

# CABARET SCENES

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# Len Triola

## The Prince Of Promotion

By Lynn DiMenna

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**hether holding**

court at his table at Joe Allen's or at one of his other favorite haunts around the city, Len Triola is a formidable presence. A casual observer might never imagine that this relatively young man, in Yankee cap, sweatshirt and sneakers, could be described in such royal terms, but within a specific segment of the music industry—namely big band, jazz and cabaret CD promotion and distribution—there are few who match his background and experience. He has earned the distinction by tirelessly promoting the CDs and careers of countless performing artists in New York and around the country by securing radio play and reviews. He is relentless in his efforts to keep alive the music he loves—the Great American Songbook—especially as it's interpreted by his idol, Frank Sinatra.

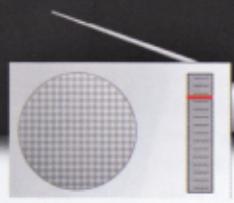
"There's no one who knows more about Frank Sinatra than Len Triola," according to Will Friedwald, well-known author and *Wall Street Journal* music critic and columnist. "He's the man!" said Friedwald, and he should know. He's written his own definitive biography on Frank Sinatra, *Sinatra! The Song Is You: A Singer's Art*.

Triola was introduced to Sinatra's music as

a child at home in Astoria, Queens. He started working as an intern when he was a teenager at the legendary WNEW radio station alongside icons like William B. Williams, Al "Jazzbeaux" Collins, Les Davis, Scott Muni and, of course, Jonathan Schwartz.

"Lennie is one of the 'darlingest' men I know!" said Schwartz in a recent phone interview, "and I support him in any cause he takes on. He knows his music and he knows what's good and what's bad, as anyone who is close to him will agree. I am immensely fond of him."

Those who are fortunate enough to be "checkin' in" with Lennie on a regular basis would definitely concur that he often starts your day off on a humorous note either with his dead-on imitation of a Tony Bennett or Bobby Short song, a Bill Clinton greeting or just his signature message "It's Lennie, hope you're well!" He has also earned the respect and admiration of other industry "heavyweights" as well. Ervin Drake, the songwriter who wrote "It Was a Very Good Year" and co-wrote "Good Morning Heartache," among many others, considers him to be "the principal connective tissue between the songwriter, the publisher and the record company." He



adds, "He does what he does to help performers, not destroy them, and no one is better at separating the truth from the B.S.!"

Having moved from Astoria to Wantagh, Long Island after his father died and, as a street-wise kid from

**At right  
(from top)**

**Len Triola with:  
Illinois Jacquet**

**Eddie Bert**

**Tina Sinatra and  
Quincy Jones**

**Dorothy Donegan and  
Fulvio Zambelli**

**Ron Dellachiesa**

**Opposite page  
(from top)**

**Len with:**

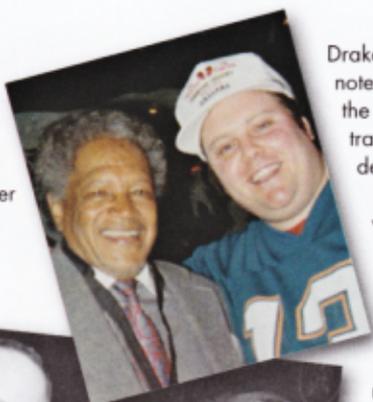
**Stanley Kay**

**Paul Cavalcante  
and Dolly Dawn**

**Fulvio Zambelli  
Joyce Galley and  
Michael Sassa**

**Hank Jones**

**Duffy Jackson**



a big Italian-American family, Triola's language can also be a little colorful at times, but as Ervin



Drake's wife, Edith, noted, it's always "from the heart." He is an extraordinary and very dear person!"

It was "the kid" who, after starting in the WNEW library doing research for the disc jockeys, moved into filing, carting and ultimately programming for the various music shows that aired during the week on WNEW-AM. On the weekends, he would feed his other passion, for sports,

and work with great sports broadcasters like John Kennelly, Marty Glickman and Bob Papa. He covered every one of Mike Tyson's championship bouts and worked closely with Jim Gordon when he called the New York Giants' football games for the station. He met anyone and everyone who came through the station doors—from Billy Eckstine, Carmen McRae, Dinah Shore, Steve Lawrence, Eydie Gormé, Michael Feinstein and Nancy LaMott—to the Super Bowl-winning Gi-

ants and dozens of other sports legends.

It was Dinah Shore who led him into the promotional end of the business. On a visit to the station, she asked for advice about reissuing her recordings. "Let me help you!" was Triola's immediate reply and he has gone on to provide promotional services for over 4,000 artists to over 350 radio stations nationwide.

In the '80s, when WNEW made major changes in its format and programming, Triola used his contacts to move into the world of booking and management. For ten years he was the entertainment director and booking manager of the world famous Tavern on the Green. He filled the Chestnut Room and The Tavern's Garden with hundreds of big name acts, including The Illinois Jacquet Orchestra, Little Jimmy Scott, The DIVA Jazz Orchestra, KT Sullivan, Tom



Andersen, Tom Postillio and, of course, the late Nancy LaMott. "She was a dear friend and she had that special ability to light up a board and fill a room. Sadly, her career was cut tragically short," laments Triola.

When taking on a prospective client, Triola sets up an initial meeting and determines whether he can work effectively with the artist.

Obviously, the talent must be there, but, along

with a CD that includes a good selection of old and new standards, great musicians and a radio-friendly sound, he also looks for realistic expectations. "My job is to promote your CD...the listeners buying it and coming to your show make you a star!

Once a comfortable working and financial arrangement is established, he does a massive mailing, with the help of his brother Frank, who also assists with computer and accounting-related issues, to stations across the country where he has developed close ties and

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## Len Triola

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personal relationships over the years. Jim Stone, Lou Powers, John Bohannon, Bill Miller and Jeffrey Williams are but a few of the radio show hosts he contacts on a regular basis. Not every performer lights up a board the way Nancy LaMott did, but there are ways of tracking the reaction that listeners have to a particular artist. Triola follows up and keeps weekly tabs on DJs' play lists, in addition to handling their interview requests. He insists, "If you're on the road, and you're not selling tickets, you'd be surprised how important radio play and

**At left  
(from top)  
LT with:  
Sir Roland Hanna  
and Eddie Locke  
Little Jimmy Scott  
Leo Green  
Errol Dante  
Stan Edwards  
and Mark Welby  
Ray Gelato and  
James Pearson**

interviews become in helping to fill venues," he insists.

His efforts on behalf of musicians and performers have taken him on the road as well. After two sold-out performances of the *Frank Sinatra Tribute Show* which played at the John Cranford Adams Theater at Hofstra University, he booked the show, with vocalist

Betsyann Faiella and an exceptionally stellar group of musicians, at performing arts centers around the country and legendary jazz clubs, like The Blue Note and Birdland in New York and Ronnie Scott's and The Pigalle Club in London. "You're talking guys like Hank

Jones, Johnny Blowers, Benny Powell, Frank Wess, Eddie Burt and Jim DeJulio, who all played with Sinatra," says Triola, "and we packed those rooms!"

"He's like a walking musical rolodex," added Bob Spiotto, friend, colleague and Executive Producer of the Hofstra University Cultural Arts Department. Together, they started what has become "a creatively exciting journey" and Spiotto readily acknowledges that he often turns to the "musical impresario" for guidance, ideas, suggestions and access to some of the best musicians and performers in the country.

Jim Czak, chief engineer at the legendary Nola Studios in New York for the past thirty-five years, who has worked with and recorded some of the biggest names in the music business, credits Triola with being a "one-in-a-million guy who knows the music, the history and the people and they all love him!"

Czak's comments might help to explain why, for this past year, Triola was the "go to" guy to help launch and promote the newly renovated Edison Ballroom's Swing Series featuring The Joe Battaglia N.Y. Big Band, one of the finest big bands in the country. In addition to their high profile private parties, Triola takes pride in the fact that The Edison Ballroom



provides one of the few opportunities in the city to dance to the music of the swing era in an elegant, sophisticated and contemporary setting. Thanks to his promotional expertise, the orchestra's CDs are also heard on over 200 radio stations nationwide.

As an equally enthusiastic and somewhat obsessive sports follower, this fall's football season will find Triola in front of his TV with multiple screens following the downs of as many as six different games at once. If a championship fight should happen to be scheduled at the same time, he'll find a way to watch that as well.

Still, as knowledgeable as Triola is about football and sports in general, it was a mutual love of the Great American Songbook that first drew veteran sportscaster, Sal Marchiano, and him together. "He's like a throwback to when I started in New York radio in the early '60s when promo guys were 'hands on' and all about personal contacts with outlets around the country." Elaborating, he calls Triola "an old head," who, for a man so young, has life experiences and an appreciation for the

music of the '30s, '40s and '50s that defies his age!"

How does Triola see this music surviving into the new millennium especially given these tough economic times? "Well, the music business, in general," he admits, "has taken an enormous hit! We've lost a lot of rooms and the loss of the major retail stores—Tower, Virgin, etc.—has been devastating! There are fewer places to put your CDs! But," he notes, "the Internet has taken over and it is here to stay!" Much like Sinatra, whom Triola describes as an "event that will go on forever," he's hoping that the Internet will find a way to help keep this timeless music going for at least the next century or two!

One thing he knows for sure, he'll be there promoting it... "night and day," "come rain or come shine" and adding, with a wink, "if they ask me," I know "I could write a book." ○

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