

Young Blue Eyes

By David J. Spatz

AT FIRST GLANCE, THERE'S NOTHING really unique about what **Brandon Tomasello** is doing as he tries to make his way and find his place in the world of modern music.

In what's becoming an increasingly common way of doing things, Tomasello is a singer whose musical support comes from a DJ spinning tracks in a booth, not from a traditional band.

But those tracks aren't the pulsing, pounding, repetitive and bass-heavy sounds favored by today's artists. Instead, the music pouring from the speakers is a sound that's rapidly becoming an endangered species.

Backed by the big-band tracks of a 40-piece orchestra, Tomasello, who's all of 19, is singing the songs of **Frank Sinatra**. What's more, he's channeling the music of Ol' Blue Eyes on the same Atlantic City casino stage where Sinatra performed more than 30 years ago.

Barely six months after working his first solo gig at a church in Brigantine, Tomasello is currently headlining his own show, *Swing, Sing Sinatra*, in the Superstar Theatre at Resorts Casino Hotel. The show will be presented on select dates through Feb. 16.

"It was amazing just being able to walk up there and know that Sinatra stood right there in the middle of that stage," the young Philadelphian says.

The way Tomasello landed the gig is equally amazing. He was first exposed to Sinatra's music when he was eight and spent time at his grandmother's home in South Philadelphia, where community rules decree that every house must contain a shrine to the Chairman of the Board.

Tomasello was instantly smitten by Sinatra's voice, his style, the cooler-than-cool musical swagger that wafted from the speakers. He was so captivated by the music that he stole his grandmother's collection of Sinatra CDs and played them over and over and over, committing the songs and the lyrical phrasing to memory.

"When you hear the same song 40 times in a row, you kind of remember them," he says. "I listened to them so much that I knew where he took his breaths [during the songs] and remembered how he sang them."

As he grew older, Tomasello enrolled in a performing arts charter school in Philadelphia, where he hooked up with a fellow student, **Stephen Garbesi**, who was also into music and recording from the technical side. Tomasello also joined the Philadelphia Boys Choir and performed around Philadelphia, including at the Kimmel Center. But he still wasn't thinking of making music his career. He initially wanted to become a fighter pilot, until he landed a part-time job working in a funeral home.

"And then I wanted to become a funeral director," he says.

Garbesi, who was in the process of setting up a small recording studio and knew Tomasello could sing, told his friend he was crazy. One day, Garbesi asked his buddy to step into the recording booth and sing a song so he could hear how the equipment sounded.

"I sang 'Fly Me To The Moon,' and as soon as I finished, [Garbesi] said 'OK, that's it, you're making an album,'" he recalls.

The album was titled *It's My Time*, and it eventually caught the attention of area publicist **Neil Cirucci**, who hooked Tomasello up with manager **Joe Donofrio** of Brigantine. Donofrio wrangled a showcase for Tomasello at a Brigantine church last July. Several weeks later, he got the teenager what was supposed to be a limited-run gig in The Whiskey Bar at Resorts, where he wowed casino president **Dennis Gomes**. The lounge gig was extended, and Gomes decided to start the new year off by moving Tomasello from the intimate 50-seat lounge into the casino's 1,600-seat showroom.

With Garbesi spinning Sinatra's musical tracks behind him, Tomasello made his casino showroom debut Jan. 4. He even gets to use the dressing room where Sinatra once prepped for his shows, and on his first night in the big room, he got to stay in the hotel suite where Sinatra slept during his Resorts gigs between 1979 and 1982.

Tomasello acknowledges his show as "mostly" a tribute to his musical idol.

"There's a couple of songs in there that aren't [Sinatra], just to switch it up a little bit," he says. "I guess the best way to describe it is [that it's] the same way **Michael Bublé** is doing it. He's doing Sinatra, but he's also doing other songs, kind of in a big-band way. So I'm not going to limit myself."

While he likes the comfort level of having his friend backing him up as the DJ, Tomasello is also in the process of putting together a band. But even if the band replaces "DJ Beezy," the two young men will continue to work together. Two years ago, they formed FIMA Productions, an entertainment company specializing in music, film, photography and Web design. ■

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