

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

A full cup of good cheer with DeGeneres

CHICAGO THEATRE | Ellen brings the laughs, magic, music and more

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The most thunderous cheer of the night came only 10 minutes into the taping of comic and talk show host Ellen DeGeneres' "Somewhat Special Special" at the Chicago Theatre Wednesday night.

DeGeneres was in town as part of the TBS-sponsored "Just for Laughs" comedy festival, with numerous events around the city throughout the week.

Upon finishing her short opening monologue, DeGeneres said off-handedly, "I almost completely forgot about this." She then disappeared momentarily backstage and emerged lugging the actual Stanley Cup, with four burly and bejerseyed Blackhawks in tow. A wild standing ovation followed.

But it all wasn't downhill from there. For this, DeGeneres' fourth TV variety show extravaganza, lots of impressive talent was on hand.

The show opened with a German duo named Sos & Victoria, the female half of which shifting rapidly, amazingly, from one sexy-frilly costume to another, with only a hidden couple of seconds between each new outfit to complete the transformation. DeGeneres made her own grand entrance in a blue three-piece suit at the tail end of that segment, much to the audience's delight.

With DJ jams provided by "America's Got Talent" host and Mariah Carey mate Nick Cannon, the high-energy performance continued with the Catwalk Acrobats. The troupe of six men and one woman twisted, flipped, spun, tumbled and bounced up the sides of a tall, specially constructed wall and through three rectangular windows with the help of dual trampolines -- all of it accompanied by blaring big-band music.

In another impressive physical display, ripped and shirtless world record holder Dominic Lacasse, aka "the flag man," gripped a small vertical pole and struck the pose of a flag flapping in the wind. At DeGeneres' prompting, he also performed sideways chin-ups, among other eye-popping feats that required astounding power, control and muscular endurance.

DeGeneres seemed to enjoy herself throughout, smiling often and waving to the enthusiastic crowd.

A devotee of magic, she also introduced Australian illusionist James Galea, who garnered gasps of awe with a dazzling slight-of-hand card trick.

In a video segment that reminded her (jokingly) of "why I don't have kids," DeGeneres hauled a group of adorable youngsters through numerous exhibits at the Museum of Science and Industry. Pre-tour, she led them in a mock prayer session that included entreaties to make Cover Girl Simply Ageless Foundation (which she endorses) No. 1, and to "please make Finding Nemo 2."

Chicago comic John Mulaney appeared for a brief but well-received set and Grammy-winning country-pop trio Lady Antebellum jammed toward the end.

In her opening remarks, DeGeneres praised Chicago, quipping that "it's a place founded by wagon train people who gave up halfway."

And she had some advice for prospective Windy City visitors who might be watching. "If you're ever in Chicago," she said, "there's one thing to try -- say it with me people: the hookers."