

Frank Sinatra and *Rocky Fortune*

By Claire Neva

Frank Sinatra (baptized Francis Albert Sinatra and “blessed” with a mob boss for a godfather) was born in Hoboken, NJ, in 1915. His parents owned a tavern where young Frank would sometimes sing for change. Expelled from high school for rowdy behavior, Sinatra never graduated. Subsequently, he tried being a newspaper delivery boy and worked in the shipyards but found singing the easiest and most pleasant way to earn a living.

Sinatra really came into his own musically in the early 1940s. He sang with both Harry James’ and Tommy Dorsey’s bands. In 1941, he led the charts in the male singer category in both *Billboard* and *DownBeat* magazines.¹ Sinatra decided to leave Tommy Dorsey’s organization in 1942 after a legal battle which convinced Dorsey to release Sinatra from his contract. There were rumors that Willie Moretti, notorious mobster (and Sinatra’s godfather), had been involved. The following year the 28-year-old Sinatra was classified as 4-F, meaning he was unfit for military service. Rumors circulated that his discharge was bought off by gangsters, but one source said that he was unfit because of a punctured eardrum and another stated that Sinatra was emotionally unstable.²

When World War II ended, Sinatra was thirty years old, a precarious age for teen idols. Then George Evans, Sinatra’s publicist, died suddenly just a few years later in 1950. According to Kitty Kelley, Evans was responsible for much of Sinatra’s young teenage girl fan base; Evans’s death hastened Sinatra’s declining popularity.³ Sinatra’s reputation as a womanizer didn’t help. Even worse, at about this time he became embroiled in an acrimonious, highly publicized, and very messy divorce from his wife, Nancy Sinatra, that featured Ava Gardner as the “other woman.”

Sinatra had been a popular singer on the radio when he was younger so it was logical that he should return to radio as his career began a downward slide. In the 1940s and 50s post-war era he was in a number of short-lived radio shows that generally featured a song or two, a little gentle patter, and a guest visitor.⁴ In October of 1953 Sinatra decided to try a different kind of radio program.

George Lefferts and Ernest Kinoy led the team that developed and wrote *Rocky Fortune* specifically for Sinatra; he was perfect in the role. His brash New Jersey accent combined with smooth delivery and clever scripts made *Rocky Fortune*, starring Frank Sinatra as “that footloose and fancy-free young gentleman,” a mild success.

Every week Fortune was sent by a temporary work agency to a new job that always seemed to involve crime, glamorous, fragile women, and tough men. He was never in the same place twice. One week he’d be helping behind the scenes at a rodeo. Another week he’d start the

¹ Summers, Anthony; Swan, Robbyn (2010). *Sinatra: The Life*. Transworld. ISBN 978-1-4070-6890-9. Qtd in https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank_Sinatra#CITEREFSummersSwan2010. Accessed 1 Nov 2019.

² Santopietro, Tom. *Sinatra in Hollywood*. New York: St. Martin’s, 45. Qtd. in Wikitree. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank_Sinatra#cite_note-FOOTNOTESantopietro200845-120. Accessed 2 Nov 2019.

³ Kelley, Kitty. *His Way: The Unauthorized Biography of Frank Sinatra*. New York: Bantam, (1981) 161. Qtd. in Wikitree. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank_Sinatra#cite_note-FOOTNOTEKelley1986161-150. Accessed 2 Nov 2019.

⁴ For a list of Sinatra’s radio shows as well as links to where you can find OTRR downloadable versions, please see the list at the end of this article or [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Frank_Sinatra_Show_\(radio_program\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Frank_Sinatra_Show_(radio_program)).

episode shucking oysters, helping a runaway child, or even serving as a caretaker at a shady statue reproduction shop.

It wasn't a star-turn like *The Adventure of Sam Spade* or *Dragnet*, but *Rocky Fortune* is a charming and enjoyable show that has worn pretty well with the passing of the years. As an earlier Old Time Radio Researchers headnote writes, *Rocky Fortune* "was a relatively undistinguished series; definitely a 'B-grade' radio series, saved by Sinatra's charm and a tongue-in-cheek approach."⁵ Like many of Sinatra's other radio ventures, this one was short lived, lasting only six months. The reason? Sinatra's stellar performance in the motion picture *From Here to Eternity* re-launched his career as an actor and brought new interest in his singing. Sinatra went on to renewed success in Las Vegas, records, movies, and television until his death in 1998.

Some of Sinatra's other radio work can be found on the Old Time Radio Researchers' library at www.otrrlibrary.org): *Broadway Bandbox*, *Frank Sinatra in Person*, *Light Up Time*, *Reflections*, *Songs By Sinatra*, *The Frank Sinatra Program*, *The Frank Sinatra Show*, *To Be Perfectly Frank*.

Works Cited, Works Consulted, and External links

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⁵ https://archive.org/details/OTRR_Rocky_Fortune_Singles. Accessed 31 Oct 2019.