

MGM Grand 891-7777 or (800) 929-1111:
Grand Theatre, "EFX" (dark Thursday)

CASSIDY

MGM Grand's *EFX* has had a major face lift since David Cassidy replaced Michael Crawford last November. Crawford and Cassidy could be described as being on opposite ends of the entertainment spectrum, so extensive changes in the show were inevitable.

The show now begins with a huge, three-dimensional image of James Earl Jones' face speaking to the audience as the *EFX* Master. He chooses an unsuspecting bus-boy from the audience (David Cassidy) to be taken on a magical journey to find his heart and realize his dreams. The addition of this new story line to tie all the special effect sequences together is a welcome improvement. The new script was written in collaboration with Shaun Cassidy, David's half brother, and David Chisholm.

The busboy is guided through his journey by the four assistant masters — the Master of Magic, the Master of Laughter, the Master of Spirits and the Master of Time. Each is portrayed by a vocally tal-

ented cast member who shares the spotlight with Cassidy. This gives the production less of a one-man show feel than when Crawford performed every role.

David Cassidy is both likable and believable as the typical bus-boy next door. His boyish quality is intensified by the contrast of his small stature on such a large stage. But his voice is anything but small. Just for an instant, when Cassidy begins to sing his first number, his familiar voice transports one back to the '70's when *I Think I Love You* was playing on everyone's record player.

In the Merlin section of the show, Crawford used to portray Merlin the Wizard. Now Cassidy portrays young King Arthur, a role more suitable to his youthful persona. His character flirts with the dancing sprites and slays a fire-breathing dragon that seems to appear out of nowhere.

New music has also been added to the production. The Barnum section of the show presents Cassidy as P.T. Barnum and introduces a new song called *Intergalactic Circus of Wonders* recorded by Little Feat. Cassidy's vocal style is more conducive to contemporary music than was Crawford's, so some of the music has been changed accordingly. The new number includes rap and hip-hop choreography for the dancers.

Included in the Barnum segment is a new specialty act called The Flying Kaganovitch, which replaces Crawford's solo vaudevilian act. This is a flying trapeze act that is of "Mystere" quality, a unique change of pace that adds variety to the show.

At this point in the show, Cassidy picks a woman from the audience whom he believes to be Laura, the one true love of his life. This theatrical scheme is employed

to continue the story line but grows weak as the thread that ties together the rest of the show, especially when Laura announces that her husband is in the audience, but she stays on stage for much of the rest of the show, anyway.

The Houdini segment features a dramatic duet between Harry and Bess Houdini. This is an area of the show that suffers the loss of Michael Crawford and the very talented Tina Walsh, whose strong vocal accuracy was virtuoso. Although they don't have the same chemistry and harmonic blending of Crawford and Walsh, Cassidy and newcomer, Satomi Hofmann, do an admirable job filling their shoes. The scene is well acted by Hofmann, but this is one number where Cassidy's usually endearing boyish quality works against him.

The next segment is the H.G. Wells time travel section that includes a fascinating 3-D movie special effect during which the audience is asked to don a pair of 3-D glasses, provided at every table. Cassidy makes a charismatic H.G. Wells as he goes back in time and battles the monstrous Morlocks to save his precious Laura (even though she already has a husband). He sings another new song entitled *Love Is a River in Time*.

The finale of the show does not fit the rest of the production and seems almost like an "Up With People" concert. The gospel-like song, *Let It Shine*, is reminiscent of the early '70's and has a dated "been there, done that" feel. The dancers are costumed in plain, unflattering jumpsuits that do not live up to the production show standards of the rest of the show.

Overall, the show is well choreographed and the dancers are proficient. Assistant Director Karen Bruce has done a praiseworthy job

of re-choreographing and re-staging the new parts of the show. Still strong in the show are the two most dynamic production numbers for the dancers: "The Jig," choreographed by Anthony Van Laast, and "The Stick Dance" which features a unique percussive arrangement that the dancers execute, were created by Jeff Krashin.

The cast seems delighted that David Cassidy is the new guest star of the show and they enjoy working with him. Cassidy's down-to-earth demeanor was immediately appreciated by the cast. "David is a very warm person," says dancer Fern Barstad. "He greets us with a hug when we come to rehearsal and he sits among us at cast meetings instead of with management. We all agree he is a very cool guy to work with."

One of the drawbacks of working in *EFX* is that there are excessive rehearsals for the performers because the staging and choreography is constantly being changed. Constant maintenance is required by the stage crew including lighting, special effects, sound, and prop automation maintenance. As one crew member put it, "This show requires more regular maintenance than the space shuttle."

So far, the changes in what MGM boasts as the world's biggest production are mostly positive ones. The special effects are phenomenal and have to be seen to be believed. Apparently Cassidy is expecting a long successful run in the show because he bought a house in Las Vegas and moved his wife and young son with him.

EFX combines drama, music, and dance, with state of the art technology. David Cassidy's unique talent, experience and energy make him an ideal lead for this eclectic production. ♦♦