

**From Purple Clover.com**

## **Frank Sinatra and I Stopped the Show!**

I had no sooner gotten to the office on the morning of April 27, 1978, when my phone began to ring.

Throughout the day, excited callers wanted to know: "Did you hear what he said about you last night!"

"He" being Frank Sinatra.

Two days before I saw him perform at the Circle Star Theater in San Carlos, just south of San Francisco. No longer in existence, the theater-in-the round seated 3,500. The Sunday night that I was there it was packed with his fans, most of which were my parents' age. Still, when he crooned, they screamed and carried on like teenagers.

I was there to review the opening night of his weeklong run for the San Francisco Examiner, where I was a feature writer and critic.

I was not a big Sinatra fan, and had never seen him sing live.

I had two tickets, so I took my friend, Brenda.

She was my second choice. I wanted to take her husband, Hal, who was a jazz pianist and vocal coach — his most famous client being Marilyn Monroe. They had also been lovers. I figured Hal could help make my review sound more informed.

Hal was on Sinatra's bad side, though. Sinatra, accompanied by Joe DiMaggio, Marilyn's ex, had once allegedly tried to break his fingers. Frank supposedly blackballed Hal so that he couldn't get work.

In his despair, Hal tried to kill himself, then became an alcoholic. So I could understand why he declined my invitation.

Brenda, unlike Hal, was able to separate her dislike of Sinatra the man from Sinatra the artist. She was eager to go with me to the Circle Star.

Seeing Sinatra was an experience I'll never forget. In 1978 he still had full range of his voice. I wasn't prepared for how graceful he was. His body acted out the lyrics of his songs. At intermission Brenda said to me, "Geez, he even sings his consonants in tune."

I went back to the newspaper that night and wrote a glowing testament to his craftsmanship. I used Brenda's line about the consonants as my own.

Two days later the phone calls began. "Frank stopped the show last night and read your review to the audience," I was told. He said he wanted to shake your hand.

A few days later Sinatra sent me an 8X10-inch, black-and-white autographed photograph. He wrote on it, "Thank you, John, for the kindest words I've read in a long time." He signed it "Affectionately."

Show business is all about timing. I think one reason my critique pleased Sinatra so much is that it came right after another review of him appeared in the same newspaper a few days earlier. My colleague, Jeff Jarvis, now of "Buzz Machine" fame, was its author. The day before Sinatra was to open at the Circle Star, Luciano Pavorotti was to headline a fund-raiser for the San Francisco Opera.

Pavorotti got sick at the last minute and had to bow out. Sinatra volunteered to go on at no cost, thus saving the gala. Jarvis covered the event. In his no-holds-barred review he badly trashed Sinatra for thinking he could sing in an opera house.

I never saw Sinatra perform live again. He died in 1998. I never did get that handshake.

But the photograph and engraved note he sent me hangs framed in my house.

Sinatra lived a life of extremes. He could be terrible monster as he was to my friend, Hal. Or he could be exceedingly generous, as he was to an ailing opera singer who couldn't go on.

All I know is that on the night of Monday, April 26, 1978, Old Blue Eyes smiled on me.

Ring-a-ding-ding.