



Heartthrob Luca Ellis Talks About Hoboken to Hollywood

Wednesday, December 29, 2010; Posted: 11:12 AM - by Don Grigware



*Actor/singer Luca Ellis is having a breakthrough year portraying Frank Sinatra in the huge hit **Hoboken to Hollywood** at the Edgemar Center for the Arts, now extended to the end of January. Having portrayed Sinatra last year with The cast of Louis and Keely @ the El Portal, he is no stranger to the legend. It shows, for when you close your eyes, you feel you are listening to Sinatra himself. Handsome and confident, Ellis talks about the show, its eventual move to a larger space - one that has been confirmed by director Jeremy Aldridge, who also directed Louis and Keeley Live at the Sahara to great acclaim - and shares other insights about singers and the art of singing.*

How much of Luca is in the portrayal of the Chairman of the Board?

I would ask the question, how much of the Chairman is in Luca's portrayal of a crooner or singer of popular song in the 1960s? My very first influence was Dean Martin, during my adolescence. I was about 7 years old. I can thank my mother for that, since she's the one who initially exposed me to this music. In my teens I found Harry Connick Jr. I was so impressed by his talent. Not only could this guy sing, but he's an exceptional musician! It wasn't until I turned 30 that I discovered Sinatra. I didn't even know I was a Baritone until I started listening to Frank. I quickly realized our voices were incredibly similar. So, I immersed myself in his recordings. For years I would listen and learn new tunes, and since I was singing professionally 4 to 5 nights a week. I had the perfect playground to become the well versed singer of American song I am today. In essence, Frank Sinatra was my mentor and I believe my predecessor to what has turned into a very rewarding and fruitful singing career. Once you learn to phrase like Sinatra, it's very difficult to sing a song in any other fashion. To sing with no inhibitions, fearlessly as if no one is listening. Yet you do all this in a very conversational manner, taking out all the theatrics and giving the most honest and often poignant interpretation of a song. I have not been given the privilege to say I'm playing the role of Mr. S. **Hoboken to Hollywood** is a tribute to the American Song Book. If delivering these songs in the highest light possible means delivering them in a style forged and innovated by Sinatra? So be it. Is *Hoboken to Hollywood* about Mr. S? That's entirely up to the audience member. Is *Hoboken to Hollywood* a love letter to Frank? Probably.

Tell me again how long you have been preparing to play this role and where you played him before.

When I started listening to Frank Sinatra, I had no intentions of playing him. I was merely curious about his style of singing. Being the legend that he is, I felt the need to check his work out. I'd heard him in passing, but it wasn't until I really started listening to Frank that I found the similarities in our voices a little over 6 years ago. The first time I ever played the Chairman was last year at the El Portal Theatre in North Hollywood. It was for the Holiday rendition of *Louis and Keely Live At the Sahara*. This took place after their run ended at the Geffen Playhouse in Westwood. The second role came a couple of months later. This time I was playing the role of "Ol Blue Eyes" in Sandy Hackett's Rat Pack Show in Las Vegas. To end up playing the same character in an entirely different show a couple of months later at the actual Sahara Hotel and Casino, seemed a little serendipitous to me. All while the "Hoboken Four" (Producer Peach Reasoner, Musical Director Paul Litteral, Director Jeremy Aldridge and Singer/Actor Luca Ellis) were well on their way to developing a new hit show titled *Hoboken to Hollywood*. Sometimes things in life just come together.



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What do you feel is the chief message of this piece? What do you want the audience to take away besides the enjoyment of the great songs?

As an entertainer I would hope my audience leaves the show with an exhilarating feeling, a sensation as if the air around them was charged with an electricity. A voltage if you will. Leaving an imprint on them causing them to still think about the show a few days later. Maybe they feel the urge to pull out and dust off their old LP collections and have a listen. Or how about the younger viewer/listener who finds themselves acquiring a taste for fine music all of a sudden. I feel this show is as educational as it is fun. Last but not least, for all my audience members to walk out of the theatre believing in the beauty of love and the incredible potential of human innovation. Experiencing a night or perhaps just a moment, where the human dilemma meets fine art.

What other singers besides Sinatra and Dean Martin do you love?

Nat King Cole, Ella Fitzgerald, Bobby Darin, Keely Smith, Sammy Davis Jr., Doris Day, Peggy Lee, June Christy, Sarah Vaughan, Julie London and Jo Ann Greer just to mention a few. Not a lot of people know who Jo Ann Greer is. She dubbed some of Rita Hayworth's vocals on musicals adapted for the silver screen such as Pal Joey, one of my all time favorites.

Among the newer crop of singers, who stands out?

Harry Connick Jr. and Diana Krall. Unfortunately most of today's singers haven't adopted the proper disciplines to singing a song, so I find it very hard to listen to most of them. Unfortunately the pickings are pretty slim these days.

What are the plans for this show beyond Edgemar?

Hoboken to Hollywood is Broadway bound. What happens between Edgemar and New York, is already written in the stars I'm sure.

Do you see yourself playing Sinatra's life perhaps on film? Or is the musical enough?

I intend to keep singing this wonderful music no matter what happens with my acting career. If anything, this show will always serve as a creative outlet for my love of singing and acting in front of a living breathing audience. I would love to keep creating other installments of the basic principal or "mechanism" that is *Hoboken to Hollywood*. I say mechanism because it's an original concept for live musical theatre. Theatre where the actor/singer has more than one take. Where spontaneity and circumstance can create an entirely different experience for the audience on a nightly basis. H2H part II would consist of all new songs and introductions to those songs. New "on set" dilemmas. Such a future installment would only come after *Hoboken to Hollywood* has been enjoyed by tens of thousands of theatre enthusiasts in LA and New York. In the meantime, if I was approached to play Frank Sinatra in a biopic? I would be honored but more importantly, as an actor I would be completely prepared. I've already studied the man for 6 years, what does that get me? A Masters Degree? Would I go for the PHD? You can bet your life on it.

What is your favorite Sinatra song? Why? What is it about "My Way" that keeps audiences wanting to hear it? "New York, New York"?

I'll quote Mr. Sinatra on that one, "That's like asking me if I like steak better than I like ice cream. There are so many songs to choose from, it's hard to pick a favorite". "My Way" I feel is the quintessential torch song for most listeners. It paints such a picture that speaks to so many people. People from all walks of life can personally relate to that song. I think it's kind of a phenomenon, I've heard of people getting shot or even lynched in the Philippines for botching up that song in a karaoke bar. Can you imagine? Getting whacked for not singing a song right?! Some people take it a little too seriously. Although "My Way" and "New York, New York" are the most requested songs, I personally feel there are far superior songs in the "American Song Book" but then again, I'm just the singer. Since it's never about me, and always about what the good people want. If that's what they want to hear, then that's what I'm gonna sing for them.