

## Just Another Man: Getting Ready in Las Vegas

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Las Vegas entertainment is unique for many reasons. One of those is that, owing more to happenstance than talent, a performer can be a big star here — huge — and, outside the city's environs, no one really knows too much about his or her work.



[Clint Holmes](#) is such a performer. He came to Las Vegas with one hit song ("Playground In My Mind") and a history of pleasing audiences. He headlined for six years at Harrah's on the Strip. When he left there last year, it was with the intention of bring his dream project — a musical based on his life story — successfully to the stage on the West End and, ultimately, on Broadway.

The show, called "Breathe" in workshop form a few months ago, is now called "Just Another Man," or, "JAM," and is being performed for a limited run at the Judy Bayley Theater on the campus of the University of Nevada Las Vegas. One would be hard-pressed to find a more outstanding group of creators or performers

anywhere.

"JAM" traces the story of the meeting of Holmes' parents Audrey and Eddie, here given the last name "Coles." She's a white opera singer from Britain, he a black jazz singer GI stationed there during World War II. They marry and move back to upstate New York. Life is difficult for the interracial couple and their children, Rei and Lorraine (Holmes and his real-life sister Gayle Steele). As we quickly learn, Audrey is intent on molding her son into an opera singer ("breathe!") while jazz musician Eddie only wants Rei to be "cool" in a conflict of culture and values.

Rei grows up in a battleground, goes off to college and the army where he learns he is perceived as a black man. He doesn't seem to know much about being black, though, until he meets Roz, the black activist he marries. They have a child, Taylor, but Rei is pursuing a singing career on the road and is home infrequently. Ultimately, Rei and Roz divorce and, as his father did, Rei finds himself estranged from his son. Can he fix it? Or will he repeat the pattern?

This is a bare bones telling of the story. There's a lot more, a lot more that is superfluous, cluttering the stage with lots of people who, one senses, don't really need to be there.

[Clint Holmes](#) — who not only stars as Rei, but who wrote book and co-wrote the music and lyrics — shows depth and feeling here and is in very good voice. He should, however, forego playing his teenage self and simply narrate, which he does anyway. Watching his real-life sister play his sister is lots of fun. Their sibling

interplay is — well — real. Ironically, it is she with the more operatic voice, a fact completely ignored by their mother.

As Eddie and Audrey, Earl Turner and Tina Walsh are stunning. She is kind of scary, her passion, that has more to do with her than her child, is fearsome and awesome to watch. Turner, who among the cast says he “never acted” before, in truth, has acted. Oh, not in the traditional memorize-a-script sense, but as a powerhouse performer in his own show who has acted out every song he’s done. And it translates beautifully. He dominates the stage when he’s on it.

As the wife, Reva Rice is great, as is Tezz Yancey as their son Taylor. This guy is so talented — acting, singing and dancing wonderfully. (For some odd reason he's burdened with an awful wig that serves to obscure his gifts because it's so distracting. But that's an easy fix.)

Rei's friend and the show's co-composer, co-lyricist, musical arranger and conductor, Bill Fayne is, in fact, [Clint Holmes](#)' friend and musical conductor. An excellent musician and performer, Fayne is delightful.

Co-writer and director Larry Moss brings a list of credentials to the table that are impressive, indeed. And he's nurtured and loved this show for years. But, now, he's got to employ some tough love.

“Just A Man” needs serious cutting and cleaning up. There are too many people onstage doing too little. The point of view isn't as clear as it should be from the beginning (tight narration could fix this) and some of the 34 songs must go. (For example, it's a nice song, and she has a great voice but Roz doesn't need a big solo at the end. She and Rei are divorced and Rei has moved on. Let it go. There are other moments like that.)

Technically, this show — sets, lighting — is quite good. And artistically it can be.

The Las Vegas audience that has for years loved [Clint Holmes](#) is a biased audience. I'd like to see this in another city with people who don't know so much about the star and his family so the response might be truer.

I really believe that with some tough love this show (perhaps, a switch back to the original, more meaningful, less coy, title) will be seen elsewhere with the same principal players — even on the West End or Broadway.

**Photo by Jerry Metellus**