

# SAN FRANCISCO

by Richard Connema

## Russ Lorensen Celebrates the Music of Bobby Darin at the Rrazz Room

Russ Lorensen unveiled his classy new Bobby Darin tribute show called *As Long As I'm Singin'* at the Rrazz Room on November 15 to an enthusiastic packed house. This cool singer (who has been compared to Tony Bennett, Chet Baker and Mel Tormé) is his own man. Russ's technique has roots in "crooning" and he has a creamy quality in ballads, but in this two-hour production he breaks out with pitch-perfect resonance in many of Bobby Darin's songs.

The between-song patter describes Bobby Darin's life and career. He tells of Darin's birth name (Walden Robert Cassotto), of his ill-fated romance with Connie Francis, and of meeting Sandra Dee on his first film from Universal called *Come September*. He later married the actress. (Darin had a contract with Warner Brothers and I met him several times in the 1960s.) There are great stories about his later travels with Robert Kennedy during the campaign for the nomination for President and how Darin was devastated when Kennedy was assassinated.

The show opened with a video on both sides of the stage showing Ed Sullivan introducing Bobby Darin, and then Russ Lorensen entered the stage looking very suave, quickly establishing a relationship with the audience. The songster opened the show with an upbeat arrangement of Newley and Bricusse's "Once in a Lifetime," segued into Darin's big pop hit "Splish, Splash" (self-penned by the singer in 1958), and then went into "Queen of the Hop" and finally "Dream Lover," also written by Darin.

Lorensen informed the packed house that he would be singing 20 songs either written or sung by the legendary Bobby Darin. He announced that Darin's first big single was "Mack the Knife"; however, the crooner said he would sing the flip or B side of the record, which was a lovely Woody Harris/Marty Holmes song called "Was There a Call for Me?," with a terrific sax solo by Tony Malfatti. Russ then launched into a stunning reading of "Mack the Knife" backed by a swinging ten-piece orchestra.

Next was a swinging version of Charles Trenet and Jack Lawrence's "Beyond the Sea," just as Darin did it on his recording. There were sleek presentations of "Multiplication" and "Have You Got Any Castles, Baby" a song that Richard Whiting and Johnny Mercer wrote for the 1937 *Variety Show*. A great duet took place with Kelly Park on piano and Russ singing "If I Had My Druthers" from *Li'l Abner*. There was a country western phase for Bobby, and Russ crooned the songs "Things," "You're the Reason I'm Living" and "Eighteen Yellow Roses," all written by Darin.

One of the great stories of the evening was about Bobby Darin recording on the Atlantic Record label. He was approached by his agent about a song that would revive his singing career. Darin listened to the song and said it would be better for a new recording artist who was with Atlantic. The song was given to Wayne Newton and the song was "Danke Schoen."

Russ concluded the evening with songs that Darin recorded for the Capital label, including Jimmy Van Heusen and Sammy Cahn's "Call Me Irresponsible," a jived arrangement of "On the Street Where You Live" from *My Fair Lady*, his own "Simple Song of Freedom" and "As Long As I'm Singin'." The crooner also sang Richard and Robert Sherman's "That Darn Cat," a song first recorded in 1965 but never released. (Bobby Darin sang the song in the Disney film, but when the album was released Bobby Troup did the singing.)

Russ Lorensen had tremendous backup from Kelly Park on piano, Daniel Fabricant on bass, Kent Bryson on drums, Brendan Getzell on guitar, Tony Malfatti on sax, Max Perkoff on trombone and Rich Armstrong on trumpet. The singer also had two terrific back-up singers Alyssa Stone and Sheelagh Murphy.

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