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Frank-ophile

A Lower Moyamensing singer yearns to emulate the success of an entertainment legend.

By Joseph Myers
REVIEW STAFF WRITER

Although many teenagers gorge on the goods from the likes of Justin Bieber and Lady Gaga, Brandon Tomasello derives his kicks from the output of The Chairman of the Board, Frank Sinatra. The 19-year-old has begun to evolve his adulation for the legend, completing a 15-track album with 12 tunes his hero popularized. He will test his tones June 8 in an 8 p.m. performance at The Kimmel Center's Verizon Hall.

The show will team the native of 11th and Porter streets with students from his

alma mater, the Philadelphia Performing Arts Charter School, 2600 S. Broad St. It also will prove his progression from a timid youngster who feared the spotlight to an eager young man who relishes it.

As a third grader, he entered the Marconi institution in 2000, its inaugural year, following time at Abraham S. Jenks Elementary, 2501 S. 13th St. Though drama became his major after fifth grade, Tomasello gained an immediate sense of his vocal acumen, winning a place in the Philadelphia Boys' Choir during his first year.

"I often said 'I don't want to do it,'" he said May 26 from his recording studio, 1130 W. Moyamensing Ave., in reference to any music-related elementary school endeavor.

Angela Corosante, the school's founder and CEO, served as the catalyst in lessening his resistance, leading to a two-year stint with the esteemed choir that bred performances at The Academy of Music, The Kimmel Center and The Merriam Theater, among others.

"Now I beg her to let me do stuff," he cracked.

Even with Corosante's input and his budding resumé, he retained a mini sense of disinterest in pursuing music. Then came Sinatra. His grandmother, Marion Fortino, regularly lauded the Hoboken, N.J., crooner.

"She talked about him as if she were his wife," he said of the late figure who exposed him to "The Voice."

Though a mere fourth grader at his first listen, Tomasello, who had varied musical interests, knew Sinatra would reign over his auditory world.

"The sound was unique and I could sing the songs," he said.

He strengthened his knowledge of Sinatra, especially his phrasing, to the point that he feels the entertainer, who died in 1998, taught him to sing. Despite his educational and musical pedigrees, he chose not to give notes nonstop regard in secondary stops at Prep Charter High School, 1928 Point Breeze Ave., and Delaware Valley High School.

Other vocations interested Tomasello, notably a fancy to fly as a fighter pilot and a wish to work as a funeral director, the latter a product of his time assisting at Stolfo Funeral Home, 2536 S. Broad St. Thanks to the nudging from his best friend Stephen Garbesi, he is set to knock people dead instead of tending to them when they are so.

With his friend's aid, Tomasello converted the first floor of his grandfather's old-architectural quarters into what he termed



Brandon Tomasello practiced his delivery from his studio May 26 in preparation for his upcoming performance. The singer has fallen for two music icons and will devote the upcoming month to singing their praises.

STAFF PHOTO BY GREG BEZANTS

"a temporary studio." Garbesi, of the 3100 block of South Sydenham Street, looked to see how seriously Tomasello took the idea of being a full-fledged artist.

"I told him 'You're making an album,'" the 20-year-old, who serves as Tomasello's manager and sound engineer, said.

"Of course I replied with 'I don't want to do it,'" Tomasello said as he leaned in toward a picture of Dean Martin, his other infatuation.

Recording commenced in September and lasted for six months. The friends gathered 40 songs but decided to trim 25 of them to produce Tomasello's 47-minute debut. Excising proved challenging but naming the creation provided more conundrums.

"People would tell me 'You sound just like Frank,' so we considered calling it 'Just Like Frank,'" Tomasello said.

Knowing how sensitive Sinatra's fans can be, the two sought help, ultimately choosing "It's My Time," a suggestion from Corosante's husband.

"It is his time," Garbesi said. "I truly believe in him as an artist."

A SELF-DESCRIBED SALOON singer, Tomasello had wanted to cover Martin's works first but concentrated on lauding Sinatra. With an impressive command of the ma-

terial, he approaches the richness of "Ol' Blue Eyes" with "I've Got You Under My Skin," the Cole Porter-penned work he deems his favorite to sing; "Fly Me to the Moon," the first recorded piece; and the rousing "New York, New York," the 1979 gem that closes the compilation.

The final song's geographic topic enthralls Tomasello, who considers Madison Square Garden his dream performance location. Before any possible stops at the famous arena, he and Garbesi are looking to make the next four months proof they can make it anywhere.

From the studio, they run FIMA Productions, offering their services in film, an early love; image; music; animation; and web design. Tomasello serves as the CEO and president, with Garbesi as COO and vice president. They hope to land summer lounge work in New Jersey and are looking for both FIMA's and Tomasello's eponymous websites to be running soon. Once autumn comes, work on a second album, this one including Martin, will begin.

While the Jersey Shore may yield its share of successes, Tomasello and Garbesi know next Wednesday will present the first big chance for their project to thrive. They will sell the disc for \$5 and hope the evening will aid their aim to move 1,000 copies.

Corosante asked Tomasello to join his alma mater, where he works as an assistant, as a part of its annual spring concert. With no hesitation, the chipper owner of enviable chops agreed to perform.

"Angela has been a constant influence.

She paid me so much attention in school, always pushing me to push myself," he said of the leader to whom he dedicates The Drifters' '60 smash "Save the Last Dance for Me" on the album.

Tomasello holds Garbesi in similar regard, dubbing him his orchestra and as someone who has expanded his musical interests. Garbesi sees Tomasello as one who "knows what it takes" to excel.

More accustomed to hip-hop, Garbesi has had to allow Sinatra, whose last album, "Duets II," came out in '94, to grow on him.

"This is not dead music," he said of any possible critique that he and Tomasello should be exploring contemporary sounds. "It's powerful material."

Tomasello will blare the tunes with full confidence as he seeks to fulfill his dream of recording for Capitol Records, Sinatra's label.

"If I do, I could probably use Frank's microphone," he said as he reached for a wood felt fedora with a custom "Sinatra" lining.

Tomasello will spend the next few days considering his June 8 selections.

"I will probably decide the day of the show," he said of his set. "There is one thing I won't perform. I won't do 'My Way.' That's Frank's song." **SPR**

For ticket information, call 215-465-4222.

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