to ecological healing may be personal, it echoes larger cultural shifts toward a new paradigm in environmentalism that goes beyond policy and science to include soul-deep reconnection to Earth.

## Legacy in Print: A Spiritual and Environmental Dialogue

Will Roger's earlier works offer valuable context for his latest vision.

In "Handbook for a Burning Age," he shares his story and how it shaped his beliefs and practices for living in balance with Earth and each other. The book is part memoir and part how-to guide for cultivating resilience and action through

creative and spiritual practices. Through personal stories and works that inspired his journey, he invites readers to cultivate their art spirit as a source of deep connection with themselves, others and the planet.

"Compass of the Ephemeral" showcases Will Roger's aerial photography of Black Rock City from 2008 – 2018, offering a stunning visual record of Burning Man's transformation from a small gathering into a city with innovative infrastructure that inspires urban planners worldwide. The book includes archival ephemera and essays by cultural luminaries.

## The Time Is Now

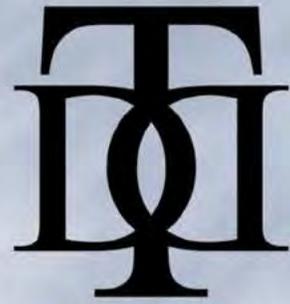
Will Roger's belief in community as the engine of change pulses through every page. Systemic transformation, he insists, is rooted in cultural consciousness. Through storytelling, art and collective action, "Habitat Annihilation" equips readers with knowledge and the tools to become agents of change. It's a manifesto wrapped in poetry—a call to arms written with heart. As environmental upheaval intensifies, this book is more than timely—it's essential.

The future is not inevitable. It's a canvas, and we are the artists. Will dares us to imagine a world reborn and to act with courage, creativity and conviction. In an age where nature is reduced to a resource, "Habitat Annihilation" calls us to reclaim our role as stewards of life's interconnection and fragility. The need for change is urgent—and it's in our hands to make a tangible impact.

*For more information or to purchase "Habitat Annihilation: Humans Have Changed the Earth, Now the Earth Will Change Humans," visit [willroger.com](http://willroger.com), [willroger.norfolkpress.com](http://willroger.norfolkpress.com) or [flyranch.org](http://flyranch.org).*



Photograph of Jonathan Karrant  
by Joseph Donato (Cashman Photo)



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## J HALEEM ON OVERCOMING ADVERSITY AND INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION

By Chanelle Hayes / Photography courtesy of J Haleem Media

Some stories are meant to inspire, but Jamar "J Haleem" Washington's journey is a testament to the power of grace. His life is remarkable in terms of resilience, transformation and purpose, which are marked by his overcoming adversity and the grace that carried him through.

J Haleem's path has been anything but ordinary, from navigating a tough upbringing to facing legal challenges and defying the odds as an entrepreneur. Yet through every hardship, he found favor, second chances and the strength to rise again.

Today, J Haleem is more than a businessman—he's a mentor, an accomplished author, a motivational speaker, a business coach and the founder of the #I Won't Starve Academy, a movement dedicated to equipping the next generation with the tools to succeed. His story proves that grace isn't just about what we receive, it's about what we do with it.

**Chic Compass:** Can you tell me about your early years and where you grew up?

**J Haleem:** I was born and raised in Newark, New Jersey. Growing up, we didn't realize we were poor because



Above: J Haleem



Above: J Haleem outside of his office headquarters in Las Vegas

everyone around us was in a similar situation. Looking back, though, it was rough. My grandmother raised me, along with her children. Out of eight kids, seven struggled with drug addiction, including my mom.

Despite my environment, I chose not to follow in those footsteps. Instead of using drugs, I gravitated toward the ones selling them. I always had a strong work ethic and loved basketball but got into trouble at night. I lived a double life. I never considered dropping out, but I was out in the streets as soon as school was over. I got shot at an early age and found myself caught up in a dangerous lifestyle.

Still, I managed to stumble my way into college. I had some serious run-ins with the law, nearly ended up in prison and got arrested a few times as a juvenile. However, my record was cleared because my first adult arrest allowed me to enter a diversion program. My first year of college was spent traveling back home to meet the program's requirements.

**Chic Compass: How did those experiences shape your approach to business and mentorship?**

**J Haleem:** Selling drugs is definitely a form of entrepreneurship, but I was drawn to business differently. I've always had a vivid imagination, and TV played a big role in shaping my vision. While we glorified drug dealers in my neighborhood, I admired characters like Martin Lawrence and Eddie Murphy in "Boomerang" and professionals wearing suits. Shows like "The Cosby Show" and "A Different World" introduced me to college. Basketball also inspired me to pursue higher education. When people asked me what I wanted to major in, I'd say business—even though I had no idea what that meant. I was the first in my family to attend college, so I just went with it.

**Chic Compass: You've authored books like "#1 Won't Starve" and "#U Won't Starve." What inspired you to write these, and what key messages do you hope readers take away?**

**J Haleem:** That came much later. I did go to college, but while I was there, I became a convicted felon. Because of that, finding a job was nearly impossible, so I had to start my own business. I graduated with honors but never had a traditional career job. Writing was never part of my plan—I grew up in

an environment where we didn't tell our stories.

However, I became even more focused on creating a better future after having kids. In 2014, I attended a T.D. Jakes conference in Orlando while working a low-paying job. His book *Instinct* had just come out, and his sermon that day changed my life. He brought a fully grown lion onstage—caged since birth—and said that despite never being in the wild, they still had to keep it locked up because its instincts could kick in at any moment. That hit me hard, and everyone from my church who was with me said, "That's you."

A few months later, I left my job, started my own business and never looked back. At that conference, a woman prayed over me and said she saw me writing a book. I had no intention of doing that at the time, but a few years later, it happened. And now, I've written four.

**Chic Compass: You also have the #1 Won't Starve Academy, which aims to support aspiring entrepreneurs. What motivated you to establish this academy, and what impact has it had since its inception?**

**J Haleem:** The idea started in 2014. I realized I was bigger and better than the life I was living, so I created my own hashtag: #IWontStarve. I was a photographer then and went all in on my business. Every time I succeeded, I used that hashtag.

By 2017, I started public speaking but wanted to do it on my terms. I launched the #1 Won't Starve Experience, my own speaking event, and packed the house. That's when #1 Won't Starve officially became a brand.

The #1 Won't Starve Experience came in 2020 during the pandemic. I realized we needed to start educating high school and college students about entrepreneurship. Frederick Douglass has a quote I love: "It's easier to build strong children than to repair broken men." I wanted to help young people avoid the

struggles I faced. Adults are often resistant to change, but kids can still be guided. No one guided me, so I wanted to give them the support I never had.

**Chic Compass: What topics do you focus on when working with young people?**

**J Haleem:** I primarily focus on entrepreneurial development. Many people talk about business development, but I believe entrepreneurship is a skill you need to learn and practice—just like being in the military. You don't just wake up one day and know how to run a business; you have to train for it.

I also emphasize career development. Not everyone is meant to be an entrepreneur. Some people need to be the ones supporting and investing in entrepreneurs. I encourage kids to pursue careers in law, medicine and engineering—whatever they're passionate about. I once spoke to a group of kids where one wanted to be an entrepreneur while the others had traditional career goals. I told them not to dismiss him—he might take longer to find his footing, but he could become their biggest asset.

Despite what social media portrays, entrepreneurship isn't easy. It's one of the most challenging paths you can take, and I want kids to be prepared for that reality.

**Chic Compass: Networking is crucial in business development. What strategies do you recommend for entrepreneurs looking to expand their businesses?**

**J Haleem:** I developed my own networking strategy, which I wrote about in my book "#U Won't Starve." I call it "Being the Cheese." Networking isn't about going to happy hours, getting drunk, collecting business cards and forgetting who you met. It's about positioning yourself in a room where everyone is a potential client, not competition.

Think of a wine festival—you have different vendors selling red and white



wines. If I buy your \$40 red and you buy my \$40 white, neither of us makes money. But have you ever been to a wine event that doesn't have cheese? Everyone buys the cheese. That's what I teach—be the cheese. Be the person in the room that everyone needs, regardless of their industry.

That's how I built a six-figure business. As a photographer, I got into government contracting, something most people never even consider. The government spends half a billion dollars annually on

*Above Top: J Haleem and Mission High School students in Las Vegas*

*Above Middle: J Haleem and Spring Valley High School students during the T.I.E. Tuesday Program*

*Above: Business and Entrepreneur Workshop at Nasri Academy for Gifted Children in Las Vegas where all participants received a copy of his book "#U Wont Starve"*

photography, and I was able to tap into a small part of that. I teach others to think beyond the obvious opportunities.

**Chic Compass: With more than two decades of entrepreneurial experience, how do you stay current with evolving business trends?**

**J Haleem:** You have to keep educating yourself. Artificial intelligence (AI) is here now. I don't have the option of ignoring it just because I don't like it. As an investor, I need to understand how AI can be leveraged in business. Entrepreneurs are getting younger and younger. You can't dismiss them just because they're young—they might have insights you don't.

Look at the gaming industry. Some doubted its potential years ago, but now it's a multibillion-dollar industry. You'll get left behind if you're not paying attention to trends.

**Chic Compass: Grace is a recurring theme in many success stories. How has grace played a role in your journey, and in what ways has it defined your approach to business, mentorship and personal growth?**

**J Haleem:** Grace is my entire story. I grew up in a challenging environment—I was the first in my family to graduate high school and attend college. I lost so many friends to the streets, and I was deeply involved myself. But I made it out. I never served serious time, and I transitioned into business with no mentors or role models. I believe that was God's grace.

Because of that, I know I have a responsibility to give back. If it was hard for me, I want to make it easier for the next generation. They'll have their own struggles, but I want to be there to help them navigate those challenges. I don't believe in burning bridges but in building them so others can cross more easily.

**Chic Compass: What do you enjoy doing for fun?**

**J Haleem:** I love traveling and spending time with my kids and family. Traveling is a passion of mine. I've lived in multiple places across the country and see myself living abroad in the future. My son still has several years left in school, but after that, I'd love to explore living overseas.

**Chic Compass: Looking ahead, what are your goals for the next few years?**

**J Haleem:** Right now, I'm focused on investing. In 2018, I set a five-year goal to become a full-time investor by the end of 2023. I achieved that, and now I'm learning and growing in this new role.

Investing is different from running a business—it's slower but fulfilling. I've

spent more than 20 years building businesses, and now it's time to step back and help others do the same. Starting a business from scratch is one of the hardest things you can do. It takes sacrifice—sometimes your friends and family won't support you. I've been through all that, and now I want to use my experience to help others.

Too often, people stay in the same role for too long. There are teachers who should be administrators by now and police officers who should have moved up the ranks. Growth is necessary. I don't need to be in the trenches competing with young entrepreneurs—I need to fund their ideas and help them succeed.

**Chic Compass: Is there anything else you'd like to add?**



*Above: J Haleem and his son JJ continuing annual holiday tradition by volunteering at the Ronald McDonald House*



**J Haleem:** I'm grateful for the opportunity to share my story. I've been in Vegas for about three years now, and one of the projects closest to my heart is Mission High School. A lot of people don't know about it, but it's an incredible place that supports high school students recovering from substance abuse.

My organization, #I Won't Starve Academy, has adopted Mission High. Thanks to partnerships with Little Caesars and Jimmy John's, we bring lunch for the students every Friday. We're working to help the school get its own cafeteria and provide consistent meals for the kids. These students are my babies, and I want to see them succeed. I hope more people in the community step up to support them.

**Chic Compass:** That's amazing. Thank you so much for your time!

**J Haleem:** Thank you! I appreciate it.

For more information about J Haleem's story, published books and services, including business coaching and speaking engagements, visit [jhaleem.com](http://jhaleem.com).



Above Top: A session during J Haleem's Business Accelerator Program

Above: J Haleem coaching at the #I Won't Starve Experience

Right: J Haleem and his books



# Thank you



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On behalf of *Chic Compass Magazine* and *Forgotten Song Foundation*, we would like to thank Anna Gomes and Loaded Empanadas for hosting our foundation farewell and *Chic Compass Magazine* launch party.



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# charity

## THE HOSPITALITY CHARITABLE FOUNDATION REBRANDS SCHOLARSHIPS AND MENTORSHIPS ASSIST STUDENTS

By Debbie Hall / Photography by Joseph Donato (Cashman Photo)

The Hospitality Charitable Foundation (HCF), formerly the Epicurean Charitable Foundation, is dedicated to shaping the next generation of Las Vegas hospitality leaders. Comprising more than 25 top food, beverage and hospitality executives, the foundation provides scholarships and mentorship to deserving local students passionate about hospitality or culinary arts careers.

### Investing in the Future of Hospitality

HCF's primary mission is to provide annual scholarships to Clark County high school students pursuing careers in the hospitality or culinary industries. Scholarship recipients are selected based on academic performance, extracurricular achievements, personal background and financial need.

Students awarded HCF scholarships receive up to \$48,000 in financial support for tuition, books and fees at the university of their choice. Many attend the William F. Harrah College of Hospitality at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. In addition to financial aid, students benefit from the Future Leaders of Hospitality Program, which pairs them with a board member mentor



Above: Scholarship winners of the Hospitality Charitable Foundation

throughout their education. These mentors provide career guidance, networking opportunities and assistance with job and internship placements.

"Education is something that can never be taken away, and we're proud to give students not just financial support, but also the professional, personal and life skills they need to thrive," said Melissa Arias, HCF's executive director.

Arias has dedicated her career to the nonprofit sector, spending nine years at the American Cancer Society before joining HCF 20 years ago. She moved to Las Vegas 22 years ago and recently earned a master's degree in public administration from UNLV.

### **Signature Events Fuel HCF's Mission**

To fund its scholarship programs, HCF hosts annual fundraising events, including its highly anticipated M.E.N.U.S. (Mentoring and Educating Nevada's Upcoming Students) gala. The event, held at a premier Las Vegas resort, features tasting stations from top restaurants, live entertainment and high-profile attendees. Past performers at M.E.N.U.S. have included Train, Counting Crows, Lifehouse, Al Green, Sara Bareilles, Stevie Nicks, the Jabbawoockeez and Chicago.

This year's M.E.N.U.S. 2025 gala will take place at the Palms Resort Casino on Oct. 10, with more details to be announced.

"Our students are truly out of this world, and they are our stars. I am so excited about this year's M.E.N.U.S.," Arias said.

"The Palms has been a great supporter of ours, with great board members who worked there, and we would hold our scholarship breakfast there. Last year, we honored Cynthia Kiser Murphey, the general manager of the Palms at the time. We really just had all of these connections over the years with the Palms, and it just seemed right to hold our annual gala there this year."



### **A Legacy of Success and Mentorship**

Since its founding in 2001, HCF has evolved from a small food and beverage club into a leading scholarship and mentoring organization. Its board of directors represents a diverse range of hospitality professionals, from hotel executives to food and beverage leaders, all working to support and guide students as they enter the industry.

"It was during one of these times that they realized they had a lot of the hospitality power players in the room, and they really should be giving back and doing something good," Arias said.

"That's when we became a scholarship and mentoring foundation. There are 25 different executives that serve on the

*Above Top: Carved watermelon with the Hospitality Charitable Foundation logo at M.E.N.U.S.*

*Above: Students and board of directors of the Hospitality Charitable Foundation*

board, from hotels to special events to food and beverage to vendors. We've evolved to serve and encompass all of the hospitality industry. With an average family income of just under \$34,000 annually, our students can bridge the financial gap to receive education and mentorship to use their academic and professional skills to thrive in the hospitality industry."

One of the most essential things in this time of conflict is that the one thing that can't be taken away is a person's education. This organization gives hope while changing the trajectory of young

people's futures because HCF gives them all the professional, personal and life skills they need to succeed.

Through comprehensive workforce development programs, HCF provides students with networking opportunities, leadership training, etiquette development, and internship and job placement.

"This includes everything from dining etiquette to communication skills and having critical conversations," Arias said.

Las Vegas struggles with gaps in education, and HCF, a local organization, can connect with the Clark County student body to help them understand what needs to be taught to be successful in the hospitality industry.

"We're realizing that we need to teach our students business communication basics, such as making a phone call, leaving a message and following up. Our board notices these things, and



those are small gaps you don't realize are missing when you're going into the workforce," Arias said.

"Another thing with our board is that

*Above: Christopher Alfieri and Melissa Arias of the Hospitality Charitable Foundation*

*Below: Chefs and other staff participate in M.E.N.U.S. for the Hospitality Charitable Foundation*



they work for companies that want to hire these kids, and Las Vegas students are struggling a little bit with interview skills. We are reviving a mock interview program to prepare these kids to write a resume and follow up on the mock interview. With our program, our students obtain a degree, write a professional resume and are prepared to go out on interviews. Our students have interviewed 25 of the most impressive people in the hospitality industry in Las Vegas, so they are ready to go, which is where they benefit from education and mentoring."

One of HCF's many success stories is Martha Morales, a former scholarship recipient who was a mother at 15 and unsure if college was an option. Through HCF's support, she completed her degree, joined the foundation's board and became assistant general manager for Boyd Gaming in Las Vegas. She recently became general manager and president of Valley Forge Casino Resort in Pennsylvania and continues to mentor students and give back.

Another former student who always said he would work for the Las Vegas Raiders is now a manager at Allegiant Stadium and has already earned his second promotion.

With 24 full-ride scholarships awarded

*Below Left and Right: Students and mentors of the Hospitality Charitable Foundation*




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**"I witnessed a board of these hospitality leaders with so much energy. We've created something that is great and making an impact. And I'm so proud to be a part of the organization." —Melissa Arias**

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in 2024 and plans to increase that number to 30 this year, HCF is expanding its reach and strengthening its commitment to Nevada students. HCF has profoundly impacted the lives of hospitality students, and they look forward to the future with renewed enthusiasm and dedication.

"The board members don't just raise funds, but they actually see that these funds are going to students like Randy, who just graduated in December and is now a manager at a restaurant at Fontainebleau and is moving up the ranks rather quickly. They see that the money and effort given to Randy have impacted Randy's life and that we will be able to see every point of our journey," Arias said. "We have just brought in 10 new students to join our existing student body. Our board of directors is stronger than ever. We are at a time when we'll be able to give more scholarships than ever. It's incredible to see the ripple effect this has—not just for our students, but for their families, friends and the entire Las Vegas hospitality industry."

*For more information, visit [hcfv.org](http://hcfv.org). Follow HCF on Facebook (@hcfv) and Instagram (@hcf\_lv).*

**Executive Board of Directors for the Hospitality Charitable Foundation:**

- Michael Kennedy, Director of Food Operations at South Point Hotel Casino & Spa, President
- Tom Gorbali, Director of F&B at Sunset Station, Chairman
- Anthony Olheiser, Senior VP of F&B at Fontainebleau, Vice President
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## A LOOK BACK AT THE 2025 ACADEMY AWARDS

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By Janet Susan R. Nepales / Photography courtesy of AMPAS

The 97th Academy Awards, held March 2 at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood, marked a triumph for indie filmmaker Sean Baker and his romantic comedy "Anora," which tells the story of a sex worker who falls in love with the son of a Russian oligarch.

Although an underdog at the beginning of the awards season, the film—which premiered at the 77th Cannes Film Festival and won the Palme d'Or—began gaining critical acclaim and accolades. It soon found itself a frontrunner among Oscar nominees, including "Emilia Pérez," "The Brutalist," "Wicked," "A Complete Unknown," "Conclave," "Dune: Part Two," "I'm Still Here," "Nickel Boys" and "The Substance."

The film grossed \$56.5 million worldwide against its \$6 million budget and became Baker's highest-grossing movie.

### **Baker Makes History With Four Oscars**

Baker made history by winning four Oscars in one night—Best Original Screenplay, Best Editing, Best Director and Best Picture. He is the only filmmaker to have won four Oscars for a single movie.

Although Jacques Audiard's "Emilia Pérez," led early in the awards season, controversy over racist and xenophobic tweets from its Spanish-born, openly transgender star, Karla Sofía Gascón hurt its standing.

However, first-time Oscar nominee Zoe Saldana won Best Supporting Actress for her performance in the musical, becoming the first American of Dominican origin to accept an Academy Award.

In her tearful acceptance speech, she added: "My grandmother came to this country in 1961. I am a proud child of immigrant parents with dreams and dignity and hardworking hands, and I am the first American of Dominican origin to accept an Academy Award, and I know I will not be the last. The fact I'm getting an award for a role where

*Above: Adrien Brody, Mikey Madison, Zoe Saldana and Kieran Culkin pose backstage with their Oscars® at the live ABC Telecast of the 97th Oscars® at Dolby® Theatre at Ovation Hollywood on Sunday, March 2, 2025*



Alex Coco, Sean Baker and Samantha Quan pose backstage with their Oscars® at the live ABC Telecast of the 97th Oscars® at Dolby® Theatre at Ovation Hollywood on Sunday, March 2, 2025



Above: Whoopi Goldberg and Demi Moore arrive on the red carpet of the 97th Oscars®

I got to sing and speak in Spanish—my grandmother, if she were here, she would be so delighted. This is for my grandmother!"

### **Mikey Madison Surprises in Best Actress Win**

Another surprise of the night was Mikey Madison, an Oscar first-timer who won Best Actress for her portrayal of Anora, or "Ani," in "Anora." Madison edged out Demi Moore of "The Substance," fan favorite Cynthia Erivo of "Wicked," festival darling Fernanda Torres of "I'm Still Here" and Karla Sofía Gascón of "Emilia Pérez."

Backstage, when asked about winning Best Actress while Baker won four Oscars, the soft-spoken 25-year-old Madison said:

"Oh my gosh, it's, for lack of a better word, just incredibly surreal. I never thought anything like this would happen in my life. I just love making movies, and I've dreamed of being an actress who would be able to be in a film like 'Anora' my entire career. And so, it's a

huge honor, one that I think will soak in later down the line, hopefully. I really did not expect it at all."

On Baker's historic night, she added:

"Sean is such a wonderful and incredible filmmaker. He is an incredible writer and an amazing editor. He is a true lover of cinema and a kind person. He has dedicated so much of his career to telling really important stories. And so, I'm so happy for him because he's just a true indie filmmaker. Like, we went off and just made this weird, crazy movie and had fun and poured our hearts into it. And you know, all of this started at Cannes, which was just a dream come true for me, a career-long dream to even just go to a film festival, specifically Cannes, and so everything that followed was wonderful."

### **Adrien Brody Wins Second Oscar**

Adrien Brody made history by winning his second Oscar for his performance as a Jewish architect in "The Brutalist."

At age 29, Brody became the youngest actor to win Best Actor for 2002's "The Pianist." Now 51, he won his second Oscar for playing László Tóth, a Hungarian-Jewish architect who immigrates to rural Pennsylvania after World War II and experiences antisemitism in the three-and-a-half-hour saga directed by Brady Corbet and Mona Fastvold.

### **Kieran Culkin Wins First Oscar on First Nomination**

Kieran Culkin, 42, had a historic first Oscar win for his role in "A Real Pain," written and directed by Jesse Eisenberg. Culkin plays a charming yet exasperating Jewish man touring Holocaust sites with his uptight cousin, played by Eisenberg.

During his acceptance speech, the New Yorker also got excited when he reminded his wife, Jazz Charton, that she had promised him a fourth child "if you win an Oscar."

He said, "And I have not brought it up once until just now. I just have this to say to you, Jazz—love of my life, ye of little



Above: Cynthia Erivo, Ava DuVernay, Colman Domingo and Raúl Domingo at the live ABC Telecast of the 97th Oscars® at the Dolby® Theatre at Ovation Hollywood



Above: Conan O'Brien hosts the live ABC telecast of the 97th Oscars®



Above: Cynthia Erivo and Ariana Grande perform onstage during the live ABC Telecast of the 97th Oscars® at the Dolby® Theatre



Above: Robert Downey Jr. and Kieran Culkin pose backstage with the Oscar® for Best Supporting Actor during the live ABC Telecast of the 97th Oscars® at Dolby® Theatre at Ovation Hollywood on Sunday, March 2, 2025



faith—no pressure. I love you. I'm really sorry I did this again, and let's get cracking on those kids. What do you say?"

### **Conan O'Brien Honors Firefighters in Opening Monologue**

Comedian and host Conan O'Brien took a moment during the ceremony to honor firefighters who battled the Palisades and Eaton wildfires, inviting

*Above: Los Angeles first responders onstage with Conan O'Brien during the live ABC Telecast of the 97th Oscars® at the Dolby® Theatre at Ovation Hollywood on Sunday, March 2, 2025*

them onstage and even letting them read some of his jokes.

"Please welcome members of the fire service who bravely responded to and battled the Palisades and Eaton wildfires," O'Brien said. "On behalf of everyone in greater Los Angeles, thank you for all that you do."

"Now I know you're going to find this hard to believe, but there are some jokes even I am not brave enough to tell. So, on behalf of myself, would you please read what's in the prompter? And remember, everyone in this audience has to laugh. These are heroes!"

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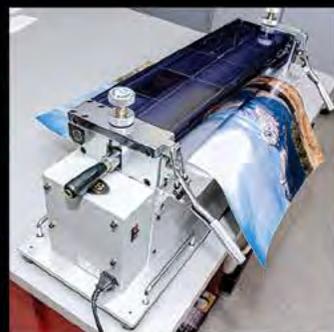
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# THE ROAD TO LYON CULMINATES IN BOCUSE D'OR: THE CULINARY OLYMPICS

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By Elaine and Scott Harris

The Road to Lyon for Team USA began in New Orleans, widely considered one of the world's top gastronomic epicenters. We witnessed Team USA compete against the best that the Americas had to offer, from Chile to Canada. After a tough battle, they won gold and qualified to compete against top chefs globally. We also had the privilege of spending time with David Leishman, Ph.D., who helped bring this competition to New Orleans. He is the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) representative in France, serving as the senior advisor for food and agriculture at the U.S. Embassy. His insight proved beneficial in understanding the importance of this prestigious competition.

The Bocuse d'Or, founded in 1987 by Chef Paul Bocuse, is a prestigious culinary competition often referred to as the "Olympics of Cooking." Held biennially in Lyon, France, the event celebrates culinary excellence and promotes the artistry of cooking.

"It is named after the celebrated French chef, Paul Bocuse (1926-2018), also known as 'Monsieur Paul' or 'The Pope of Gastronomy,'" Dr. Leishman said.

Bocuse is widely esteemed as one of the foremost chefs of the 20th century. In 1982, he gained heightened fame in



the United States after partnering with Walt Disney's Epcot Center in Orlando, Florida. Eventually, he was the inspiration for the fictional character of Chef Auguste Gusteau in "Ratatouille," a film presented by Walt Disney Pictures and produced by Pixar Animation Studios, which won an Oscar in 2008.

Bocuse excelled in all his culinary endeavors, striving to elevate the profession, celebrate excellence, and promote the artistry of cooking. He envisioned a platform where chefs could highlight their skills and creativity on a global stage, and thus, the Bocuse d'Or was born.

Before our journey to Lyon, we learned how this competition came to the United States. "I was serving as the director of the U.S. Agricultural Trade Office in Russia from 2015 to 2020," Dr. Leishman said. "Chef Christian Têtedoie propelled my discussion with the organizers of the Bocuse d'Or. As president of the *Maitres Cuisiniers de France*, Christian is one of the top chefs in France. We met years ago when I was in Russia, and he also happens to be one of the great star apprentices of Paul Bocuse. In 2023, at the Bocuse d'Or final in Lyon,

*Above: (L-R) Elaine Harris, Chef Paul Bartolotta, Scott Harris*



we discussed bringing the competition to the United States."

Over the years, the competition has evolved into a prestigious event that attracts attention from culinary professionals, food enthusiasts and the media worldwide. It has become a benchmark for culinary excellence, inspiring chefs to pursue innovation and mastery in their craft.

Dr. Leishman noted, "In 1987, while serving as honorary president of the Culinary Sector Exhibition and Trade Fair in Lyon, Paul Bocuse launched the 'Concours Mondial de la Cuisine,' a truly international live cooking competition for young chefs selected to represent their country." The competition is now known as the "Bocuse d'Or" or the "Golden Bocuse," named after the gold statue awarded to the winning team.

Competing in the Bocuse d'Or is a rigorous two-day event. Each country is represented by a chef (the candidate) and an assistant chef (commis). Teams must prepare and present two main dishes, one focused on meat and the other on fish. Specific requirements vary, but they often involve whole cuts of beef and whole fish, showcasing chefs' butchery and cooking techniques.

Timing in the kitchen is critical. Teams have a limited time, usually around five hours, to complete their dishes. This time pressure adds intense excitement and challenge to the competition, as chefs

must manage their time effectively while ensuring the highest quality standards.

After finishing in the kitchen, chefs present their dishes in an aesthetically pleasing manner. The visual appeal of the dishes is significant, as judges assess not only the flavors but also the artistic presentation. Chefs are encouraged to incorporate culinary heritage and creativity elements into their plating.

The Bocuse d'Or judging panel comprises renowned chefs and culinary professionals from around the world. The esteemed panel evaluates the dishes based on specific criteria, including flavor profiles, how well ingredients complement each other, balance of flavors, seasoning and overall palatability.

In addition, the ability to evoke emotions and create memorable flavor experiences is highly valued. Visual appeal is also critical in the judging process. Judges look for artistic plating, creativity in presentation and detailed composition. The presentation should reflect the theme and concept of the dish.

The execution of cooking techniques is closely scrutinized. Judges evaluate the precision in preparation, cooking methods, and overall craftsmanship. This combination of techniques in butchery, cooking and garnishing is essential for success.

Creativity and innovation are also important. Participants are encouraged



to "think outside the box" and push culinary boundaries. Unique flavor combinations, modern cooking techniques and inventive presentations can set one dish apart from another. This balance between innovation and tradition is a hallmark of the competition.

The competition is fierce, with teams from over 60 countries participating. National selection processes, such as the Americas selection in New Orleans, ensure that only the best chefs reach the global stage.

Just as in the Olympic Games, fans travel to support their teams, waving flags, singing, and in Team USA's case, ringing cowbells. Teams compete in identical kitchens with support from spectators. After the final dish evaluations, the chefs and supporters anxiously await the judges' decisions. France won gold at the Bocuse d'Or 2025, Denmark took silver, and Sweden earned bronze. Team USA missed the podium this year but delivered impressive dishes in a tough competition. They won silver in 2015 and topped the podium in 2017 with gold.

Winning the Bocuse d'Or is a career-defining achievement that offers international recognition and opportunities.

*Above Left: The Bocuse d'Or judging panel*

*Above Right: (L-R) Team USA: President Gavin Kaysen, Head Coach Sebastian Gibrand, Commis Bradley Waddle, Head Chef Stefani De Palma*



*Left: Bocuse d'Or spectators from around the world cheer on their favorite teams*

*Bottom Left: Team France wins Gold: (L-R) Coach Christophe Quantin, Head Chef Paul Marcon, Commis Camille Pigot*



to represent Team USA, and that she will soon be one of the great chefs in America. I'm a huge fan!" he added with a smile.

Bartolotta emphasized that the Bocuse d'Or deserves greater recognition in the United States.

"First, it is a serious competition where chefs compete regionally to qualify for Lyon. For example, Stefani De Palma won gold in the America's Cup in New Orleans last June. In other years, it was held in Mexico City or Santiago, Chile. Teams from North, Central, and South America compete, and only the gold, silver, and bronze winners earn the privilege of competing at the Bocuse d'Or in Lyon. A total of 24 countries vie for the coveted title.

"Second, we have a 'farm team' of young chefs and commis who compete regionally to represent Team USA or serve as support commis. Third, we raise funds for our scholarship and grant program, which helps young chefs attend top culinary schools or travel to apprentice at the world's best restaurants—hence our name, Ment'Or! We mentor the next generation of American chefs.

Past winners have gained fame, opened restaurants, and collaborated with top chefs. More than just a competition, the Bocuse d'Or celebrates culinary artistry, fosters innovation, and honors tradition, ensuring its lasting influence in the culinary world.

As Dr. Leishman put it, "Most importantly, the Bocuse d'Or encourages international camaraderie, emphasizing the Olympic spirit that 'the important thing in life is not the triumph but the struggle; the essential thing is not to have conquered but to have fought well.'"

While in Lyon, we met two-time James Beard award-winning Chef Paul

Bartolotta, who opened the renowned Bartolotta Ristorante di Mare at Wynn Las Vegas in 2005. We reminisced about the heyday of fine dining in Las Vegas and, of course, the Bocuse d'Or.

"I have been on the Ment'Or Culinary Council since 2015. The first Bocuse d'Or I participated in was in 2017, and I have traveled there every two years since. The Road to Lyon... Go Team USA!" he enthusiastically interjected. "2017 and 2019 were special years. In 2017, we took home silver with Chef Philip Tessier, and in 2019, gold with Chef Matt Peters. This year, I had high expectations. I remain convinced that Stefani De Palma was the right chef

"Lastly, we are working to amplify our voice in Washington and across the country to influence policies affecting our industry. Twenty-five years ago, America was emerging as a culinary powerhouse. Today, Team USA proudly represents our nation and culinary culture."

It was an honor to attend the Americas selection and travel to Lyon for Bocuse d'Or 2025. After experiencing exceptional meals, impressive demonstrations from Michelin 3-star restaurants, exquisite wine, and a range of emotions, we are confident we will return in 2027.

See you in Lyon!

# A RECIPE FOR SUCCESS: THE POWER & PASSION OF PANEVINO

By Brian G. Thornton / Photography courtesy of Marnell Companies





When Tony A. Marnell II, founder and chairman emeritus of the Marnell Companies, envisioned the Marnell Corporate Center in Las Vegas more than two decades ago, he was unknowingly crafting a master recipe—one that would simmer into a legendary dining institution. Little did he realize that among his finest ingredients would be Panevino Italian Grille. This restaurant has seasoned Las Vegas' culinary scene with power, passion and an impeccable blend of traditional innovation.

Now, more than 20 years later, Panevino remains the city's most celebrated Italian dining destination. As any great dish requires the perfect balance of flavors, a restaurant needs the right mix of talent, too. This is the story of how Vincenzo Granata, Mark Lopez and Kamille Hadee have become key ingredients in Panevino's ever-evolving recipe for success. A tale rich with dedication, people power and a dash of undeniable charm—it serves up a narrative as satisfying as the culinary delights that have made this restaurant an institution.

"We're not afraid to experiment, but we stay within the bounds of quality and tradition and recipes," said Tony A. Marnell II in an interview with the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* in 2023.

## Antipasti

As with any great dish, a story must first set the scene. Here, that scene is framed by an unparalleled view—Las Vegas' shimmering Strip to the north, the vibrant runways of Harry Reid International Airport in the foreground, where the take-offs and landings lend a unique cadence to the dining experience.

*Left: Every seat in the house is privileged with a view, from the power booths and intimate four-tops to the grand, tufted oval banquette*

Any seasoned food critic with a golden palate and a timeworn passport through the culinary world will tell you that a restaurant's shelf life is often heartbreakingly short. The competitive Las Vegas dining scene is unforgiving, with statistics showing an average restaurant lifespan of just eight to 10 years—many never even make it that far. According to the National Restaurant Association, approximately 60% of restaurants fail within their first year, and a staggering 80% close their doors within five. While location, inexperience, inflated costs, improper pricing and lack of marketing are all common culprits, there's another, more elusive ingredient at play—one that separates the ephemeral from the enduring.

When I sat down with Assistant General Manager Mark Lopez, it took mere moments to recognize that Panevino possesses that elusive quality: a deep, almost instinctual understanding of what makes a restaurant thrive.

Perhaps it starts with the architecture—timeless, compelling and nestled in a park-like setting. The jewel of a building,

*Below: "I hope that people associate us with the quality that is the Marnell way—We look forward to another 22 years."*

with its elegantly canted curving glass façade, orchestrates an uninterrupted visual symphony from the lounge, main dining room and private dining room directly to the Strip beyond. Every seat in the house is privileged with a view, from the power booths and intimate four-tops to the grand, tufted oval banquette. Even the sculptural mosaic-tiled column—more art than obstruction—plays its role without intrusion.

For those in the know, another hidden gem lies within: the chairman's private dining room. Enclosed by conical wood-paneled walls, it is home to a treasured round table sourced from a European castle, where the restaurant's weekly business meetings unfold—fitting for a place that understands longevity is as much about leadership as it is about flavor.

By day, natural light bathes the space; by night, the city's vibrant beat takes center stage. Thoughtful, automated blackout shades trace the angular mullions, diffusing the sun's intensity without compromising the spectacle. And anchoring it all—the open kitchen, where Executive Chef Mario Andreoni's mastery unfolds like theater.

According to Lopez, "What sets us

apart is being able to see the entire Strip and all its glory from the dining room windows. You have to take a step back from the Strip to truly appreciate it. It's also a showcase of what Marnell Companies has contributed to building, so it's a canvas of some of the bigger projects the company has done over the last 50 years."

## Primi

The foundation for this successful recipe introduces General Manager Vincenzo Granata, a native of Italy's Puglia region who has been at the helm almost from the very beginning. His stylish and elegant demeanor offers just a glimpse of the savvy hospitality boss within. Mark Lopez, with his corporate finesse and passion for structure, joined a few years later. History has shown that the most successful establishments, events, meals, dining experiences and even daily oper-

*Far Right Above: "The key to our longevity is to be consistent in what we deliver—from the food, drinks, service, atmosphere and maintenance of the restaurant itself." Assistant General Manager, Mark Lopez*

*Far Right Below: Panevino Power: The chef's table is fitting for a place that understands longevity is as much about leadership as it is about flavor*







ations are never by accident. They are planned. That primary gathering of ingredients guarantees a memorable next step in the experience. I witnessed passion with the powers that be and got a taste of why Panevino, as an institution, is continually possible.

As Granata's presence indicates the stock of this recipe, Lopez's journey has become the roux to the stew. As the assistant general manager, he is a seasoned hospitality professional with a sharp corporate mindset and a deep appreciation for the business of dining. Originally from El Paso, Texas, Lopez's journey to Las Vegas took him through New Mexico, where he refined his operational skills. His background is steeped in restaurant culture, as his grandfather owned four restaurants in Stockton, California. He got his start working for him at just 14. With a decade at Metromedia Restaurant Group, overseeing brands like Steak and Ale and Bennigan's, Lopez developed a

*Above: Executive Chef Mario Andreoni's mastery unfolds like theater: Chilean Sea Bass, left and Fried Calamari & Shrimp Antonio, right*

*Left: General Manager Vincenzo Granata: his stylish and elegant demeanor offers just a glimpse of the savvy hospitality boss within*



meticulous, by-the-book approach to restaurant management that eventually led him to Nevada following his parents' move.

Now celebrating two decades with Marnell, Lopez is the driving force behind Panevino's seamless operations, ensuring that its four key areas—the bar and lounge, the dining room (renowned for its power lunches), the deli for casual dining, and special events suites—run with precision. He thrives on structure, paperwork and the corporate side of the business, but his warmth is just as integral to the Panevino experience. Impeccably dressed and effortlessly affable, he is a familiar face to regulars, always making the rounds with a greeting or a hug—unless the demands of the day keep him behind the scenes. An upcoming milestone birthday marks another chapter in a career dedicated to excellence in hospitality.

"The key to our longevity is to be consistent in what we deliver—from the food, drinks, service, atmosphere and maintenance of the restaurant itself. A great part of our identity is reacting to the needs of the guests and being flexible at every chance possible. Guests have

*Above: The Deli a lunchtime favorite in the Marnell Business Center*

*Right: Panevino signature Veal Parm Cutlet*

come to know what to expect of us, but they also know we are not set in stone if it serves them better," Lopez said.

## Secondo

At the heart of hospitality lies the main course—the true measure of a restaurant's endurance. After whetting your palate with an aperitif, savoring the antipasti and indulging in the first course, the meat of the Panevino story is served.

A restaurant's longevity is no accident. It is a delicate balance of location, culinary identity, steadfast management

and economic foresight. Now, layer in the distinct complexities of Las Vegas—where high-volume tourism and fierce competition dictate survival. Only those with an unwavering commitment to excellence can withstand the heat. The leadership at Panevino understands this reality down to the finest detail, ensuring that every facet of the guest experience is curated to perfection.

Management sets the stage, but the cuisine is the star. Executive Chef Mario Andreoni hails from Trentino-Alto Adige, Italy, and brought his culinary artistry to the mix in 2009. Renowned for his mastery of plant-based and pasta-driven cuisine, he has curated a menu of signature dishes that loyal patrons return for time and again. His success lies in a simple yet profound philosophy: consistently delivering excellence while listening to his guests, ensuring every dish reflects their desires.

"Everyone who enjoys calamari says that ours is the best, and as I have ordered this in many other restaurants, I would have to agree. The osso buco is a traditional favorite, but so is the ahi tuna—which doesn't seem like a staple in an Italian restaurant, but there is nothing like it. Believe it or not, one of our very highest sellers is the artisan bread—an item that was basically a 'mistake' that has now become an absolute must-have menu item.



"With the rising costs of food and beverage that resulted from the pandemic, people have grown accustomed to paying more than they did five years ago. With that comes higher expectations, which push us to compensate the costs with uncompromised service and attention to detail. We may have to charge more than before, but we also give our very best in everything we do so that Panevino will always be the choice of the locals and those who frequent us every time they visit Las Vegas. There is no room for complacency," Lopez adds.

## Dolce

No matter how extraordinary or ordinary a dining experience may be, dessert has a way of leaving the final impression—a sweet sendoff that lingers long after the last bite. Understanding Panevino's enduring success takes just one visit, where hospitality and heart blend seamlessly.

Most evenings, the first taste of sweetness isn't from the dessert menu but from the warm welcome of Assistant Manager Kameliegh Hadee—or simply Kamille, as she's known in the restaurant. Her familiar voice, often accompanied by a hug for the regulars, sets the tone for the experience that follows.

Hadee, a Los Angeles transplant, has been part of the Panevino family for more than three years. Having honed her hospitality expertise at Bellagio and later M Resort, she was delighted to discover that Panevino was also a Marnell Properties creation. The transition felt natural, seamlessly continuing her love affair with people and the community. Her compassion for guests and the establishment shines through—especially when she reminisces about visits from Mr. Marnell and his family, her eyes lighting up with admiration.

Perhaps it was the love of her mother, who passed from COVID-19 on Easter 2020, that shaped her warmth, her attentive ear and her gift for making people feel at home. That profound loss, though painful, became the foundation of her new chapter—one where she

now welcomes others as the first face of Panevino, embodying the extended family feeling that keeps guests returning time and again.

"The impact that our guests have on the enrichment and quality of my professional and personal life is immeasurable," Hadee said. "From the thoughtfulness and the beauty of the design, smiles, silly dances and great hugs that we exchange are what keep Panevino in the hearts of the community. The daily commitment to excellence here is no challenge but a privilege."

What's a special place without a special memory? Lopez recalled, "One of my most memorable times was when Prince was performing regularly at the Rio and would order food for pickup almost every Sunday. His assistant finally convinced him to dine in person, and he did. Just Prince, his guest and I were in a private room. It was a special moment I'll never forget. And we've had many like that—from a huge book launching party we did for Forks Over Knives to the president of Konami Gaming coming from Japan and transforming the restaurant into a magical venue with a Japanese theme that was breathtaking. Drake brought a massive entourage in to celebrate his 25th birthday, and we hosted several large cast parties for various Cirque du Soleil shows."

A truly memorable meal lingers long after the last bite—just like Panevino. My journey with this restaurant began before I even called Las Vegas home in 2005. Lost on Sunset Road, I caught sight of its striking architecture and knew I had to turn around. A celebratory meal at the bar, a warm conversation with Maître d' Santino and an unexpected Maryland connection sealed my loyalty. Nearly every January since, I've returned for my birthday, welcomed like family—proof that genuine hospitality is Panevino's signature ingredient.

For more than 20 years, this institution has served up more than just exquisite cuisine; it has dished out an experience that keeps guests coming back. In a city where fine dining often fades before the next trend, Panevino has perfected the recipe for longevity: award-winning flavors, heartfelt connections and an unwavering commitment to its craft. The future? It's a dish yet to be plated, but one we can all savor in anticipation.

Lopez leaves us with: "I hope that people associate us with the quality that is the Marnell way—beautiful surroundings with management and staff who love what they do and love the guests who have been through it all with us. I am very excited for our future and the future of the city itself. We look forward to another 22 years."



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# THE U.S. TARIFF STRATEGY: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

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By Joseph Amato

The history of tariffs in the United States is a complex tale intertwined with the country's economic development, politics and international relations.

Immediately after the Constitution was ratified, the first U.S. Congress passed the Tariff Act of 1789. Its primary purpose was to generate revenue for the new government and pay off war debts, but it also aimed to protect young U.S. industries from foreign competition.

Throughout the 19th century, tariffs became a tool of U.S. economic policy, with the debate often split between industrialists in the North—who favored high tariffs to protect nascent industries—and agricultural interests in the South and West, who opposed them because they raised the cost of imported goods. Just before the Civil War, the Morrill Tariff Act of 1861 significantly raised import duties to support the federal government and protect American industries—an effort that gained importance during the war.

The Revenue Act of 1913 lowered tariffs significantly and implemented a federal income tax to make up for lost revenue, reflecting a shift toward more liberal trade policies. The Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act of 1930, one of the most infamous tariff laws, raised U.S. tariffs to historically high levels. Many U.S. economists blame the legislation for worsening the Great Depression by stifling international trade and prompting retaliatory tariffs from other countries.

After World War II, the U.S. led efforts to reduce tariffs globally through the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and later the World Trade Organization (WTO), recognizing that open trade was crucial for global economic recovery and growth.

The latter half of the 20th century saw a general trend toward lower tariffs and more free trade agreements, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994. In recent years, however, there has been a resurgence of U.S. protectionist policies. Many foreign countries—such as China, Japan, Canada, Mexico and the European Union—have long imposed high tariffs on U.S.-made goods without major pushback. The Trump administration initiated a significant shift in U.S. trade policy by imposing tariffs on steel, aluminum and various products from China and other nations with trade imbalances. This sparked a series of trade disputes, market volatility and ongoing negotiations.

In the short term, tariffs almost certainly lead to higher prices for U.S. consumers on foreign-made goods, which can decrease consumption and reduce consumer surplus. Tariffs can also limit the variety of goods available to consumers. However, certain U.S. industries may benefit if tariffs reduce foreign competition, allowing local companies to increase production and potentially hire more domestic workers.

There are downsides for U.S. industries

that rely on imported raw materials or components. If tariffs do not lead to negotiated settlements, they can increase production costs and reduce profitability. Tariffs may also hinder economic growth by reducing trade volumes and raising the cost of goods and services. In response, other countries might impose their own tariffs, potentially escalating into a trade war. This can worsen economic conditions, disrupt global supply chains and lead to higher prices.

Long-term tariffs might prompt countries to form new trade alliances and shift away from U.S. markets, potentially isolating the United States. Developing nations that depend on exports to the U.S. can be particularly vulnerable, risking economic instability as a result.

While tariffs are designed to protect domestic industries, they can also lead to higher consumer prices, inefficiencies and strained international relations. The overall impact depends on how tariffs are implemented, the products involved and how other nations respond.

The potential for the U.S. to be drawn into a trade war hinges on its specific policies and how other countries react. Trade wars often begin when one country's tariffs trigger retaliatory measures, creating a cycle of escalating trade barriers. If the U.S. imposes tariffs to protect industries or counteract unfair trade practices—such as dumping, subsidies or intellectual property theft—affected nations may respond in kind.



Diplomatic relationships play a critical role in determining whether tariff disputes escalate. Strong communication channels can help nations resolve conflicts without retaliatory measures. Countries that rely heavily on U.S. markets may be more cautious in their responses, while the U.S. may hesitate to impose severe tariffs on nations it depends on for key imports.

In periods of global uncertainty, nations often become more protective of their industries, increasing the risk of tariff conflicts. Membership in trade organizations like the WTO can offer

mechanisms for dispute resolution and penalties for noncompliance, helping to deter escalation.

In recent years, U.S. tariff policies—particularly under the Trump administration—prompted retaliation from countries like China, Canada and several European nations. This led to a notable escalation, especially between the U.S. and China. Sectors including agriculture, manufacturing and technology were hit hard.

Countries most affected by rising U.S. tariffs typically share key traits. Those that rely heavily on U.S. markets are particularly vulnerable, especially if they export products targeted by tariffs. Economies with less diversification face greater risks as they have fewer alternatives. Developing nations may also lack the resilience or negotiating power to respond effectively.

Nations with large trade surpluses—like China—have frequently been targeted. Due to deeply integrated supply chains under USMCA, U.S. allies such as Mexico and Canada feel the effects of policy shifts almost immediately. Germany and Japan, major exporters of automobiles and machinery, are also affected—despite some of their manufacturing occurring in the U.S. Nations like Vietnam and Bangladesh have grown their exports to the U.S., especially in textiles and electronics, but they also face significant risk from targeted tariffs. These dynamics underscore the interconnected nature of global trade, where U.S. policy decisions can ripple across international markets.

Tariffs should be used selectively to protect strategically important U.S. industries vulnerable to unfair practices. Ideally, they should be temporary and serve as bargaining tools to create a level playing field. While international trade agreements offer a framework, they are not always reliable—they are often subject to political influence or institutional bias. Tariff policies should be regularly assessed to avoid long-term negative effects like trade wars or sustained inflation. A thoughtful, strategic

approach can maximize benefits while minimizing harm.

Several recent statistics help illustrate the real-world impact of U.S. tariffs. Since 2018, the U.S. has imposed tariffs on about \$360 billion of Chinese imports. In response, China applied tariffs on roughly \$110 billion in U.S. goods. Trade volumes between the two countries declined significantly, but the overall U.S. trade deficit did not shrink—imports shifted to other countries instead of boosting domestic production.

As a result, U.S. imports from nations like Vietnam, Mexico and Bangladesh rose. According to the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, tariffs on China cost the average U.S. household more than \$800 annually, primarily due to increased prices on electronics and apparel. U.S. agriculture was hit hard by retaliatory tariffs. China targeted major exports like soybeans and pork, leading to a sharp drop in trade and prompting the U.S. government to allocate about \$28 billion in subsidies to support farmers in 2018 and 2019. According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the trade war reduced GDP in both the U.S. and China and rerouted roughly \$21 billion in trade to other countries in 2019. Overall, tariffs can serve strategic goals but often have far-reaching consequences: disrupted supply chains, higher consumer prices and slowed economic growth.

In 2025, we may witness a tariff-influenced economy's strengths and weaknesses. The current administration has not hesitated to expand tariffs to correct longstanding trade imbalances. While the strategy may yield a more balanced global trading system, it also introduces uncertainty. Markets appear to be bracing for turmoil, but the administration is betting that this bold approach will yield results. Some countries have already started rolling back their own tariffs and returning to the negotiating table. Time will tell whether this gamble pays off—or backfires. We may find out in the coming months whether the current tariff strategy is an economic masterstroke or a misstep.



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# ZIO'S ITALIAN STEAKHOUSE REIMAGINED

## A TOP LAS VEGAS DINING DESTINATION

By Elaine and Scott Harris

Zio's Italian Steakhouse in Las Vegas is a highly regarded destination for those seeking an authentic Italian dining experience. Conveniently located adjacent to the Las Vegas Convention Center within the Renaissance Las Vegas Hotel, the restaurant has proven its commitment to traditional Italian culinary practices and flavors after a 20-year run as Envy Steakhouse. Now transformed with a culinary facelift—including rebranding, redecorating and shifting to an entirely new cuisine focus while maintaining its love of steak—the restaurant presents a fresh take on Italian dining.

"We originally opened in November 2004 as Envy Steakhouse; this is our 20-year renovation," said our server. "We kept the steaks that everyone loves, but because so many people have been coming for so many years, we gave it an Italian twist and re-launched it as Zio's Italian Steakhouse."

The restaurant offers a varied, curated menu catering to diverse palates and dietary preferences while maintaining Italian cuisine's nuances and complex flavors, making it a must-visit for locals and tourists alike.

Upon walking in, we noticed the warmth and charm of Old World Italy, coupled with the grandeur of an Italian palazzo, while maintaining a modern, spacious feel. The restaurant now



*Above: Zio's Italian Steakhouse*

features an impressive black-and-white marble tiled floor, living greenery and an expansive dining area. The subdued dark green wood panels, soft lighting and cream-colored accents create an intimate atmosphere.

"The original Italian-style arched ceiling, designed by Richard Chamberlain and Lewis Shaw 20 years ago, we managed to keep that, and the young lady hired managed to airbrush the ceiling within two weeks," said our server. "We also kept the open kitchen so you can

hear and smell steaks sizzling, and we kept our original wine cellar."

The swirling green and mauve streaks embellishing the vaulted ceiling complement the voluminous mauve drapery surrounding the inviting seating arrangements, creating a welcoming environment suitable for various occasions—an intimate dinner for two or a larger gathering with family and friends.

Right: 20-Layer Lasagna at Zio's Italian Steakhouse. Photo by Louiie Victa

Bottom Right: Tomahawk Steak at Zio's Italian Steakhouse. Photo by Louiie Victa

## A Culinary Celebration

Taking our seats and looking over the menu was a delight—a true celebration of classic Italian dishes, each crafted with care and attention to detail. Zio's Italian Steakhouse takes pride in its handmade pasta, so why not savor the tortellini Alfredo, featuring ricotta-stuffed tortellini enveloped with mortadella mousse and crispy mortadella bits that complement the pasta perfectly? Alternatively, the 20-layer lasagna Bolognese is a crowd favorite, showcasing a hearty meat sauce that embodies the essence of rich Italian-style home cooking, expertly ladled between thinly layered pasta.

For seafood enthusiasts, there are a plethora of delightful options. Tuna crudo begins a meal with fresh pieces of tuna, melding the fattiness of the fish with Calabrian chiles, which bring bright pops of spiciness to each forkful. The sautéed Gulf shrimp scampi comes tossed with fresh tagliatelle, garlic butter and lemon.

Carnivores will be pleased with exquisite selections like a 16-ounce USDA Prime rib-eye, a 32-ounce porterhouse and a 32-ounce long-bone tomahawk—all succulent and expertly prepared. These marvelous meat options remain the menu's stars after 20 years. You may want to share these meaty offerings with a friend or two.

The restaurant also boasts hearty entrées highlighting traditional Italian cuisine with layers of flavor. Guests can enjoy classic dishes such as veal Parmigiana, where tender veal is composed in an intensely flavored marinara sauce with classic mozzarella and Parmigiano-Reggiano.

For the grand finale, you can't pass up the tiramisu or the chocolate budino, featuring luscious Amarena cherries and vanilla whipped cream, which will



send you home with a sweetly satisfied countenance.

## A Carefully Curated Wine Experience

Zio's Italian Steakhouse presents a carefully curated wine list showcased in its 1,500-bottle-capacity original wine cellar. Each wine is expertly selected to complement the food offerings and enhance the dining experience. The list includes a variety of Italian wines, ranging from crisp, refreshing whites to full-bodied, robust reds.

Italian wine sommelier Luciano Di Meo is knowledgeable and passionate

about wine and is often available to assist diners in selecting the ideal bottle to pair with their meal. This thoughtful approach to wine service adds an extra layer of enjoyment to the dining experience, allowing guests to explore the nuances of Italian wines.

## Breakfast and Lunch Offerings

Are you staying at the Renaissance Las Vegas Hotel or attending an early morning convention? Are you in the mood for breakfast? The breakfast burrito—flour tortilla, scrambled eggs, provolone, bacon, house-made salsa and rosemary potatoes—is an ideal way to start the

day. The zesty buttermilk pancakes with fresh berries and maple syrup will satisfy your morning cravings.

Keep it traditional with the All-American breakfast: two eggs any style, a choice of applewood bacon or sausage, rosemary potatoes and a selection of toast. Add a touch of Italy with a brilliant Italian frittata with cage-free eggs, roasted tomatoes, pancetta and spinach, served with a peppery arugula salad on the side.

Need a fulfilling midday meal? The restaurant offers a lunch menu with seasonal dishes. You may enjoy an Italian focaccia sandwich made with mortadella, salami, capicola, olive oil, vinegar, lettuce and pepperoncini, or even a steakhouse burger with aged cheddar, applewood-smoked bacon, truffle aioli, lettuce and tomato, served with fries or a house salad on the side.

## A Dynamic, Evolving Experience

Zio's Italian Steakhouse goes above and beyond to enhance the dining experience by offering exceptional seasonal and standard features. These may include seasonal menu items highlighting fresh, local ingredients and chef's specials showcasing creativity and innovation in Italian cuisine. The menu selections occasionally change as seasonal specials are added to ensure that the freshest ingredients remain the focal point.

Additionally, the restaurant occasionally hosts wine-pairing events, allowing guests to explore new flavor combinations and deepen their appreciation for Italian culinary traditions. Given the restaurant's popularity, particularly during weekends and holidays,

making a reservation in advance is highly recommended.

Zio's Italian Steakhouse has become a beloved destination in Las Vegas for Italian cuisine while maintaining its reputation for serving the best quality steaks. Its delectable dishes, extensive wine selection, charming ambiance and attentive service offer an authentic Italian dining experience. Travelers, conventioners and locals keep returning for more.

Whether you're a resident or a visitor to the city, Zio's Italian Steakhouse promises a culinary journey that captures the essence of Italy in every bite.

*For more information, visit [zioslv.com](http://zioslv.com).*



*Above: Oysters and cocktail selection at Zio's Italian Steakhouse. Photo by Louie Victa*

# SEVEN DECADES OF HAPPINESS MAKE JOYFUL MEMORIES AT THE DISNEYLAND RESORT 70TH CELEBRATION

By Heather Turk / Photography courtesy of Disneyland Resort





**"Disneyland will never be completed. It will continue to grow as long as there is imagination left in the world."**

These words, spoken by Walt Disney, continue to ring true almost 70 years after Disneyland opened in Anaheim, California. What Walt Disney hoped would be "a source of joy and inspiration to all the world" has grown over the past seven decades from 18 major attractions on 160 acres to a 500-acre, world-class family resort destination, complete with dozens of attractions for guests to enjoy at two renowned theme parks: Disneyland Park and Disney California Adventure Park.

While Disneyland Park's 70th anniversary isn't until July 17, Disneyland Resort's yearlong anniversary celebration kicks off early on May 16. The Disneyland Resort 70th Celebration invites Disney fans of all ages (including

Disney adults!) to experience not only what's new at the resort, but also special anniversary décor, themed food and beverages, collectible merchandise and limited-time entertainment—including the return of the fan-favorite "Paint the Night" parade.

The dazzling nighttime parade will once again illuminate Main Street, U.S.A., at Disneyland Park with its innovative floats, vibrant costumes, state-of-the-art special effects and high-energy music that includes a special rendition of the song "When Can I See You Again?" by electronic music project Owl City. Guests can watch as Mickey Mouse uses his vivid imagination to harness the power of Tinker Bell's pixie dust and "Paint the Night" in Disney dreams, bringing to light beloved characters and stories from Pixar Animation Studios films such as "Monsters, Inc.," "Cars" and "Toy Story," and Walt Disney Animation Studios films like "The Little Mermaid," "Beauty and the Beast" and "Frozen."

Disneyland Park's nighttime spectacular "Wondrous Journeys" will also make its return, featuring stunning projection effects that turn Sleeping Beauty Castle, the Rivers of America, Main Street, U.S.A., and the façade of "it's a small world" into a magnificent canvas. Spectators will embark on a journey filled with artistry, music, storytelling and even sparkling fireworks on select nights as they celebrate more than 100 years of Walt Disney Animation Studios classics like "Hercules," "Moana" and "Peter Pan."

*Far Left: "Wondrous Journeys" features an original song, "It's Wondrous," that pays tribute to 70 years of delight at The Happiest Place on Earth (Richard Harbaugh/Disneyland Resort)*

*Above: During the Disneyland Resort 70th Celebration, guests can see Mickey Mouse, Minnie Mouse and their pals dressed in festive attire with bright pops of color and sparkling embellishments (Christian Thompson/Disneyland Resort)*

Additionally, the façade of "it's a small world" will come to life each night through lights, music and projection effects for "Tapestry of Happiness." A visual love letter to Disneyland, the all-new projection show not only features an animated mosaic of Disneyland attractions, moments and memories brought to life in a style inspired by the work of legendary Disney artist Mary Blair ("Alice in Wonderland," "Cinderella"), but also the original 70th anniversary celebration theme song "Celebrate Happy" and nods to recognizable Disneyland tunes from across the decades.

During the day, revelers can enjoy a new character cavalcade at Disneyland Park: "The Celebrate Happy Cavalcade." Guests will spot characters, including Goofy and his son Max, in their festive 70th anniversary attire, as well as friends not often seen at Disneyland—like Mickey Mouse's teddy bear, Duffy, and Duffy's teddy bear friend, ShellieMay.

Even Disney California Adventure Park is celebrating Disneyland Park's 70th

anniversary with an all-new "World of Color" fountains show inspired by Walt Disney's opening-day dedication: "To all who come to this happy place ... welcome!" Hosted by Joy and the other emotions from the Pixar Animation Studios films "Inside Out" and "Inside Out 2," "World of Color Happiness!" explores the concept of happiness through moments from favorite Pixar films like "Turning Red" and "The Incredibles" and Walt Disney Animation Studios films like "A Goofy Movie," "Tangled" and "Encanto."

In addition to featuring classic Disney songs throughout the euphoric show, the nighttime spectacular boasts a rendition of "Rainbow Connection" performed by legendary R&B trio Boyz II Men and an original song, "Makes Me Wanna Move," by the frontman of Fitz and the Tantrums, FITZ. Before the show begins, guests will even be treated to a zany song-and-dance number by more than a dozen of The Muppets as they share some safety information with the guidance of Joe the Legal Weasel.

Furthermore, Pixar fans can see more than two dozen of their favorite characters from Pixar Animation Studios films like "Luca" and "Soul" at "Better Together: A Pixar Pals Celebration!" The delightful daytime parade will once again take over the streets of Disney California Adventure Park for the Disneyland Resort 70th Celebration.

Beginning on Disneyland's official anniversary, guests will be able to enjoy several new experiences on Main Street, U.S.A., that honor Disneyland Park's cherished history and optimism for the future. The most anticipated attraction is "Walt Disney—A Magical Life," which, through remastered footage and audio recordings, will take audiences on a cinematic journey that leads from Walt Disney's early endeavors to the bright lights of Los Angeles and beyond.

*Below: See Red Panda Mei and her friends from "Turning Red" come together to rock out to their favorite boy band, 4\*Town, during the "Better Together: A Pixar Pals Celebration!" parade (Christian Thompson/Disneyland Resort)*





*Above: See, hear and experience Walt Disney like never before when "Walt Disney—A Magical Life" debuts at Disneyland Park this July (Artist rendering courtesy of Disneyland Resort)*

When the curtain rises inside the Main Street Opera House, audiences will be transported to Walt Disney's office, where the first-ever Audio-Animatronics figure of Walt Disney will share some heartfelt stories and words of wisdom with guests. The figure marks an advancement in the technology Walt Disney pioneered at the 1964 New York World's Fair with an Abraham Lincoln Audio-Animatronics figure—which is fitting since the show will play in rotation with Main Street Opera House's own "Great Moments with Mr. Lincoln" following its premiere.

Before audiences sit down for the show, they can browse through an all-new gallery at the Main Street Opera House that focuses on the evolution of

Disneyland. Guests will see images, arts and artifacts on display that show Disneyland before, during and after Walt Disney's dream became a reality. More than 30 artifacts showcased will come from The Walt Disney Family Museum in San Francisco, including an original rocking chair, lamp and table from Walt Disney's private apartment above the Fire Station on Main Street that have never been publicly exhibited at Disneyland Park before. Several of Walt Disney's humanitarian accolades will also be on loan from the museum, including his 1955 Emmy Award for the "Disneyland" TV show and his Presidential Medal of Freedom awarded by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964.

Visitors can enjoy a special exhibit at the Main Street Opera House, too, that details how far Audio-Animatronics figures have advanced through the years—something they'll see for themselves

when they watch Walt Disney seemingly come to life during "Walt Disney—A Magical Life." Once the show ends, audiences can learn more about how Disneyland plans to continue to move forward in the years to come at an informative exit lobby exhibit that focuses on The Happiest Place on Earth's future projects.

Starting on July 17, guests will also be able to enjoy the heartwarming 3-and-a-half-minute film "The Last Verse" at Main Street Cinema. Celebrating the timeless connection and hope behind the Sherman brothers' iconic song "It's a Small World," the movie unveils a new verse written by legendary composer Richard M. Sherman for the song's 60th anniversary last year—his final Disney contribution before sadly passing away. Additionally, park guests will be able to hear the all-new verse when it debuts in the "it's a small world" attraction that same day.

Guests riding "it's a small world" during the Disneyland Resort 70th Celebration will notice another recent addition: Miguel and his trusted alebrije, Dante, from Pixar Animation Studios' "Coco" can now be seen as riders sail through Mexico. This change is one of several updates Disneyland Park has welcomed in recent months, including a newly reimagined bride scene toward the end of Haunted Mansion. The popular attraction has actually undergone several changes over the past year, including an expanded outdoor queue that now features gardens by two of the attraction's classic characters, Master Gracey and Madame Leota, as well as a Mansion Greenhouse. There's also an all-new retail shop, Madame Leota's Somewhere Beyond, where guests can find merchandise themed to Haunted Mansion and "Tim Burton's The Nightmare Before Christmas." From Aug. 22, 2025, through Jan. 7, 2026, Jack Skellington and the residents of Halloween Town will once again take over the eerie estate for the seasonal Haunted Mansion Holiday attraction that's a part of both Halloween Time at the Disneyland Resort and Holidays at the Disneyland

Resort. Both events will coincide with the Disneyland Resort 70th Celebration.

Summertime is also a great time to check out the new Tiana's Bayou Adventure attraction that opened last November just next door to Haunted Mansion in Bayou Country. The thrilling water ride is the perfect way to escape the summer heat, as it crescendos with a 50-foot drop and a swingin' soiree featuring the new song "Special Spice" performed by Anika Noni Rose (the voice of Princess Tiana). Riders are sure to be singing the catchy tune as they are wringing out their clothes after disembarking!

Although the Disneyland Resort 70th Celebration will continue through summer 2026, Disneyland Park's "Wondrous Journeys" nighttime spectacular and Disney California Adventure Park's "Better Together: A Pixar Pals Celebration!" parade will temporarily pause later this year to make way for the parks' Halloween and holiday entertainment offerings. Be sure to visit the official Disneyland Resort website for up-to-date show times and announcements about the anniversary celebration. Regardless

of when guests visit, they are sure to make joyful memories they won't soon forget—just like Walt Disney wanted 70 years ago.

For a limited time, guests can purchase specially priced 4-day, one park per day Disneyland anniversary tickets for just \$100 a day, or 3-day, one park per day tickets for \$120 per day. Tickets can be used on nonconsecutive days from May 16 through Aug. 14.

For more information, visit [disneyland.com](http://disneyland.com).

*Below: "Drop in" on a thrilling new chapter in the story of "The Princess and the Frog" aboard Tiana's Bayou Adventure (Sean Teegarden/Disneyland Resort)*

*Far Right: Miguel and Dante from "Coco" recently made their debut in "it's a small world" (Artist Concept/Disneyland Resort)*

*Far Right Bottom: This summer, Pixar Place Hotel will add two new two-bedroom premium suites, including one themed to "The Incredibles" featuring hidden messages, a secret door and other fun surprises (Artist Concept/Disneyland Resort)*





# DESERT MUSE

## ALISHA KERLIN'S ARTISTIC ODYSSEY AT THE BARRICK

By Laura Henkel

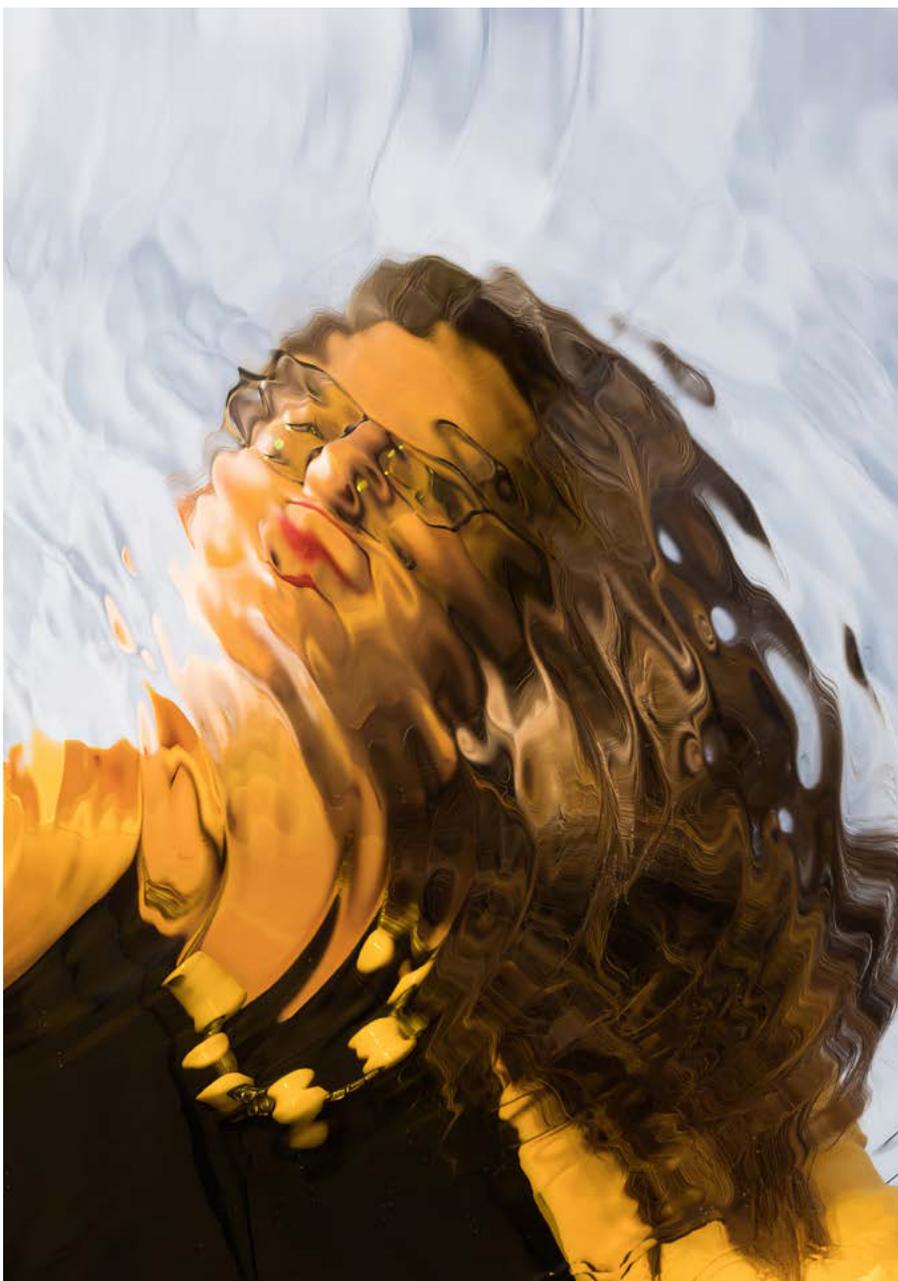
As with many artists, the journey to create is an evolution—fluid, unpredictable and deeply influenced by time and space. Does life imitate art or does art imitate life? For some, the line is not only blurred but entirely nonexistent. Every moment, every decision and every intention become part of a never-ending, living work of art. A perfect embodiment of this philosophy is Alisha Kerlin.

An artist rooted in Brooklyn, Kerlin was fueled by the city's relentless pulse—the clatter of subway trains, the hum of crowded streets and the endless energy that electrifies the boroughs.

Immersed in this vibrant chaos, she thrived in her element, a singleton perfectly in tune with the rhythms of creative urban life. Yet, even amid this momentum, a desire stirred to evolve as an artist, grow her practice and seek new opportunities to deepen her work and expand her reach.

### **A Leap of Faith into the Unknown**

She applied for an eight-week artist residency with the UNLV Department of Art in spring 2012, an opportunity that would shift her life's trajectory in unimaginable ways. What began as a temporary relocation became an irreversible call of the desert. Upon completing her residency, Kerlin felt an unexpected longing—not for the noise and lights of New York but for the open skies and enigmatic pull of Las Vegas.



*Above: Photo of Alisha Kerlin by Mikayla Whitmore*



Above: Photo of the "Contemporary Ex-Votos: Devotion Beyond Medium" installation by Krystal Ramirez

The desert's silence, surreal landscapes and raw aesthetic left a profound impression. The Vegas vortex, as some call it, had her completely under its spell.

Within weeks of returning to Brooklyn, she made a decision as bold as it was unorthodox. She sold everything she owned, packed her life into a pickup truck and set her sights on the Southwest. She had no job lined up and knew only a handful of people in Las Vegas, yet the pull of the neon metropolis was undeniable. She bet it all on Vegas—a city of audacious energy and constant reinvention—trusting that her next chapter would be written in the rhythm of the Mojave.

At the time, the Las Vegas arts scene was a collection of brilliant moments—flashes of inspiration and ambition—but lacked the centralized art-centric infrastructure in cities like New York or Los Angeles.

Finding work was imperative, and Kerlin sought opportunities to grow within the arts while sustaining her new life in the desert. She accepted a position as collections manager at the Marjorie Barrick Museum of Art—a decision that would be either predestined, a fabulous stroke of luck or simply kismet.

## A Museum Transformed: The Barrick's Cultural Awakening

The Marjorie Barrick Museum of Art, where Kerlin now serves as executive director, has undergone a remarkable transformation. Originally founded in 1967 as the Museum of Natural History by the Desert Research Institute, it was housed in Nevada Southern University's (now known as UNLV) first gymnasium.

While the building's origin was functional, the museum's name has a far more significant heritage. In 1989, it was renamed the Marjorie Barrick Museum of Natural History in honor of Marjorie Barrick, a devoted philanthropist and advocate for education and the arts in Southern Nevada. The Barrick family's enduring support helped shape UNLV's cultural identity, and the museum stands as a testament to their legacy.

Over the decades, the museum evolved from its natural history roots into a vibrant hub for contemporary visual art. This shift began around 2011, but it was not until 2017, under Kerlin's leadership as interim executive director, that the museum was officially renamed the Marjorie Barrick Museum of Art. The name change marked a profound commitment to showcasing work that reflects the diversity and cultural richness of the Southwest. As the only free art museum in Las Vegas, it upholds Marjorie

Barrick's vision of accessibility and education for all.

## Kerlin's Vision: Redefining Las Vegas Art

The Barrick's presence in Las Vegas is especially significant given the city's often misunderstood relationship with the arts. While Las Vegas is globally famed for its entertainment, nightlife and spectacle, its identity as a city of culture and contemporary art is frequently overlooked. The notion that Las Vegas lacks a serious art scene is being actively dismantled by institutions like the Marjorie Barrick Museum of Art, which leads this cultural redefinition with audacity and grace.

Alongside legendary galleries that sparked the Las Vegas Arts District into what it is today, as well as the Rita Deanin Abbey Museum and the Las Vegas-Clark County Library District's exhibition programs, the museum plays a critical role in enriching the city's cultural landscape. What sets it apart is its status as a university-based, nonprofit museum that offers free admission, making art accessible to all, regardless of socioeconomic status.

The museum's exhibitions are a kaleidoscope of voices, perspectives and stories—each thoughtfully curated to highlight the power of visual language

as a tool for connection and change. Thousands of visitors from across Southern Nevada and beyond engage with the museum annually, including students, local families and tourists seeking a deeper connection to the region's creative pulse. Signature initiatives like the Bus to Barrick program facilitate access for K-12 students and underserved populations, further reinforcing the museum's commitment to inclusion and public service.

## A Vision Realized: Leading Through Change

By 2015, Kerlin was balancing the delicate art of leadership with the joyful chaos of new motherhood. Her daughter, Faye, arrived in October of that year. By early 2016, Kerlin had stepped into the role of interim executive director, the sole full-time employee at the museum, supported by a small but dedicated crew. Among them was writer Deanne Sole, now the museum's full-time editor and curator, whose collaboration with Kerlin would reimagine the museum's future in bold, transformative strokes.

In 2017, Kerlin formally added "of Art" to the museum's name, solidifying its identity as a contemporary art institution and honoring the vision she had nurtured since her early days there. That same year marked the beginning of a period of remarkable growth. Following a national search, she was named executive director in 2019. The following year, the COVID-19 pandemic struck. As institutions worldwide shuttered, the museum closed its doors—and Kerlin was tasked with guiding the museum through a critical and uncertain time.

Despite the pandemic's challenges, Kerlin and her team emerged stronger, reopening the museum in 2021 with renewed energy and purpose. Under her guidance, the Marjorie Barrick Museum of Art has grown from a staff of two to a team of five full-time professionals as of 2025, with plans to hire a sixth member underway. This growth has enabled the museum to expand its curatorial programming, community outreach

and institutional infrastructure. In 2026, Barrick will begin the accreditation process, a testament to its evolution into a comprehensive and nationally recognized art institution.

Under Kerlin's leadership, the Marjorie Barrick Museum of Art has curated an audacious and richly layered series of exhibitions that reflect the institution's unwavering commitment to diversity, accessibility and critical engagement. Each exhibition becomes more than a visual experience—it is a platform for dialogue, reflection and social inquiry.

## Art as Catalyst: Curating the Barrick's Voice

One of the museum's landmark projects, "Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano L.A.," explored the vibrant intersection of queer identity and Chicano art in Los Angeles. Through works that ranged from intimate personal expressions to public acts of resistance, the exhibition illuminated marginalized voices and their profound contributions to the canon of contemporary art.

"Seeing/Seen," curated by Las Vegas writer and scholar Erica Vital-Lazare, focused on Black women's contemporary and historical presence through photography, video and archival imagery.

Featuring works by veteran Newsweek photojournalist Lester Sloan and local artists A. Moss, Carl Summerlin, Jeff Scheid and Q'Shaundra James, the exhibition invited viewers into intimate moments of joy, labor, leisure and resilience.

In a celebration of spiritual artistry, "Contemporary Ex-votos: Devotion Beyond Medium," curated by Emmanuel Ortega, bridged historical reverence with contemporary creativity. Historic Mexican retablos were presented alongside fearless reinterpretations by modern Latinx artists, creating a sacred dialogue that expanded the boundaries of devotional art and emphasized its enduring cultural resonance.

"Notes for Tomorrow" was a global conversation in visual form. Curators from around the world selected works that engaged with spirituality, politics and collective memory, inviting viewers to imagine alternative futures through artistic reflection. The exhibition's shimmering installations, tinged with neon and desert hues, left visitors with renewed possibility and shared humanity.

Embracing emotional nuance, "The Emotional Show" delivered a visceral and immersive journey through the human psyche. Bold multimedia works explored themes of joy, grief, anger and



Above: Photo of the "Seeing/Seen" installation by Mikayla Whitmore



Above: Photo of the "Content May Settle" installation at Available Space Art Projects (ASAP) by Mikayla Whitmore

love, creating an unflinching portrait of our shared emotional landscape that captivated and moved audiences.

"Color Made" investigated the potent symbolism and cultural resonance of color across artistic traditions. Alongside it, "Women's Rights Are Human Rights" utilized striking international poster art to confront gender-based inequality and advocate for justice, aligning the museum with global movements for human rights and social change.

Together, these exhibitions elevated the Marjorie Barrick Museum of Art from a local treasure to an international force for artistic dialogue, activism and critical thought, solidifying its role as a museum and a catalyst for cultural transformation.

### Mastery at the Breakfast Table

Kerlin's commitment to accessibility and engagement is evident in her art practice. In her "Content May Settle" exhibition at Available Space Art Projects

(ASAP), she transformed the venue into an experimental playground, creating and installing dozens of new works from her ongoing junk mail series. This was her first solo project since becoming a mother and museum director.

"My work is made at our breakfast table in the living room. I paint on junk mail and other disposable or disregarded materials. I use fragments from family conversations for the text in my paintings," Kerlin notes. "These conditions shape what I make—imperfect, quick gestures made to acknowledge the roles others have in my life."

Layered atop gleaming grocery ads, her paintings erupt with humor and introspection. Text fragments like "a disappointed nutcase" and "why don't unicorns exist?" leap from the page, capturing childhood wonder, domestic chaos and existential playfulness in brushstrokes that feel both spontaneous and deliberate. As Matthew Newton wrote for *Art21*, "In their isolation, Kerlin's paintings function much more closely to the slippery, meaning-stuffed, ever-evolving nature of language itself."

Over the last decade, her work has shifted increasingly toward connection,

vulnerability and presence themes. Her practice offers a critical yet inviting approach that celebrates the intention to create and the human spirit that drives it—regardless of time, space or material.

### The Future Is Now: A Renaissance in the Making

Kerlin's approach to curating is intuitive and deliberate. She examines the gaps in the museum's past exhibitions—what narratives were missing, which voices went unheard—and uses that awareness to shape future programming. This ensures that the Marjorie Barrick Museum of Art's exhibitions are timely and culturally and socially resonant, creating a more inclusive and dynamic space for all.

Although she maintains her art practice, Kerlin has fully embraced her role as a maestro—harmonizing the talents of an incredible staff, collaborating with a visionary dean and curating exhibitions that shimmer with originality and relevance. Las Vegas, much like Kerlin herself, thrives on reinvention. Under her inspired stewardship, the future of the Barrick is not only bright—it's electrifying.

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# DAVID TUPAZ PAYS TRIBUTE TO KARL LAGERFELD AT LOS ANGELES FASHION WEEK

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Article by Chanelle Hayes | Designs by David Tupaz  
Photography by Jaime Lim, Liquid Star Photography

Los Angeles Fashion Week, powered by Art Hearts Fashion, presented the collection of David Tupaz, the only established fashion and couture designer based in Nevada. His latest work is a tribute to the late legendary designer Karl Lagerfeld, known for his iconic tenure at Chanel.

Anna Wintour, editor-in-chief of *Vogue*, recently featured nine of the world's top designers to interpret Lagerfeld's style in celebration of his fashion legacy. Tupaz continued this homage in his Fall 2025–26 collection, honoring the creative force behind one of the world's most recognizable fashion houses.

Lagerfeld, who became creative director of Chanel in 1983, modernized the brand with his "Ode de Mademoiselle Coco" vision, building on Coco Chanel's turn-of-the-century legacy. Today, Chanel remains one of the top French fashion houses in history.

Tupaz's interpretation featured the classic black-and-white palette with subtle touches of red, accessorized with layers of gold chains and pearls—signatures of Coco Chanel. The collection also highlighted the camellia flower, one of her favorite symbols.

Branching into menswear, Tupaz

introduced a unique twist: transforming Chanel's iconic chains into hand-knitted scarves, a detail that drew applause on the runway. His reinterpretation of Chanel's classic aesthetic is both timeless and modern.

After the show, during backstage interviews with media and press, Tupaz shared his heartfelt dedication: "To my dearest maestro, Karl Lagerfeld ... I hope I made you proud."

*Photography of the full collection was captured by Jaime Lim. — Los Angeles Fashion Week, March 20, 2025*



LOS ANGELES FASHION WEEK

POWERED BY ART HEARTS FASHION

DESIGNER: DAVID TUPAZ  
PHOTOGRAPHY: JAMIE LIM,  
LIQUID STAR PHOTOGRAPHY



**LOS ANGELES FASHION WEEK**



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LIQUID STAR PHOTOGRAPHY



# HIGH STAKES HEALTH: BIOHACKING YOUR WAY TO VITALITY IN LAS VEGAS

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By Erika Luren

"Living La Vida Vegas" is like playing all your cards, hoping to end up with either a fortuitous gain or the loss of every penny. Yet, if you approach life in this "Sin City" way, you're likely to suffer a decline in the integrity of your body, mind and emotions. To sustain a high quality of life while still enjoying the splendor of this city, a proactive anti-aging approach to wellness is essential. Don't gamble with your health—integrate these five biohacking tips to keep the odds forever in your favor.

## 1. Prioritize Sleep Like a High Roller

Sleep cycles align with the circadian rhythms of both nature and nurture. A 2022 Northwestern University study, reported by NPR, found that even minimal light exposure can disrupt sleep. Flickering streetlights, the glow of a TV "off" button or flashing lights from The Sphere can disturb circadian rhythms and melatonin production, making sleep harder to come by. Such deprivation has been linked to a higher risk of diabetes, insulin resistance and cardiovascular problems. A good night's sleep is essential for hormone production, cell regeneration and muscle recovery. To improve your sleep, eliminate light sources, keep your bedroom cool and avoid bright screens from TVs, computers or phones 30 minutes before bed.

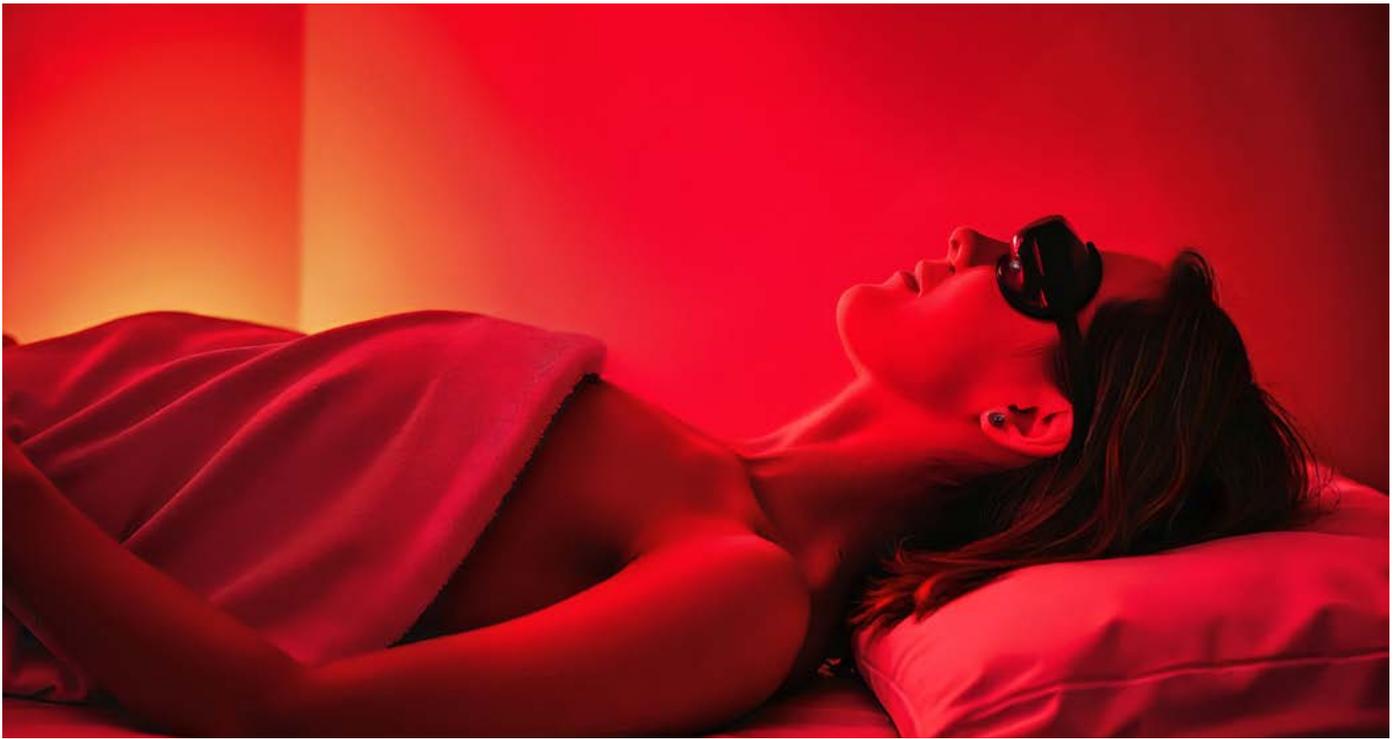


## 2. Upgrade Your Champagne Flute to an Electrolyte Water Flask

The human body is 60% water; staying hydrated is crucial for every cell and tissue to function optimally. In Las Vegas, daytime mimosas, soaking in the pool under 110-degree heat or hiking the trails at Red Rock Canyon can all cause dehydration. While the "eight glasses of water a day" rule is a good rule of thumb, hydration needs vary based on gender, body weight and activity level.

To maximize hydration, infuse your water with electrolytes like sodium, potassium, magnesium and calcium. These elements help water move into your cells for better absorption. Lastly, make it a habit to sip your H<sub>2</sub>O from metal containers, which hold less risk of environmental toxins being sipped into your body.

## 3. Exchange Desert Rays for Red Light Regeneration



Many active individuals insist that golfing, swimming, running and tanning are essential for getting sun-induced vitamin D. However, the human body only requires 15 minutes of sunlight daily to meet its needs. The rays that truly benefit this fast-paced lifestyle are actually red light. Red light therapy reduces inflammation, stimulates collagen production (think fewer wrinkles from sun damage), boosts mitochondrial energy, enhances muscle recovery and elevates mood. While inexpensive red-light masks are available online, they are far less powerful than what is available in medical spas. To level up your therapy, visit an anti-aging provider three to five days a week for five to 20 minutes to experience the full benefits of low-level light therapy (LLLT).

#### **4. Supercharge Your Cells with Peptides**

The previous tips are accessible, but incorporating peptides is a game-changing move. Peptides are biochemicals made of short chains of amino acids that serve as the building blocks of protein. In the body, they act as messengers that regulate healing, muscle growth, fat loss, cognition, mood, sleep, energy and general anti-aging. Popular peptides

include NAD, glutathione and sermorelin. While the first two are available as supplements, the most potent versions are prescription-based. If opting for an over-the-counter peptide, order from reputable brands like Life Extension, Thorne or Pure Encapsulations, which are known for their quality and potency. Prescription Sermorelin, often considered the gold standard, stimulates human growth hormone (HGH) production, promoting improved bone density, joint health, better sleep and significant muscle growth and fat loss. Peptides are never a gamble—they are a surefire way to maintain a youthful appearance and vitality.

#### **5. High-Roll Your Health with Bio-Identical Hormone Balancing**

A healthy body isn't optimized unless its internal rhythms are harmonized like a symphony at The Smith Center. Hormones such as estrogen, testosterone and progesterone must be impeccably tuned. If not, the stakes of suffering symptoms of perimenopause, menopause and andropause will be as sure as placing a bet aided by Dustin Hoffman's character in 1988's "Rain Man." Hot flashes, mood swings, low libido, weight gain, insomnia, fatigue,

memory issues, dry skin and hair loss are common after age 35. However, not all medical providers are created equal when testing and treating these stages of life. It is commonly passed off as "getting older" and eluded that you have to suffer the consequences. Yet, when medications are offered, they are synthetic, with non-individualized combinations or dosing. For top-tier care, seek consultation with a functional or anti-aging provider, who will take a different approach to accurately assessing lab levels and treating proactively for quality of life as you age.

Although you can't stop the clock, you can navigate aging through the decades with a winning youth-defying combination. Integrating these biohacking tips into a lifestyle is the ticket for an ultimate high-roller reset. This is how you truly navigate the work-life-play balance of "Living La Vida Vegas."

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**Erika Luren, BSN, MA, MS, NP**

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By Debbie Hall / Photography by Tonya Harvey and Cashman Photo Enterprises

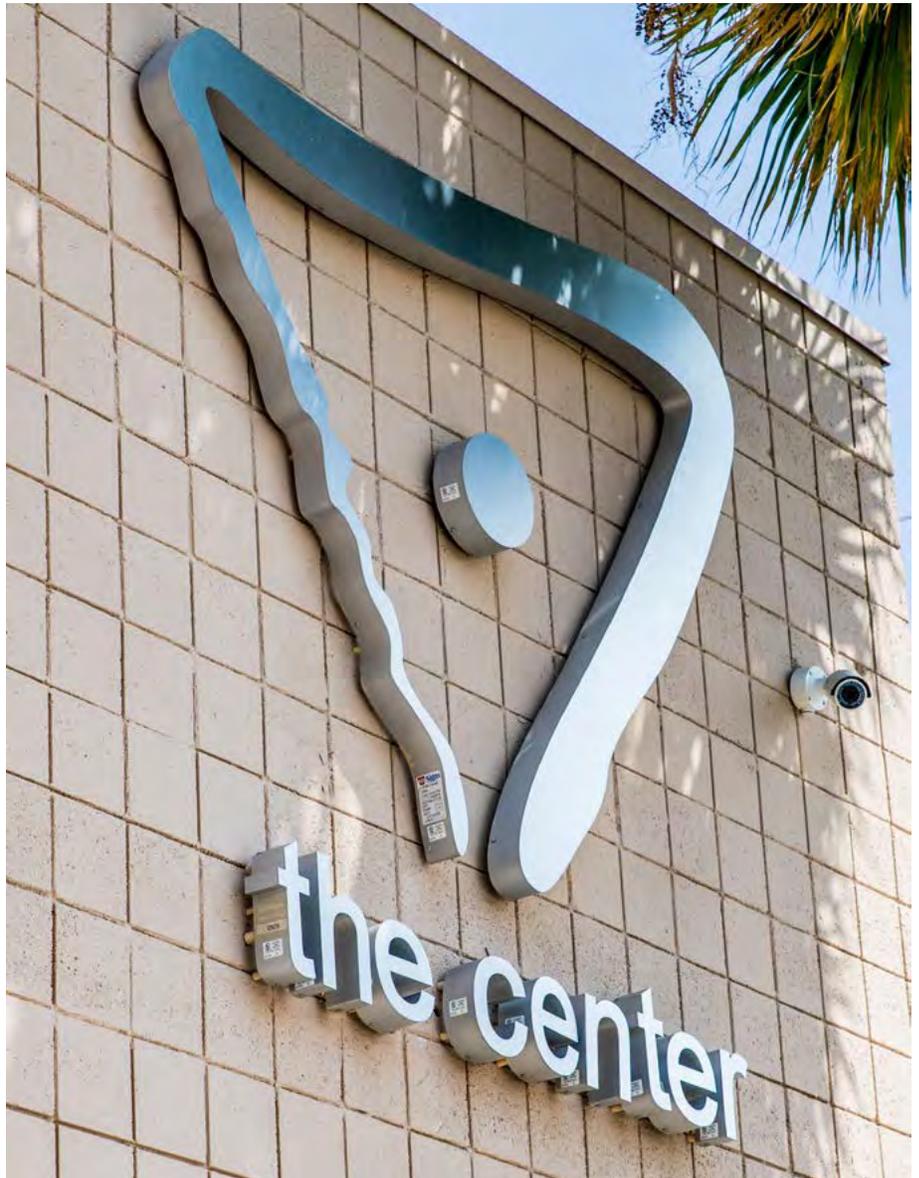
The LGBTQ Center of Southern Nevada (The Center) brings together various programs, resources and services to serve downtown Las Vegas and the broader community. The Center strives to be the heart and home of the LGBTQIA+ community by fostering connections, delivering programs and offering a safe space for health and wellness, social services, arts and culture, advocacy and community building.

The Center operates a full medical center, two pharmacies, a mobile clinic and mental health facilities.

"Whether you're a senior, a member of the trans community or a young person, you can find community here. You can find a chosen family. You can find activities with people you want to connect and engage with," said John Waldron, CEO of The LGBTQ Center of Southern Nevada.

Its history is an important aspect of its success today. Formerly known as the Gay and Lesbian Community Center of Southern Nevada, The Center began in a small former dentist's office 21 years ago. It moved to the Historic Commercial Center District before relocating to a 16,000-square-foot former paint and home improvement store on Maryland Parkway. Now known as the Robert L. Forbuss Building in downtown Las Vegas, The Center remains focused on serving people with its tagline: "We Are The Center."

Longtime resident Waldron became CEO of The Center on Jan. 22, 2019.



*Above: The LGBTQ Center of Southern Nevada (The Center)*

"I can tell you that we essentially had no money the day I took over at The Center. It was a vital and central resource for the community, but we were in a very precarious position—the donor base had waned. What kept us

going was our staff's dedication, our volunteers' passion and the community's unwavering support. Together, we ensured The Center could continue fulfilling its mission," he explained.

When Waldron took over, The Center received grant funding—but it was through reimbursable grants. The Center had to spend the money upfront to receive reimbursement from the grantors.

"If you don't have operating cash to spend the money upfront, it doesn't do you much good to have grants," Waldron said. "The Center was in a lot of trouble, and we were also in a situation with 10 paid staff members. When we were struggling to pay the power bill, we were also burdened by the fact that we had a balloon payment coming up in a year and a half from that point in August 2020. That would have been \$1.6 million to pay, and The Center didn't have anything near that. No bank in town would help to refinance us or offer a mortgage there. We faced the pending loss of our beloved property,"

In early 2019, a dedicated group came together to keep The Center open. One key supporter was Lanny Love, a Las Vegas business owner and advocate who frequented The Center. In 2019, Love donated the amount needed to cover the mortgage, utilities and payroll. In her honor, the Lanny D. Love Hero Award is given annually to an individual who is recognized as a hero.

In April 2019, Waldron met attorney Russell Rosenblum and his wife, Anne Mazzola. Rosenblum, who owns several Five Guys Burgers, Fries and More franchises and other businesses, is also a professional poker player passionate about business problem-solving. Waldron shared The Center's financial challenges, including the balloon payment.

In July 2019, Rosenblum opened

*All photos on this page and facing page: The Clinic of The LGBTQ Center of Southern Nevada*





Lexicon Bank in Tivoli Village and became its board chairman. He and his team worked through the end of 2019 to refinance The Center's loan, cutting the monthly payment in half and securing a fixed interest rate for 10 years. This helped stabilize The Center's financial future.

"We owe so much to Lexicon Bank, which became a big supporter of The Center in many ways," Waldron said.

Today, more than six years later, The Center has an annual gross revenue of \$21.5 million and nearly 60 employees.

When Waldron speaks about The Center, he divides it into three areas: health and wellness, community buildings and advocacy.

### Health and Wellness

The Center participates in 340B, a federal pharmaceutical pricing program that allows community health centers to purchase medications at deeply discounted rates. These medications, primarily for HIV and STD prevention and treatment, are stocked at Genoa

Healthcare, The Center's partner pharmacy.

When prescriptions are filled through the clinic, patients pay via insurance, like at any pharmacy. Genoa Healthcare retains a small margin, and the remaining savings go back to The Center as unrestricted revenue. These funds serve uninsured patients who can't afford treatment—ensuring no one is turned away.

Genoa Healthcare fills more than 100 prescriptions daily and serves a neighborhood considered a pharmacy desert since the closure of the last nearby pharmacy.

By 2023, clinic demand outgrew the original space. In January 2024, The Center partnered with Lexicon Bank and acquired a 16,000-square-foot, three-story medical building at Las Vegas and Charleston boulevards, formerly Dr. Eric Wolfson's practice. A new full-service healthcare facility opened in June 2024, with two medical doctors, three nurse practitioners and a team of assistants and phlebotomists.

"One of the things that The Center prides itself on is that we're open to everybody," Waldron said. "When you come into The Center, we don't ask you for your LGBTQ ID card. We always say that anybody who comes into The Center willing to be kind to others is welcome, and we're happy to serve you in any way we can. We don't turn anybody away at our medical clinics. We work with the Mexican Consulate across from our new medical clinic and provide services for their constituents. We offer services to the unhoused. Everybody throughout Southern Nevada can use our medical clinic."

Future plans for The Center include a second full-service pharmacy, dental care, mental health services and telemedicine. One area will consist of pharmaceutical companies focusing on HIV prevention and research.

The Center analyzes the unique needs of the communities it serves. For example, someone from the unhoused population may not be able to carry a 30-day supply of medication. The Center is exploring the installation of on-site lockers to provide a seven-day

*Right: The LGBTQ Center of Southern Nevada offers a safe space for arts and culture, advocacy and community building*

*Middle and Bottom Right: The LGBTQ Center of Southern Nevada's full-scale medical facility in its brand-new RV*

supply of medication, along with food and possibly a bus pass. Other plans include developing a full-scale medical facility in its new custom-built RV. The mobile clinic will serve rural communities in Southern Nevada.

## Community Buildings

"Those things that we can do out of the Las Vegas Boulevard location are driven by many donors. But in particular, three people helped us to do that. One of them was Gavin J. Goorjian," Waldron said.

Goorjian, a gay teen who first came out to mentor Robert L. Forbuss, later became a board member. He passed away in May 2022 at 38, leaving \$3.5 million to The Center. Dr. Wolfson offered to sell his medical center for that same amount. It was renamed the Gavin J. Goorjian Community Health Center.

The Engelstad Foundation donated \$2.4 million for two years of operating costs to help get the clinic off the ground. The foundation also donated the money to buy new state-of-the-art mammography technology because Kris Engelstad is passionate about getting mammograms in the community. This can be a challenge in Southern Nevada, where it sometimes takes more than eight weeks to get an appointment. The equipment has been purchased, and the clinic will be able to offer mammograms to the community.

The Helmsley Charitable Trust, established by Leona Helmsley, awarded a \$2.2 million gift last year to help The Center expand access to rural communities through its mobile clinic. Part of the funding will be used to build a new pharmacy and provide dental and mental health services.



## Advocacy

The Center certifies volunteer victim advocates through the national Center Advocacy Network's 80-hour program. Most staff and more than 300 volunteers are certified. Once someone completes the program, they volunteer at The Center to help victims of crime and people in crisis. When someone comes to The Center as a victim of human trafficking, domestic violence or suicidal thoughts, advocates can help. They never hand someone a list of phone numbers and send them on their way; they stay with them and connect them to people and resources. A major part of The Center's mission is nonjudgmental harm reduction.

"We want people to come through our doors and tell us exactly where they are because we want to help them stay safe," Waldron said. "We may be helping local sex workers with safe-sex kits in a judgment-free, no-pressure manner. We may be assisting an intravenous drug user in getting clean needles to stay safe and reduce the transmission of HIV. If someone is ready to get into care or is being forced into the sex trade and needs help, that's where our advocates can step in. If someone who is using drugs shares that they are ready to get into care, our staff and full-time outreach workers can help. We link them to care and get them into treatment.

"We partner with Capt. Seely of Metro's Downtown Area Command in our advocacy programming, and his

officers know to trust The Center and our advocates."

## Other Services

The Center partners with Three Square for weekly food distribution. During business hours, free computer access is available in the lobby.

*For additional programs, information or to donate, visit [thecenterlv.org](http://thecenterlv.org). Follow The LGBTQ Center of Southern Nevada on Facebook, Instagram and TikTok (@thecenterlv).*

### **John Waldron, CEO of The LGBTQ Center of Southern Nevada**

Waldron has lived in Las Vegas for 46 years. At age 14, he began a career in newspapers, eventually spending 25 years as director of advertising operations at the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*.

After the newspaper was sold in 2014, his department was eliminated. Waldron then served as director of organizational development for Opportunity Village for 1½ years.

He later worked in the gaming industry, using his doctorate in leadership from St. Thomas University in Miami to lead national development programs. Eventually, he joined The Center's board, representing Boyd Gaming.

Waldron is an openly gay man and passionate community servant. For more than six years, he has continued his commitment to advocacy and service.



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# HAL SAVAR

## FROM HUMAN JUKEBOX TO TRAILBLAZING SONGWRITER

By Kendall Hardin

*H*al Savar single-handedly carved out an astounding musical journey for himself as a talented artist.

Growing up in Philadelphia and numerous locales across the country as an Air Force brat, music became his sanctuary—an outlet for self-expression and connection.

At 16, he resurrected his mother's old

*Above: Hal Savar performing at the Firelight Barn with Bert Django (lead guitar), Amonte Henry (drums), DJ Atewo (keys) and Peezy (bass)*

guitar from storage and taught himself to play, sing and write songs. This journey of self-discovery grew into a lifelong passion, fueling his desire to create original works and entertain as many people as possible through his music.

### Performing as a Human Jukebox

Savar landed in Las Vegas 23 years ago, where he honed his craft and live performance style, appearing nightly at every venue, dive bar, restaurant, pub and casino he could get into.

He has a rare gift some scientists call *auditory memory*, associated with *eidetic memory*—the ability to recall images and sounds with high precision. People with this ability often have a strong connection to music, which enhances their recall of lyrics and melodies.

Savar demonstrated this talent on stage in interactive shows where the crowd created the experience by picking from a menu of 350 songs, which he instantly and expertly performed "as a one-man band." His adoring fan base dubbed him "The Human Jukebox."

## Life as an Independent Musician

In a recent interview with *CanvasRebel*, Savar described his challenges as an independent musician.

"I'm my own roadie, setting up and taking down at each show. I had to learn to design my own graphics and fliers. I do all my own promos. I book my own shows and pay my musicians when I play with a band."

Nonstop gigs showcase Savar's enormous range, covering folk, rock, blues and melodic pop. However, gig artists usually secure work through booking agents, who pay "net 30"—meaning musicians may not get paid for four to six weeks. In addition, casinos have cut back on their booking directors, relying instead on local musicians as background for gambling and drinking rather than as featured entertainment.

Independent artists receive no health care or retirement benefits, and gig artists are rarely unionized.

"Typically, I sing for two to four hours at my shows—sometimes two shows a day—four nights a week. While I do all that, I also write and record my own new music.

"I spent a long time fighting and hustling to play music for a living, and I would hide away my own music for fear of being rejected. But after the pandemic, I realized I wanted to reach the most people I could to bring joy into their lives."

## Hitting the Road With 'Highway to Hal'

"When the pandemic hit, the Las Vegas entertainment industry collapsed, and we were all out of work with no safety net," he recalled. "It was a shock that made me deeply re-evaluate my life choices as an artist."

So, in the summer of 2021, he embarked on a unique journey, taking his family—including his 1-year-old son



and 7-year-old daughter—on the road. During this expedition to music meccas such as Memphis, Branson, Nashville and Austin, he independently filmed a docuseries titled "Highway to Hal."

The series explored live music hotspots across the country, while connecting with key players in the music industry, and performing solo as well as with local singer-songwriters.

"I learned so much on the road about today's digital music industry—and where I can fit in," he said. "Songwriters need critical feedback on their songs, helpful insights into navigating today's digital platforms and solid encouragement from successful artists and producers."

Upon returning home, he set a bold goal: to release a new single every six weeks, keeping his music fresh and relevant while engaging a fan base that grows with each release.

*Above: Hal Savar on his epic road trip accompanied by loving family fans Heather, Violet and Memphis*

While releasing new music is central to his songwriting, Savar's performances in Las Vegas are equally important to his artistic identity. Every performance is an opportunity to deliver an unforgettable experience, and each song is packed with passion and authenticity.

Savar is committed to engaging his audiences and online fans. He is making his mark on the music industry with his raspy vocals, percussive guitar style and compelling storytelling.

## Launching the Vegas Songwriters Showcase

After touring the country with the docuseries experience, Savar returned to Las Vegas more convinced than ever that

the city holds an endless array of up-and-coming talent. Inspired by his visits to cities with strong local music scenes, he sought to create a rallying point for indie artists to build a vibrant music community in Vegas.

In 2022, he founded the Vegas Songwriters Showcase, which convenes weekly in venues across the valley. Over the last three years, the showcase has featured more than 150 shows and 3,000 artist performances, with three primary goals:

- Cultivate and create a thriving original music scene in Las Vegas
- Give original artists a place to network and collaborate with other artists, perform inspired music and connect with the community
- Provide the Las Vegas community with a weekly performance event where audiences can celebrate and support local artists

One of his collaborations resulted in the song "Nevada to Mississippi," a blend of country artist Emily Stinnett's style with his folk-rock sound. It was featured at Keith Thompson's Composer's Showcase at The Smith Center and became popular on streaming platforms.

## Trailblazing to the Top

"I don't think the average person thinks about the costs that go into creating and promoting emerging artists' music," Savar said.

"When I want to record a song, it takes a lot of time, and a quality recording costs a chunk of money. Once it's produced in the studio, I have to market it with my own time and money while getting it out there on Spotify and Apple Music so the algorithms feature my songs more often with followers. Then, I have to play shows to help support those new songs with audiences that can hear me perform live.

"It's shocking that the majority of venues and clubs don't pay for original music artists. I can make a living playing



three-hour cover music shows, but if I want to play my own music, I would need a day job. The good news is that we have some hyper-talented producers in town, but their prices shoot up with their rate of success, ultimately pricing indie artists out."

Indie artists need that one breakout song or album that catapults their work into the industry limelight—perhaps picked up by a superstar entertainer or optioned for a film or a streamed TV series. Savar's latest work has received rave reviews from online industry critics. He is lauded for his fresh lyrics and music that weave clever, memorable, soulful stories for the listener, whether it's a ballad or an anthem.

*Anonymous Author* describes Savar's recent works as "Big on lyrics. Unique music that catches the ear. Ridiculous production! Another banger on the way!"

*Spiderhands* beautifully deconstructs

*Above: Captivating Las Vegas audiences as "The Human Jukebox"*

three of his recent hits—"Nevada to Mississippi," "Vegas" and "Bar Karma"—handing over the ultimate compliment: "Hal Savar has found his own unique voice—you can tell it's a Savar song."

### Chic Compass: Who are your biggest musical influences?

**Hal Savar:** That's a tough one for me. I'm influenced by many artists, from newer talents like Ed Sheeran and Shawn Mendes to legends like Bob Seger, John Mellencamp, Stevie Ray Vaughan and Michael Jackson.

### Chic Compass: What is your greatest non-musical influence?

**Hal Savar:** Las Vegas as a city is part of my DNA as an artist.



*Above: Hal Savar's songwriting goal is to release a new single every six weeks*

*Below Right: Recording in Sun Studio in Memphis, 64 years later to the exact night Elvis Presley recorded his first song "That's All Right"*

**Chic Compass: How can Las Vegas foster an environment supporting artists and creatives?**

**Hal Savar:** It's a shame we don't have what other cities like Memphis, Seattle, Nashville and Atlanta have established—like grants for emerging artists, dedicated performance spaces and street districts, or even corporate-sponsored festivals for new songwriters that attract locals and visitors alike. Fans can help by subscribing online to help young artists keep going.

We need to work to establish weekly

showcases with all the casinos on and off the Strip—if only each would host one exciting venue a year. We're ready to pitch an annual Las Vegas Independent Music Festival to showcase local indie artists alongside national and international breakout stars.

We should build our showcase into a nonprofit collective organization so we can apply for program grants and secure corporate and individual support to fund ongoing initiatives and performances for our artists and the community. The talent is here, and the audience is hungry.

**Chic Compass: What are your plans for the future?**

**Hal Savar:** I'm going to keep releasing a new single every six weeks while working to expand my fan base. I want

to continue writing, recording and performing for as many people as possible. I want to show my kids that you can accomplish your dreams if you love what you do and work hard at it. And I'm ready to break some barriers!

**Chic Compass: On that note, we'll conclude with the final line from Savar's "Bar Karma" track: Can I get an Amen?!**





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# LAS VEGAS JAZZ SOCIETY CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF KEEPING JAZZ ALIVE

By Judy Tarte and Debbie Hall / Photography courtesy of the Las Vegas Jazz Society

Las Vegas is not commonly known for celebrating its historical heritage, so marking 50 years with the Las Vegas Jazz Society (the Society) is especially noteworthy.

The Society has been a fundamental part of the city's cultural community, committed to promoting an appreciation for jazz music through concerts, education and community outreach. Over the years, the Society has hosted legendary performers, supported local

talent and nurtured a deep love for jazz across generations.

"What I believe is especially significant is that the Las Vegas Jazz Society is an all-volunteer organization. Even though we've gone through numerous personnel changes and differences in approach, goals and directions, the Society has essentially stayed true to its original goals: providing opportunities to individuals who love jazz to get together, support their beloved music in all its various forms and educate younger generations on the history and

uniqueness of this American art form," said President Judy Tarte, one of the founders.

From the 1950s to the 1970s, Las Vegas offered incredible opportunities for musicians through the abundance of jobs in showrooms and lounges. Musicians settled in Southern Nevada because it was a place where they could get off the road, start a family and have steady employment. The appeal of this stability kept them in town, where they and their families could enjoy new homes, cars and boats—essentially living the good

*Above: The Las Vegas Jazz Society staff, 1977.  
Photo by E.V. McGuire*

life. Some musicians, however, grew bored playing the same shows daily.

"I remember a drummer who was in one of these show bands and also pursuing a degree at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. He'd take his books to work and study while on the bandstand," Tarte said.

This era in Las Vegas is detailed in the book "Midnight Muse – The Book: Las Vegas – Where Hip Meets Hot," created by Ann Parenti, who also produced a two-CD set and documentary with a slightly different name: "Midnight Muse – Milestones in Music – Las Vegas." The film can still be found on Amazon Prime.

### How the Society Started

When jazz bassist Monk Montgomery, who introduced the Fender Precision Bass to jazz in 1951, came to town in 1966, he noted the boredom among top players. Monk, the elder brother of jazz guitarist Wes Montgomery and vibraphonist/pianist Buddy Montgomery, found that many musicians wanted more outlets to play jazz. It became his mission to establish jazz in the hotels for professionals and provide opportunities for jazz lovers and players to gather at jam sessions and smaller clubs. He succeeded, calling on many of jazz's top players to make a home for their music in Las Vegas.

"Monk's charisma played no small part in rallying people to his cause. He would convince you that you could do things you thought you didn't have the time or expertise to do. You knew what he was doing—but you'd do it anyway because it was Monk, and he was so devoted to the cause. I'm still doing that, 50 years later," Tarte said, laughing.

With help from jazz fans, notable Las Vegas residents and fellow musicians, Monk founded the Las Vegas Jazz Society. It was incorporated as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization (EIN 88-0281671) on April 22, 1975.

The 10-member board of directors included Monk, Jay Cameron, Frank



Gagliardi, Ken Joy, John Lindner, Sari Phillips, Tom Severns, Dan Skea, Tarte and John Unrue.

*Above: From Left: Monk, Judy Tarte, Unknown, Unknown, Count Basie, Larry Ridley. Photo by Ed Boyer*

Under Monk's leadership, the organization thrived. His motto was "Think Jazz," which was essentially his life. He petitioned for May to be designated Jazz Month in Nevada. He wrote a column titled "Think Jazz" for the Society's newsletter and hosted a late-night radio broadcast that played jazz recordings and featured interviews with jazz celebrities. Additionally, he chaired all the Society's meetings and hosted parties and jam sessions in his home.

After Monk's death in 1982, the Society went through a period of confusion.

"Many pertinent documents were lost. I remember going through boxes in Monk's closet trying to find significant paperwork from the National Arts Council and then going to the NAC with Monk's wife Amelia to address various issues that needed to be resolved," Tarte recalled.

Personnel changed, leadership changed hands and a new headquarters needed

to be established. The Society came under the umbrella of the Allied Arts Council, housed in the former Press Club building on Las Vegas Boulevard. The Society eventually formed a long-standing alliance with the Winchester Dondero Cultural Center under the guidance of devoted supporters such as Patrick Gaffey and Dan Skea.

"Over time, many venues, clubs, musicians and supporters have come and gone, but here we are 50 years later, having become a grassroots community support group of volunteers encouraging all who will listen to "Think Jazz" and support live music, still carrying on our original mission," Tarte said.

### Present Day

Jazz Appreciation Month is held every April in the United States and Canada in honor of jazz as an early American art form. The honorary month was created in 2001 by John Edward Hasse, curator of the Smithsonian's National

Museum of American History. The Reno Jazz Festival and the Las Vegas City of Lights Jazz and R&B Festival were held in April.

The Society celebrated its 50th anniversary April 25–27. Festivities began at the Nevada State Museum with a reception and the opening of a special exhibit honoring the musicians who accompanied legendary performers and helped establish Las Vegas as the "Entertainment Capital of the World." The Winchester Dondero Cultural Center and Park co-sponsored a festival featuring performances, workshops and classes conducted by more than 100 of the area's top jazz musicians.

Performers included:

- Jazz Arts Community Ensemble
- LVA small group
- Jose "Pepe" Jimenez with Groove Culture
- Sax Summit featuring Charles McNeal, Wayne DeSilva, Mat Schumer
- Bruz Brothers with Tom Hall
- Uli Geissendoerfer with Julian Tanaka
- Joe Lano
- JoBelle Yonely with Strings
- Gary Fowler
- Arcade Bops
- Festival All-Star Big Band with LV Divas: Toscha Comeaux, Naomi Mauro, Michelle Johnson
- Las Vegas Boneheads
- Piano Summit featuring Bill Zappia, Micah Smith, Tristan Selzler, Chris Cadenhead

For further information on jazz performances in Southern Nevada throughout the year, visit [lvjs.org](http://lvjs.org). Follow the Las Vegas Jazz Society on Facebook (@LVJazzSociety), Instagram (@lasvegas\_jazzsociety) and YouTube (@LasVegasJazzSociety1975).

Top Right: The Las Vegas Jazz Society's Jazz Picnic of Yore

Middle Right: Joe Williams, May 1995

Bottom Right: Photo of Ken Seiffert by Cal Snyder courtesy of the Las Vegas Jazz Society



### 2025-2026 Board of Directors

- Judy Tarte, President
- Chris Blando, Treasurer
- Cheryl Waites, Secretary
- Tom Hall, Events Committee
- Diane Ecker, Membership Coordinator
- Evelyn Chavers, Volunteer Coordinator
- Adam Schroeder, Education Committee
- Rita Pardue, Jazz Outreach Committee
- Ryan Baker, Jazz Outreach Committee
- Tristan Selzer, Jazz Outreach Committee

### Advisory Board

- Gary Anderson
- Pete Barbutti
- Dennis Bono
- Lorraine Hunt-Bono
- David Loeb
- Charles McNeal
- Thom Pastor
- Uli Geissendoerfer



## Judy Tarte, President of the Las Vegas Jazz Society

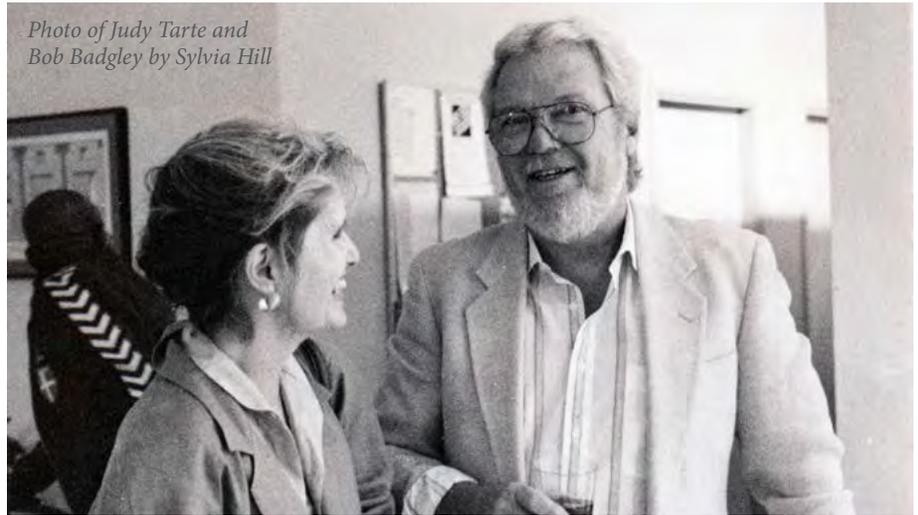
Raised in Michigan, Judy Tarte moved with her family to Las Vegas in 1969 due to her then-husband's job appointment as a faculty member at Nevada Southern University (later becoming UNLV). She retired from the Clark County School District in 1998 after 22 years as a teacher and facilitator in the Gifted and Talented program.

Tarte served in many capacities, including:

- Past president, Nevada Association for Gifted and Talented
- Member, Las Vegas Metro Chamber of Commerce
- Past president, UNLV Women's Club
- Steering committee, Friends of the Library
- Task force for Clark County School District academically talented program guidelines and curriculum
- Coordinator and committee member, Czech National Academy of Sciences at the International Psychological Conference in Prague, Czechoslovakia
- Music Division director, Allied Arts Council
- Committee member, Jazz Month panel
- Auditions panel member, CLASS ACT partnership program
- Executive coordinator, Jazz Month

Tarte obtained her Master of Education at UNLV, taught History of Rock Music and Art of the Western World at the College of Southern Nevada (including classes at the prison in Jean, Nevada) and owned a catering business, Tarte, the Happy Cooker.

She served on the original board of directors of the Las Vegas Jazz Society when it was formed under Monk Montgomery's leadership. She later served as committee chair for advertising and sales, executive coordinator, and eventually president. Tarte also served as executive coordinator of the Western Regional Federation for Jazz Conference, a coalition of jazz societies



and individuals dedicated to furthering the cause of jazz west of the Mississippi River.

Tarte's roots are in music. She began piano lessons at age 5 and loved visiting record stores in Detroit with her father, a vocal music and choir teacher and avid jazz fan. She obtained a degree in voice and piano from Alma College in Michigan.

After moving to Las Vegas in 1969, Tarte continued her informal musical education by listening to big bands and hearing road stories from musicians at Musicians' Local 369. Living 15 years with jazz saxophonist Joe Romano and her friendship with landlord jazz horn player Carl Saunders has also offered Tarte unique opportunities and insights into the world of jazz musicians and their music.





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# ABOUT TOWN

**Chic Compass Magazine Launch Party at Mae Daly's Fine Steaks & Whiskeys**

(Photography by Cashman Photo)

**Right:** (L-R) William and Louie Tandiono-Cellona

**Below:** (L-R) Stacey Gualandi, Laura Henkel, Elaine Harris



**Above:** (L-R) Shari Guest, Kiky Hutton, David Tupaz

**Left:** (L-R) Eduardo Tolentino, Paul Tolentino, David Tupaz, Robert Dolan, Louie Tandiono-Cellona, William Tandiono-Cellona



**Chic Compass Magazine  
Launch Party at Liberace  
Garage** (Photography by Cashman  
Photo)

**Above:** (L-R) Anna Billings, Dianna Barraza, Sondra Lynch, Kiky Hutton, Shari Guest, Justine Rizzo-Filipovich

**Above Right:** (L-R) Stacey Escalante, Alice Whitfield

**Right:** (L-R) Cocho Arbe, Jeff Davis, Mike Candito

**Below:** (L-R) Nate Jones, Deng Jones, Marty Morawski, Stacey Gualandi, Roxy Jones, Skai Jones

**Below Right:** Liberace Garage inside the Hollywood Cars Museum in Las Vegas, Nevada.





**41st Annual Nevada Ballet Theatre Black & White Ball** (Photography courtesy of Nevada Ballet Theatre)

**Above:** (L-R) Nancy Houssels, Debbie Gibson, Beth Barbre, Stella Roy

**Right:** (L-R) Shelley Berkley, Debbie Gibson

**Below:** Debbie Gibson receives "Woman of the Year" award



**Below:** (L-R) David Tupaz, Stacey Gualandi

**Bottom Left:** Performance during the 41st Annual Nevada Ballet Theatre Black & White Ball





**2025 Writers Guild Awards (WGA)** (Photography by Sherman Alford, Sasaphotos)

**Above:** Jon M. Chu (Director/Writer, "Wicked")

**Top Right:** Joel Kim Booster (Host of WGA Awards)

**Right:** Edwin Lee Gibson (Presenter/Actor, "The Bear")

**Bottom Right:** Ernie Hudson (Presenter/Actor)

**Below:** Sheryl Aronson & Lisa Ann Walter (Presenter/Actor, "Abbott Elementary")



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