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MIKE WEATHERFORD

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MIKE WEATHERFORD: Saxe adds theater at Miracle Mile Shops

A venue that once competed with producer David Saxe's V Theater will soon carry his name at the Miracle Mile Shops at Planet Hollywood.

The Saxe Theater will be the new name for the 435-seater formerly operated by magician Steve Wyrick, who surrendered it to the mall in a December foreclosure. Saxe will now oversee both venues, and hopes to have the new venue up and running by June 1.

Saxe has "a very proven track record with us with the V Theater," says Russ Joyner, the mall's general manager. "While we had a lot of considerations to go through, at the end of the day the right person to do this was right in our backyard."

While the twin operation offers economies of scale, Saxe says few ticket buyers should pick up on the mutual ownership. "The game plan is for it to have its own identity, its own shows, marketed separately."

At this point, Saxe says he would rather produce new titles or cut landlord deals with new performers than move any shows over from the three show spaces inside the V, which runs as many as 17 performances of 10 titles per day. He is considering a flagship title based on the history of Las Vegas entertainment.

"Never say never, but right now I don't want to mess with success" at the original theater, he says. However, "the beauty of running a theater (as a neutral venue) is that if I had a show with a short shelf life we could change it, as opposed to an entertainer buying a theater and putting their name on it. If they don't succeed, what do they do?"

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Saxe protested Wyrick's lease with mall officials in 2005. Wyrick opened two years later, but neither his show nor a succession of tenant productions ever caught up to the investment. The theater finally closed in December.

Saxe and Joyner doubt Wyrick's failure carries any stigma for the location. Based on the number of inquiries, neither do prospective producers or performers looking at the space. "Everyone's come out of the woodwork," Saxe says. "You can't say, 'Oh it doesn't work because of the mall, or the economy,' when right down the hall there's a line (for the V Theater)."

The big awards will be handed out on April 18 from the MGM Grand Garden, but the "industry awards" for the Academy of Country Music already singled out Green Valley Ranch for Casino of the Year. Las Vegas venues were slighted the past two years, though Boulder Station won the title three times between 1999 and 2003. ...

"Peepshow" co-producer Scott Zeiger says absence made Las Vegas grow fonder for the girlie show that took an eight-week break during the winter, a time in which cost-cutting adjustments were made backstage at Planet Hollywood.

"We expected to take a little time to ramp back up," Zeiger says, but when the revue reopened last month, "we kind of beat our expectations."

He gives much of the credit to star Holly Madison: "She's become quite the little star in Las Vegas, the darling of the town." "Peepshow" will add an extra show each Saturday this summer after Madison's new reality show arrives on E! cable network Memorial Day Weekend.

That means any roommate productions probably will be short-term engagements such as the recent "Donny Clay" experiment with Jason Alexander, "unless we found the quintessential, perfect show" that doesn't cannibalize the "Peepshow" demographic, he says.

"America's Got Talent" is still welcome if its producers decide to bring it back, Zeiger says. Alexander might be a better fit in the smaller theater at The Venetian if he comes back, but the Planet Hollywood theater was a good place to test the show because Zeiger's company also operates the theater. ...

Finally, a reminder that sometimes it's better not to be first. The Las Vegas Hilton is on the tour schedule for an "Unplugged"-style pairing of classic prog-rockers Keith Emerson and Greg Lake on April 24. Emerson, Lake & Palmer is one group of its era that hasn't succumbed to the oldies circuit. Part of that may be because of its members' famed inability to stomach one another.

The duo's opening night in Ohio -- and two dates after that -- was canceled after ticket holders waited in their seats 45 minutes. On his Web site, the 65-year-old Emerson's apology explained: "The production we had hoped to put on was lacking in its musical and technical preparations. I was too distraught and embarrassed" to perform.

Lake's Web site interpreted that as, "Keith is not the first performer to have experienced stage fright, and my heart goes out to him."

Previous reunions also were hindered by Lake's diminished vocal capacity. The duo tried again on Monday in

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Maryland, but on Tuesday, Lake's Web site reported the singer's laryngitis "dramatically worsened overnight to the point where he has no voice" and was ordered not to sing until today.

Fans who suspected this sounded too good to be true might want to have backup plans on the 24th.

Contact reporter Mike Weatherford at mweatherford@reviewjournal.com or 702-383-0288.

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