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A GRAND OL' TIME Pete's dueling pianos have migrated from Texas to Town Square BY RICK LAX



ON'T TELL DON'T TELL Mama, but there's a new locals piano bar in town. And this place has two things DTM doesn't: a second piano ... and a really big crowd.

Okay, technically, Pete's Dueling Piano Bar isn't new (then, neither is Manhattan's Don't Tell Mama), but it's new to Las Vegas; the original Pete's opened 17 years ago in Texas, and the Vegas version opened a week ago in Town Square.

When I first walked into Pete's Friday night, around 10 p.m., the entertainers were leading the crowd of 250 in a sing-along of "Joy to the World" (the one that starts "Jeremiah was a bullfrog"). One dueler was at the keys, slamming the piano lid on beats 2 and 4; the other was standing on top of his piano (not really a piano, if you want to nitpick; an electric keyboard set inside a grand piano-shaped wooden shell), teaching the audience the song's accompanying R-rated hand gestures.

Like the Big Bang Dueling Piano Bar chain based in Missouri and the Howl at the Moon chain based in Chicago, Pete's subscribes to the cheesy Vegas philosophy of musical performance—that it's not about the music, it's about shtick. And let me tell you, Pete's has more shtick than a Liberace impersonator doing a kid's party.

Quick example: I left my friend Sheena at the table to use the bathroom, and by the time I walked back into the main room, the piano players had pulled her onstage to do the chicken dance.

So I went to the bar to get a drink. The bartender told me he'd just moved to Vegas the previous week. He used to work at Pete's in Texas, and so did one other bartender, the general manager, the four piano players and the cocktail server, who resembled a young Piper Perabo.

"Let's give it up for the United States

of America!" cried one of the piano players, and then he sang Lee Greenwood's "God Bless the U.S.A." And then the duelers transitioned into a "Marches of the Armed Forces" medley. Somewhere between "From the Halls of Montezuma (Marines' Hymn)" and "Semper Paratus," the U.S. Coast Guard song, the glitzy woman in front of me turned to her glitzy friend and asked, "What is this?!" Her friend didn't know either.

Y'all aren't in Texas any more.

Around midnight, the show became a full-fledged, legitimate rock concert, and here's what I mean by that: This girl sitting in the front row kept dashing onstage, rolling onto her back and kicking her legs in the air like Chuck Berry playing a guitar solo. Each time she did this, the smiling bouncer at stage left politely escorted her back to her seat. Around 12:30, she changed her M.O. and decided that she wanted to sit at one of the piano benches. (The player who'd been occupying it had moved over to the drum set.) Ten strikes and she was out; the stage-left bouncer gave the *she's gotta go* signal to the other bouncers, and the entertainers stopped their song mid-measure and started playing "Na Na Hey Hey Kiss Him Goodbye."

And oh how we all laughed. It's about shtick.

Pete's will succeed, but to do so, the duelers might have to slightly alter their act. They might have to tone down the overt patriotism and consider driving to Studio Lites, buying a Criss Angel wig and teaching one of the guys to sing the *Mindfreak* theme song. Or maybe visit the Terry Fator Gift Shop, pick up a Winston the Turtle puppet and learn to sing "What a Wonderful World" like Kermit T. Frog and Louis Armstrong.

But they shouldn't stray too far away from the traditional Pete's Dueling Piano Bar formula. You gotta shtick with what works.