

Brandon Tomasello joins Pops for ‘Great American Songbook’



OCEAN CITY – Sunday night’s concert brought together South Philly native Brandon Tomasello and Maestro Vince Lee with the Ocean City Pops Orchestra. The “Great American Songbook” defines the songs “everyone” knows, songs made famous by singers such as Frank Sinatra, Rosemary Clooney, Dean Martin, Sammy Davis Jr. and Frankie Valli.

Many of them used arrangements by Nelson Riddle: an enlarged front row of saxophones, blasting brass, sweet sustained strings, and a rhythm section carrying the beat. The Pops captured all of that instrumentation and Tomasello put his own touch on the band settings.

The orchestra opened the evening with an overture establishing the smashing sound and quoting so many of the tunes that would be covered later by vocals. Tomasello has the smooth style, excellent diction, and an easy way with the audience that these standards need. When he entered, dressed in a classic look of a sport coat and bow tie, his “This Could Be the Start of Something Big” predicted the 20 tunes and 12 minutes of enjoyment.



For a Dean Martin medley, Tomasello mentioned that he didn't drink, a tasteful reference to Ocean C distinctiveness. "That's Amore" featured the orchestra's fine strings and conductor Lee took them accurately through some difficult tempo changes. Before singing "Fly Me to the Moon," Tomasello introduced members of Sinatra's staff, seated in the front row of the Music Pier audience. Clearly, those knowledgeable guests approved of the way Tomasello handled the repertoire.

The screens displayed photos of the artists that Tomasello covered. But, for "the House I Live In" the images were of his parents' and grandparents' generations in the armed services, a lead-in to a sensitive patriotic rendition of that sentimental favorite. Tomasello also included his younger generation with a clever "Old McDonald Had a Farm" for his son. That setting began with pianist Keith Chasin and gradually added the rest of the orchestra for fun and virtuosity.

Tomasello skillfully navigated contrasts. He appropriately observed that "the music is the star of the show" and he always let the melodies shine. The varied choices included big-band treatments for "Almost Like Being In Love," "Over the Rainbow," "Moon River," and "When I Fall In Love." "Mack the Knife," from Kurt Weill's 1928 "Three Penny Opera," had a quiet string bass beginning that built and to a fitting finale. And then he tossed a farewell to the large and appreciative audience with "I'm Glad There Is You."

– By **RICHARD STANISLAW** *For the Sentinel*