

FRISKIE IS KING



'If you're sitting in the audience and watching this kid, he is Elvis,' says retired impresario Hugh Pickett of Randy Friskie, pictured above.

Elvis impersonator, among North America's best, rocks the Royal on Friday

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BOB HOPE WAS ONCE flabbergasted by an Elvis Presley impersonator in Victoria.

Or so the story goes.

Retired impresario Hugh Pickett says he once took Hope to check out the Royal Theatre in about 1990. At the time, the comedian was interested in doing live shows in Victoria and Vancouver, and wanted to examine available venues.

At the theatre, Hope happened to catch Abbotsford Elvis impersonator Randy Friskie doing a sound-check for his concert there that night.

"Bob Hope couldn't believe it," said 87-year-old Pickett, a legendary show-biz figure who ran Famous Artists booking agency out of Vancouver until the mid-1980s. "He stood there for half an hour and watched him perform. He said, 'That's uncanny.'"

Friskie — who returns to the Royal Theatre on Friday — recalls the incident well. He wasn't aware of Hope was watching him at the time. The pair didn't meet then, but were introduced later.

"He said, 'I've never seen anybody do what you do the way you're doing it,'" said Friskie.

Friskie, 37, is widely considered one of North America's leading Elvis impersonators. And there's major-league time competition for what may seem a dubious honour. One Internet report estimates there are now "approximately 35,000" faux Elvises world-wide. They include "El Vez," a Mexican Elvis with a pencil-mustache, a Virginia-based cardiothoracic surgeon and a 10-man skydiving team from Las Vegas called "The Flying Elvi".

Some are great, some are good, and some are simply awful. But Pickett believes Friskie is the best. And he speaks from experience, since he was the man who brought Elvis Presley to Empire Stadium in 1957 for his first-ever Canadian appearance.

"If you're sitting in the audience and watching this kid, he *is* Elvis," said Pickett. "He has the same charisma that Elvis had. The people all like him and want him to be good."

Friskie, performing with his nine-piece show band, will portray Elvis through three decades: the '50s, '60s, and '70s. His 10-year-old daughter, Cassandra, will appear during the finale to sing, *Don't Cry Daddy*. The show travels to Nanaimo's Port Theatre on Saturday night.

Friskie may or may not be the best Elvis impersonator around. But one thing for sure, the audience at the Royal Theatre will hear more of the King's music than the Empire Stadium audience did in '57.

Pickett says the real Elvis sang only one-and-a-half songs before the promoters pulled the plug. Maniacal fans rushed the stage, ending the concert. Elvis was whisked off into a waiting limo to the Georgia Hotel. Meanwhile, 25 musicians still on stage were left to pack up their instruments and make their escapes.

"It was chaos," Pickett recalled.