

ALL THAT'S JAZZ

by Tom O'Neill



THE RAT PACK

[This is the first of an undetermined number of articles about legendary figures in the Jazz world, presenting little-known facts about those artists, about whom we thought we knew everything, or as time went on, had forgotten.]

In the 1960s, the men's club consisting of Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Sammy Davis Jr., Joey Bishop and Peter Lawford could often be seen performing in Las Vegas. Internally, they referred to themselves as The Summit. As Eisenhower, de Gaulle and Khrushchev were planning a Paris Summit Meeting, it was reported that Sinatra commented at the Sands Casino and Hotel that "We'll have our own little Summit Meeting." But on the outside, thanks to the press, they were dubbed the Rat Pack, which will not be dwelled on here. But was that *déjà vu*?

At one point, Holmby Hills, Bel-Air, and Beverly Hills formed the "Platinum Triangle" of Los Angeles' priciest and most exclusive neighborhoods. Judy Garland and (her husband at that time) Sid Luft made their home from 1953 to 1960 in Holmby Hills. Here, it was evidently the young, scrappy Lauren Bacall who commented that "you guys look like a damn rat pack," or words to that effect, describing her haggard-looking husband and his buddies who just returned from a night out in Las Vegas. Other sources credit the name to Bogie himself, who proudly referred to his group as the Holmby Hills Rat Pack. In any event, Garland's home became a frequent hangout, where they could attempt to escape the press.

There was organization to the pack; a young Frank Sinatra was Pack Master, Garland was VP, Bacall was the Den Mother, Luft as the Cage Master, Bogart as the PR rat, the press agent Swifty Lazar as Secretary and Treasurer, and the author Nathaniel Benchley as Historian. No one acknowledges if any dues were assessed, but one has to think it most likely involved something to drink.

Other members that drifted in and out of the group were Katherine Hepburn, Spencer Tracy, David Niven, Shirley MacLaine, Rex Harrison, Jimmy Van Heusen, even Cary Grant. The common link that brought the two iterations of the Rat Pack together was Sinatra.

I was personally fortunate to see the latter Pack perform at The Sands and other venues in Las Vegas. They created a very unique mystique. They exhibited an upbeat entertainment style and performed smooth, well-rehearsed musical and comedy routines. Yet, much of what they did was ad-libbed, a credit to the large talents involved. Can anyone my age forget a young, dynamic

Sammy fronting the Will Mastin Trio? You just knew he was headed for the big times. They all were. But... we can never forget their pedigree.

Tom and his wife Cheryl perform locally as "Just Me 2", a live music duo specializing in songs from the Great American Songbook. They can be reached at (772) 532-5054 or at www.JustMeLiveMusic.com. See them on Facebook at www.facebook.com/JustMeLiveMusic