A Helluva Show!

Eric Comstock & Tom Santopietro
Bring “Sinatra in Hollywood”
to Life

The NYSMS May Meeting by Jerry Laird

I knew Frank Sinatra was a big star (I lived through it), but until Tom Santopietro pointed it out to us at the May meeting, it didn’t occur to me that he had been a very big star for six decades! Yes, there were a few downsides, but overall, he made 70 films, and the good ones, like “On the Town,” and “From Here to Eternity,” definitely overcome the bad ones like “Dirty Dingus Magee,” and “The Kissing Bandit.”

The book deals with the swinging ups and downs of Sinatra in Hollywood, including his marriages, as well as the ups and downs of his singing and acting through the years. “The Manchurian Candidate” stands out as his breakthrough role as a serious actor.

Tom Santopietro did an excellent job of vividly telling us just enough about his book so that we still want to read it, and an outstanding element of the afternoon was Eric Comstock’s performing more than 15 of Sinatra’s privately-branded songs, from one “New York, New York” (from “On the Town”) to the other “New York, New York.” One of the many interesting things about the book is that it consists of Santopietro’s own interpretation and research of Sinatra’s years in Hollywood, not just another “as told to” bio. The author should get an award of his own for sitting through the Bert Wheeler parts of “Las Vegas Nights,” just to get a few glimpses of Sinatra’s un-credited performances in that movie, which featured Tommy Dorsey and his band.

Several of Sinatra’s initial movie appearances were like that: he had no billing in “Reveille with Beverly” (Ann Miller as a tap dancing radio disc jockey. Wow!); “Ship Ahoy” singing one of my all-time favorites, “Poor You”; Ah, but neither did Jo Stafford get billing. I guess Hollywood (or Tommy Dorsey) was like that.

Among the other songs that Eric sang, and around which Santopietro built his discussion, were “Hot Time in the Town of Berlin,” “I Fall in Love Too Easily,” “Saturday Night is the Loneliest Night of the Week” (sung as a slow ballad, and not the usual jump tempo—and it was terrific), “The House I Live In,” (from an MGM short for which Sinatra got an honorary Academy Award), “That Old Black Magic,” “The Tender Trap,” “All the Way,” “The Lady is a Tramp,” “One For My Baby,” and one I never heard: “Every Day Was Monday.” Since there is always One More Song, Eric sang “Chicago Is” from “Robin and the Seven Hoods”…a most appropriate title for that particular cast.

One more one more thing: Ervin Drake, who just celebrated his 90th Happy Birthday, concluded the afternoon by singing and playing one of his big hits that was also one of Sinatra’s big hits: “It Was a Very Good Year.” And it was a very good program indeed.
President’s Message...
Linda Amiel Burns, President

Can you believe that this is the last Newsletter of the season - and what a season it was! We had an amazing line-up of talent and programs and we will be ending on June 13 with a spectacular panel of industry professionals and entertainers, moderated and produced by Margot Astrachan speaking on the subject, “Is Sheet Music Alive and Well? - The Future!” You can read all about it in this issue.

I cannot thank Tom Santopietro enough for bringing us his wonderful book, “Sinatra in Hollywood,” and sharing his knowledge of this legendary performer, at last month’s meeting. And, you certainly cannot get better than Eric Comstock singing Sinatra’s music. Eric was the creator and star of “Our Sinatra” which ran for years. I was thrilled with the way it all came together and with the generosity of both Tom and Eric.

The Board of Directors will meet this month and start planning next season’s Programs. There are already some exciting afternoons in the works, so please remember to rejoin and get your friends to join, so that this important organization can continue to thrive and stay vibrant. If any of you have some ideas and want to participate, let me know. I particularly want to thank Jerry Laird and Joan Adams for the work that they do on the NYSMS Newsletter and Glen Charlow for his work as “chief cook and bottle washer,” serving as our Webmaster, Treasurer, Membership Chair, and Designer! Whew!

Wishing you all a healthy and happy summer and looking forward to seeing you on June 13, and then again in October for our first meeting of the 2009-2010 season!

with all good wishes,

Linda

Jerry Osterberg has sent us the following notice:
Male singers needed for benefit performance on Tuesday, June 30, at 6:00pm, at the New York Athletic Club, located at Central Park South and Seventh Avenue. Proceeds will support Marine Corps Law Enforcement Foundation (which provides scholarship funds for children of Marines, Navy Corpsmen, and Federal Law Enforcement officers killed in the line of duty), and The National Foundation for Facial Reconstruction (addressing the plight of children with facial disfigurements, and adults injured in designated combat zones or by terrorist acts). Rehearsals on Tuesdays June 2, 9, 16, 23, and Monday, June 29. For more complete information, please call Jerry at 516-248-7549.
Member News...

If you have any member news, or other items you would like to have considered for this newsletter, please send it by e-mail to the editor, Jerry Laird: lairdstdio@optonline.net. It will be subject to editing, depending on size and content, and please remember that we try to go to press four weeks before each monthly meeting. We often get very good items that get to us after the newsletter has been printed and mailed.

“It’s the Talk of the Town: a musical tribute to Jerry Livingston” will be at the Laurie Beechman Theatre on Thursday, June 4th at 7:00pm; Sunday, June 7th, at 4:00pm; Thursday, June 11th at 7:00pm, and Saturday, June 13th at 4:00pm. For MAC & NYSMS there is a special offer: $15 cover and $10 minimum.

Peggy Eason will be bringing her exciting new show, “Discover Me,” to Don’t Tell Mama (343 West 46th Street) for two performances: Saturday, June 19 at 7:00pm, and Sunday, June 27 at 5:30pm. Guest artist is Laura Slutsky; Musical Director/Pianist is Richard Danley; Director is Linda Amiel Burns. Reservations are suggested – call 212-757-0788. $10 cover plus two drink minimum. $5 discount for TNYSMS members.

Linda Amiel Burns’ next Singing Experience, “Say It With Music” will be at the Triad on Tuesday, June 16th at 7:30. Rehearsals will be on Tuesdays, starting May 19th. Richard Danley will be playing. Call Linda (212 315 3500) for reservations.

Saint Peter’s Midtown Jazz at Midday, St. Peter’s Church, Wednesdays at 1:00 pm, hosted by Ronny Whyte (54th Street, just west of Lex) Suggested Donation: $7.00. You may always find the schedule at www.saintpeters.org/jazz/midtownjazz.htm

June 3 – Barry Harris – Piano – Sanctuary
   www.barryharris.com
June 10 – Peggy Stern’s River Jazz Chorus – Sanctuary
   Peggy Stern, Piano
   www.peggystern.com
   Lew Scott, Bass
June 17 – Judy Carmichael – Piano – Sanctuary
   www.judycarmichael.com
   Mike Hashim – Sax
   Ed Ornowski - Drums
June 24 – Sandy Stewart & Bill Charlap - Sanctuary
   Note: Midtown Jazz is off for July and August, and will return in September.

Vince Giordano and his Nighthawks are featured every Monday, from 8:00pm to 11pm, at Sofia’s Restaurant at the Edison Hotel at 221 W. 46th Street, between Broadway & Eighth Avenue. $15 cover and $15 minimum for food & drink. On Saturday, June 6th they will be at the Drew University, Jazz Festival, Madison, NJ. For detailed information, go to Drew University web pages.

In case you have a trip to Australia in June between the 5th and the 20th, Julie Wilson will be part of the Adelaide Cabaret Festival then. David Campbell, who made a big splash here a few years ago (and is from Australia), is the director of the festival. Campbell was outstanding as Valentine in Encore’s production of “Babes in Arms” while in this neighborhood. (When the MGM movie was made in the late 30s, Mickey Rooney would not play a named Valentine, which necessitated the removal of the song “My Funny Valentine” from the movie.)

Scot Albertson & Jerry Scott can be found every Sunday afternoon, 1:00pm-4:00pm at La Mediterranea French Bistro & Piano Bar, 947 2nd Avenue, between 50th & 51st Streets. For reservations, call 212-755-4155. Scot will also be at the Kitano in NY on Wednesday, June 17th at 8:00pm. Not so incidentally, Scot’s new CD, “With Every Note, A Step” had an excellent review in the April issue of “Jazz Improv,” which noted that “Albertson’s music blends the Broadway tradition with jazz like nothing else currently on the market.”

You can see The Singing Experiences on Cable. Time Warner, Channel 56: RCN Chan 83, every other Sunday at 5 pm.

Do you seek an elusive song? If so, contact Sandy Malone, smu-sandy@aol.com or call her at 856-829-6104. You can also visit Sandy in New Jersey to see thousands and thousands of sheets of music, most of which can be yours very reasonably.

Trudi Mann’s Open Mic is going strong at the Butterfield Eight Restaurant, 5 East 38th Street, 212-679-0646, from 1:00pm to 5:00pm. If you’re gonna’ sing, please bring two copies of your music. Sign-in starts around noon. There is no cover charge, but “the hat” is passed on behalf of the musicians. $16 minimum.

Scott Barbarino has a website www.CabaretExchange.com with excellent features and articles, and his current performance schedule.

Lynn DiMenna and Jeffrey C. Williams have resumed their weekly live radio broadcasts, “At The Ritz,” on WVOF 88.5 FM from 3:00 to 5:00 pm on Fridays. Better still, here’s how to hear their show any time you feel like it: just go to http://www.attheritz.org/and click on 24/7.

Joe Franklin and Steve Garrin have re-opened the Joe Franklin Comedy Club at 761 Seventh Avenue, at 50th Street. Call 212-541-6592 for the schedule.

Mel Miller offers five musicals for less than the price of one Broadway ticket, with his “Musicals Tonight.” Actually, this is a LOT less than some of the prices being charged these days! Call 212-468-4444 for information.

Send Member News to Lairdstdio@optonline.net no later than the 15th of each month for the next issue.
As I’m writing this, I don’t have the complete list of the participants for the June meeting, but I do know that two of my all-time favorite people will be there: Ed Shanaphy and Steven Lutvak. If these two guys had been around several decades ago, their names would have been right up there with Rodgers and Hart, Cole Porter and Irving Berlin - nothing less. Lutvak has been working on a musical version of “Kind Hearts and Coronets,” and at a previous meeting he previewed a few of his songs for that show, which are the equal of any of the hits of the Golden Age of Broadway. And Shanaphy continues to keep our musical world alive with his publication, “Sheet Music Magazine.”

In writing the lead story about Tom Santopietro’s book “Sinatra in Hollywood,” and the fact that Frank Sinatra did not get screen credit for several of his first movies (when he appeared as the boy singer with the Tommy Dorsey band), I’m reminded that Bing Crosby didn’t get screen credit for a very big part he played in Paul Whiteman’s film, “King of Jazz,” in the very early ’30s. It was during Crosby’s carousing days, with more wine and women than song, and he was often late or absent from the set of the movie. His big song, “It Happened in Monterey,” was given to John Boles (who did get screen credit, but had less screen time than Crosby did). Bing was just considered part of the Rhythm Boys. One of my favorite quotes about Sinatra, which is attributed to Crosby, is: “If he had the voice of a lifetime, why did he have to be born during MY lifetime?”

I also mentioned in the Sinatra story how fantastic Eric Comstock is, but we can never praise him enough for his contribution to the Sheet Music Society. He consistently comes through for us, and he just keeps getting better and better.

About a month ago I was asked to be an Official in the Connecticut Odyssey of the Mind program, an organization that offers young people the opportunity to participate in small groups where they choose one of several projects to create, construct, and perform on their own. Adults supervise, but cannot take a hands-on part of the project. In the creation of their chosen project, the participants often write their own music and lyrics, which are then performed as part of their eight minute program, which takes place after approximately seven months of preparation. And although it’s nice to win, just being a part of this is truly a reward in itself. It was a thrill listening to their enthusiastic descriptions of their individual parts in creating their project, and to see how much of the musical and lyrical creativity was similar to the swing style that I grew up with. It gave me hope that perhaps the Great American Songbook doesn’t exist only in the past.

Next column, you will find a note I received from our Assistant Editor, describing a recent performance by Ronny Whyte at Saint Peter’s Church. Ronny’s new CD is reviewed elsewhere in this issue, by Elliot Ames, but with talent like Ronny’s, there is no such thing as too much praise!
Have you ever wondered how folks in the music business and other aficionados of popular song spend a free Saturday afternoon? That’s right, they’re all at the Metropolitan Room listening to Lynn DiMenna sing the songs of Johnny Mercer. Her entertaining show on May 2nd, “My Huckleberry Friend: A Centennial Salute to Johnny Mercer,” marked her debut at the cabaret.

Lynn’s growing roster includes The Oak Room, The Waldorf Astoria, Danny’s Skylight Room, The Tavern on the Green, Town Hall, Birdland, and many more. On April 5th, she participated in a Big Band concert devoted to Mercer songs at Hofstra University; and on April 29th, she was the vocalist in a tribute to Johnny Mercer at Fairfield University, performing in a program which was free to the public.

From the first minute she walked on the Metropolitan Room’s stage, the gracious Ms. DiMenna’s warm and engaging personality pulled in the enthusiastic audience. More than a hundred of her closest friends, including Andrea Marcovicci, Daryl Sherman, Richard Skipper, and Julie Wilson, filled the intimate room.

The diverse collection, representing thirty years of Mercer’s extraordinary talent, ranged from the sexy Latin tempo of “It Had Better Be Tonight” to the easy sentimentality of “Moon River,” both written by Henry Manchini for “The Pink Panther” and “Breakfast at Tiffany’s,” respectively. Besides Manchini, more than a dozen of the 170 of Johnny’s marvelous collaborators were offered – Arlen, Carmichael, Whiting, Kern, and Warren, among them.

DiMenna’s versatility was much in evidence throughout “This Time The Dream’s On Me,” “Skylark,” “Too Marvelous For Words,” “I’m Old Fashioned,” and “The Atchison, Topeka, and the Santa Fe.” Our NYSMS President, Linda Amiel Burns, who founded “The Singing Experience”, a series of performance workshops, more than thirty years ago, was the director. Lynn was superbly accompanied by Steve Doyle on piano, Chris Higgins on bass, and David Meade on drums.

CD REVIEW: “Whyte On Whyte”

By Elliott Ames

Among this season’s new releases and of particular interest to NYSMS members is a CD by Ronny Whyte, who has frequently brightened our programs with stylish sophistication, humor and his piano virtuosity. The 15 cuts on the album represent a compilation of Ronny’s work as a singer, composer and occasional lyricist from the 1980s to the present. Many of the tunes have been recorded by leading artists and all reflect a respect for a well-written lyric and, in tradition of The Great American Songbook, express with wit and compassion, that recurring theme of so many of our finest songwriters so simply put: I Love You. Three of the cuts on this recording — “Something To Write Home About,” “People, Places, Things,” and “Lights On, Nobody Home” — offer lyrics by long time SMS member Roger Schore. They are love songs in the purest sense. A number of the selections on this technically clean recording feature the distinguished pianist John Bunch as accompanist along with alto sax and flute backing by Lou Caputo. On a humorous note, Whyte fans may recognize his ode to Hampton types and their foibles: “Hampton Blues” — “I’ve got the blues in the Hamptons/ And it really is a sin/ My maid’s away for the rest of the day/And I can’t find my gin...” In all, here’s a thoughtfully selected melange of well-structured songs, intelligently phrased — jazz, cabaret, humor on the highest level — and clearly a worthy addition to your collection.

Each one has most impressive credentials, having worked with many of the biggest names in cabaret, concert, and recording.

Steve Doyle, who is also a bass player and singer, joined Lynn for the clever “Have You Got Any Castles?”, written by Mercer and Richard Whiting for the movie “Varsity Show,” which was introduced by Dick Powell and Rosemary Lane; and “Two Of A Kind,” the music by Bobby Darin, who later recorded the song with Mercer. Doyle also performed “Laura,” from the film of the same name, with music by David Raksin and the lyrics supplied by Johnny Mercer a year after the picture’s release.

Although Ms DiMenna performed a few numbers for which the prolific song writer did both words and music, notably “Dream” and “Something’s Gotta Give,” there was only one that came with a story attached. A woman from Youngstown, Ohio wrote to Mercer, suggesting a title for a song. He agreed, and gave her half of the credit after he wrote” I Wanna Be Around,” and published it. The song later became a huge hit for Tony Bennett. If anyone should ask, the woman’s name is Sadie Zimmerstedt.

Lynn DiMenna is far too young to have ever sung with Johnny Mercer, a well-respected singer in his own right, but one can easily imagine them doing duets of “Hit the Road to Dreamland,” “Blues in the Night,” and “Come Rain or Come Shine.” Still, her presentation reflected an impeccable taste in music, a generous sense of humor, and a voice that encouraged all the right emotions.

If you missed the show, or simply want to hear more of this fine singer, you can catch her on WVOF radio, where she appears regularly with Jeffrey C. Williams on “At The Ritz,” a program dedicated to the extraordinary range of talented people who inhabit the field of popular music. Or, you can run down to the internet and buy her latest CD – “Sweet & Swing,” featuring a tasty slice of the American Song Book- Berlin, Ellington, Hammerstein, Rodgers, and a lot more.
What’s Coming Up Next...

June 13, 2009

“What’s Coming Up Next...”

Our Program’s Moderator/Producer, Margot Astrachan has gathered the biggest and the brightest for our last program of the 2008-2009 season! We will be hearing from a varied and highly-esteem panel of industry professionals and performers: one of New York’s most exciting and popular musicians, singer/songwriter/pianist Steven Lutvak, will perform his fabulous original music; The always-delightful singer/pianist Daryl Sherman, right off her well deserved MAC Award win, will treat us to jazz and standards; Deborah Grace Winer, journalist/author/Artistic Director of “Lyrics and Lyricists” at the 92nd Street Y. She has written extensively on the American Songbook; Jeff Liebenson, Counsel at Herrick, Feinstein, LLP, where he specializes in digital entertainment, music, and intellectual property law; Jeff has over 20 years of experience in the entertainment industry; Marsha Patelson, President and owner of Joseph Patelson Music House, and a professional cellist, who has conducted and taught music in New York City High Schools for 31 years. She is active in chamber music and orchestras in the metropolitan area; Sean Patrick Flahaven, has produced over 100 shows, concerts, workshops and readings. He is a writer/composer/orchestrator/conductor/producer. He is Vice President of Theatre and Standards Repertoire for Warner/Chappell Music; our moderator, Margot Astrachan is the American Artistic Director of the Jermyn Street Theatre in London, and produces the ongoing British American Theatre Initiative. She has written, produced, and performed five one-woman shows in New York and in London. As a writer, she is currently working with Carmen de Lavallade on the book of a new jazz musical, tentatively titled, “Summer.”

LOCATION – Local 802 – Musicians’ Hall at 322 West 48th Street. Flea market 12:30 – Great place to find music sheets, tapes, CD’s etc. Program: 1:45 – 3:30PM. Non-member guest fee $10. Membership only $50 per year...quite a bargain! Nine great programs and our monthly Newsletter.

HAVE A GOOD SUMMER EVERYONE AND WE’LL SEE YOU OCTOBER 10th.

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P.O. Box 564
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