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Today: June 22, 2007 at 8:43:35 PDT

Performer home in Vegas, wants to work here again

Ginger Rogers helped shape Lisa Donovan's career

By Jerry Fink <jerry@lasvegassun.com>

Las Vegas Sun

Lisa Donovan is among the growing population of talented Las Vegas performers who have better luck finding work outside the city.

That's Lisa, with an "s."

"I've lived here a year now," she says. "I moved to Las Vegas for the work and I've been working steadily ever since - just not here. So yes, I have been working. I just got back from Tahiti."

She went to Tahiti to board a ship, where she performed for several weeks.

"I've been doing a lot of sailing lately," Donovan says.

She's had gigs on ships sailing from Fort Lauderdale, Fla. ; San Francisco ; and other ports around the country.

Local fans don't have to worry about getting their sea legs if they would like to see Donovan perform.

On Saturday she'll be at the Starbright Theatre in Summerlin.

"I would love to have more work here," Donovan says. "I'd love to have my own room."

The vocalist, comedian and dancer is a New York native. But she performed in Las Vegas often in the past, opening for such legends as George Burns and Donald O'Connor at Caesars Palace. Her last major Las Vegas performance

IF YOU GO

Who: Lisa Donovan

When: 7:30 p.m. Saturday

Where: Starbright Theatre, Summerlin

Tickets: \$12 for Sun City residents, \$15 for nonresidents; 240-1301



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was in 1998, when she opened for Don Rickles at the Desert Inn.

Donovan first worked at the DI in 1994, alternating performances with Keely Smith and Sam Butera. She was hired for a three-week engagement that stretched into seven months.

She is perhaps best known for her part in the syndicated game show "Face the Music" (originally airing in 1980). Fans of the show will recognize her as the vocalist who sang all of the songs that were clues to the question's solution.

Donovan also appeared in the 1985 revival of the musical "Babes in Arms," directed by Ginger Rogers. "It was her directing debut," Donovan said of the late actress and Fred Astaire's well-known dancing partner. "She was terrific. Everything she ever learned in acting onstage, in movies and concerts - it all went into her directing skills, and I was the beneficiary."

Donovan says she first met Rogers at a Screen Actors Guild function in Los Angeles in the late 1970s.

"Ginger was there as one of the original members of the guild, and I was there as one of the new ones," Donovan says. "She was so lovely." The pair hit it off and when Donovan auditioned for "Babes in Arms," she was cast.

"I actually wore one of Ginger's gowns in the show, and she allowed me to wear Ruby Keeler's shoes," Donovan says.

"She was the most beautiful person. She had those light blue eyes. I looked at her and I thought I was looking at an angel. To work with her was thrilling and educational. She was so generous and wonderful."

She and Donovan have something else in common, both have had their portraits painted by Edna Hibel, who's 90 years old.

"I was working on a cruise ship when I met Edna 12 years ago. I met Phyllis McGuire on the same cruise," Donovan says. "Edna was lecturing on the ship and was on her way to one of her many art shows. I believe she had an exhibition in Tokyo. She asked me to sit for her, and I was thrilled."

Years earlier Hibel had painted Rogers. During the cruise Hibel and Donovan discovered they had a mutual friend in Rogers.

"By the end of the cruise the portrait she was painting of me was well under way," Donovan says.

The painting was finished at the artist's studio/gallery in Palm Beach, Fla. , and now hangs over Donovan's fireplace in Las Vegas.

When Rogers died in 1995, her portrait was returned to the gallery and Hibel sent Donovan a print. "It was huge, floor to ceiling," Donovan says of the painting of Rogers dressed as Dolly from the musical "Hello, Dolly." "Edna sent me the print because she knew Ginger and I were friends."

Jerry Fink can be reached at 259-4058 or at jerry@lasvegassun.com.

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