

Melinda to end local run, take magic show on road

Home-grown yet well-traveled Las Vegas magician Melinda Saxe is leaving Las Vegas.

The so-called "First Lady of Magic" is shuttering her show, "Dreams: An Evening of Wonders," at the downtown Lady Luck on Sept. 3 and soon will be taking her act on the road as headliner of a bus-and-truck show called "The World's Greatest Magicians."

The tour will depart in mid-October and play 60 American cities over about three months, said Saxe's manager and partner, Steve Zadrick.

After that, Melinda reportedly will move on to venues in Italy and Germany, said Zadrick, noting that a recent two-hour television special filmed in Las Vegas has been getting foreign air time.

"I think this is a good time for Melinda to take her act right to the American people," Zadrick said, "and we'll even be playing some of the same venues (New York's Radio City Music Hall, the Pantages in Los Angeles) as David Copperfield. She's been making progress, and we think the world tour will be a good way to display her talents."

Indeed, many observers may agree that a break away from Las Vegas could prove beneficial both emotionally and financially for Saxe. The tour is getting \$10 million worth of backing from Houston-based Metro Networks.



Michael Paskevich

Saxe, whose age is in the "upper 20s," is a former showgirl who launched a family-run magic show almost a decade ago. The blond-haired performer possessed good looks that helped overcome skills that were modest at best, and the show produced by her mother, Bonnie Saxe, always seemed to find a new venue (at least a half-dozen) after closing down. Generous rebates to ticket brokers were widely credited with contributing to the show's resilience.

Melinda also got her share of publicity, wanted or otherwise. Her romance with impressionist Rich Little dissolved amid tabloid TV reports and rumors about an alleged videotape taken of a sexual encounter. Attorneys worked it all out. In August 1993, she married magician Lance Burton — a marriage that lasted about nine months.

After their breakup, Melinda reunited with her mother, manager but backstage and other problems eventually

led to a family estrangement. Zadrick moved into Melinda's management gap, and although the most recent show was running in the black during a nearly three-year run, he said it was time for Melinda to stretch out in new directions. Her skills are improving and this is a real chance for her to expand her career," he said.

Several show dancers and stagehands will join the bus tour — specialty acts may link up in Europe — and Melinda will be the featured performer, presenting 30-minute spots in the 80-minute shows. No word from Lady Luck officials regarding a replacement show, but Saxe deserves best wishes for her upcoming travels. ...

If "Beehive," the live-music tribute to big-haired female singers of the 1960s, fails to survive at the Sahara, it won't be from a lack of trying. Bark Productions tried low ticket prices (\$18.50), bigger rebates to ticket brokers and a current \$26.50 price tag that includes a buffet. Last week, company officials set aside 2,000 tickets for free distribution to Nevada residents in an effort to generate crucial word-of-mouth publicity.

Still, it could all be for naught with Bill Bennett and a new ownership team moving into the property in October. Sources say that rather than give the dowdy Congo Theatre a much-needed makeover, the showroom sim-

ply may be closed down — a definite loss.

That potential shutdown has to have female impersonator Kenny Kerr pleased about cutting a recent deal to ship "Boy-Lesque" from the Sahara to the Debbie Reynolds Hotel by Oct. 26. Reynolds will continue to perform early shows, with Kerr and Co. taking advantage of a state-of-the-art showroom for late-evening shows. The Smothers Brothers and other name entertainers will continue to be a part of the show-room lineup. ...

The House of Blues, a popular live-music spot with branches in Los Angeles and New Orleans, is looking at Las Vegas for a future expansion site, according to owner Isaac Tigret. ... Rip Taylor moves in as replacement host for Susan Anton in the "Great Radio City Spectacular" at the Flamingo Hilton for the second time, beginning tonight and running through Thursday. ... Former Vegas regular Cyd Charisse has turned to hawking a new spray pain reliever. ...

And some final words of wisdom from first-rate comic Jack Coen — closing tonight at the Riviera's Comedy Club — for anyone planning to watch one of the free pirate ship battles in front of Treasure Island: "Don't bet on the British!" Coen warns. "I know it seems like they're due (to win), but save your money."