

Outtakes Around The Lakes

With

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Ol' Blue Eyes 'Lives' On

As readers know, credited with playing more than 70 stage characters ranging from Neil Simon's 'Willie Clark' in his comedy, "The Sunshine Boys," to 'Lazar Wolf, the Butcher' in the musical, "Fiddler On The Roof," and, with three acting awards safely tucked into my portfolio, I'm probably as qualified, if not more so than anyone, when it comes to judging new talent. And when I hear of any, I make every attempt at viewing it.



Photo courtesy The Repository/Bob Rossitor

That's why I was so excited last month when I heard about the Frank Sinatra impersonator appearing here in the lakes at Dusty's Yacht Club. I've always been a big Sinatra fan and if he was half as good as what I had been hearing, I knew I'd enjoy the show.

The late great Frank Sinatra, sang with that magnificent romantic voice, a heart filled with music and hand gestures. More than most singers, he used his hands as no other entertainer had before or since.

Sinatra had an uncanny way of emphasizing the lyrics with his hands. He could win over an audience with any one of the three but it was mainly how he put the beat of his music to subliminal hand motions that really put his signature on songs.

Sinatra passed away eight years ago but Mike Sonata of Canton works mighty hard making sure no one in the area forgets the Chairman of the Board. Save for Bobby Darin, no other entertainer, not Bing Crosby, not Dean Martin, not even Elvis Presley have ever used their hands as effectively in stressing song lyrics like Sinatra did; that is until Sonata came along.

The 55 year old Canton, Ohio native's impersonation of Sinatra at about the same age is so uncanny, he's even mastered Ol' Blue Eyes' hand movements. One that almost says loud and very clear to anyone watching, 'Sinatra still lives.' That gesture alone has put him one small step removed from resurrecting this American entertaining icon.

And like Sinatra, Sonata checks in at five feet 10 inches tall, carries a svelte 175 pounds on his frame and sports blue eyes.

Not only is Sonata's resemblance to the leader of the Rat Pack remarkable, but his wide vocal range smoothly runs the gamut from the low notes of "Witchcraft" to the highs of his show's closing tune, "My Way." And for two solid hours every song in between is purely Sinatra.

Make no mistake about it. When Sonata dons the hat, bow tie, suit and shoes, when he coordinates his hand gestures to the lyrics, when he moves Sinatrasque with the beat, when he bellows out the lyrics as only the Chairman of the Board could, he no longer is Mike Sonata. From the very moment he starts until he finishes, you'd swear you were watching, and listening to, Sinatra's reincarnation.

While making a recording of Sinatra tunes for his wife, Lisa, a year ago, he was told how much he sounds like the long time singing star. Sonata took then the next step by putting together musical tracks of Sinatra's best loved songs. He studied Sinatra's hand movements as well as body English and his long association with plays in the local community theatre circuit enabled him to naturally act out Sinatra in his prime. Of course it certainly didn't hurt that he looked and could dress like the singer, too.

Starting out at the 'Little Chicago' club in downtown Canton, Sonata and his act soon advanced to the 'City Grille' on Whipple Avenue (now the 'Cite' Chop House') near Belden Village Mall. That's where Kristy Spahr from Dusty's Yacht Club here in the Portage Lakes discovered him and was instrumental in making arrangements for his appearances at the historic waterfront establishment.

From his show's early number, "Luck be a Lady," through "New York, New York" when he invited the audience to join him and become the chorus line, to "That's Life," Sinatra...er, Sonata (sorry about that, folks), worked the

crowd. And on that third Saturday evening in October when my wife, Peggy, and I saw the show at Dusty's, the crowd responded enthusiastically. Simply put, the nearly full house of club members and special guests, who were there from word of mouth, loved it.

After ending his set, the crowd gave a standing ovation and begged for more, finally convincing Sonata to do not one, nor two but three full encores before leaving for the night convinced that what they had just heard and witnessed was nothing short of stellar entertainment.

On Friday, Nov. 10, Sonata returned to the lakes for a private birthday party at Dusty's. However, word of mouth soon traveled faster than the Cleveland Cavalier's LeBron James running the basketball court, delivering one of his patented, reverse spin, supersonic dunks, and just like James, Sonata ended up playing to another packed house.

The singer resides with Lisa and their son, Brendan, 14, at their Canton, Ohio home. His theatre credits include performing for the famed Canton Players Guild. Currently the biggest part of his December weekends are filled. Sonata is playing the father, one of the lead roles in 'The Christmas Story' at Barberton's Magical Theatre Company.

If Michael Sonata ever graduates from stage to the silver screen, he could very well end up doing for Sinatra what Kevin Spacey did for the late Bobby Darin in the movie, 'Beyond The Sea.' That's right, folks. Based on my 26 years of stage experience, he's that good. You have my word for it.