



Celine Dion talks 10th anniversary of The Colosseum at Caesars Palace



Celine Dion's opening night at The Colosseum at Caesars Palace on March 15, 2011.

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It's difficult to believe that 10 years ago this month, Celine Dion opened The Colosseum at Caesars Palace to premiere her first Las Vegas residency. The doors were unlocked on March 25, 2003, and I was there opening night when Celine lost her shoes at one point and had to go onstage barefoot to sing.

It proved to be good luck, and the star-studded audience that included Siegfried and Roy, Dick Clark, Justin Timberlake and David Foster gave her the first of what are now hundreds of standing ovations.

It was a huge gamble: Caesars executives gave the go-ahead for a \$100 million investment converting the Magical Empire building into a spectacular, large yet intimate performance theater. AEG, the entertainment-production conglomerate, put up an additional \$150 million to stage Celine's show "A New Day."

Naysayers said it was a gamble destined to fail. It was just four days after the Iraq war began, and people feared Las Vegas would suffer a tourist turndown. Nobody believed a solo French-Canadian singer could fill 4,000 seats night after night and make the building a big success.

Incredibly, the same was said for Sir Elton John, Rod Stewart and now Shania Twain. All are still performing, all are selling out the theater, and The Colosseum is busier than ever.

As an AEG spokesman said: "No one could have envisioned how the show and venue would forever raise the bar for Las Vegas entertainment and how it would set the stage for the biggest entertainers in the world to call The Colosseum and Las Vegas home."

Celine's "A New Day" set box office records. She took a Las Vegas hiatus for the world tour of "A New Day" and then to give birth to her twin sons. Now she's about to start the third year of her second residency show and has agreed to a two-year contract extension. When that runs its course, she will have celebrated 10 years of shows in the theater.

For the next three weeks, we'll share memories -- and secrets -- of The Colosseum's first decade. Next week, our interview with AEG chief John Meglen and the following week with two of the theater staff who have been there

since Day 1 and never missed a show.

We start today with Celine since the building was created for her. The bestselling female artist of all time is probably also the world's only entertainer to have a building built for her and her artistic vision. She agreed to a Q+A with AEG, and she talks about her role in the design and construction of the building and what makes The Colosseum a performer's dream.

Ten years ago, The Colosseum was built for you. Patrick Berge, president of Sceno Plus, said that the main goal was to create a building you feel comfortable singing in every night and one that helps you develop a stronger connection with your audience. How did you work with the development team/architects to accomplish this?

Well, first of all, I have to say that I love performing in this theater. Ten years later, it feels as warm and intimate as it did when we did our very first show. We're performing in front of 4,000 people, and it feels like we're in my living room. I can see their faces, I can hear them talking to me in between songs, and I can even shake their hands (not all of them!).

Patrick and his team at Sceno Plus worked very closely with Franco Dragone's team and our team to make sure that the acoustics and the sightlines were perfect, and they did an amazing job. The giant screen allows us to present incredible visuals for the audiences to enjoy. On top of this, they created built-in humidifiers on our stage to keep the air moist for my vocal chords. This is amazing!

I've played at hundreds of wonderful venues around the world, but I think The Colosseum is the best of them all. I know everyone's used this expression, but it's true -- there's not a bad seat in the house!

What is your favorite memory/moment at The Colosseum?

We've had so many memorable moments at The Colosseum, but since we're talking about the 10th anniversary, how about something that happened on the very first show 10 years ago on March 25, 2003? We had all the media and VIPs in attendance for this premiere. ... Obviously, it was a very big night.

Somehow, during a costume change, my shoes went

missing. It was like do I leave the audience waiting, or do I go out in my bare feet? You can't keep the people waiting, especially on opening night, so I started the song shoeless ... and just as I was starting to sing, my brother Michel came onstage with the missing shoes!

I think that moment set the tone for every show since then. We're "live," and that means no show is ever exactly the same as another. There's something different and unique about every performance. Sometimes it makes our hearts beat a little faster, but it also makes it very exciting. By the way, so far no more problems with shoes not showing up on time!

There are now additional resident artists joining you during the year in The Colosseum's roster (Elton John, Rod Stewart, Jerry Seinfeld and Shania Twain). Have you given them any suggestions or tips about performing at The Colosseum?

I haven't really given any of them advice. They're all great artists with a lot of experience. The only thing I learned from my very own experience was to not do too many shows in one year. We started out doing 200 shows a year, and that was a little tough. Now we do 70 shows a year, and it's working out great.

Do you have a "Happy Anniversary" message for the team at The Colosseum?

Yes! I'd like to say a very Happy 10th Birthday to the team at The Colosseum, and more than this, I want to thank everyone for their hard work and dedication, whether they've been there for the entire 10 years, or they've joined along the way. It's a great place for an artist to call home, and this is because of the great teams that we have at Caesars, AEG, as well as my musicians and our team at CDA.

Last but not least, I want to thank the fans for coming to see our show over the years. They make it all happen!