

WHEN HE SINGS

By Jessica Maldonado

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS: *This play was inspired by a conversation I had with my partner one night. We were talking about a song sung by Frank Sinatra. I ask, “Oh, is that by Michael Buble?”, and he responds “No! It’s Frank Sinatra. Although, I do know a lot of people who confuse the two.”*

I laugh, “Yeah, no I can never tell which is which sometimes.”

My partner then turns to me and goes, “I think Frank Sinatra would be extremely offended to know people mistake him for Michael Buble.”

“Did they live around the same era?”

“Lemme look it up.”

A few seconds of google sleuthing later, we find out that their lifetimes indeed DID cross a bit. We started imagining scenarios back and forth, how Michael Buble and Frank Sinatra would interact with each other if it was possible. Especially since Frank Sinatra was well into his career while Michael Buble was a pre-teen, imagining them as adults in the same space seemed very much like “tired artist meets the young fresh noise” shenanigans that happen commonly within the world of entertainment.

I should also mention that before this play I had never written a comedic play before. The thought came to me to give it a try when the idea of Michael Buble and Frank Sinatra being in one room reminded me of Lauren Yee’s play “The Hatmaker’s Wife”. The presence of extremely human emotion juxtaposed with Yee’s fantastical sense of reality within that play largely inspired me as an artist to find the humanity in comedy. So, I decided to try my hand at finding humanity while forging the unimagined; Michael Buble is possessed by the ghost of Frank Sinatra, and is treated by Sinatra’s estranged son in order to get rid of him.

There is something strange in the realm of comedy. We laugh at the strange, the weird, the daring images that society wags its finger at, and we wonder why we do it. I think comedy is funny because in it there is truth. No matter how out there, impossible, exaggerated, crazy the story is, the funniest ones are the ones where we find the truth; we are allowed to laugh at the truth. Having this outrageous story, this outrageous and weird premise, I wanted my characters to carry truth. These characters were based on real people. They are beings displaced from their space, time, and reality. Yet, despite it being impossible, I had the privilege to have a draft of this other world play out in front of me in the form of a staged reading during an open mic at my

college. People loved it! They laughed, and I can only imagine the fun it would be to have it fully produced for people to see the previously unimagined. I realized then that part of playwriting that is so amazing is about achieving the impossible. We, creators of plays, poetry, prose, and the performance of our everyday lives, get to alter reality, and it's in those moments, the moments we spend imagining the impossible, that we imagine a better world. We begin to believe that anything is possible. Anything IS possible, and that is when we begin to change the world.

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Characters

FRANK- aka Doctor J: Exorcist Specialist. Specializes in a specific type of exorcism

MIKE: A famous singer. Very famous, but possessed.
“La la la I’m possessed”

MAN: Ghostly alcoholic. Very chaotic neutral.

*“You gotta love livin', baby, 'cause
dyin' is a pain in the ass.”*

-Frank Sinatra

About the Author:

Jessica Maldonado is a rising senior at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. She is currently pursuing a BA in an individual concentration called “Storytelling Across Mediums and Cultures”. She also writes poetry and song lyrics in her spare time. She believes in the power of stories. She also believes in the power of humor. This is her first crack at a comedy ever. Enjoy!

[Open with **FRANK** sitting on a big chair. He is in office of some kind. There's a couch opposite him to sit, but it's empty. Walls are lined with photos of Dr. Frank with many musical prodigies throughout time. **MIKE** knocks on the door and enters.)

MIKE

Is this Dr. Frank's office?

FRANK:

Yes! Close the door! You must be Mr.-

MIKE:

Oh just call me Mike. I'm just another patient.

FRANK: (giddy)

Wow okay! Well...It's an honor to meet you... *Mike*-no one's ever let me be on first name basis with them before- OH I'M A HUGE FAN

[**FRANK** stands up and walks over to **MIKE**, enveloping him into a tight embrace]

MIKE: (demonic voice) FLY WITH MEEEEEE

[Mike's body tenses up and there is a large sound that comes out of his open mouth, not his voice, like something of a growl that comes out of him.]

(reverts back to normal voice) He doesn't like hugs.

FRANK:

(Quickly letting go) Oh my...it's worse than I thought.

[Chuckles excitedly to himself as he scribbles notes on a notepad in his pocket]

MIKE:

I thought I explained over the phone how *painful* he can be when I receive affection of any kind. He's the "no homo bro punch my dick" kind of apparition.

FRANK:

Oh I know, I just wanted to see it happen in person. I mean I don't have many patients who have observed the disorder progress this far. Had to see it for myself. You know. For the research.

MIKE:

Right. *(Aside:)* For the research.

FRANK:

Well, let's get started. I know you want to get this done as soon as possible.

MIKE:

Yes doctor. He's been incredibly difficult to live with now that my career is taking off.

FRANK:

Wait a minute. You're saying... he's fully formed?

MIKE: (sheepish)

Well...it happened very recently but... yes. He's a *visible* asshole now.

FRANK:

JESUS CHRIST-(deep breath in) may I see him?

MIKE: (looks at his feet)

Uhh I don't know if that's a good idea-

FRANK:(very desperate)

PLEASE-(clears throat. Tries to contain himself) uh. Please? I need to see what we're up against. If I am to help you to the best of my-um-ability.

MIKE:

Well...

FRANK:

I will make sure I remove him TODAY.

MIKE:

TODAY? But- they said it'd be weeks before-

FRANK:

I know what my receptionists said, but I think I can really do this TO-DAY. But you really need to bring him out RIGHT NOW ...so I can help you.

(A beat)

MIKE:

Oh god.. this is really happening-I'm finally- he's finally- ok Fuck it let's do this!

FRANK:

Excellent! Now-sign this very normal boring waiver-and let's see him.

[**MIKE** signs the piece of paper that Frank hands him and then closes his eyes really tight. Squats
as if he is pooping.]

MIKE:

Ok...I think he's....almost...

[Suddenly a man in a Fedora, suit, and bowtie appears very drunk and sitting on the couch.]

MAN: (singing off-key)

Flyyyyy with meeeeeeee over the rainbow to blue hawaii to the moon....

FRANK: (in awe)

Wow. I can't believe it.

MIKE:

I *know*. He's blended all the songs TOGETHER it's atrocious.

MAN:

What's atrociousss is how yourra big pfat PHONY

MIKE:

(sarcastic) uh huh. Okay. I'm not the one drunkenly possessing better singers-

MAN:

Hah! Dyouu...think that YOU...sing better than MEEE? FRANCIS DAVID OBEDIAH-

MIKE:

Yes. I do. Especially now. Fans even MISTAKE my voice for yours-

MAN

HEY! That's only b'cause you won the Youth singer's Talent search when I sang FOR you. You didn't do swuat.

[**MAN** snaps his fingers and Mike begins lip syncing to a Frank Sinatra song, or Frank Sinatra sounding song. **MIKE** launches into a very taxing dance and singing routine. Lipsyncing doesn't have to be too accurate. One can simply hold their mouth open as if they are a bluetooth speaker]

FRANK:

Wow.

[**FRANK** pokes **MAN** in the cheek several times in awe of the situation. **MAN** slaps his hand away]

MAN:

Getchur filthy mitts off me stranger! Wait a minute- I remember you.

[**FRANK** looks lovingly and expectantly at **MAN**. A beat. Recognition.]

You're the quack doctor who's obsessed with me.

[**FRANK** immediately turns away. **MAN** then snaps his fingers and **MIKE** goes back to normal, but is panting from giving such an elaborate performance]

MIKE:

I think I'm gonna hurl.

MAN:

Didju really think that you could bring me to this quack and HE would fix ya? HA! I've jumped into hundreds of different singers and all he's done is get me from one sorry case to the next. Ain't no way he's getting rid a me for good. I'm (starts singing badly) gone with the breezzzzzz-

MIKE:

..You mean the wind?

MAN:

SCREW YOU!

MIKE:

No one even understands these references to your son-

[MAN snaps again and MIKE is sent into another intense lip sync routine to a different Frank Sinatra-esque song. It is much louder this time.]

FRANK:

AmAZING.

[He writes notes in his notebook and puts his hands over his ears to block out the sound of the performance. He yells over the loud music.]

YOU ARE THE STRONGEST VERSION I'VE MET SO FAR! AS A FULLY FORMED APPARITION WHAT ELSE ARE YOU CAPABLE OF?

MAN:(also yelling)

WELL- WELL SOMETIMES I- FUCK ITS SO LOUD

[**MAN** snaps to release **MIKE** of his performance, and **MIKE** really struggles to catch his breath
while **MAN** continues]

(normal volume) *Well*, sometimes when I'm REALLY bored I can materialize all by myself! Look!

Eh??? (disappears) Eh! (reappears) eh..????(disappears) EH! (Reappears)

FRANK:

Fascinating. Does that mean you spend most of your time possessing Mr. Buble casually or..?

MAN:

Oooh, y'know. I like to come out in this one's voice a little when he's sucking too hard at his job.

MIKE: (still out of breath)

Doctor....

MAN:

And sometimes I just come out and act like 'im for fun!

MIKE:

So...much...dancing....(collapses on the floor)

FRANK:

MIKE!

MAN:

Awww he's fine! Don't sweat it, I do this to him all the timeeee and he always gets *right* back up.

[Both **FRANK** and **MAN** look at Mike's motionless body for an awkwardly long time]

FRANK:

He's not getting back up-

MAN:

Giiiiive im a second.

[another awkwardly long moment of silence]

MAN:

Oh shit did I kill im? Hah. So much for "holding on". (whispers to the audience) That's a song

FRANK(Screaming in Mike's ear)

MIKE!

MIKE:

Uuuueeuaoohhh

FRANK:

MIKE! Oh thank God I made you sign that waiver.

MIKE:

What?

FRANK:(yelling much louder than he needs to)

Nothing, I'm GLAD YOU'RE OKAY!

MIKE:

No need to scream in my ear..

FRANK:(pokes an eardrum with one finger)

Oh, sorry. The speakers were really loud before and I *definitely* damaged an eardrum.

MAN:

HEY! That's MY thing.

FRANK:

Oh I know I was just-

MAN:

NO. IM THE ONE who gets to be famous for having a busted eardrum (to the audience) look it up (back to FRANK) Yoouuu're just enjoying AAALLLL this attention that ear is giving you to the famous Mr. Buttigieg over there-

MIKE:

Buble.

MAN:

THAT'S EVEN GAYER.

MIKE:

What does that even MEAN?

MAN:

Doesn't matter, time is irrelevant. [**MAN** begins amateurly juggling some apples]

MIKE:(grabbing head as if in pain)

He's so CONFUSING-

FRANK:

Okay, I think we should all just sit down and talk about how to move forward-

MAN:

I mean voting for the gays is *pretty* forward-

FRANK:

I'm talking about this whole "weird wednesday" situation you've got going on here.

MIKE:

You gotta be kidding me.

MAN:

Woooooow did you think o' that yourself?

FRANK:

I did

MAN:

Very catchy

FRANK: (Proud)

Thank you-

MIKE:

CAN YOU PLEASE GET HIM OUT OF ME?!

FRANK:

Alright! I just need one more moment to speak with Mr. Sinatra alone so-

MIKE:

So what? So you can go on talking about nothing while he continues to control me every
goddam minute-

FRANK:

No, I just need to speak with him alone so-

MIKE:

No- You never wanted to cure me did you? You just wanted to see me so you could get a stupid autograph for your stupid fuckin kids and leave FRANK SINATRA'S GHOST MIXING JACK DANIELS WITH MY CEREAL

MAN:

One tortured soul to the next I think we BOTH needed that whiskey-

FRANK:(to MAN)

Not helping.

MIKE:

You know what? I give up! Fine Francis! HAVE MY BODY. I DON'T. CARE ANYMORE.

FRANK:(back to MIKE)

No-wait. I can fix this you just need to trust-

MIKE:

"TRUST" you? Like "trust" that you'll keep whacking yourself off to the fuckin ghost of Francis Sinatra? Yeah sure, WHACK AWAY.

FRANK

This will be the last time that he has to bother you just-

MIKE:

WHACKING. ALL I HEAR IS WHACKING. WHACK WHACK WHACK

FRANK:(frustrated)

Just let me speak-

MAN

Y'know what Mikey, he can whack to whatever he wants to. When I was a boy I-

FRANK:

GEEZ DAD NOT EVERYTHING IS ABOUT YOU!

[a beat]

MIKE:

...Dad?

[Beat. MAN begins throwing up over the edge of the couch]

FRANK:

Man, all the time. Even as a FULLY MATERIALIZED GHOST he couldn't manage to recognize his own son. Possession after POSSESSION I'd throw him out and he still doesn't remember me. Just like he did when he died.

MAN:

I-

[MAN feels the need to throw up again and vomits over the couch a second time]

FRANK;

Ugh this is typical. He can't even handle his liquor in the afterlife.

MIKE:(remembering a bad memory)

And yet I always end up with his hangovers.

FRANK:

Yeah I'm at a loss. I have no idea why he keeps wanting to stay...I'm sorry. I should have been more honest with you about this case. I just got so excited. I have tried over and over and OVER again to get my dad to cross, but he just ends up jumping from one singer to the next, and I don't know how to stop it.

MAN:

Hey I HELPED this kid get to where he is okay? He's CANADIAN. What was he supposed to do with that?

FRANK:

Oh yeah? Well what about helping ME dad? What about helping. ME?

MAN:

Ah Junior, I'm sorry I haven't recognized ya till now. [burps] To be fair, you didn't say anything to me any of the other times people came in here trying to get rid of me.

FRANK:

Well I was hoping at some point you'd recognize your own flesh and blood. But you were just a mere haunting energy most of the time. I always thought if one day you got strong enough, you'd become a fully formed apparition with a pair of EYES and you'd FINALLY recognize me. But I guess I was wrong.

MAN:

Junior don't be like that-

FRANK:

No. It's fine. I'm fine. Just cross over and get the hell out of my life.

MAN:

Junior you don't mean that.

FRANK:

I do.

MIKE

He does.

MAN:

THIS IS A FAMILY MATTER [*Snaps his fingers*]

MIKE:

Whatever-

[Another lip sync ensues. Frank raises his hands to his ears. MAN raises his hand and waves it over and MIKE'S performance is pushed to the very edge of the curtain and upstage. The music is not as loud]

MAN:

There. Now we can talk.

FRANK:(puts hands back down)

Ok. I just- I just need you to tell me that you see me. That you're proud of me.

MAN:

Wadduya mean? I showed you I was proud every day! I'd dedicate every concert to you and your siblings...(annoyed) and your mother.

FRANK:

But you never SAID that dad. To me. To my face. Sometimes it's good to hear it.

MAN:

Ah. I see.

FRANK:

yeah....so...

MAN:

Well? I'm proud o' ya kid. Ya got a sweet business goin' on here.

FRANK: (smiles dryly)

Wow. Thanks...dad

MAN:

Anytime kid.

[They embrace. Suddenly there is a large rumbling, and MIKE freezes mid-routine]

MAN:

WOAH!

[MAN reaches for his chest and begins to contort his face in weird ways]

FRANK

Dad? You okay? What's happening?

MAN:

I think.. I'm... crossing kid.

FRANK:

Wait! But- we just hugged for the first time! We still have to catch up! There's lots about my life you still don't know.

MAN:

Well kid...Shoulda thought a that before you resolved my ghost shit.

FRANK:

Damn it that was too easy!

[MAN begins to collapse slowly]

MAN

Not as easy... as your sister...

FRANK:

What?

MAN:

Fuck- I said... Im so queasy... my poor blister...

FRANK:

That makes no sense.

MAN:

Goodbye son...

FRANK:

Bye dad.

[**MAN** finally collapses on the floor **DEAD** dead. **MIKE** breaks out of his freeze and rushes over]

MIKE

So he's really gone now..huh...

FRANK:

Yup...

MIKE:

You gunna miss him?

FRANK:

Well he called my sister a slut so-

MIKE:

Hm. Is it true?

(FRANK makes a move to hit MIKE)

MIKE:(holds hands up in surrender)

KIDDING! What now? What's next for Frankie Jr.?

FRANK:

Don't call me that. I guess-I mean, I think I'll just follow in my dad's footsteps now. Have no reason to stay in the exorcism business anymore.

MIKE

Wait...you mean you spent years studying and performing exorcisms just so you could get your dad to cross?

FRANK:(shrugs)

Yeah.

MIKE

Seriously?

FRANK:

I mean it's no different from showbiz.

MIKE

How so?

FRANK:

Nobody reads the fine print

MIKE

Right.

FRANK:

Like you owe me mad royalties.

MIKE

Aaaah...wait what?!

FRANK:

Read the goddam fine print bro.

MIKE

(laughs dryly) It's like the legend is reborn.

FRANK:

Don't insult me.

[both exit dragging MAN's body with them]

END PLAY