

Bruce Postle tells the story of a special night in 1978 when, as a press photographer for *The Age*, he took a photo of Sammy Davis Jr that instantly became the Rat Packer's favourite.

Sammy Davis Jr did a concert at Festival Hall, the old boxing stadium in Melbourne, and straight afterwards he went down to Channel Nine. He just walked in and took over the *Don Lane Show*, and kept it going until half past one in the morning, singing all his great numbers.

This photo was taken at the Festival Hall concert. *The Age* sent me down there to cover it and instead of taking a short lens and standing right in front of him, I stood back with a big telephoto lens. As soon as I pressed the shutter, I thought, "That's a great picture". I've been taking photos for a long time, and you just know when you've taken a good one. I went back to the office and processed it, and I was so pleased that I did a couple of prints, which I took down to Channel Nine.

Working in the industry, I knew the guards and so I walked straight through to the back of the stage. I was standing there when Don Lane walked past. He said, "Bruce, what are you doing here?" I said, "I've taken this picture" and he ran straight on stage and showed Sammy Davis – and I followed him! So the next thing I knew, I was on national television.

Sammy held it up to show the audience and said, "What a great picture". They used it on the front page of *The Age* the next day. Three weeks later, the phone rang and my boss said, "Bruce, Sammy Davis Jr wants to speak to you". Sammy said, "You took the best photo ever taken of me. Could you please send me four poster-sized prints?"

I sent them over, Sammy kept three for himself and framed and autographed the other one and sent it back to me with a letter. The picture won the Portrait of the Year in Australia and also the Rothman's Portrait of the Year.

When Sammy came back to Australia 18 months later, he rang me and said, "Bruce, I don't know your marital status, but I'd like you and your wife or your girlfriend, or bring both of them if you want to, to be my special guests at the show tomorrow night". We had a table 10 feet from the stage and there was a bottle of French champagne with a note that said, "Thanks for the photo, Sammy Davis Jr.". It was a lovely gesture.

I was a fan, I had his records. It helps to have an affinity with the subject, for sure, but being a press photographer you've got to have an affinity for everything. That night, I was lucky – I was at the right angle, the light was right and I was using the right lens. The cigarette, the microphone, the rings – it was pure Sammy Davis Jr. YL



Bruce Postle, Don Lane and Sammy Davis Jr

PHOTO: COURTESY CHANNEL 9

Acts of Creation



PHOTO: BRUCE POSTLE

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