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ELVIS IMPERSONATOR

Next best thing to the King

■ **Veteran concert promoter says Randy Friskie's show a dead-on tribute to Elvis Presley**

By J.P. SQUIRE

The Okanagan Sunday

When Randy 'Elvis' Friskie brings his nine-piece Las Vegas show band to Kelowna, one of his biggest fans wants to be there.

Friskie began singing Elvis songs at the age of 17 after forming a band with his brother.

Decades later, he is hailed as the world's best Elvis impersonator.

"I don't have any interest in Elvis impersonators, but you'd swear it was Elvis," says Hugh Pickett, a retired



Friskie

Vancouver concert promoter who earned the nickname Mr. Showbiz.

"The question is: can I get to Kelowna for his show? I love Kelowna. I've spent a lot of time in Kelowna. I love the park, the lake, the hotel (The Grand). We've flown to Kelowna just for the weekend."

Pickett booked a veritable who's who of entertainment in Vancouver from the 1950s to the 1980s, and also brought a number of shows to Kelowna and Calgary.

He met Elvis Presley when he was "a nice young man" at the beginning of his career.

Pickett brought Elvis to Empire Stadium in Vancouver in 1967 and remembers his four young bodyguards in

Stadium in Vancouver in 1957 and remembers his four young bodyguards in particular.

At one point, Elvis pulled him aside and whispered: "You know, I don't need bodyguards, but I went to school with these guys and they needed the work."

"He slowly deteriorated into a fat horrible mess," says Pickett.

"I couldn't sit through his Las Vegas show in the late '70s. He was soaking wet, wiping himself off with towels and then throwing them into the audience. He didn't know what he was doing. I had to get out."

He remembers the first time he saw Friskie in Victoria in the 1960s.

Bob Hope, a personal friend, wanted to inspect theatres in Vancouver and Victoria, and perhaps perform there.

The two stood at the back of Royal Theatre in Victoria and saw part of Friskie's show.

"Bob was thrilled to death. Randy's as close to Elvis as you can get although he's a bit heavier," says Pickett.

"Randy's not only the best, he's the reincarnation of Elvis."

Ten years later, Pickett saw Friskie again.

"It was the first time I actually sat down and saw his show. He's got it perfected. He doesn't kid with the audience. He believes he's Elvis at the time he's doing it. He really gets the audience going. If you're imitating someone, that's how it has to be done."

Friskie will perform at 2:30 and 7 p.m. on Feb. 18 at Kelowna Community Theatre. Tickets are available through Towne Ticket Centre outlets or charge by phone at 860-1470.