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It's not unusual...
...For Tom Jones to be loved by anyone.

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Women are still throwing their panties at Tom Jones. Which is incredible, come to think of it, because 'The Voice,' as this singer has come to be known over the last four decades, is pushing 57.

Jones, who was brought here this week to promote the opening of the Club Hotel in Eilat with performances there, and in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, has the ability to adapt himself to current music without losing any of his raw, raunchy talent.

First recollections of Tom Jones: He made our moms swoon, a Vegas-style lounge lizard, an old tribute to Rock 'n' Roll - capital 'R' - like his friend and admirer, Elvis Presley. (Presley used to warm up his voice to Jones's hit 'Delilah' and is said to have called up radio stations to request Jones's songs.)

Those who are not in the know might write him off as being strictly 70s - like Johnny Cash or Tony Bennett; but then they probably missed Jones's transformation in 1988 with his remake of Prince's song 'Kiss,' with The Art of Noise. The song, which hit the top 40 in America and the top 10 in the UK, introduced the next generation to Jones, who since then has showed that he can take any song and make it his own, as implied by the title of his 1994 album, *The Lead and How to Swing It*.

Jones's first hit was in 1964, with his second single, 'It's not Unusual' - a song that was banned by the well-established BBC radio as 'too hot' and only by courtesy of pirate radio stations broke into the British charts soaring to No. 1, and to the US top ten. 'It's not unusual to be loved by anyone/ It's not unusual to have fun with anyone/ but when I see you hanging about with anyone/ It's not unusual to see me cry/ oh I wanna die,' are the lyrics to a throaty, bouncy, Sinatra-type ballad which was written and produced by the man who discovered Jones, Gordon Mills.

Mills found Jones ('Tommy Scott' and the Senators) in one of the Welsh nightclubs where he had been performing since his teens. Born Thomas Jones Woodward to a miner, Jones attributes the timbre and strength of his voice to his first demanding audiences, the Welsh: a people of poetry and depth.

Mills signed him on, moved him to London and renamed him Tommy Jones.

Even a decade after Elvis's revolution, Jones's gyrating, pulsing performances were still racy enough to titillate. At one of his early concerts one fan took off her underwear and gave it to Jones, starting the underwear-throwing tradition. A year after 'It's Not Unusual,' Jones opened for the Rolling Stones at London's Beat City. His powerhouse voice and over-the-top sexiness gave him tons of press coverage and contributed to hits like 'Once Upon a Time' and 'Little Lonely One' as well as film themes including 'What's New Pussycat?' and 'Thunderball.'

But three years after his first hit, Jones started slipping from the charts and Mills decided it was time for a new image, that of a more respectable crooner. With country ballads such as 'Green Green Grass of Home' and 'Detroit City,' Jones appealed to a broader audience. He was a regular feature in the charts in the US and the UK for the rest of the '60s.

In 1969, he was offered his own TV show by ABC: *This is Tom Jones*. With guests such as Elvis, Stevie Wonder, Little Richard and Jerry Lee Lewis (both idols of Jones), Janis Joplin, The Who, Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, The Bee Gees, Smokey Robinson, The Supremes and Joe Cocker, Jones showed his wide-ranging influence on rock and his ability to pull in anyone in the industry - a talent which he still holds today.

By the end of the '70s, Jones had sold over 30 million records. For Jones, that decade was mostly spent belting it out in Vegas. In fact, Eilat's Club Hotel, which has been touted as one of Israel's first 'Vegas-style hotels' brought him in because of his Vegas persona; they are billing him as 'one of the most requested singers at dazzling Vegas performances.' Though Jones still rules in Vegas, they have missed the new and improved model.

Fast forward to the MTV generation: By the middle of the '80s, the only kids who might have heard of Jones were those whose parents would croon along to old vinyls in a romantic blast into the past. When Jones was asked in 1988 to lead for British techno-pop band The Art of Noise's over-produced remake of Prince's song 'Kiss', the children of his baby-boom fans met Jones through the new medium of MTV.

In 1991, he released the critically acclaimed album *Carrying a Torch* in which Van Morrison wrote, produced and played four of the songs and his band provided backup.

That year, backed by Pink Floyd, Jones also played two UK benefits, alongside the likes of Paul Simon, Whitney Houston, Sinead O'Connor and Seal. His 1992 UK six-part TV series Tom Jones: The Right Time also had a bevy of musical talents including Joe Cocker, Cindy Lauper, Al Jarreau, Lyle Lovett; it aired on VH-1 in the US.

The hallmark of Jones's 'making it' with the X-ers was his 1992 serenade on the TV show The Simpsons. In Jones's 1994 disc The Lead and How to Swing It (produced by Interscope Records, whose roster includes Nine Inch Nails, Bush, Dr. Dre and Snoop Doggy Dog), Jones proved he knows how to swing the lead, with disco, pop, and rock remakes, including Yazz's 'Situation' and 'I Wanna Get Back with You,' featuring Tori Amos.

But the true testimony to Jones's immortality is the CD about to be released, The Complete Tom Jones, a collection that spans three decades, with the golden oldies like 'I (Who Have Nothing),' to the newer 'Kiss' and 'Couldn't Say Goodbye.' Though all the old songs are technified, they still sound camp - just in time for the comeback of lounge music and dimly-lit retro-'70s parties.

With this polychromatic CD - like at concerts where he has done everything from Hendrix to the Jackson Five to Lenny Kravitz - one thing remains the same: The Voice. It wails, it booms, it rumbles; it overpowers everything, transcending genre and generations to hit that primitive core which still makes him appealing despite his age.

Neil Strauss from The New York Times summed it up perfectly in 1994 when he wrote: 'Mr. Jones proved himself to be a pop-music interpreter able to transcend kitsch and nostalgia. [He also] sang with an unmistakable voice that switched from a throaty baritone to a smooth bedroom whisper, altering his style enough to attract new fans without alienating his old ones.' Though native Israelis probably aren't familiar with the old Tom Jones (here he will probably be most recognized from his recent performance in the movie Mars Attacks!), his ribald candor - even more aggressive in his newer songs - is sure to strike a chord with our sabra nation.