





To be perfectly Frank

Three local singers keep the spirit of Ol' Blue Eyes alive with tribute shows at Delaware venues

By Peter Bothum • The News Journal • February 11, 2010

Blues, British Invasion, punk, New Wave, rap, grunge, boy bands, hip-hop.

Musical fads have come and gone over the years, leaving the bands that led each movement behind as mere entries in the Great Big Book of Popular Music.

But a few faces have been etched in stone on the Mount Rushmore of pop: Elvis,

The Fab Four, Michael, Madonna.

And [Frank Sinatra](#).

Ol' Blue Eyes is arguably the most enduring pop star of all time, with an appeal and name recognition that transcends age and race. If you've seen "Goodfellas," you know Frank. If you watch TV, you know Frank.

And if you've ever tried to romance someone, you know Frank, or at least you should if you want to increase your chances of success on this Valentine's Day weekend.

If you'd like to take it up a notch from a recording of "I've Got You Under My Skin" or "The Way You Look Tonight," there are plenty of guys around Delaware who put on amazing performances of Frank Sinatra tunes – and even a few this weekend.

Here's a look at three of 'em, baby.

A second act

NAME: Bryan Clark
AGE: 46
HOMETOWN: Dagsboro
WEB SITE: www.bryanclarksings.com

The name of Bryan Clark's show is as straightforward as you can get: "Bryan Clark Sings Sinatra."

But people who come out to see one of Clark's shows at a local restaurant for the first time might be a little surprised when they look up from their salads and match what they're hearing to what they're seeing.

Clark is a self-described "man of color" – his mother is white and his father is black and part American Indian.

"I certainly don't look like him," said Clark, who lives in Lewes. "I make a joke about it: There's got to be Italian somewhere for me to love Sinatra like this."

Clark got started on his career as a performer immediately after graduating from Indian River High School, going out on his own in 1981 to pursue an acting career in Los Angeles.

Brief, unsuccessful stints there and in New York convinced him that singing was his meal ticket.

He went out to Las Vegas in 1983 and became the "Singing Bus Boy" at a Sunset Strip joint called the Westward Ho Hotel and Casino.

"I was just so ambitious. I would sing to the guests. They would write on the back of their checks – 'We love the singing bus boy,'" Clark said.

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Clark parlayed his schtick into a full-time gig at the Westward Ho and later sang at the Riviera Hotel and Casino.

"It was awesome. It was a little dream come true, if you will."

In 1988, he left Vegas and returned to the East Coast, where wouldn't relaunch his career for another 12 years. He started singing professionally again in 2000, and in 2004 he got an offer to play the cop in the **Village People** in the Legends In Concert tribute show at the Claridge Hotel in Atlantic City.

It was an odd return to a steady engagement, but it was a return nonetheless.

"That was the turning point where I said: This is what I want to do full-time."

Now, there's no more day job. Clark pays the bills through a show called "Drinking, Singing, Swinging: A Salute To Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr. and **Dean Martin**," where he portrays Sammy Davis Jr.; larger shows, like the Portrait of Sinatra engagements he'll do in Lancaster, Pa., this fall; and Bryan Clark Sings Sinatra & More, which features Clark crooning the tunes of Frank along with songs by Tony Bennett, **Nat King Cole** and Tom Jones.

The shows, which Clark performs regularly at Annabella's Italian Restaurant in Lewes, Casa DiLeo Restaurant in Rehoboth and other eateries, feature high-quality backing tracks of orchestral arrangements. His favorites are "I've Got You Under My Skin," "The Way You Look Tonight" and "One For My Baby."

"To me there's just no other. I guess Sinatra, to me, typifies the music of class. You hear it and it just puts you in a certain time," Clark said. "It gives you a certain feel of taste and elegance."

Upcoming shows:

- 6-9 tonight, Jake's Seafood House Restaurant, 4443 Highway One, Rehoboth Beach.
- 6-10 p.m. Saturday, Valentines show at Baywood Greens, 32267 Clubhouse Way, Long Neck.
- 4:30-8:30 p.m. Sunday, Soffritto Italian Grill, 1130 Kirkwood Highway, Newark.

- Sept. 1, 8, 15, 22, 29, Portrait of Sinatra at the American Music Theater, 2425 Lincoln Hwy East, Lancaster, Pa. Clark will be backed by an eight-piece orchestra. There will be two shows each day at 3 p. m. and 7:30 p.m.

A whisper in his ear

NAME: Sean Reilly
AGE: 53
HOMETOWN: Wilmington
WEB SITE: www.seansinatra.wordpress.com
The Frank Sinatra thing didn't hit Sean Reilly like a crashing, swooning wave of strings.

It was a whisper in his ear.

"When I was a kid my mother used to sing 'In The Wee Small Hours Of The Morning' to put us to sleep," Reilly said.

It continued to build. Sure, he got into The Beatles and The Rolling Stones like every other teenager on the planet, but he also listened to his parent's Sinatra albums.

When he started driving, his passengers would have to listen to Frank.

"All my life, every day, I'd listen to Sinatra," Reilly said. "But I'd learn from the master how to breath. There's more to a song than just singing it. And I

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learned how to speak better diction, just by listening to when he did it and how he'd do it."

Reilly got his start three years ago when he was asked to sing "The Lady Is A Tramp" at a Judy Garland tribute in Wilmington. David Zipse, now his musical director, told him he should start doing some gigs, so the pair started performing regularly at the Wilmington restaurant Ameritage (which has since closed). Zipse plays keyboards behind Reilly and "sounds like an orchestra."

Reilly later entered a "Frank Sinatra Idol" contest in Hoboken, N.J. – Ol' Blue Eyes' hometown.

"And I won. An Irish Delawarean," Reilly said. "I thought all these [guys] were going to throw me in the Hudson River."

The secret of his success is no secret at all. In addition to vocally nailing Sinatra's songbook, Reilly is the spitting image of Sinatra.

The big win in Frank's old stomping grounds propelled Reilly, who works as a recruiter at the Network Group for a day job, into a schedule that was almost too much to handle. He went from two shows a month to 17 gigs in 28 days – or every other day.

Reilly can slip into character on cue, shifting into the slightly chauvinistic Sinatra when discussing Pink's wet-and-wild Grammy performance.

"You know how Frank was ... 'Look at those crazy chicks,'" Reilly says, drenching his voice with an Italian accent. "'I wish she had some oil on her. I'd get some dressing on her salad.'"

Reilly uses the 12 to 15 times he saw Sinatra in concert to help him bring the crooner to life.

"In 1973, he came out of retirement. That was the best day of my life," Reilly said. "I thought he was gone forever. There was a whole new world to be had."

He loves to sing "That's Life" – or "John Edwards' new theme song," as he calls it – "Moonlight In Vermont" and, of course, "New York, New York."

In addition to performing at restaurants and clubs like Union City Grille, Reilly will take a scaled-back version to nursing homes like Shipley Manor. He also recently performed at two funerals for people who loved Sinatra.

"Remember Adam Sandler, the wedding singer? Let me introduce you to Sean Reilly, the funeral singer," Reilly said.

Upcoming shows:

- 7-10 p.m. Saturday, Valentine's Day show at the Hotel du Pont's Green Room, N. Market St. and W. 11th St., Wilmington. Call 594 3100.
- 6-9 p.m. Wednesday, Union City Grille, 805 N. Union St., Wilmington.
- Feb. 20, Delaware Humane Association Fundraiser. Call 571-0111.
- 6-9 p.m. Feb. 25, Pescatores Restaurant, 1810 Wilmington Pike, Glen Mills, Pa.

A lifelong Sinatra-aholic

NAME: Anthony Barcola

AGE: 53

HOMETOWN: Wilmington

WEB SITE: www.anthonysingssinatra.webs.com

Even though Anthony Barcola had been a self-proclaimed "Sinatra-aholic" for his entire life and would, on occasion, sing Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin tunes at karaoke, he didn't think about doing it for money until customers at his Newark-based business, Salon By Anthony, noticed his pipes.

"It's not uncommon for people to come in here and hear me sing 'fly me to the moooon,' " Barcola

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said, crooning the Sinatra classic. "People'd say, 'Man, you really have a good voice. You should go out and sing.'"

Barcola has been singing in bands for years, but doing Frank came naturally because he's a walking, talking reincarnation of Sinatra all day long. His voice bounces to the Sinatra cadence, and you can imagine him doing just about everything in his daily life in a tux, with a cigarette dangling out of his mouth and a drink at the ready.

"I'm in a Frank mode 24/7. I listen to him on the way to work. I rehearse him in the car," said Barcola, who lives in Avon Grove, Pa. "People probably look at me at a red light and think I'm nuts because I have my arms up in the air."

Barcola's regular gig is at Valle's Cucina Italian Restaurant in Pike Creek, where he holds court at 6 p.m. every Sunday. What he's surprised to see is how many young people are still into Sinatra, whom Barcola has seen four times.

"You can't believe the young girls that gravitated to me," he said of a recent performance at the Stone Balloon Wine House. "It's an amazing thing. First of all, I'm not a bad-looking guy. I'm humble, too."

His favorite songs are the barroom ditties like "One For My Baby (And One More For The Road)," "I've Got A Crush On You" and "If I Had You."

"When you listen to the titles to these songs it's what has happened to us, and what will happen to us. The chick that got away," said Barcola, who has been listening to Sinatra since he was a little kid infatuated with the big-band sound. "That's where he made his bones."

Upcoming shows:

- 6:30 p.m. Sunday, Valle Cucina Italian Restaurant, 4752 Limestone Road, Pike Creek.
- 7 p.m. March 3, Valle Cucina Italian Restaurant, 4752 Limestone Road, Pike Creek.

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