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COVER



SIR TOM JONES

Performing in Abu Dhabi on Thursday, the living legend tells us about heeding Frank Sinatra's advice and why he's fond of Kylie Minogue

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Although his name will forever be entwined with Las Vegas, Jones has been living in Los Angeles with his wife Melinda for nearly 40 years. The singer's early Stateside flirtations irked some of his more fiery fellow Welsh nationals, although as he once exclaimed, "They didn't like it when I moved to London!"

JANUARY 2015 WILL mark 50 years since Tom Jones first unleashed his booming baritone voice on the world with *It's Not Unusual*, a pop classic that mixed maudlin lyrics with a '60s swing.

The rug-chested Welshman went on to become an entertainment phenomenon – amassing 100 million record sales, a net worth of roughly \$200 million and a 2006 knighthood for services to music. Oh, and he's the favourite singer of both Marge Simpson and Carlton Banks, lest we forget.

Jones, 73, is personable, energised and extraordinarily upbeat as he chats to us over the phone from the UK.

"What can I grumble about?" he asks. "When people are loving what you do, it's like a massive pat on the back and you think, 'My goodness, what can be better than this?' That never ceases to amaze me."

Last year, Jones released his 40th studio album *Praise & Blame* – providing bluesy reinterpretations of songs by the likes of Leonard Cohen and Bob Dylan – to warm critical response and a UK top 10 peak.

The performer has also familiarised himself to a younger

'I HAVEN'T LOST THE FIRE'



Vegas buddies: Hanging out with Elvis and Priscilla Presley in 1971

audience as a coach on TV singing show *The Voice UK* alongside Will.i.am, Jessie J and The Script frontman Danny Donoghue.

While the latter two acts left the show after the second series wrapped in June, earlier this week Kylie Minogue was announced as one of its new faces.

"She's as good as any entertainer today and she'll make a great coach," says Jones about the Australian pop princess. "She's had highlights and low points like we all do, and she can explain to younger singers how to get through it."

"It's not all highs, and you shouldn't get disappointed if you do hit a low patch. Just keep being true to yourself, and if you have the talent you'll rise again."

VEGAS BOUND

Jones' own ascent to fame came in his early 20s, when music impresario Gordon Mills saw him performing with the band Tommy Scott and the Senators at a working men's club in rural Wales.

It was Mills who also provided the singer – born Thomas Woodward in 1940 – with his new stage name, trading off the runaway success of 1963 comedy film *Tom Jones* about a loveable lothario (played by Albert Finney).

While heartthrobs of the day like The Beatles tended to be boyish and long-haired, Jones' beefy frame and curly locks provided a more macho alternative for teenyboppers' affections.

Jones quickly rose to stardom in the United States as well as his homeland thanks to tracks like *What's New Pussycat?* and *Delilah*, before decamping to Las Vegas in the late 1960s. He became a staple entertainer in Sin City over the years – befriending fellow stars like Elvis Presley and Frank Sinatra

while sending female fans into a frenzy both on and offstage.

"Frank gave me some good advice," says Jones, who would perform two shows per night in the town's top hotels. "He thought I was singing a little too hard in the beginning, so he told me, 'You don't have to push everything. Don't abuse your voice – treat it as an instrument.'"

Although he has many happy memories of his friendship with Elvis, Jones was also forced to witness the mental and physical decline of 'The King' firsthand, leading to his eventual death in 1977 aged just 42.

"I remember asking Elvis' bodyguards, the guys that grew up with him, 'How did this (his deterioration) happen?' They said, 'Tom, you can't protect a person from himself all the time. It was a terrible shame.'"

And what prevented Jones from following a similarly self-destructive path?

"I've just been lucky," he replies. "I've never fallen into drugs, even though I started in the '60s and saw a lot of people getting involved. Doing drugs always seemed destructive to me, and when I go onstage I want to be clear-headed."

'ANYTHING COULD HAPPEN'

While he has collaborated freely in recent years with everyone from Jack White to Hugh Laurie, Jones is yet to record the sequel to 1999's *Reload*, which saw him perform cover duets with popular acts from the day such as Stereophonics (*Mama Told Me Not to Come*) and The Cardigans (*Burning Down the House*).

Thanks to its cross-generational appeal, the LP became his most successful ever in the UK, generating quadruple-platinum sales and topping the charts.



Sir Tom has familiarised himself with younger audiences by serving as a coach on TV singing show *The Voice UK*

Although a follow-up album fell through once before due to record company wranglings, Jones is still open to the prospect.

"It never happened, but that's not to say that it won't," he insists. "It would be great to sing with Adele, she's got a fantastic voice. Anything could happen, but I'm all for it."

In the meantime, Jones is doing everything possible to ensure his future remains bright and busy.

"I haven't lost the fire, it's still there," he says. "I'm in my 70s but I still walk every day and get in the gym when I can. I try to take care of myself because I love what I do so much, I want it to last forever."

"And I'll do whatever I can to make that happen."

EVENT DETAILS

WHAT

Sir Tom Jones
live in concert

WHERE

Du Forum, Yas
Island, Abu Dhabi

WHEN

Thursday,
September 19

COST

Dhs300 (general admission)
Dhs450 (golden circle)

TICKETS

Go to ticketmaster.ae
or call 800 86823

For more info: See www.thinkflash.ae