

Interview with Bob Jackson, aka “Piano Bob”

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Bob Jackson is a pianist, entertainer, comedian who has been featured at Walt Disney World for more than twelve years. With a show that features great sing-a-longs, fast and furious boogie-woogie piano solos (with some foot-stomping ragtime thrown in for good measure), Bob’s main gift is to draw in and engage audiences of all ages.

At what age did you first take an interest in music and playing the piano in particular?

I’ve been playing the piano ever since I can remember. I always knew I was going to be a musician. I never thought of doing anything else. I started taking lesson when I was seven, and I still practice every day.

In your early career days, you toured quite a bit around Europe and Scandinavia as a band leader. How did you cope with the change in cultures and what do you remember most about this period in you life?

That was such a fun time. In Europe, professional entertainers are treated as artists. I’ve always been an xenophile. I love to go. If you are courteous, and show an interest in people, you can make friends anywhere you go.

Who did you take your inspiration from and are there any musicians you have a lot of time for in the present day?

I would say the biggest influences for my stage character at Port Orleans would be Barney Fife, Pee Wee Herman, Harpo and Chico Marx. My biggest musical influences would be Fats Waller, all the piano players from the 1930’s and 40’s.

For those who have yet to come see one of your shows, can you describe the general flow of things and what guests can expect to enjoy from your set?

The show starts off slow, falls apart, and then quickly fizzles out.



You could say that your outfit is a good representation of your personality, colorful and grabs your attention. Is there a story behind why you chose that particular outfit or colours?

I used to play, live, and dress the music from the 1930's and 40's. I wore hand painted neck ties, and had a pencil thin mustache! My Disney character just kind of morphed out of that.

There's a lot of audience interaction during your shows, do you have a way of choosing a participant (to avoid making the more timid uncomfortable) or is it just entirely random?

No, it's not random at all. Sometimes, people will come up and ask to have someone in their party singled out. I'm always watching the audience. If a person is enthusiastically participating with total abandon, then they are a good candidate to lead the conga line.

What would you say was the most prominent memory you've had during your many years entertaining at Port Orleans Riverside?

A couple different times, I've had men come up, get on one knee, and propose to their girlfriends over the microphone. Once, I had people dancing on their chairs, and they knock the chandelier hanging from the ceiling down. I've had a big group of kids push all the chairs and tables out of the way, and dance for an hour. I had a lady do a hand stand, and then walk all the way around the room on her hands. Every night there's something to watch.

Have you ever had any, shall we say, 'difficult' guests who've tried to knock you off your stride during a performance?

The guests at Port Orleans are always perfect!

Your regular Wed thru Sat slot at Port Orleans is not the only involvement you've had with Disney, can you tell us about some of the other shows you've been a part of down the years?

I had a great time performing the Diamond Horseshoe show, at the Magic Kingdom. I always loved the energy at the Tarzan show, when I subbed there.

When you're not busy tinkling the ivories or joking with a crowd, what do you do to keep yourself occupied, any favourite pastimes?

I love to cook, and I exercise every day. I'll swim for an hour when it's warm. Right now I'm riding the bike 11 miles everyday. I always find time to practice every day, an hour, sometimes two.

You spend a lot of time around Disney's Port Orleans Resort, what would you say was its finest redeeming feature (besides yourself of course!)

The people that work there. Everyone from the guard at the gate, the wait staff, the desk staff; everyone really tries to do their best.

And Finally,

What does the future hold for Bob Jackson, anything in the works?

This is a very exciting time for me. I'm rehearsing, and planning to put out a CD of piano music from the 1920's and 30's. I hope to record a children's CD this year. We're recording a video, featuring my original songs. I have a lot going on, a lot to be thankful for.

Thanks Bob!

You can see Bob in action at Disney's Port Orleans Riverside Resort Wednesday through Saturday, the show starts at 8:30pm.