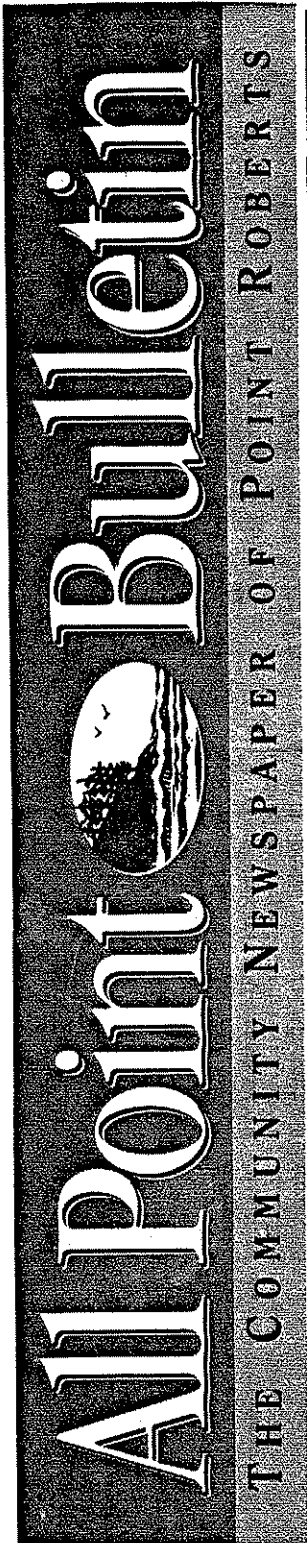


# Brian Evans – a show not to be missed



Does Evans really live up to his advance billing as "A Sinatra for the 90s"? To put it in that context, there is little doubt that any singer – including Harry Connick, Jr. – can cover Sinatra as well as Brian Evans. Some critics have written that Evans sings better than Sinatra did at the same age. Hmm... well, Evan's phrasing, pitch and stage presence invite comparisons to Frank Sinatra that are interesting, but the question of who is the better singer is not particularly relevant. After all, these are the 90s, not the 40s.

At 25, Sinatra was singing with the Tommy Dorsey orchestra at the height of the Big Band Era. Sinatra's renderings of I'll Never Smile Again, Maire and In the Blue of Evening reveal a light, unaffected baritone that complimented, but never dominated the real attraction of the day – the band leader and his band.

Whether or not Evans could capture the clarity and tonal quality of a young Frank Sinatra is an open question. Perhaps the answer will come when Hollywood decides to cast The Frank Sinatra Story. Time will tell.

Both Sinatra and Evans are classic baritones, the category closest in weight and timbre to a normal male speaking voice, with a range of roughly two octaves. Evans' phrasing has obviously been influenced by Frank Sinatra, just as Sinatra's style was, by his own account, heavily influenced by jazz greats Mabel Mercer and Billie Holliday.

Commenting on the young Sinatra, A reviewer once wrote, "He is not an impressive singer when he lets out – that's a cinch." Of the two singers, it is Evans who has the greater ability to really belt out a song and his rendition of the closing lines of New York, New York, handily prove the point.

Both singers demonstrate a mastery of the microphone. The ability to use the microphone as an instrument to interpret as well as amplify a song is a rare gift, and Evans is fortunate to have perfected that art early in his career.

Comparisons aside, of far greater interest will be the musical journey of Brian Evans. At 24, his voice could easily be that of a 35-year-old. It is a voice that, like Sinatra's, will grow richer – and better – with age.

Evans has wisely chosen to sing the instantly recognizable and popular Sinatra standards of the 50s through the 80s and he handles them with a remarkable verve, freshness and conviction.

Speaking of conviction, I couldn't believe any 24-year-old kid would have the nerve to even try to sing My Way. Besides Sinatra, only three other singers have recorded My Way; Paul Anka, (who wrote the song) Elvis Presley and Sid Vicious.

The results were uninspired for Anka, embarrassing for Elvis and, in the case of Sid Vicious, downright bizarre.

By contrast, Evans' My Way is the best

version – next to Sinatra – that you will ever hear. And he delivers the song without a shade of the pretense and self-mockery that mark the attempts by the other artists.

Evan's haunting rendition of Summertime, with superb accompaniment by saxophonist David French, was the best performance of the evening, along with the Louis Armstrong classic, What a Wonderful World. Wonderful World is featured on Evans' latest CD, Quite Frankly, which has topped the charts in Canada for two months running.

Surprises included I Left My Heart in San Francisco, further proof that the kid has the chutzpa to cover a signature Tony Bennett song that most other artists, including Sinatra, would not touch for fear of falling far short of the original.

Okay, no one can sing San Francisco like Tony Bennett. But Tony Bennett can't hit the notes he did when the song was recorded back in the 60s. Evans can, and the result is a fitting tribute to what has become a great American standard.

Twenty songs and three sets later, the Breakers crowd, which included Evans' mother Helen, was as enthusiastic as ever, a mood reflected by the singer himself and his band, which included Cal Bezemer on keyboards, David French on sax, Byron Thames on bass and percussionist Damien Graham.

Evans, who now lives in Steveston, B.C., spent nine years in Los Angeles and has shared the stage with Dionne Warwick, Tracy Chapman, Frankie Valli and Kenny Loggins. His television credits include roles on ABC's Full House and Fox's Beverly Hills 90210.

If you're into the retro-cool lounge scene, Evans regularly performs at the Babalu in downtown Vancouver, where the atmosphere could best be described as a mix of cigar smoke, overchewed gum, undermixed drinks and semi-desperate thirtysomething angst.

The Breakers is a much better venue to catch this rising young star. Great room, great sound, great performance – and an event you'll be telling your children – and grandchildren about in years to come.

*John Heron*  
August, 1997