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Constable: Suburban music venues grateful for the dead



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Elvis would be 80, but tribute artist Bill Cherry still makes a living performing songs of The King. He is part of the "Elvis Lives" show Feb. 22 at the Rosemont Theatre.

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As the outrageously flamboyant and immensely talented lead singer of Queen, Freddie Mercury probably wouldn't have been caught dead in the tidy suburb of Rosemont. But that sure looks like him on the electronic billboard promoting the "One Night

of Queen (<http://www.rosemont.com/theatre/events/one-night-of-queen/>)" concert coming up March 15 at the Rosemont Theatre (<http://www.rosemont.com/theatre/>). The show promises to pay tribute to "the greatest rock band of all time."

As snow and traffic keep me at that intersection long enough to contemplate others in any "greatest" conversation, the billboard switches to an ad touting the Feb. 21 "Let It Be (<http://www.rosemont.com/theatre/events/let-it-be/>)" show, fresh from Great Britain and starring four mopheaded guys in black suits. Now I can't stop my mind from wondering if Ringo Starr will outlive Paul McCartney to become the last living Beatle. That would be my parents' equivalent of seeing Joey Bishop become the last living member of the Rat Pack.

And that's when that same billboard tells me that "The Rat Pack is Back (<http://www.rosemont.com/theatre/events/the-rat-pack-is-back/>)" March 14 in a "swinging party of a show" that will transport the audience to a night when Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr., Dean Martin and Bishop had some fun at the Sands Hotel in Las Vegas.

Am I stuck in traffic or in a time warp? As if it can read my mind, the billboard flashes with the news, "Elvis Lives (<http://www.rosemont.com/theatre/events/elvis-lives/>)," for a show on Feb. 22. Another Elvis group performed last week at the Hemmens Cultural Center (<http://www.cityofelgin.org/index.aspx?NID=1570>) in Elgin.

"With music, it's all about memories, and that's why it works," says marketing guru Gehrig Peterson, whose Media Consultants (<http://www.mcchicago.com/index.html>) business brings all these tribute shows to Rosemont and other suburban venues. "I'm kind of the king of tribute shows."

Elvis, the King of Rock 'n' Roll, would have turned 80 last month if he hadn't died in 1977, but his memory still sells out the Rosemont Theatre every winter.

"The first time we did the show in Rosemont, it had 12 standing ovations," says Peterson, who suggests that Bill Cherry, one of the three champion Elvis impersonators in the show, might actually give a better show than the original Elvis. Peterson heaps similar praise on Gary Mullen's tribute to Queen (<http://www.garymullenandtheworks.com/tour-dates>).

"This guy looks and sounds like Freddie Mercury," Peterson says.

That people still pay money today to hear a guy pretending to be Elvis perform a 60-year-old song such as "Hound Dog" would have been the equivalent of Elvis shelling out dough in 1968 to watch a duo of Bayes-and-Norworth impersonators croon the 1908 Ziegfeld Follies' classic "Shine On, Harvest Moon" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9sGGE43xjGo>).

"It's a different phenomenon," notes Peterson, 57, who says today's middle-age customers long to hear music from their youth. "It's all about fun. All the time is erased, and they go back to being teenagers."

The Metropolis Performing Arts Centre

(<http://www.metropolisarts.com/>) in Arlington Heights will bring us a Patsy Cline

(<https://tickets.metropolisarts.com/shows/patsy%20cline-%20she's%20got%20you/info>) show on Feb. 5, a Reely Dan

(https://tickets.metropolisarts.com/events/reely%20dan/2015-2-27_20.00/assigned) tribute to Steely Dan on Feb. 27, and a

Start Me Up

(<https://tickets.metropolisarts.com/calendar/2015-3-7>)

homage to The Rolling Stones on March 7.

"Nowadays, there are a lot of bands that do things that are more tribute bands," says Phil Chihoski, director of marketing for the Rosemont Theatre. Shows featuring people impersonating long-gone stars draw crowds, Chihoski says, and are the only option for fans who "can't see the real thing."

The members of ABBA are still alive, but they won't be participating in the March 13 Rosemont show. "The Music of ABBA (<http://www.rosemont.com/theatre/events/the-music-of-abba-featuring-arrival/>)" features the music, but the parts of ABBA are performed by a Swedish group called Arrival.

Some tribute bands actually compete against the real thing. Bruce In The USA sells out concerts even though Bruce Springsteen still draws rave reviews on tour. If you can't afford Springsteen or his concert sells out, Bruce In The USA is the next best thing, Peterson says.

Purple Reign and Erotic City do Prince tributes. The music of Justin Timberlake gave birth to The Timberfakes. Think Floyd makes a living off Pink Floyd. The Blues Brothers, a group that started as a comedy sketch on "Saturday Night Live," spawned a world where The Bluz Brothers compete with The Blooze Brothers.

The Allman Brothers Band gave rise to The Almost Brothers Band. AC-DC is responsible for AD-HD. Black Sabbath inspired cover bands such as The Blizzard of Ozz or Crazy Train.

Guns 4 Roses honors Guns N' Roses. The all-female Ramones tribute band calls itself The Hormones, much like the all-female

Led Zeppelin knockoff calls itself Lez Zeppelin, which is different from the reggae version that calls itself Dread Zeppelin.

In a generation, the suburbs might feature tribute shows such as "Taylor Swift: 1989 Again," "Hozier: Return to Church," "Meghan Trainor: Still A Bit About the Bass" and "Big Sean: We Can Say 'Effing With You' Now."

"I don't know who's got those kind of legs," Peterson says. "It's hard to say who's going to endure."

But for now, tribute bands are thriving.

"If you added up all the shows done by Beatles tribute bands," Peterson says, "they've probably sold more tickets than The Beatles did."

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