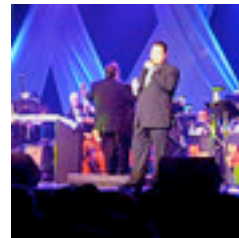


Sinatra Birthday Bash aims to entertain

By [Dw. Dunphy](#)



Fourth edition of event highlights the Red Bank Jazz Orchestra.



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The Count Basie Theatre, located on Monmouth St. in Red Bank, hosted the 4th annual Sinatra Birthday Bash, celebrating the birthday of singing legend and Hoboken native, Frank Sinatra.

The refurbished and renovated Count Basie Theatre provided an impressive venue for the show, not simply because of the beauty of the interior work, but because Count Basie had been a Sinatra collaborator, and there was a sense of synergy between the theater and the event.

The Red Bank Jazz Orchestra, led by musical director Joe Muccioli, was primed to impress and never let the audience down. The main theme of the evening was swing, and the brass section is always a key element to that sound. If the band can't punch it when necessary, it simply doesn't "swing." This, however, was never the case on Friday night. Not only in unison, but when taking the solo spotlight, such as Bruce Williams and Kurt Bachur did during the evenings selections, the orchestra was off and running.

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While Sinatra's music was arguably the lynchpin of the evening's presentation, the program also included songs not associated with him, but suited the big band accompaniment. This enabled acts like the trio The Manhattan Dolls, who specialize in three-part harmony like The Andrews Sisters, to do songs like "Rum and Coca-Cola," more reminiscent of the era than the Sinatra repertoire specifically.

Highlights of the evening included Maggie Worsdale taking on "Whatever Lola Wants, Lola Gets," a song culled from the score of the musical *Damn Yankees*, without specific relationship to Sinatra. Her comedic sensibilities retained the light-hearted nature of the piece which, in its original setting, involved the Devil's right-hand woman Lola on a mission of seduction. Worsdale's vamping suited the material perfectly.

Also notable, but in a much different way, was Paul Bernhardt's rendition of "Angel Eyes," a classic from the famous *Frank Sinatra Sings Songs For Only The Lonely* recording. Of Sinatra's associated songs, this one demands the highest degree of restraint and attention to phrasing, as it has much more to do with crooning than it does the bombast of Sinatra's signature delivery. It was important that the listener hear every lyric clearly, as this is one of Sinatra's most memorable broken-hearted ballads. Bernhardt handled the piece beautifully, with the emphasis on clarity of vocal tone.

The key word is, in fact, tone. A new generation is slowly coming around to the virtues of it as robotic auto-tune and melismatic singing styles grow more prevalent and tiresome. It's a very peculiar skill; one that asks not for every note to be sung up and down the scale to impress, but to locate and maintain the single, right note and make it worth the listener's attention. By that account, the entire cast of the evening did a fantastic job.

The most inspiring moment of the evening came when students of the Jazz Arts Academy took the stage and very ably demonstrated their right to be there. With so much musicianship in one concentrated setting, having to come up against that and show what you've got is a major challenge, and it separates students from musicians prepared to play as a career. With Bruce Williams as their instructor, their dedication has clearly paid off.

If I had one qualm with the performance, it would be that occasionally Sinatra's enunciation would creep into the songs, causing the individuals performing them to veer from tribute to impression. It did not occur on a glaring, frequent basis, but when it happened, it occurred to me that what I wanted to hear were these talented performers singing it their way, not his way. In that, the ultimate tribute would be the individual's performance. I reiterate that this never slumped into the domain of parody, but it was important to note its presence.

That said, the show was extremely entertaining, the participants gave all they had and, as an example of a body of work, not just from Sinatra but from the entirety of the Great American Songbook, the 4th annual Sinatra Birthday Bash celebrated the enduring qualities of the material with great style and skill.