

“Songs for Young Lovers”—Frank Sinatra (1954)

Added to the National Registry: 2002

Essay by Cary O'Dell



Original album



Original label



Frank Sinatra

During the course of his legendary career, Frank Sinatra recorded over 200 songs and released dozens of studio albums. His first was 1946's “The Voice of Sinatra” for Columbia; his last was “Duets II” for Capitol in 1994. In this remarkable career, trying to pick out the best or most definitive Sinatra collection is not for the indecisive of mind or the faint of heart.

Yet, by any account, the years 1953 to 1962 were golden ones for Sinatra, the singer. His golden voice was at its golden peak and he benefited immeasurably during this period by working with the equally legendary conductor and arranger Nelson Riddle and the talented producer Voyle Gilmore. Between '53 and '62, Sinatra, Riddle and Gilmore teamed on the albums “Swing Easy,” “In the Wee Small Hours,” “Close to You,” “Only the Lonely,” “Songs for Swingin’ Lovers,” and “A Swingin’ Affair.” Their first collaboration was the provocatively titled “Songs for Young Lovers.” It was released in 1954 and was named to the National Recording Registry in 2002.

Eight songs make up the song cycle of “Songs for Young Lovers.” They are: “My Funny Valentine,” “The Girl Next Door,” “A Foggy Day,” “Like Someone in Love,” “I Get a Kick Out of You,” “Little Girl Blue,” “They Can’t Take That Away from Me,” and “Violets for Your Furs.”

The selection includes standards and soon-to-be standards highlighting the work of some of America’s most renowned composers. Rodgers and Hart are responsible for “My Funny Valentine” and “Little Girl Blue”; the Gershwins for “A Foggy Day” and “They Can’t Take That Away from Me”; and Cole Porter for “I Get a Kick Out of You.”

“Young Lovers,” for Sinatra, was a mix of old and new. “Violet for Your Furs” was a Sinatra chestnut; he first performed it during his days with the Tommy Dorsey orchestra. Other songs on the album marked Sinatra’s first crack at them.

“Young Lovers” was new in another way as well. It was the singer’s first work for Capitol Records having just, one year before, ended his long relationship with Columbia.

Columbia was Sinatra’s home for his nascent years, the “Bobby Sox Years” as they have been called. It was there that, for a few years, he drove to a frenzy a generation of teenage girls. But by the early 1950s, Sinatra and Columbia had come to an impasse over the types of songs he should sing. Sinatra’s move to Capitol in April of 1953 signaled a move for the performer to

take greater control of his recording career and also to take on a more mature sound. (It is notable that 1953 also saw the release of Sinatra's "comeback" film "From Here to Eternity" for which he would win an Oscar for Best Supporting Actor.)

One of Sinatra, Riddle, and Gilmore's first enterprising moves for this, their first Capitol release, was their envisioning of what could be considered the origins of the concept album. As both a technology and marketing tool, the "LP" had just been introduced. Sinatra and company believed that the new LP had the power to be something besides just a collection of random songs or even songs done in a particular musical style. Instead, the LP experience should present and possess and carry a mood throughout. Sinatra once elaborated, "First I decide on the mood, perhaps pick a title. Or sometimes it might be that I had the title and then picked the mood to fit.... Next comes the pacing of the album, which is vitally important; I put the titles of the songs on twelve bits of paper and juggle them around like a jigsaw until the album is telling a complete story lyric-wise."

The mood of "Songs for Young Lovers" is (though open to some interpretation) reflected in the title but also bears resemblance to a Sinatra nightclub performance infused with a bit of jazz and a touch of swing. All in all the songs and their arrangements bespeak of love but with a definite melancholy slant reminiscent of Julie London's sultry but somewhat sad work that would follow one year later. The "Young Lovers" Sinatra is singing to, or for, here may be smitten but they are also realistic. The album's cover art, with its dark, shadowy figures and Sinatra alone beneath a street lamp, also suggests this, an advisory to follow your heart but proceed with caution.

Regardless of any of the album's many moods, Sinatra is in full, robust voice throughout. His is a voice still fresh and unflawed by wear and infused with just the right mix of swagger and pathos. Here Sinatra shows a full command of the lyrics and a confidence missing from many of the other male singers of the era.

"Songs for Young Lovers" was recorded, remarkably, in just two days—November 5th and 6th of 1953. Upon its release, in 1954, it was a hit, heralding Sinatra's return and his renewed domination of the pop charts. Happy with the formula, Capitol would soon send Riddle, Gilmore and Sinatra back into the studio for a quick follow up. "Swing Easy," featuring such songs as "Just One of Those Things," "Wrap Your Troubles in Dreams" and "All of Me," emerged in August of 1954.

As mentioned, the three-way partnership of Sinatra, Riddle and Gilmore would be a prolific one and an artistic highpoint for each. After amicably going their separate ways, Gilmore would go on to produce others including the Kingston Trio and Judy Garland. Riddle meanwhile would continue his arranging for some of the top vocalists of the 20th century including Peggy Lee, Johnny Mathis, Ella Fitzgerald, Rosemary Clooney and Nat King Cole. He would enjoy a career renaissance in the 1980s when Linda Ronstadt tapped him to arrange her salute to the great American songbook in her trilogy of albums "What's New," "Lush Life" and "For Sentimental Reasons."

Sinatra of course would continue to appear in nightclubs and star in classic films including "Suddenly," "Pal Joey," "The Manchurian Candidate," "High Society," and "Ocean's Eleven." He kept recording too. Songs like "Love and Marriage," "Strangers in the Night," "That's Life" and his theme song, "My Way," were still to come in the next two decades.

For many, even dozens of years and hundreds of voices later, Sinatra is still the greatest pop singer of all time. And "Songs for Young Lovers" his most notable achievement.

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