

96-year-old World War II veteran Bill Von Blomberg, right, sings a Frank Sinatra tune with the help from a 16-piece swing orchestra on Oct. 1, 2022, at Red Hook High School Auditorium in Red Hook, N.Y.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TOM SULLIVAN



A VFW Post in New York paid homage to its oldest member, a World War II veteran, and his generation last year. The two-hour show featured a 16-piece swing orchestra playing famous songs of the period.

BY ISMAEL RODRIGUEZ JR.

After waiting a couple of years in anticipation, VFW Post 7765's oldest member, World War II Navy veteran Bill Von Blomberg, 96, received a musical tribute to his generation on Oct. 1.

Alongside hundreds of young and old veterans and music enthusiasts at the new Red Hook High School Auditorium in Red Hook, N.Y., Von Blomberg watched his nephew, renowned jazz musician Arthor Von Blomberg, deliver a masterful performance entitled the "Gene Krupa Story."

Gene Krupa was a jazz drummer who gained fame in 1937 with a drum solo on Benny Goodman's recording of "Sing, Sing, Sing." Named "the founding father of the modern drum set" by *Modern Drummer* magazine, Krupa stayed active professionally until his death at 64 in 1973.

"It was great to finally get the show on the road," Von Blomberg said of his nephew's touring performance. "It was important to promote big band music

to people not having heard this kind of music, but also for us older fans to enjoy our music."

Led by Arthor, who portrayed Krupa on the drums, the two-hour show featured a 16-piece swing orchestra, a female vocalist and many familiar period songs played to a video presentation of famous historical scenes of the era.

The elder Von Blomberg, who served as the master of ceremonies and emcee, also dazzled with a surprise solo performance of a Frank Sinatra tune that roused cheers from the audience.

"It brought me back to my good old days playing in the bands," Von Blomberg added. "That's why I chose a Sinatra song I happen to love very much."

Among hundreds cheering on the World War II veteran was his Post commander, Brian Williams, who first helped Von Blomberg set the event in motion before COVID-19 struck in 2020.

"To see him emcee the event and sing Frank Sinatra with a 16-piece orchestra

might have been the single best moment in my years as commander," Williams said. "This show was about giving back to the greatest generation while we still can, and in particular, our own member, Bill V."

After hosting such an event as an homage to the older veterans and their families, Williams added that the event was deemed a success after raising more than \$13,500 toward the Post's fund for future projects and programs.

The success, according to Williams, stemmed from the Post's relationships in the community of Red Hook. From securing a venue by the Red Hook Central School District to receiving donations and sponsorships from local businesses, organizations and private individuals, the Post managed to cover all expenses as a result.

"It was truly a community effort working with the VFW to honor our oldest veterans and their families," Williams said. "It was incredibly moving." ★

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