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Gettin' Down with Motown

Boy bands, it seems, are back. Who would have thought that it would return to Vegas in the form of Australian import and quartet, Human Nature? Originally called "4Trax," the group, comprising high-school classmates - brothers Andrew and Michael Tierney, Toby Allen and Phil Burton, was formed in 1989, while at Hurlstone Agricultural School, in Australia.

That's a long ways away from where they stand today, though their road to success, while not particularly bumpy, was one that was long and ever-evolving. After an initial stint as buskers, "4Trax" started performing in clubs and built up a following, winning several awards as club entertainers. They went through the usual route of sending demos off to record labels, until that fateful day when they walked into the office of Sony CEO Denis Handlin, performed an a cappella version of "People Get Ready," and were signed on the spot.

With this deal, came the name change, to "Human Nature," which was suggested by Michael Tierney. And the rest, as they say, is history; though perhaps in this case, more like history in the making.

It seems they got it right on their first try. When they launched their debut album, "Telling Everybody," in 1996, it went on to achieve triple-platinum status. It was also during this time that they created 'extra buzz' by working as support acts for such superstar performers as Celine Dion and Michael Jackson. This initial success was followed by more of the same, with every

succeeding year, with their albums, "Counting Down," "Human Nature," "Here and Now: The Best of Human Nature" and "Walk the Tightrope."

With the realization that they were perhaps outgrowing their original teen market - take note that this was during the time that "NSYNC, Backstreet Boys and the like were all the rage - their fifth studio album went in a completely different direction. "Reach Out: The Motown Record," was launched in late 2005, where it peaked at number one on the Australian charts and has reached 5 times platinum.

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For the next few years, they toured extensively throughout Australia, at the same time releasing two more Motown-themed albums, "Dancing in the Street: The Songs of Motown II" and "Get Ready," which featured appearances by several original Motown legends such as Smokey Robinson, Martha Reeves, Mary Wilson and The Temptations.

Early 2008 was the move to America, with a two-month performing gig at Atlantic City's Tropicana Casino. They played to rave reviews and sold-out shows, so it's not surprising that they've found a "semi-permanent" home on the Strip - at the Imperial Palace.

If you're a Motown fan (and who isn't), then you're in for a treat. While they pay tribute to Motown songs, their sound is not what you would associate with the various "tribute acts" found in many Las Vegas showrooms. In short, if you close your eyes, it's not going to be a case of "it's almost like listening to the original" - as in the case





of The Temptations tribute band who used to perform in another show, "Legends in Concert."

Although, looking at these four, clean-cut, young men - why would you want to? They're a sight for sore eyes and they know it. And the charming Aussie accent is gravy to American ears. And have we mentioned that they can sing?

And sing they do, from their opening salvo with "Dancing in the Streets" to their finale, "(Reach Out) I'll Be There," it's a high-energy show that will get you dancing in your seat. Maybe I'm biased, but I like Motown, I listen to it, so watching this show is the equivalent of seeing a "Best of Motown compilation," except it's live.

The night we caught the show, the group's energy was extra amped-up, probably because they were introduced by no less than Smokey Robinson himself, plus, Mary Wilson (of The Supremes) was also in the crowd.

Human nature just might have a good thing going here. No one disputes Motown's popularity, but it seems that throughout the years, at least in Las Vegas, Motown revues have come and set-up shop, and just as quickly, closed its doors. You need to hurry if you want to catch this group because they only signed-on for one year.

It would be hard for me to pinpoint a favorite part of the show, but to me, it seemed better when they were performing a cappella, as in the case of their renditions of "People Get Ready," "The Way You Do The Things You Do," and the most impressive, a "tribute" to Smokey Robinson and a song he wrote for The Miracles, "Ooo Baby Baby." While Human Nature is ably-backed by a live band, The Funk Foundation, there were certain moments of the show when the music seemed to

drown-out their voices. Although, perhaps this is just a matter of where you happen to be seated. Even the back row is preferable to seats to the left and right of the stage, where you'll find yourself right next to the speakers.

The 90-minute production chugs along smoothly, with some of the numbers peppered with audience participation, even some sing-a-longs. It's during these moments that you realize the popularity and legacy of Motown. I don't believe there was anyone in the audience who didn't know the words to The Temptations' "My Girl," The Four Tops' "Baby, I Need Your Lovin'" and Stevie Wonder's "Uptight (Everything's Alright)." Actually, even if the group wasn't asking the audience to sing along, I suspect they would still do so. They hardly needed the invitation to "stand-up and dance," because they were already on their feet for the most part. Be forewarned, though - the show will go by so quickly that you'll definitely want more - of the songs, the group, the performances, the dancing - than the allotted hour and a half production time.

Also, don't be surprised if, while exiting the theater, you find yourself, one, still humming the songs, and two, walking with a "Motown beat" to your step. Yes, it's that infectious.

-Rachel M. Sugay

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"Smokey Robinson Presents: Australia's Human Nature - The Ultimate Celebration of Motown." Imperial Palace Showroom, Imperial Palace Hotel. Show times are 8 p.m., Saturday through Thursday. Tickets are \$49.95 and \$59.95. To purchase, call 1-888-777-7764.

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