

What's new pussycat?

JOE CALLURA HAS SHARED THE stage with the likes of Cher and Rod Stewart — well, make that their look-alikes. A singer since he was a child, the 45-year-old sole practitioner from Hamilton, Ontario, is also a Tom Jones impersonator — and has had the opportunity to perform with other “legend” impersonators in Ontario, and as far afield as Las Vegas.

At one of his recent shows, held in Wasaga Beach in the Georgian Bay, Ontario, area last summer, Callura was just one of 13 well-known faces who performed. “When I walked by, I saw Whitney Houston and Willie Nelson,” he says, almost forgetting they weren’t the real McCoy. “When they saw me, they said, ‘Oh, Tom Jones, right?’”

Right they were, as Callura has spent years perfecting his Tom Jones act. In the late 1960s, when the flamboyant pop artist came on the scene, Callura was the lead vocalist at Club Continental, a Hamilton dance club. “Tom Jones sang in a style very similar to my own natural voice, so it was easy to emulate him,” he says. He got a suit made up, developed a routine, made the women swoon — just like Jones himself — and drew packed crowds. “Actually, it was Tom Jones who stole my act,” jokes Callura.

In 1970, Callura was asked by the RCA Victor record label if he wanted to take to the road. But he wanted to finish his studies at McMaster University first, and turned down the offer. (Other entertaining Canadians attending the university at the time include singer Ian Thomas and his comedian brother Dave of SCTV fame, as well as actor/comedian Martin Short, who beat Callura out for the lead in the school’s production of *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*.)

Once Callura started articling at the Hamilton office of Clarkson Gordon in



Keeping up with the Joneses: *Singer Joe Callura still draws in the crowds with the Tom Jones act he created more than 25 years ago*

1972, he abandoned the Tom Jones routine and formed his own banquet bands, including Joey Cal & the Royales, and later, *Breezin’ with Joe Callura*. The gold suit stayed in the closet until last year, when a musician in the Kokomo Beach Band, a popular Beach Boys cover group, remembered Callura’s act and called him. They were planning a “living legends” show at Toronto’s Delta Chelsea Inn and asked Callura to take part. “The show went over very well,” says Callura, adding that it was the most exciting one of his career. “We got two five-minute standing ovations.”

Last December, Callura joined Kokomo again, this time for three nights at the Aladdin Hotel in Las Vegas. He has considered performing on more of a full-time basis, but for now he enjoys the spontaneity of gigs coming up on short notice once every couple of

months. “If I did it full time, it might wear thin and become just another job.”

It’s hard to believe that Callura would approach any job with that attitude, especially considering that when he was with Clarkson Gordon, he was known to don solid red or yellow suits. “No way I’m going to be Mister Pinstripe,” he says. “I’ve got a certain amount of rebel inside of me.” Step aside, Tom Jones — you’ve met your match. ■

Tamar Satov