

PRESS INFORMATION

NEWS & DATES OF SEMMEL CONCERTS ENTERTAINMENT GMBH

A Tribute To the World's Greatest Entertainers

Sinatra & Friends

2021 Tour

Who were the RAT PACK?

In the mid-1950s, the RAT PACK started off as simply a clique around the film star Humphrey Bogart and his wife Lauren Bacall. It also included David Niven and his wife, restaurateur Mike Romanoff and his spouse, literary agent Swifty Lazar, and Judy Garland and her husband Sid Luft. To join this clique, you mainly had to display a certain ability to hold your drink, party all night and share a particular sense of humour. You were supposed to care as little as possible about what other people thought of you – and you needed to be a bit musical as well. According to legend, the name THE RAT PACK was coined by Lauren Bacall in the 1950s. Seeing Humphrey Bogart, Frank Sinatra and a group of their friends after a night on the town, she apparently exclaimed: “You look like a goddamned rat pack!”.

Sinatra joined this clique in the spring of 1954, and following the death of Humphrey Bogart on 14th January 1957 he became the leader of the RAT PACK, which now also included Peter Lawford (a renowned party animal and jet setter who was married to Patricia, the sister of the future President Kennedy), Joey Bishop, Dean Martin, Jimmy Van Heusen, Shirley MaLaine and Sammy Davis Jr. The years that followed were commercially very successful and busy, with the group's motto being “film all day and fun all night”. The two most significant RAT PACK films were “Ocean's Eleven” (1960) and “Robin And The Seven Hoods” (1964). At that time, the hard core of the RAT PACK vied with one another, sometimes in rather immature ways, to see who could sell the most records, command the highest fees, hook up with the most starlets and knock back the most whisky – activities which frequently landed them in the headlines of the tabloid press. This clan's level of influence within the American entertainment industry was also legendary.

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Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr. and Dean Martin were unquestionably the most important members of this “rat pack”, bonded by a close friendship. In 1988 the RAT PACK took to the stage for the final time in the “Together Again” tour.

The RAT PACK and the Sands Hotel in Las Vegas

Between 1960 and 1966 Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr., Dean Martin, Joey Bishop and Peter Lawford gave a great many concerts in Las Vegas. At this time, Sinatra, Martin and Davis Jr. were among the most popular and prominent entertainers in the country. Their live performances together, particularly in the Sands Hotel in which Frank Sinatra had shares at the time, were the biggest showbiz attraction in the gambling paradise of Las Vegas.

The starting point for these “happenings” was the 1960 filming of the comedy caper “Ocean’s Eleven”, which mainly took place in the Sands Hotel. After a day of filming, they would keep boredom at bay by making an evening (or a night) of it, boozing in the hotel casino. Until, one evening, Dean Martin took to the stage to sing a few songs. Frank and Sammy had nothing to do but heckle him from the audience. They yelled out, told jokes about him and laughed hysterically when Martin finally reacted. While the stars were having fun, the audience laughed along with them. Backstage became front of stage. This coincidence saw the birth of modern entertainment – creating the concept for all future RAT PACK shows. It was a mix of cabaret-style dialogue – between the entertainers and with the audience – and performances of their songs, most of which were already known around the world. Each artist performed part of the programme solo, before joining forces to tread the boards together. Although the shows appeared to be improvised each evening, they were based on a well-planned concept. Only 40% of the act was, in fact, based on improvisation.

Even after filming for “Ocean’s Eleven” was complete, the RAT PACK came together in various different line-ups. They called their performances “The Summit” (a playful reference to the meeting between Khrushchev and Kennedy in 1961). Any member of the RAT PACK who had the time and energy would fly spontaneously to Las Vegas and join the others on stage.

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Nancy Sinatra on the RAT PACK era in Las Vegas:

“The early sixties was their time and Las Vegas was their place. They made movies there and played nightclubs there and set a tone of arrogance and confidence, of energy and expectation that spoke for many of their generation. At the Sands, my father and his friends Joey Bishop, Sammy Davis Jr., Dean Martin and Peter Lawford filled every seat in the house – and they did that twice a night. There were also surprise guests of the very highest order: Bob Hope, Milton Berle, Dan Daily, Harry James, Red Skelton, Shirley MacLaine and Danny Thomas, to name just a few. Whenever J.F.K. or another person of prominence sat in the audience, Dad gave one colleagues the honour of introducing him or her to the crowd. One time Dean Martin would do it, another time Sammy, and so on. I remember the night Dean said to a room that was full of extra excitement and some tangible glow: ‘There’s a senator here tonight and this senator is running for president or something and we play golf together, we go fishing together, he is one of my best buddies’ and he turned to Frank Sinatra and said, ‘What the hell *is* his name?’ and John F. Kennedy started laughing.”

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