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Don't be cruel

ELVIS 'TRIBUTE ARTIST' IS THE REAL THING

By MIKE ROSS
Staff Writer

People who take Elvis Presley too seriously give me the creeps. You know the type: They speak of the King in hushed tones, light candles on his birthday and actually get angry when you say things like "Elvis has left the building."

Geez, you'd think we were dissing Jesus or something.

How refreshing that one of Canada's top Elvis impersonators has a sense of humour about his chosen profession. Randy "Elvis" Friske has heard all the jokes - and they don't bother him. What bothers him is when people take their Elvis worship a little too far.

"I think if anybody gets too caught up in anything, it can be dangerous," he says.

That said, it's comeback-special time. Friske returns to sing Elvis songs in Edmonton for the first time since 1992. He performs tomorrow at the Myer Horowitz Theatre. The Randy "Elvis" Friske 2001 Odyssey Tour promises to be a big ol' Elvis revue with a nine-piece band, three backup singers and guests that include Friske's 11-year-old daughter Cassandra doing a Patsy Cline tribute.

Friske wants to make one thing perfectly

clear: When he's on stage, he's not pretending. He actually *is* Elvis. He may talk and look and sing like Elvis, but it's just a tribute. This sets him apart from a lot of Elvises, or "Elvi," out there.

"Some people think they have to transform themselves into Elvis to do a tribute and I think that's crazy," Friske says. "As long as there's a little bit of me that shines through and the people feel they can relate to that better, then it's a little bit more real."

After appearing in the *Elvis! Elvis!* show, Friske got his big break at Expo '86 in Vancouver. He did such a good job that organizers hired him to do a solo gig. That went so well that Vegas beckoned.

Aside from the odd break to pursue his country music career, Friske's been doing

Elvis ever since - not to worship Elvis but to honour his memory. After all, Elvis wasn't a god. He was a man - "a good man who loved to perform," Friske says.

"That's what he was born to. That's how I feel, too. I think that's what we have in common."

The Randy "Elvis" Friske 2001 Odyssey Tour runs tomorrow at 3 p.m. and 8 p.m. Tickets at Ticketmaster (451-8000).



Randy 'Elvis' Friske