

## Italian-American Crooners Speak the Language of Love by Cookie Curci

Perry Como, like most of his Italian-American singing peers, was born to immigrant parents. Como was the seventh son of a seventh son. (The sign of good fortune) The first of his parents 13 kids to become an American citizen by birth, he began his career as a barber who liked to sing. But one day, when bandleader Freddie Calone offered him a job, Como gave up his lucrative \$120.00 a week barbershop income to take \$28.00 a week as the band singer. He married his childhood sweetheart and through the years, became one of America's most endearing and beloved performers. When interviewed after their 65th wedding anniversary, wife Roselle was asked how they managed to stay so happily married all these years? "It's not difficult", said Roselle, "when a man and woman commit themselves to God and to their marriage, everything else just naturally falls into place." Perry Como had 148 top 40 hits during his career, among them: "Prisoner of Love", "Wanted" and "It's impossible".

While Dean and Frank were busy forming the "rat pack", and Perry Como was starring on a new medium called television, the more serious minded music lover was listening to a new Italian-American voice. It was only natural that Mario Lanza, (1921- 1958) become a singer, his mother had a beautiful soprano voice and his childhood hero was the great Caruso, who, ironically, died the year Lanza was born. He was christened, Alfredo Arnold Cocozza, but later took the male version of his mother's maiden name, Maria Lanza. During his career he thrilled millions with his magnificent voice and good looks. Lanza was one of the rare, gifted tenors who could sing "D" flat and high "C". With the same ease Lanza sold over 50 million records, an impressive feat when you consider his short life. His death from a heart attack, at age 38, left an unfulfilled void.

Through his films and recordings, Lanza introduced the masses to opera, who otherwise may never have experienced it. To his legend of fans, his glorious renditions of "Ave Maria" and "Pagliacci" remain incomparable. Renowned conductor Arturo Toscanini said of Lanza: "He is the greatest voice of the century". His faithful followers will agree. Although Mario Lanza has been gone for some 42 years, his recordings remain popular with his loyal fans, who continue to revere him as the one and only Italian tenor.

To his many followers, the Italian-American singer symbolizes romance, tradition and love. It has been said Italian crooners are as plentiful as the stars and as alike as pennies in a pond. I will grant that Italian singers are plentiful, but they are as unique from one another as they are many, with each one bringing something different of himself to his music.

The Italian-American singer has had a great impact on the 20th century' music world; through his songs, he sings to us of the magic of love and recalls for us the romances of our lives. And now, in the 21st century, we move ahead with the new style of Italian singers who still make the ladies swoon, but deliver a song with a voice that equals all who came before him. Whether we listen to his music on 8 track, cassette, or CD player, the feelings they evoke are still the same. The Italian singer touches a place in the hearts of every generation; a place reserved for our private moments, secret wishes and unfulfilled dreams.

The Italian crooner has created a musical legacy that endures through the decades and continues now into the 21st century. His contributions are many and continue to give enjoyment to music lovers everywhere and his voice is a source of pride to all Italian-Americans.