

STAR SIGHTINGS

SEQUINED SENSATION: Completely comfortable in tuxedos and heavily sequined shirts, DJ Frank Torino spent four years perfecting the vocal styles of "Old Blue Eyes" Frank Sinatra, hip-wiggler Elvis, and Tom "The Voice" Jones.

By SUE STARKWEATHER
Beach Bulletin Editor

The Maestro of Multiple Musical Personalities spends more money on clothing than most women.

To look the part, DJ Frank Torino pays as little as \$500 for a sparkly Elvis jumpsuit, to thousands for hand-sewn Tom Jones shirts.

For four years, Torino designed a 90-minute tribute show, "A Night With The Stars," and practiced the different singing styles of Tom Jones (known as "The Voice," so one needs to hit just the right tone), Elvis, Frank Sinatra and friends.

"I want to be a tribute artist, not an impersonator," explained Torino. "I sing in the style of that so-called artist, not so much as impersonating their mannerisms and voice. When I'm doing my show, you'll hear me going in and out, from sounding just like Tony Bennett to using my own voice."

Squeezed in between triple digit work weeks as the 11-year Lani Kai Beach Resort entertainment director, Torino decided to pursue his dream of a tribute show in late summer, parting amicably with the hotel known as "Spring Break headquarters."

"People kept telling me I look like Tom Jones," Torino said, "but I sing like Elvis. Elvis is fun, but I do him more as comic relief. Tom Jones is challenging because he's so passionate, and Frank Sinatra is just 'buttah.' I love Big Band, and his songs and melodies are amazing."

Moving to Fort Myers Beach from Philadelphia with wife Nancy in 1986, Torino studied for a Realtors license, but dumped those textbooks in the trash after seeing how many agents there were, and a newspaper ad for singers.

"I became a karaoke host at Long Branch in La Belle for a while, before switching to Pier One (where Beach Pierside Grill is now)," he said. "I think I was the first karaoke DJ on Fort Myers Beach."

Taking a sunset stroll down the beach for the first time, Torino said all he heard was hard rock thumping from beachfront bars.

"It just didn't fit the tropical setting," Torino said, "so I played steel drum music every day at sunset."

Simultaneously, Torino got a part-time gig as a bellman at the Sheraton in 1987.

"I got autographs from Johnny Matthis, Bo Jackson, and Frank White of the Minnesota Twins there," he said. "Then another newspaper ad caught my eye: 'DJs wanted, '50s format.'"

Flashbacks in downtown Fort Myers hired Torino to fill in a couple nights a week for another DJ, then took over full time when Torino's popularity built up the club.

Jump-starting Torino's experience with 1950s-'60s music, he packed the dance floor with "Rock Around The Clock," sang — not lip synched — Elvis, and choreographed little skits with the poodle skirt- and "greaser"-garbed staff.

Flashbacks moved to the Metro Mall, and that's where the Pier One owner caught Torino's Elvis act.

"He booked me for his daughter's wedding and the Beach club, where I worked for seven years," said the then manager, "until an offer came from the Lani Kai in 1993-94."

Currently shopping around for venues, Torino hopes to debut his tribute show at country clubs and corporate events.

"I just started promoting the show, and have been a weekend DJ at Junkanoo for a couple of weeks," Torino said. "I'll sing throughout the afternoon, mostly top 40 to get people to dance, and may perform some selections from my show because one-third of my audience is older people."

Having survived the Lehigh Senior High School homecoming dance with 800 students ("I treated them like they were Spring Breakers, and I know what songs they like"), and charmed the socks off all the ladies with Sinatra at an 80th birthday party, Torino's versatility allows him to liven up any social occasion, no matter what age group is present.

"The tribute show is what I really want to do on Friday and Saturday nights," he said, "but I have to be my own boss. Along with freelance DJing, I think my calendar will be full."

A one-man band, Torino sings, plays guitar, DJs, and has access to a huge music library, sound/light system and video service. For bookings, call (239) 634-3667 or visit: www.FrankTorino.com.