

CELEBRITY PLAYGROUND

BY MICHAEL SHULMAN

A DAME IN THE DESERT

Dame Edna Everage aims her wry, deliciously wicked wit at Sin City audiences with a 16-show limited engagement at Luxor Las Vegas

Hot on the tail of her critically acclaimed Broadway show *Dame Edna: Back With A Vengeance!*, the incomparable international housewife, megastar and style guru is coming to Vegas. Having specially tailored her extravaganza for Sin City audiences, *Dame Edna: A Dame in the Desert* begins a 16-show limited engagement at the Luxor Las Vegas on December 18th.

VEGAS: To what do you owe your acclaim as 'the most popular and gifted woman in the world today'?

DAME EDNA: I am the most popular and gifted woman in the world today according to a very recent survey conducted globally. I am proud to say that I am adored in countries that don't even speak English or American. Recently on Halloween, deep in the jungles of the Amazon, the Pygmies paid me a wonderful tribute by dressing up as me. There were very few witches or zombies, but you only had to glance down to see hundreds of little purple hairdos and rhinestone glasses.

You've received two Tony Awards—the first in 2000 as a special award for *Dame Edna: The Royal Tour*, and again this year for Special Theatrical Event—as well as awards from the Outer Critics Circle, the Golden Rose of Montreux, a British Academy Award nomination, a gold at the New York Film and TV Festival, and first prize at the San Francisco Film Festival. Which do you hold to be most dear?

I do not treasure awards. It's nice to get those ugly little statues, but the award I cherish most is the stomping and cheering of a satisfied theater audi-



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ence, and that's the award I get every single night of my life.

As a member of that exclusive group known as the jet set, which of your myriad homes do you most enjoy [i.e., where do you hang your Treacys]?

I have lost track of the homes that I own, and at least two of them have been turned into Edna museums, which are enjoyed by Japanese (and very soon Iraqi) tourists. I suppose I like my home in Malibu the most because I am not far from my old flame, Larry Hagman; and since I don't swim, it's nice to be close to water that is too dirty and unattractive to swim in.

Your brilliant talk show *The Dame Edna Experience* featured many A-list guests, including Robin Williams, Liza Minnelli, Sean Connery, Jane Fonda, Charlton Heston and Mel Gibson. Who were your favorites, and if the sky was the limit, who would be your dream guests? I'm picturing a trio of Dame Shirley Bassey, Dolly Parton and Boy George, with perhaps Vivienne Westwood thrown in.

My favorite guests were Charlton Heston and Julio Iglesias—who revealed an unexpected sense of humor. I have had Vivienne Westwood on my show already and I adore her, but Boy George isn't such a good idea since I doubt if I will be able to get the cameras in the cramped accommodation the poor darling will soon occupy.

Which television series or hosts (British, Australian or American) most influenced your style of hosting?

My talk show (now available on DVD) was cutting-edge and inspired by nobody. However, it influenced many other shows, and my habit of sometimes leaving the studio was copied by David Letterman and many others.

Which of these can we find in your music collection: Led Zepelin, Tom Jones, Public Enemy, Shirley Bassey, James Brown, Kylie Minogue, 50 Cent or 'N Sync?

Kylie Minogue is my favorite singer and, incidentally, my goddaughter. I also quite like 50 Cent in very small doses when I am working out.

Who were your inspirations when you were blossoming from Dame-selle into Damehood?

I suppose the woman who inspired me most as I moved from housewife to superstar was my old friend the Queen of England. She had a lovely way of

talking to ordinary people similar to my own—though her clothes aren't nearly as nice as mine.

Your page-turner of an autobiography, *My Gorgeous Life*, is being adapted for the screen. Given your druthers, whom would you cast to portray you throughout the various parts of your life?

When my autobiography, *My Gorgeous Life*, becomes a film, I want Claire Danes to play me as a teenager, Nicole Kidman to play me as a young

drivers are clean and know where they are going—taxi.

When did you first feel drawn to the stage? When I was a very small girl, I was in a little play at Sunday school playing the part of Jesus' friend Mary Magdalene. I got all the laughs.

What is it about performing for an audience that entices a woman of your vast means to continue touring?

I do these shows for my audience. I don't need the money, but they desperately need their vitamin E (for Edna).

What made you decide to perform at the Luxor—let alone in Las Vegas?

I always felt sorry for Las Vegas, stuck out in the middle of the desert with little or no entertainment. I feel a bit like a missionary bringing my message to a heathen land. It's a homecoming, too, for me at the Luxor, because in a past life I was Queen Nephritis of the Nile, and I will feel very much at home in the ancient-Egyptian Luxor Hotel Casino and Conference Complex.

You specifically tailor each of your shows to the cities in which you perform. What can Las Vegas audiences expect for your performances at Luxor that they might not see in, say, Detroit or Cleveland?

They will see their luck coming true. I will bring the luck to the Luxor and laughter, which we so desperately need in the world today. You will see marriage counseling, psychic readings, songs, dancers and exciting costumes.

You are known for devoting what little spare time you have to the noble calling of counseling royalty, addressing gender issues, redefining cultural strategies and posing for photographs with refugees. From which of these (or others) do

you derive the most joy?

My charity, Friends of the Prostate, gives me the greatest pleasure. I have really put that organ on the map. Most people didn't even know where it was until I began my charitable work, and now there's the World Prostate Olympics as well as the two current projects I am planning to build in Las Vegas: Prostate World (the big new urological adventure playground) followed by The Prostate Inn Resort Casino and Convention Center. ♠



Barry Humphries, a.k.a. Dame Edna, here with his wife, author Lizzie Spender, in London for the launch of her new book *Wild Horse Diaries*.

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mother, and Oprah Winfrey to play me in older age. **In light of Benedict XVI having jilted you by barring you from the Pope-mobile, which had been promised to you by the late Pope John Paul II, what other vehicular arrangements have you made for your U.S. tour?**

Never in a limo or a Hummer (a sure sign of a small talent with too much money). I will be traveling on public transport, wearing a simple head scarf that the Queen gave me. I like buses and trams, and if the

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