

# A Big Impression

André-Philippe Gagnon creates a buzz on the Strip with others' voices, his talent

by Seven McDonald

**I**t started with cartoons. When French-Canadian André-Philippe Gagnon was 5 years old, he realized that his Tweety Bird imitation not only cracked up his family and friends, it served as a safety precaution. "Instead of punching me as usual, my brother, who is six years older than me, would be calling my mom and dad in to hear my Tweety Bird. I was like, 'I must be on to something,'" the Quebec native recalls.

Looney Toons led to the Beatles, Elvis Presley led to Frank Sinatra, and a slew of French pop stars led to the entire lineup of "We Are the World." "I got hooked on the Beatles for a long time," says the boyish-looking 38-year-old in a thick French accent. "If I sang a Beatles song, it had to be sung the way Paul McCartney would sing it. That's what I thought. I could memorize the vocal textures phonetically without knowing what I was saying, because at that time I couldn't speak English. I made a career out of it."

He landed his big break in 1985, after performing at the Just for Laughs comedy festival in Montreal. Gagnon followed Jay Leno, when the hot comedian was guest-hosting on *The Tonight Show*. "We Are the World" had just hit the charts as a single, and the crowds loved Gagnon's version. So did Leno, who asked Gagnon to send a tape to the show. Two months later he was on, performing to roaring laughter that led to an invitation by Carson to sit on his couch afterward—something that didn't happen often for first-timers.

Since then, Gagnon has carved quite a career out of his gift for vocal impersonation. For the last two years, he has performed all over the world as the opening act for Celine Dion's record-breaking tour. Now he has his own show, which is drawing critical

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