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ITALIAN AMERICAN MUSIC

...“THE ITALIAN DECADE”

A major postwar phenomenon in the United States was the emergence of Italian American music – when Italian American singers won the hearts of the American public with a smooth, stylish, classy brand of pop. In a new book entitled *“Amore: The Story of Italian American Song,”* author Mark Rotella writes about the music of the “Italian Decade,” the years after World War II and before the Beatles and the British Invasion (1947 - 1964). It was a time when a wave of talented Italian American singers dominated the pop charts with sounds that became the standard on American jukeboxes and radio and provided the soundtrack for postwar America.

These Italian American singers had a kind of charisma not seen before. They sang with a passion that appeared casual and easy. They embodied the Italian idea of - *La sprezzatura* - making hard work appear easy. Not only were they Italian Americans but their songs were sung, in part, in Italian - *“That’s Amore,” “Volare,” “Mamma,” “Angelina,” “Mala Femmina,” “Eh Cumpari,” “Come Prima,” “Al di la,” “Innamorata,” “O’Sole Mio,”* and *“Return To Me.”* During the rock and roll era, Italians and Italian language music were involved in more hit records than any other foreign language.

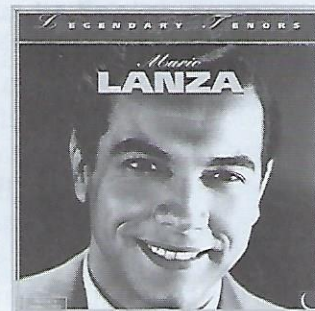
It was a time when Italian Americans entered mainstream American life and popular culture. From 1956 to 1959 - there were more Italian American singers on the Billboard charts than at any time before or since. One neighborhood, the Little Italy of South Philadelphia, produced singers like Fabian (Fabiano Forte), Frankie Avalon (Avallano), Bobby Rydell (Ridarelli), Buddy Greco, Al Martino (Cini), and Mario Lanza (Cocozza).

Some changed their names to fit the American Scene and some did not. There was Perry (Perino) Como who had 148 top 40 hits. Dean Martin (Dino Crocetti) crooned *“That’s Amore”* in his warm romantic style which remains one of America’s most played tunes. Connie Francis (Concetta Franconero) made everyone weep to *“Mamma.”* Jerry Vale (Genaro Vitaliano) belted out *“Mala Femmina.”* Bobby Darin (Robert Cassotto) hit it with *Splish Splash,* *“Dream Lover”* and *“Mack The Knife.”* The list of hits and singers is long: Johnny Rivers- (Ramistella), Lou Christi (Luigi Sacco), Don Cornell (Luigi Valardo), Joanie James (Joan Babbo), Vic Damone (Vito Farinola), Louie Prima, Julius La Rosa, Annette Funicello, Connie Stevens (Concetta Ingoglia), Frankie Lane (Francesco Lo Vecchio), Johnny Desmond (Giovanni Di Simone), Jimmy Roselli, James Darren (Ercolani), Lou Monte, Anna Maria Alberghetti and Sergio Franchi - to name some of the most well known.

Some formed groups that carried a uniquely Italian American sound. Groups like Frankie Valli (Francis Castelluccio) and The Four Seasons (*Sherry*) which enjoyed over 40 chart hits; Dion (DiMucci) and The Belmonts (*Teenager In Love*); The Mystics (*Hushabye*); The Elegants (*Little Star*); The Capris (*There’s A Moon Out Tonight*), The Regents (*Barbara Ann*), The Teardrops, The Classics, The Passions, The Gaylords and The Four Aces.

Their music became a mainstay. The legendary singer from Hoboken, Frank Sinatra (Francis Albert Sinatra) became the first modern American singing idol and ...did it his way. Dean Martin’s *“That’s Amore”* remains one of America’s most played tunes. In the Summer of 1964, Martin’s *“Everybody Loves Somebody”* overtook the Beatles #1 spot on the charts. Domenico Modugno, the Sicilian guitarist (*Ciao Ciao Bambina*), wrote and sung *“Volare”* entirely in Italian, which reigned as the number one chart topper for all of 1958 and won the first Grammy Award. Tony Bennett’s (Antonio Benedetto) *“I Left My Heart In San Francisco”* is still a requested standard as is Al Martino’s *“Spanish Eyes.”* Mario Lanza, “The American Caruso,” brought an operatic voice to pop music and his songs *“Come Prima”* and *“The Most Wonderful Night Of The Year”* topped the charts and opened the door for future Italian tenors to come.

Italian American singers created a musical legacy that endures and is a source of pride to Italian Americans. Today, this musical heritage can be heard on Italian American radio shows around the nation. Shows with names like “Italian American Serenade,” “Italia Mia,” “Italian American Music Hall,” and “Italian Odyssey.”



In Sacramento, California, listeners can tune in to the weekly radio show - “Sacramento Italian Style” - hosted by Phyllis Cupparo, to listen to their Italian and Italian American favorites. The show is sponsored by the Italian Cultural Society and has been broadcasting every Sunday at noon for over two decades. Tune in to Access Cable channel 18 or listen on the net at www.accesssacramento.org.