



SEEMS LIKE SINATRA BACK FOR KSO SERIES OPENER

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The Chairman of the Board is back -- so to speak.

Frank Sinatra sound-alike John Vincent helped kick off the Kentucky Symphony Orchestra's 13th subscription series Saturday with a tribute to Ol' Blue Eyes. The evening, the second of a pair of concerts in Northern Kentucky University's Greaves Concert Hall, proved to be an enjoyable trip back in time -- minus the cocktails and a smoke-filled lounge -- exploring love, heartbreak and life philosophy through music Sinatra made famous.

KSO music director James R. Cassidy discovered Vincent, a former professional football player, at a visit to Mike Ditka's restaurant in Chicago. He told Saturday's audience he had thought at first he was listening to a Sinatra recording. Vincent first appeared with the KSO in September 2003, singing Sinatra songs on the orchestra's summer series in Devou Park.

Also joining the KSO, arrayed in big band formation, were legendary Cincinnati jazz vocalist Mary Ellen Tanner, the Frankettes (singing backup) and the KSO Kids (children of KSO members).

The program's 22 numbers covered several facets of Sinatra's career, including his early days as a big band singer, music from his movies and later hits.

The night opened with a medley featuring highlights from some of Sinatra's movies. The orchestra then segued into "Come Fly With Me" as Cassidy introduced Vincent, who stopped to kiss Cassidy's hand in a Godfather-like manner, then took to the microphone with the same comfort and smoothness that Sinatra possessed. Through the performance, both Cassidy and Vincent bantered with the audience while providing interesting insights into the music.

In addition to offering her own takes on standards, including "All the Way" and "Day In, Day Out," Tanner -- remembered as a vocalist on the "Bob Braun Show" -- teamed with Vincent in "Our Love Is Here To Stay." Sinatra originally recorded this George Gershwin song as a duet with Peggy Lee.

Tanner gave Peggy Lee a run for her money with her sultry, expressive voice. Marlon Brando sang "Luck Be A Lady" in the movie "Guys and Dolls," but Sinatra took on Sky Masterson and did it better. It also was Vincent's most dead-on Sinatra of the night.

Vincent dedicated "The Way You Look Tonight" to his girlfriend, who took the trip from Chicago with him. He joked, "If I didn't, she was going to kill me." Those in the audience bobbed their heads to the gently swingin' rhythm.

However, for "Young At Heart," which focuses on maintaining childlike curiosity and wonder as an adult, Vincent relied on a lyric sheet which caused him to juxtapose verses out of order.

The same problem occurred with his 2003 KSO performance. Those unfamiliar with the song would not know; those considering it a favorite found it jarring as they sang along.

The KSO brass were particularly strong, performing mostly Terry LaBolt adaptations of classic arrangements by the likes of Nelson Riddle, and they belted out the sound with only an occasional raspy note. To be able to go over two hours hitting high note after high note shows amazing endurance. Yet they sometimes shared the spotlight too much, overpowering Vincent and the Frankettes in "That's Life" and Tanner during her medley of Chicago inspired tunes.

The nearly full house jumped to its feet after the official concert closer, Sinatra's anthem, "My Way." The chairman didn't adjourn the meeting, though, until offering two encores, both Sinatra staples: "I've Got You Under My Skin," dealing with a relationship that's doomed from the beginning, and "New York, New York," an ode to America's greatest city.

The performance created a deeper appreciation for the music of yesteryear.

Between the thoughtful lyrics and colorful instrumentation, it offers a higher level of quality than what's found in most of today's popular music.

Thanks to an anonymous grant, the weekend's performances were recorded for future release as a concert CD, the orchestra's first.

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