

Tony DeSare and the Blossom Festival (Big) Band light up the summer night with Sinatra tribute (Aug. 25)



Tony DeSare and the Blossom Festival (Big) Band paid tribute to Frank Sinatra on Sunday night at Blossom Music Center, entertaining a crowd of more than 8,000 with an evening of Ol' Blue Eyes classics. Courtesy of Cleveland Orchestra

by Daniel Hathaway | ClevelandClassical
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CUYAHOGA FALLS, Ohio —

The deities that throw the dice to determine what the weather is going to be like were kind to vocalist & pianist Tony DeSare on Sunday. A dark and stormy morning morphed into a beautiful late summer

evening that according to a tram usher doubled the crowd, originally expected to number 4,000.

Those fans enjoyed a generous two-set concert mostly of songs associated with super-crooner Frank Sinatra. Although this wasn't a tribute show, DeSare's 20 selections reflected the singer/pianist's deep regard for Sinatra's taste and musicianship. And while DeSare brought his own fair share of charisma to the stage, he avoided becoming a caricature of Ol' Blue Eyes.

With The Cleveland Orchestra away on a European tour, DeSare's henchpeople on Sunday were thirteen members of the Blossom Festival (Big) Band who joined his own bassist (Dylan Shamat) and drummer (Mike Klopp) to superbly back up the singer and contribute delicious solos. DeSare himself frequently turned to the Steinway grand to dialogue with his sidemen, add percussive color to the mix, and share some of his own unpretentious but expressive music with the crowd.

DeSare appeared onstage with Jimmy Van Heusen's and Sammy Cahn's "Come Fly With Me," then queried the audience, "Are you ready for some Sinatra?" Of course they were.

After a lively rendition of Harold Arlen's "Get Happy," DeSare turned to "I've Got the World On a String," the first song that Nelson Riddle arranged for Sinatra.

Introducing "Luck Be a Lady," he said that in the 50s Sinatra was one of the foremost leading men in Hollywood. Once he and Marlon Brando were both vying for the lead role of Guy Masterson in *Guys and Dolls*. Brando ended up winning the role, but Sinatra had his day when the song became a hit.

DeSare told the audience that Sinatra was a great interpreter of popular song. Though Prince's "Kiss" came along well after he had stopped singing, he was delighted to present the song in the style of Sinatra.

After a ballad opening, the pianist moved into an upbeat tempo for "Just in Time," featuring an impressive solo by trumpeter Jack Schantz.

Introducing his beautiful original, "How I Will Say I Love You," DeSare told the story of performing at the Carlyle Hotel in New York when he saw Paul McCartney come in — and stay. After the show they had a long chat about songwriting, and how writing a love song is especially difficult.

Next came another DeSare original, his striking "New Orleans Tango." "I always wanted to write a song people can dance to," he noted.

The Gershwin brothers' "I've Got a Crush On You" included a show-stopping trombone solo by Paul Ferguson, and "Something's Gotta Give" gave tenor saxophonist John Klayman an important moment in the spotlight.

Tony DeSare returned after intermission in a glittery black jacket, telling the crowd, "There you are — I've missed you. Intermissions are difficult on performers. You're just getting started, then you find yourself sitting alone in a room as though you're in a time out." Then he launched into "You Make Me Feel So Young."

“I Can’t Give You Anything But Love” was studied with solos by John Klayman, trumpeter Garrett Folger, and drummer Mike Klopp.

After a bright performance of “When You’re Smiling,” DeSare rehearsed the audience for their role as backup singers in “That’s Life,” and sang a sultry account of “The Best Is Yet to Come.”

DeSare recalled seeing Sinatra in Saratoga Springs at the very end of his career, then said he was going to sing a drunk song — Harold Arlen’s “One For My Baby” (and one more for the road).

In an interview, DeSare told Clevelandclassical.com that ““One of my favorites is a not-well-known song called “I’m Gonna Live Till I Die.” I love doing it in the show because it exemplifies the way Sinatra lived his life to the fullest.”” Taking that as his cue, he let loose on the piano and inspired a powerful drum solo by Klopp.

DeSare said that after achieving Rock-Star status, Sinatra faded, only to stage one of the biggest comebacks in history with “My Way.” Its English lyrics by Paul Anka were set to the music of the French song “*Comme d’habitude*.”

How to end this Sinatrafest? With “New York, New York” of course, a tune that brought the large and rapturous crowd to its feet. The indefatigable DeSare sent everyone home with an encore — “I Only Have Eyes for You.”

Photo by Vincent Soyez

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