

WAY OF LIFE MAGAZINE –TRANSLATION

Europe's Top Life Style Magazine



Photo: Anna Schori look-a-like agent Denise Bella Vlasis like Madonna, Jennifer Lyons, singer Fergie of Black Eyed Peas, Brandon Registry Watford is actor Robert Pattison and Jennifer Popagain as Jennifer Lopez.

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What happens to those who are lured to Hollywood for a life in the spotlight?

Many find-a place that copy instead.

Johan Åkesson has met five look-alikes in Los Angeles.

We are in an apartment in the Los Angeles district of Los Feliz, just minutes from the Hollywood sign, which for many has come to represent perhaps the greatest American dream - to be known. Mrs Angela stares into the mirror. She moves not flinch. A tattooed makeup with pink hair suggests an eyeliner before she lifts up Erika's chin and admire facial lines.



The Californian morning sun casts its light through the living room window and powdery dust in the sweet perfumed cloud that surrounds the two women. When the makeup is added starting Erika test different poses and looks, flirting spirit with her own reflection. Until she throws her long dark hair over her shoulder, turns around and says:

- Now I'm ready. Now I'm Angelina Jolie

The transformation did not take very long and Mrs Angela looks spot on to Jolie. On the coffee table are newspaper clippings of inspiration: the red carpet pictures and portrait photographs of the famous actress. Mrs Angela, who reads everything, she comes over and stays updated on what happens in the star's life, go into the bedroom to try a dress that is "very Angelina".

In Los Angeles there are many who try, but also those who realized that the "second best" may be good enough - just look like a celebrity. It is not unusual to bump into Elvis Presley in Hollywood's most touristy streets, or see Marilyn Monroe holding down her at a private party. Corporate events and premiere parties often spiced with hired look-alikes, a mock-Arnold, who will cut a ribbon, a fake Gaga to mingle at a VIP party, a Michael Jackson at a children's party. And even if the scaffold guests know that it is not the real thing, they are still as satisfied.

Mrs Angela has been Angelina Jolie in just six months. But has long been a big fan. For years, she went to auditions to become Angelina's "Body Double" in various movies and the feature film "Beowulf" (2007) Erika was hired as a test model to body double for a movie poster for Angelina. They have a very similar body type and size.

Even before Angelina Jolie's big break, when the movie "Gia" just released in 1998, Erika Angela often hear how similar she was such a promising actor.

- And it is true, of course, we have the same height, weight, eye color and hairstyle. So I took it as a compliment. Angelina is one of the world's most beautiful women in my eyes, says Erika Angela. She has also worked on getting his voice to sound so much like Angelina as possible.

During its first half-year look-alike, she has multiple appearances on the red carpet and cocktail mingle. While she also works as an actor and model.

- This is something I do on the weekends, I see it as acting. That's what Angelina Jolie does full time. While she plays other roles I play her.

So you think you are doing the same job as Angelina Jolie?

- All the acting jobs are equivalent, it is about how to re-create another person.

On her latest assignment, a Corporate party, arrived Erika dressed in black dress and large sunglasses. At her side she had a suit wearing Brad Pitt-look-alike.

- We talked with the guests and let them take pictures of us stayed in two-three hours and got paid well.

In Mrs Angela's apartment is also his colleague Jennifer Popagain reclined in the living room couch. She lives close by and lives with her dog in South Los Angeles. When the make up artist asks Jennifer to sit in front of the mirror and try out wigs, she tries on a particular one with a laugh.

- Is it Jlo? she asks.

With a blond wig, a thick layer of makeup and a tight-fitting dress Jen turns into Jlo.



- I love J-Lo , says Jennifer Popagain while she browse for a picture of the star in a gossip magazine.

She has never met his namesake, but Jennifer Popagain say it was close, both the time she stood in line to sit in the audience to the television program "American Idol" in which Lopez was a celebrity judge, and the time she saw Jennifer Lopez shopping at Bloomingdale's . Like Erika Angela , Jennifer Popagain is a professional actor and only works look-a-like part-time. She also moonlights as a “Mrs. Bella’s Doll” (Denise’s successful cigarette girl company) the cigarette girl – working events and VIP parties as a vintage cigarette girl.



When Mrs Angela has to leave us for a "secret meeting", we join Jennifer Popagains for a ride in her sports car and roll along the palm-lined pavement to a nearby cafe. Jennifer, in hat and big sunglasses - and a photographer to follow - get many looks from neighboring tables.

- I like the attention, she says, reflecting on the cafe guests really think she's Jennifer Lopez or not.

Both Jennifer and Erika get their assignments from Madonna. Not the real Madonna, but the woman who was Madonna's professional look-alike for 26 years. Jennifer sips her drink as she drives us across Los Angeles to suburbia where Denise Bella Vlasis live and work.

Denise Bella Vlasis has had “an amazing career as Madonna’s double for over 26 years” and feels she has done everything she could possibly accomplish as Madonna’s double gagger so she is more than happy to keep growing as a producer these days. “I can’t imagine just doing the same work year after year without some kind of growth in what I do”, as Madonna I have “been there and done it” already. She has met and worked with Madonna, written two industry books and now has her own agency where she books and grooms other lookalikes.

She likes to "stay at home in sweatpants these days," she says, as she gets ice water to her guests. We sit at the kitchen table and scroll through photos of the imitators she represents. Four year old daughter Sofia sits and watches. When Denise Bella Vlasis husband, who is a Big Band singer and impersonator for Elvis Presley returns home in the middle of the interview, it’s just a typical day for Denise.

Denise takes us out on the lot, past the pool and toward the garage where she opens the door and shows a huge, overcrowded closet full of costumes, props, head- pieces.

- When I book my cigarette girls, or look-alikes, they can always find something to wear here, she laughs. Denise still will take more unique bookings as Madonna or actor like print or film work. Denise has studied acting most of her life and has been in a few feature films as an actor including Clint Eastwood’s Flags of our Fathers.

- But Madonna has truly changed my life forever. When I was 20 and did not know what direction I would choose, I discovered Madonna. I was never fanatical or a “fan” but more interested in emulating her in a business sense. Madonna is brilliant and someone you cannot take your eyes off of when she performs. I never wanted to “be her” like other impersonators may feel, I know who I am and working as an impersonator is just a great avenue to work creatively.

In what ways are you and Madonna's life the same?

- We were both a dancers as young girls. Being a dancer gives a performer a certain strength as a performer. We were both drummers, focused our adult life on our careers, and had a baby girl when we turned 40 years old and we both love Latin men, Denise laughs. And I have also had a Sean Penn and Carlos Leon, in my life. But I never met a Guy Ritchie, I got an Elvis instead, she says, laughing.

Madonna is worth spending 26 years of your life?

- It has not been about her, but about my own journey. Madonna is just the magic carpet, I traveled

on. By playing a strong woman, I myself have learned to be strong in what I do. I also learn to keep working, I must re-invent myself, and all I do but it keeps life interesting to me, I get bored if I am not inspired. I don't do things "just for the money".

She wrote two books about this niche industry, and continues to groom new talent.

-The most in demand today are the classic Hollywood icons, like Marilyn Monroe, The Ratpack and great Elvis Presley. These imitators, she gets calls for all the time.

Now is also a large demand for "the new Hollywood," explains Denise Bella Vlasis. That is why she invited home two more celebrity impersonators. The doorbell rings and Robert Pattinson, actor from "Twilight" films, walks in. He introduces himself as Brandon Registry Watford and he is exact to the actor.



Brandon has just flown in from Orlando, Florida where he works as an actor at Universal Studios theme park. When the vampire movie "Twilight" (the first of a suite of three) was released in autumn 2008 was also the film actor Robert Pattinson world famous overnight. Meanwhile, people started turning around in town where Brandon Registry Watford went past. He covers his eyes when he is now, well-articulated, talks about his life as "real theater actor" home in Florida. Appearance-wise, he is frighteningly similar to the one he now makes money by imitating. The conversation quickly becomes confused. Brandon explains that he is an Edward-look-alike, that the character in "Twilight" films, not the actor. For Brandon, it is important to distinguish between the two. He is currently booked as vampire-Edward on a European cruise ship. Brandon offers a proud smile.

- So, it's not that I always enjoy being like him. When I am going to the gym and feel tired I usually don't want to be photographed, but it is clear that it's great otherwise, he says, while the doorbell rings again.



- Wow, you look just like Kylie Minogue, Brandon says to the woman who comes into the living room.

- I often hear it, she replies.

But it's not Kylie Minogue as Jennifer Lyons will pose as today. She's Fergie, singer of American group Black Eyed Peas.

- And sometimes I'm Shakira, and Taylor, she adds quickly.

Jennifer Lyons has been a professional actor for many years, had roles in TV series like "Married with Children" and "That 70's Show," and a bunch of feature films. Yet she sees look-alike missions as a good-part-time job.

- It started when I shared an apartment with a Britney impersonator six years ago, while I went through a period Shakira with very curly hair. My roommate's agent wanted me to test the job as her imitator, and as I danced some belly dancing before so I took the job, says Jennifer Lyons.

Her first gig was at a 13-birthday party. All the girls at the party thought that Jennifer was the real Shakira.

Jennifer Lyons goes into the bathroom to change about. When she comes out of turns on the party, and Jennifer Popagain bursts into an "ooohh, hot mama!".

- You are so incredibly like Fergie now, says Denise Bella Vlasis.

Jennifer Lyons staggers out of four inches high platform shoes, the socks, black skirt and a riveted corset.

Entire impersonator party goes into the garden to pose together at the poolside.

Denise Bella Vlasis, now dressed in her finest Madonna outfit, would not speculate on why people like to meet celebrity impersonators, but she says that as a young Madonna look-alike, she met people often in town who were convinced that she was Madonna.

She would explain to people she was not Madonna, and sometimes she gave the excited fans a little gift, a souvenir and photo of her as an impersonator. Playing the role of Madonna has also meant less pleasant encounters. Denise Bella Vlasis has often been reprimanded for things Madonna made but explains it is part of the job.

- As a look-alike may be both haters and lovers, it's the same for us as for the real celebrities, she says.

Brandon Registry Watford have similar experiences. Among the Twilight movies, and books, fans have fans split into two camps: Team Edward, who like Robert Pattinson's character, and Team Jacob, who prefer the opponent. When Brandon hits on someone from the opposing team, he can get acting shield for their loathing.

- It is teenage girls and their mothers who are the worst, he says.

- I personify their fantasies, for better or worse. An old grandmother attacked me once because I refused to kiss her.

Reality From Flipping fans are part of everyday life for look-alikes, and in a sense, also what they live on. But even mimic themselves can become chaotic in the personality of the carousel. Denise Bella Vlasis says she survived, but they are all of equal celebrity they mimic can be a little crazy.

- There are clearly those who struggle with drawing the line, that I write about in my next book, she says:

- Without saying anything too negative about my industry, I can mention the identity crisis as the most common problem. But often it is associated with which star you resemble, I say in my book this industry should be for performers, not fans. You should have a sense of self before working as a double.

Competition is the scourge of imitator groups. Some people feel an ownership and believe himself to be the only one who can play the celebrity in question. For Denise Bella Vlasis, there is always room for more.

- I have always been together with other Madonna's, we each bring something different to the table and all have their talents. I don't understand when a lookalike feels you are betraying them somehow if you like another who does the same character as they do. We are all in this together and should help each other, she says. Its' the fear of lack of work and competition I see in some that is disappointing.



The whole gang impersonator joins into the house to take a look at Denise Bella Vlasic calendar and discuss upcoming bookings. She has Brandon and Jen booked for tonight, and they are happy about this.

What is next for your career, will you keep pushing to be Madonna

I feel very happy to move on from working as a lookalike. Unless a job comes in that I have not tried yet. I need inspiration and creative people around me and feel I have maxed out the lookalike work as much as possible. When I started 26 years ago I bleached my hair, trained at the gym like a maniac and worked almost nightly, it was really crazy but fun and as fun as it was, I need to keep pushing myself to do more. I am not the type to just do the same thing for the money, I need to keep building. My Madonna act is only one small part of my creative abilities, so it's time for me to create again, but this time not imitating anyone. I am very excited about my Production Company Tribute Productions and my newest success of "Mrs Bella's Dolls" Cigarette Girl Company.

www.tributeproductions.com

www.mrsbellasdolls.com

Johan Åkesson

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Facts: Known lookalikes

In the 1920s, participated in a Charlie Chaplin look like Charlie Chaplin-contest and was not even a finalist.

A conspiracy theory says that Paul McCartney died in 1966 and then replaced in the Beatles by a Canadian police officer named William Shears Campbell.

Derek Williams of the English Football Association has been used as a stand-in for Sven-Goran Eriksson in a variety of contexts. Williams, also known as Sven Alike, has to bear in mind that the Swedish coach has become the most famous lookalikes in the UK.

Jeannette Charles has since the early 70's worked as Queen Elizabeth II lookalike.

Bill Gates-lookalike Steve Sires has played founder of Microsoft in several commercials and even himself tried to launch the brand Microsortof.

In the 70's was the actor Richard M Dixon (born James Laro) some attention after being portrayed President Nixon in the film.

Elvis Presley allegedly sent doppelganger from her house, then himself be able to leave home in peace.

Leaders like Joseph Stalin and Saddam Hussein have been reported to have had a number of lookalikes to reduce the risk (at least to themselves) to be killed in the attacks.