

I Stayed Up With Jerry

Our man wings to Vegas for a Love Happening

BY BILL BAROL

LAS VEGAS, Sept. 6, 5:50 p.m. PDT: The slogans of the Jerry Lewis Labor Day Telethon for Muscular Dystrophy are "Stay Up With Jerry and Watch the Stars Come Out" and "Miss a Little and You Miss a Lot." All right, then. This year I intend to sit through the telethon's entire 21½ hours, missing not one minute.

My plan, a kind of Vegas anthropology, is to consider the telethon solely as a show-business phenomenon. It's not my intention to make light of the cause, which is deadly serious, or the Muscular Dystrophy Association, which is beyond reproach. It's the show itself I'm interested in. Mix pathos and bathos, fold in the cloying clubbiness of old-time showbiz, add a few stars and a bunch of hacks and retreads, season with fatigue and you have the kind of event that could only happen in Las Vegas.

It's 10 minutes to air. The 25,000-square-foot Caesars Palace Sports Pavilion is filling up; the last few guests, many of them in black tie, are being shown to their seats by white-uniformed midshipmen from the Merchant Marine Academy.

6 p.m.: Airtime. Jerry enters to a standing ovation. He introduces Casey Kasem and Julius LaRosa, and then Sammy Davis Jr., "who will always be here for whatever I need him to do, and tonight that's let me love him." Sammy: "This year, man, is gonna be the best. I love you." We're cooking now. Jerry brings out Ed McMahon, "the giant who has stood beside me, a marvelous force." Ed kisses Jerry. "You ready to go?" he asks. "Let's do it."

6:41 p.m.: "This gentleman is durable," Jerry says, "because he only does quality. And he only does quality because that's the way he thinks. And he's a super-talent. Mr. Paul Anka." Paul, who is looking more and more like Frank Sinatra as the years go by, sings a specialty version of "My Way": "When Jerry phoned / I swear I groaned . . . / I'm working the Nugget / But Jerry said / Alive or dead / So I'll do it his way . . ." The "Applause" sign flashes on.



PHOTOS BY LESTER SLOAN—NEWSWEEK

'Lay it on me, man': With Sammy Davis



Standing ovation. I feel like I've had a very fast, very vigorous massage.

7:15 p.m.: The first break. The national telethon will go off for 15 minutes every hour and local stations will fill the time; in Las Vegas, a new audience is brought in.

7:51 p.m.: Jerry reintroduces "my main man, Sammy Davis Jr." Sammy, dedicating his performance to a fellow performer stricken with MS: "I know some people

think, it ain't gonna happen to the entertainers. It can't happen to them."

8:43 p.m.: Frank Sinatra, from Atlantic City, sings "What Now My Love" and "New York, New York." It's kind of sad to see. Nobody loves his old Frank Sinatra records more than I do, but tonight Sinatra is running on fumes and his mind is elsewhere—"I am about to be a brand new start of it in old New York," he sings. The Vegas crowd loves him anyway, giving him the biggest hand of the night when he's through.

9:30 p.m.: "Hiyo," Ed says.

10:03 p.m.: Sammy's back. He has

changed from a tux into a short-waisted dark-gray suit. For those of you who like to keep track of this sort of thing, he is also wearing six big rings and something that looks like the astro-sign medallions the Swinging Czechoslovak Brothers used to wear on "Saturday Night Live."

10:30 p.m.: "Hiyo," Ed says. Two very nice young ladies have sneaked me in some milk and McDonald's Chocolate Chip cookies from the commissary, a strict violation of telethon rules. I stash them in my bag. The place is crawling with midshipmen.

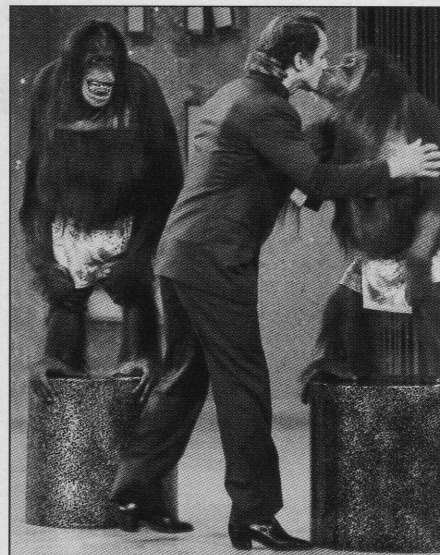
10:45 p.m.: The Coasters, or three guys billing themselves as such. None of them, except maybe the one in the 11-foot Afro toupee, looks old enough to be a Coaster. And none seems able to stay on key. This is depressing.

11:30 p.m.: Ed: "Hiyo." Jerry: "Our next guests have brought new dimensions to dance music as well as to rock," Jerry says, introducing Oingo Boingo. Oingo Boingo is terrible. The audience stares back at them in frank bafflement, wondering almost audibly why they couldn't have gotten Frank or Sammy or even the Coasters in their segment.

11:50 p.m.: Jerry: "Here's a lady who really walks with style and who really sings with style, and we're very glad to have her walk and sing right here—Miss Susan Anton." "We're gonna do for you here in this midnight hour," Susan says dramatically, the band vamping behind her, "the blues." Well, sure. When I think of that great Afro-American art form, Susan Anton's the first person I think of.

12:30 a.m.: Jerry's back. He introduces Mr. T, and as the two chat Casey Kasem slips behind the cohort's podium. Problematic. Casey Kasem, as far as I know, has no signature saying comparable to Ed's "Hiyo." What's Casey Kasem going to do to get the crowd up at the start of the hour, count down the Top 40? I am beginning to understand the concept of lower back pain.

Now Mr. T climbs up into the audience. Jerry tells him to sit, because he's going to introduce "one of the brothers—Sammy Davis Jr." Sammy is in midnight blue this trip. Jerry: "You got something for me? Lay it on me, man." Jerry and Sammy may be the only two people left in America who talk this way. It's "Begin the Beguine," then "Candy Man." When the songs end, Sammy and Mr. T meet at center stage. "If I can't sing like you," Mr. T says, "at least I can come out and shake the people hand." "You are a classy man," Sammy tells him. "I mean that." Mr. T exits to a huge ovation, leaving me to try to figure out just what it is he does for a



PHOTOS BY LESTER SLOAN—NEWSWEEK

That's entertainment: *The incomparable Charo, Bobby Berosini and his Orangutans*

living. Whatever it is, he has apparently done it here tonight.

2:19 a.m.: The crew is setting up a bunch of multicolored sawhorses. I have this terrible fear there's a dog act coming up. Judging from the size of the sawhorses, though, which are a good three feet high, I'd say they'd have to be *big dogs*—Newfoundlands, say, or Black Labradors. Unlikely. As far as I know there are no performing Newfoundlands, even in Las Vegas.

2:24 a.m.: Worse than I thought. A bunch of clean-cut fresh-faced kids in multicolored satin warm-up jackets have started to gather around the multicolored barricades. Unless this is a high-school drill team salute to "Les Misérables," which I doubt, I'd say they're some kind of professionally clean-cut fresh-faced singing and dancing troupe.

2:33 a.m.: The clean-cut fresh-faced kids are apparently something called The Young Americans, introduced by Jerry as

"ambassadors of good will," which is never a good sign, and they are lip-syncing some sort of salute to the '50s. "Oh yeah!" the Young Americans shout, and it's over. "Oh yeah!!" Jerry shouts. "And they'll be back!"

2:46 a.m.: Jerry brings on Jerry Vale, describing him as "about the best at what he does," which praise sounds fainter every time I think of it, but never mind. You know what? *Jerry Vale has the most amazing hair.* It's the color of a platinum watch, and swept up high on one side like meringue. I cannot take my eyes off Jerry Vale's hair.

4:05 a.m.: "The young people are always there. You can always count on 'em."—Jerry.

5:29 a.m.: I think I lost my keys.

5:41 a.m.: Jerry thanks Fuji Photo Film in a zany Japanese dialect.

6:31 a.m.: Jerry: "Many people tell you the age of the romantic crooner is dead. Not as long as this man is in demand—Mr. Don Cherry!" I perk up for a second, thinking it's the jazz cornetist, although I can't imagine why Jerry would introduce him as a "romantic crooner." (Doesn't throw me, though. The advantage of being this tired is that you can laugh at cognitive dissonance. "Two contradictory ideas?" your weary mind says. "Hey, come on in, the water's fine!") But no. This Don Cherry is a lounge singer who belts out "You Always Hurt the One You Love."

8:58 a.m.: A tiny kid from "Star Search" sings "Over the Rainbow." I wish I could find something kind to say about this kid. I wish I could find my keys. Standing O #11.

9:24 a.m.: The people coming



'A giant, a marvelous force': *Lewis and Big Ed McMahon*

in now make me sick. I want to punch each and every one of them. I can tell, they think they're better than me just because they slept last night.

9:52 a.m.: Jerry introduces Bobby Berosini and his Orangutans. The orangutans grab Bobby's butt. He tries to slap them, but they slap him first. He shoots one with a toy gun and it falls down. Bobby's a little confused, apparently—"Something new for you here tonight," he says.

10:31 a.m.: Jerry brings out two jugglers. My mind is an utter, peaceful blank.

11:52 a.m.: The toteboard turns over to \$22,301,614. "Yeah!" Jerry cries. "Go, and do! With the thing!"

11:53 a.m.: Casey mentions "La Bamba" and Jerry starts babbling in mock Spanish. Casey enunciates, as if he has learned each syllable phonetically: "Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha, ha, ha! To get serious for a moment . . ." A gasp goes up from the audience as Charo and her dancers enter. I don't believe I have ever seen anything like the outfit Charo is wearing. It is pink, with sequins and rainbow-colored ruffled sleeves. "The kick, the joy," Jerry intones, "of listening to the one and only, the incomparable Charo." Charo sings Madonna's "La Isla Bonita," and I'm too stunned by her sleeves to absorb the full import of this for a moment. When I regain my composure I realize that what I'm witnessing is a cross-cultural love thing, a true sharing, a caring and a giving, and I feel blessed. Then I black out, my head hitting the seat in front of me with a nasty *whack*.

12:31 p.m.: "How can you not go out cooking," Jerry asks rhetorically, "when you present a guest like this next young lady—Miss Lola Falana!" To some sort of big-beat pseudo-gospel thing, Lola demands that "everybody put your hands together," and everybody does. In Vegas this phrase apparently carries the same persuasive power as a New Jersey cement contractor's suggestion that you might like to consider buying his product. Standing O #96.

1:55 p.m.: Time has no meaning. The tote goes over last year's total, to \$34,103,874. Jerry weeps.

2:31 p.m.: Sammy Davis Fashion Update: a tux with loosened bow tie. "To be this big a cog in this machine," he says, "this Love Happening . . ." Now he's singing "What Kind of Fool Am I?" What a blockbuster. How I wish I could be here for it.

3:14 p.m.: Jerry sits alone at center stage. The toteboard reads \$39,021,723. "It's been a long day," Jerry says quietly. "A good day. A good day for mankind. My *God*, what a good day for mankind." He's singing "You'll Never Walk Alone." The big, the final Standing Ovation, and he's gone. I study him as he walks off. Jerry Lewis looks much better than I do. As the fog swirls in around me I realize why this is: he hasn't spent the last 22 hours watching Jerry Lewis. I'm going to bed.