



## Madonna materializes

Why Indio, asks the world. Why not, say desert residents

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By HELENE BLATTER  
The Press-Enterprise

Driving east along Highway 111, lush resorts and upscale shopping centers give way to a mishmash of aging strip malls and fast-food restaurants as you approach the desert's oldest and largest town, Indio.



Amanda Lucidon / The Press-Enterprise

A sign on Historic Route 99 welcomes visitors to Indio, the city of festivals, including the Coachella Valley Music and

But with the help of local events, such as this weekend's Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival, the city's image as a weatherworn, working-class town is beginning to change. With booming development, increasing name recognition, and a new city manager working to pave the streets and lower crime, Indio is reinventing itself as an important hub in the Coachella Valley.

"The perception is changing," City Manager Glenn Southard said. "We're definitely on people's radar."

Which makes the unlikely town of Indio a perfect place for a performance by one of this year's most talked-about Coachella guests, the queen of reinvention and the master of publicity, pop icon Madonna.

"(Coachella) is the premier cutting-edge festival in America," said Thomas Mitchell, vice president of the desert radio station KMRJ 99.5. "(Madonna) wants to be a part of it to stay relevant."

Some residents were surprised to hear of her appearance.

"Madonna in the desert? At the Coachella Fest?" said an incredulous Cynthia Tinoco, 23. "She's such a big name."

Others, such as Kathy Ward, 51, a waitress for almost 20 years at Cactus Jacks Restaurant and

Arts Festival this weekend.

Bar, were less surprised by the news.

"I figured eventually someone like her would come," she said. "Every year, the festival grows."

### City on the Rise

"Over the past five years, Indio has changed from a nonentity," said Raymond Madick, owner of Gold Coast Tube and Steel in Indio. "(Today), you can tell people you're from Indio and they recognize it."

Madick, who lives in Palm Desert, is building a new home in Indio, where the population, according to Southard, is expected to grow from 70,000 to 100,000 in the next four years.

Southard said one of the driving forces behind Indio's changing image is its reinvention as the "city of festivals," playing host to the Riverside County Fair and National Date Festival, the Southwest Arts Festival, the International Salsa Festival, and the country's largest tamale festival, in addition to the now-internationally known Coachella music gathering.

"We're getting a lot of press and attention locally, regionally and nationally," Southard said.

Madonna's appearance at Coachella might be another signal that the town is on the rise.

At 47, with a career spanning more than a quarter of a century, Madonna is set to kick off another international tour next month to promote her album "Confessions on a Dance Floor." At Coachella, her debut festival appearance, she'll perform in the dance- and electronica-oriented Sahara tent, not on the main stage.

Bill Fold, an independent promoter helping to put on the festival, told The Press-Enterprise in March, "The fact that (Madonna) is playing the tent and not playing on the main stage shows that she's reinventing herself to be a part of Coachella rather than Coachella reinventing itself to accommodate her."

### Mother of Reinvention

From her start in the early 1980s, Madonna's sexy, independent persona propelled songs such as "Borderline," "Lucky Star" and "Like a Virgin" into the top 10, and turned adoring teenage fans into "Madonna Wannabes."

"She was a cultural icon," said Elayne Rapping, a professor at the State University of New York at Buffalo and a pop culture expert. She was "enormously important, presenting female sexuality in a powerful way."

Nick Bogardus, of New Noise Management, said a lot of the bands playing at Coachella grew up listening to '80s new wave and drew inspiration from artists such as Madonna.

"At her prime, she helped spawn a lot of indie music," he said.

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Not content with her role as a pop songstress, Madonna took up acting, furthering her fashion influence -- lace, bustiers and bangles -- with the film "Desperately Seeking Susan." She appeared on Broadway in David Mamet's "Speed-the-Plow," documented her Blond Ambition tour with the controversial film "Truth or Dare" and published the salacious book "Sex," featuring erotic pictures of herself and other celebrities.

Then, according to the Web site [www.allmusic.com](http://www.allmusic.com), in 1995, she began a subtle makeover campaign in a ploy to snag the role of Eva Perón in the film version of the musical "Evita," appealing to a more "mature" audience with her album "Something to Remember." She soon became pregnant with her daughter Lourdes and took on the persona of "mom." Her 1998 techno/trip-hop album "Ray of Light" was a return to a more modern sound.



Amanda Lucidon / The Press-Enterprise  
Indio was formerly known as an agricultural community and is now the largest growing city in the Coachella Valley. Indio's population is projected to grow from 70,000 to 100,000 in the next four years.

Since then, Madonna has made a home in England, married filmmaker Guy Ritchie, made studying the Kabbalah, or Jewish mysticism, vogue, had a son, published several children's books, and continued to make pop music and the news.

Rapping sees this as a conflict.

Madonna can't stay out of the spotlight, but she's changed her whole lifestyle, she said. She lives in a palace; she wants to be called Mrs. Ritchie; she's affected a British accent; she's taken up Kabbalah. "How can she be the lady of the manor and want to come back to youth culture and be a sex symbol?"

## Pop Legend

Out at the Empire Polo Club, home to the Coachella festival, Indio presents its most opulent face, with a rose garden, rows of blooming oleander, and views of snow-capped mountains in the distance.

It's a place even a material girl could love.

"The layout, the big grassy field, the desert environment, the energy ... " said 99.5's Mitchell of the festival. "Everyone's there for the love of the music."

Coachella is known as a festival for alternative artists, so the surprise at Madonna's appearance has as much to do with her musical style as it does with her fame.

"To play an alternative rock festival for someone who's always been more dance pop is definitely a stretch," said Mitchell. "But if she wants to stay important then she needs to stay active with upcoming artists."

Madonna fan Sylvia Segal, 18, of Indio, agrees that playing Coachella is a smart move for the pop star, and thinks she'll use the opportunity to hear new music and attract a different fan base.

"Madonna always makes sure that she looks fresh for her public," she said. "She's not old news; she's always new news."

But whether or not Madonna's current music will appeal to the young festival crowd, her appearance furthers a Coachella tradition of featuring iconic '80s bands such as Depeche Mode, the Cure and the Pixies.

Bogardus of New Noise Management said many Coachella attendees see Madonna as a pop legend.

"You're there with 1,000 people seeing this person that you've only seen on TV," he said. "It really will be the experience of the day. Everyone will be talking about it."

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