

Duel Purpose: For Dueling Pianos, The Key is Fun

By David T. Farr / Sturgis Journal

The piano bar style has been turned upside down by the popularity of dueling pianos, the show that gets audience participation with sing-a-longs, parodies, requests, room splits and show times.

Dave Caruso and his band of musicians will bring their high-energy show to the Sturgis Elks on Jan 26th.

NOTEWORTHY

Caruso, of Trenton, MI is a songwriter and entertainer at the forefront of the dueling piano craze.



Dueling pianos comes to Sturgis Elks on Jan 19, 2008. Dave Caruso's *Piano Wars!* dueling pianos show tackles just about any request, including Elton John or AC/DC.

Photo by Lori Juncaj

He studied the craft of dueling pianos in Michigan, Cleveland and Las Vegas before coming up with his own company, *Piano Wars!*

His brand of entertainment caught the eyes and ears of club owners and soon he found himself playing at such clubs as Rum Bullions of Reno, NV., J.D.'s Key Club in Pontiac, Rum Runners in Mishawaka IN. and Lansing, and Sluggers in Chicago.

He also became the Entertainment Director for Pub 13 in Ypsilanti and helped earn the bar a "Best Piano Bar" award from the Real Detroit Weekly.

Caruso is currently Entertainment Director for Rum Runners' dueling pianos club in South Bend, IN.

A dueling pianos show boasts a variety of possibilities, all of which start with the audience.

Caruso said the key to dueling pianos is audience interaction.

“Everybody likes to have a good time,” Caruso said. “The people generate requests because the show is totally about them. It’s organized chaos.”

THE SHOW

The performers are seated at two pianos. They take turns singing and playing songs that someone in the crowd requested. Once the show begins, the performers never take a break. It becomes a non-stop event.

Caruso has performed for more than 30 years, which has allowed him countless opportunities.

During that time, he has opened for the likes of Joan Jett and the Blackhearts, UB40, Burton Cummings, John Cafferty and the Beaver Brown Band and Corey Hart.

ALL TYPES

With his keyboards, guitars and bass, Caruso has performed more than 3,400 shows in 200 cities, but for the last 6 years his focus has been dueling pianos shows.

“It’s just so much fun,” he said. “I tell people ‘we’re going to entertain you to within inches of your life.’”

Caruso’s *Piano Wars!* and dueling pianos shows have been seen by audiences of all ages, which is one of the reasons every show is so different.

“Dueling pianos is big in the college towns and resort areas,” Caruso said. “It’s a matter of having good players and learning to play for all types of people.”

Caruso picked all the players and performers involved with *Piano Wars!* “We all work so well together and feed off one another so well,” he said. “We can play just about any song, but it’s really not about us. It’s about the audience and having a good time.”

Caruso said they use costumes and props and ultimately get the audience going with the song. “Sometimes, “Elvis makes a stop or Elton John has been known to appear during our shows,” Caruso said. “We never really know what’s going to happen or who’s going to pop up.”

“We can even do AC/DC, piano style, he said. “You know that’s going to be fun.” ■