

July 28-30th, Branson's Shows & Entertainment

Some will tell you that Branson is way too commercialized and has a "honky tonk" atmosphere, what with all of the shows, theaters, theme parks, etc. They are, of course, right. I used to have a friend that would never even bother to look out over a spectacular New England harbor or at some distant mountain if it required looking past some man made commercialism in the foreground. A lot of beautiful scenery was missed by that friend in the process. Sometimes one must look through the trees in order to see the forest. That is the way it is with Branson. To a degree it does spoil some of the natural beauty that I wrote about in my previous posting. However, to be fair, it also offers a lot to do and see for the family that is on vacation, and to the senior citizens who come by tour bus. Lets face it, kids are not interested in viewing mountains and lakes every day, when there are roller coasters and race car tracks to explore. And touring seniors, without the benefit of private car, are keen to see and hear those icons of their era who are now singing and performing in Branson. Besides, with late July afternoon temperatures reaching well into the middle 90's, sitting in a dark, cool air conditioned theater for 2 1/2 hours doesn't sound like a bad idea.

My first experience with Branson had to have occurred some 15 years ago when Miriam and I flew in with my twin-Comanche to spend a long Labor Day weekend in the Ozarks. We stayed at the old Branson Hotel Bed and Breakfast, and depended on the show-tour trolley to take us to our various venues. It was only after we got to town that we learned that 1960-70's entertainer [Andy Williams](#) had his own theater and was performing daily. Now a word about Andy and Miriam. Miriam's parents were missionaries in the west-African country of Nigeria for over 30 years. Each of their 4 daughters were raised there, attending the mission boarding school until their sophomore year in High School. Then they had to return to the US to complete their education. Miriam was 16 when she started her Junior year at the George, Iowa High School in 1966. It was also a year when her parents were home on "furlough", so as to raise enough pledge money to return to the mission field. The High School class had scheduled a visit to the nearby city of Sioux Falls, SD to see a TV personality by the name of Andy Williams perform a one night concert. When Miriam asked her parents if she could attend, they said "absolutely not". No daughter of a Presbyterian minister would be allowed to see a "swivel hipped rock and roller" if they had anything to say about it. Well, she didn't go with the rest of her class.

Now fast forward to 1992 when we are in Branson and I had just learned that Andy Williams was going to perform at his "Moon River" theater on the final night that we are there. I immediately called the box office to purchase tickets, only to learn that they were completely "sold out" for that evening. Greatly disappointed, I told the ticket sales lady the story of Miriam's Junior year at high school. She said "just a minute" and went off of the line. When she returned, she told me that she had spoken with her supervisor and that they were so impressed with my story



"The Strip" Hwy. 76 where most of the shows are



The Branson Belle Showboat & Dinner Theater



"Silver Dollar City" is Branson's answer to TN's Dollywood (which originally had the same name)



Andy Williams house, the "Moon River Theater"

that they would release 2 of their VIP front row seats for us. It was a night to remember, and Miriam even got to shake Andy's hand (something he only reserved for the VIP seats). I took some fantastic close up photos of him performing. A few months later, I was telling my ex-wife of the adventure, and her comment was, "That's no big deal". Apparently she had a "one better" story. Now follow this closely, it gets somewhat confusing. Her new husband's ex-wife was now married to a guy that was Andy's right hand man, and she had gotten to meet him at family get togethers on several occasions. She even gave me the name and phone number of that person. I contacted him, and told him my story and wondered if I could get one of the photos that I had taken at the show personally autographed? (Prior attempts to get an autographed picture produced only the standard "stamped" signature publicity photo). He said, "send it onto me". I did, along with a typed version of same story that I have recounted here. In a couple of weeks, back came my photo, with this gold colored hand written inscription... "Miriam, I only hope that it was worth the wait...Love, Andy Williams". She has it on her mantle to this day.

The point here is that there are a number of very well known artists who perform in Branson these days...many at their own theaters. Each time I have come to this city, I try to see an assortment of performers. It is said that if you see a different act each night, at the end of one month you will not have seen all of the shows in this town. This time Andy was performing with Ann Margaret at his Moon River theater. I also went to the [Jim Stafford](#) theater. He is another 1970's era performer who plays a mean guitar, and has quite a comedy whit. I saw a John Denver tribute, as well as several 60's music shows, including Bill Haley's "The Comets" (**Rock around the Clock**) at the [Dick Clark Theater](#). Performances are only limited by the amount of time that you wish to spend visiting the various theaters, as well as your budget. (Those 12-15 dollar tickets of the early 90's are now in the 35-55 dollar range.) The town's "big name" [Shoji Tabuchi](#), a very talented fiddle player who has his own theater and a Broadway style production, gets over \$60 for his tickets. [Yakov Smirnoff](#), a very funny Russian immigrant, does his thing for about half that, and it is likewise very worthwhile. This year there is a [Titanic](#) exhibit that cost over \$30 million to create and which features actual memorabilia from that doomed ship. I expected that it would be "tacky", but wound up being a 3+ hour visit for me and was both interesting and informative. It was produced and funded by a wealthy investor who was on the original deep exploration that uncovered that sunken ship some 2 1/2 miles down on the ocean floor back in the early 90's. If you don't rush and take time to read and examine all of the artifacts and photos, this could easily be a half day's activity.

While I do not have the time or space to go into great detail about each and every show and entertainer that I have seen during my stay here, suffice that you will never say that, "I have nothing to tonight" when in Branson.



Moon River Theater Marquee, from ground level



Yakov and Me - His billboards are all over town



Jim Stafford and me (in front of his theater)

They put my scooter in the motorcycle section



Spectacular new Titanic Exhibit, & Museum