

# DOING IT HIS WAY



Brandon Tomasello performing with the City Rhythm Orchestra this past December

*A Philadelphia-born crooner pays tribute to a musical legend.*

By Molly Golubcow

Here's a story about music that transcends the generations. Before we begin, let's start with a major musical misconception: anybody can sing Sinatra. From Las Vegas to Atlantic City, entertainers attempt to do "New York, New York" and other Sinatra classics. They may get the words right, but nobody possesses that smooth-as-silk voice, classy, but edgy style, and magnetic stage presence like Francis Albert Sinatra.

Now, let's talk about Brandon Tomasello — the young and on-the-rise performer who absolutely loves Sinatra era music. However, he does not attempt, in any way, shape, or form, to

imitate Old Blue Eyes. He respects the legend too much to even try.

Tomasello grew up in South Philadelphia where Sinatra music drifted out of every row house. In fact, the 28-year old still lives in the same neighborhood. Tomasello, at the ripe old age of five, recalls getting the Sinatra bug. "One day I was going through my grandmother's CDs — she absolutely loved Frank Sinatra. She always told the story of her meeting him at the 500 Club in Atlantic City in the 1950s. I sat down at the CD player and listened to Sinatra for the first time. It was "Sinatra Gold," the song was "Young at Heart." Instantly,

I knew I was listening to the best."

Although Tomasello was only seven years old when Sinatra died, the man got *under his skin, deep in the heart of him* and has never been extracted. As a child, Tomasello loved hamming it up performing magic shows in the family living room — in a tux, of course! Like most kids, Tomasello wanted to grow up and be many things ranging from a fighter pilot to undertaker. Regardless of what phase he was going through, he continued to entertain, "... anything to get people to laugh."

Tomasello's musical training started in 2000 singing in the Philadelphia Boys Choir. He attended the Philadelphia Performing Arts Charter School, where he played the violin and took musical theater classes. Although he was exposed to all facets of music, Tomasello looked to Sinatra as his ultimate singing coach. In fact, he would love to have been able to do a duet with him — even singing "Happy Birthday" with the legend would have been sheer joy!

Tomasello explains, "I can honestly say I learned the most from very carefully listening to Mr. Sinatra over and over again. Where he would take a breath, how he would play with phrasing and the melody. I keep all of that in mind when I sing and try to add my own little nuances."

By the time Tomasello was 20, he and childhood friend, Stephen Garbesi, opened their own production company and built a small studio. As a test, he recorded "Fly Me to the Moon." The next thing the boys knew, they had recorded and produced an album, "It's My Time." Within months of releasing the album, Tomasello got his first singing job in the Whiskey Bar at Resorts Casino. A year later, he moved up to The Superstar Theater and has been booked at various venues ever since.

On stage, Tomasello has got that knack — handsome, dapper, and comfortable in his own skin. His personality matches a fine voice that pays homage to Sinatra without trying to be Sinatra. In between sets, Tomasello chats with the audience and shares his love of Sinatra and his songs. He shows the audience his gold necklace dangling a charm of Sinatra, of course. Tomasello winks and jokes, "You wear your God, and I'll wear mine!"

Although most of his childhood friends never understood why Tomasello liked that "old" music, his love for the standards never faltered. According to Tomasello, Sinatra style music makes him happy; it tells a story. As a musician, he appreciates the complexities involved and that it takes "real" and devoted musicians to produce that sound.

Tomasello passionately explains, "You cannot replicate that sound with a computer. I listen to a song over and over until I understand the meaning of it and can hum each individual instrument's part. If you as the singer can relate to the song, that in turn will convey to the audience. Sinatra always said, 'a song is nothing but a four-minute movie'."

What's on the horizon for Tomasello? In the spring, he plans to record an album featuring many of the standards that everyone knows and loves, as well as some contemporary songs. The album will also include a duet with his South

Philly neighbor, Bobby Rydell, crooning Sinatra's big hit, "The Tender Trap." All of the arrangements will be brand new, written specifically for Tomasello's style. Accompanying him on the album will be a 28-piece orchestra comprised of top musicians from Atlantic City, Philadelphia, and New York — many of whom have played for everyone from Sinatra to Gaga.

The album will be co-produced by Chuck Granata, record producer and co-host of Nancy Sinatra's weekly *Nancy for Frank* radio show on Sirius-XM. Granata encourages and guides Tomasello to emulate Sinatra, but to absolutely not imitate him. In addition, the seasoned Sinatra expert is recommending song selections where Tomasello can make his own mark.

Granata explains, "I am there for Brandon to help him define and focus the craft. He's got a great voice and charisma — and that's what it takes to carve out a performer's unique niche."

The album is expected to be released in Spring 2020. It will be available for digital download on iTunes, as well as CD and vinyl — for the musically pure at heart. So, start spreading the news — Brandon Tomasello can make it here ... and anywhere. ■

