

Sammy Davis Jr.

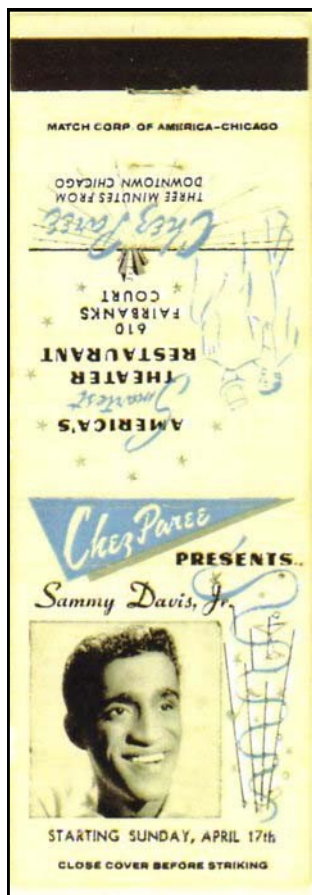
Samuel George Davis Jr. (December 8, 1925 – May 16, 1990) was an American singer, musician, dancer, actor, vaudevillian, comedian and activist known for his impressions of actors, musicians and other celebrities. At age three, Davis Jr. began his career in vaudeville with his father Sammy Davis Sr. and the Will Mastin Trio, which toured nationally.

After military service, Davis Jr. returned to the trio and became an overnight sensation following a nightclub performance at Ciro's (in West Hollywood) after the 1951 Academy Awards. With the trio, he became a recording artist. In 1954, at the age of 29, he lost his left eye in a car accident. Several years later, he converted to Judaism, finding commonalities between the oppression experienced by African-American and Jewish communities.

After a starring role on Broadway in *Mr Wonderful* (1956), he returned to the stage in 1964's *Golden Boy*.

Davis Jr.'s film career began as a child in 1933. In 1960, he appeared in the Rat Pack film *Ocean's 11*. In 1966, he had his own TV variety show, titled *The Sammy Davis Jr. Show*. While Davis' career slowed in the late 1960s, he did have a hit record with "The Candy Man" in 1972 and became a star in Las Vegas, earning him the nickname "Mister Show Business".

Davis had a complex relationship with the black community and drew criticism after publicly supporting President Richard Nixon in 1972. One day on a golf course with Jack Benny, he was asked what his handicap was. "Handicap?" he asked. "Talk about handicap. I'm a one-eyed Negro Jew." This was to become a signature comment, recounted in his autobiography and in many articles.



After reuniting with Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin in 1987, Davis toured with them and Liza Minnelli internationally, before his death in 1990. In August 1989, Davis began to develop symptoms—a tickle in his throat and an inability to taste food. Doctors found a cancerous tumor in Davis' throat. He had often smoked four packs of cigarettes a day as an adult. When told that surgery (laryngectomy) offered him the best chance of survival, Davis replied he would rather keep his voice than have a part of his throat removed; he was initially treated with a combination of chemotherapy and radiation. His larynx was later removed when his cancer recurred. He died in debt to the Internal Revenue Service, and his estate was the subject of legal battles.

Davis Jr. was awarded the Spingarn Medal by the NAACP and was nominated for a Golden Globe Award and an Emmy Award for his television performances.

He was the recipient of the Kennedy Center Honors in 1987, and in 2001, he was posthumously awarded the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award. In 2017, he was inducted into the Rhythm & Blues Hall of Fame for being the Greatest Entertainer in the World, said founder Lamont "ShowBoat" Robinson.

On June 25, 2019, *The New York Times Magazine* listed Sammy Davis Jr. among hundreds of artists whose material was reportedly destroyed in the 2008 Universal fire. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sammy_Davis_Jr.]