

All The Way. Frank Sinatra **by Adrian Wootton**

The specific timing of this re-appraisal is linked to a sense that, just as Capitol Records have recently shined up Frank's vocal rep by judiciously re-releasing classic 50s LPs like 'Songs for -Swinging Lovers', Sinatra's movie appearances require similar attention. Indeed, it was after watching *Young at Heart*, a lush Technicolor musical Sinatra made in 1954 with Doris Day, that I recognized the special allure of a star who deserved reclaiming from the forgotten files of American movie history. Sinatra's allure is particularly illustrated by the beauty of a scene in *Young At Heart* where, playing a stylishly down-at-heel bar-room singer cum unsung composer, he performs 'One More For My Baby' to an indifferent audience while co-star Doris Day gazes adoringly at him. Perfectly encapsulating his then very chic torch-song persona, and preserving in aspic the melancholy charm and understated emotional resonance of Sinatra's acting style, this is a small but perfect moment. Reminiscent of those evocative record sleeves from albums like 'No One Cares', featuring Sinatra with bourbon in hand, hat perched on head and body poised on a bar stool as couples dance oblivious around him, such scenes in *Young At Heart* recall how he represented, for a whole pre-rock 'n' roll generation, a potent masculine image of the lonely lover. While this tour and piece span the full gamut of Frank's movies, the aura and sparkle of these particular images are the kernel of, and inspiration for, Celluloid Sinatra.

Notwithstanding the romance of Frank the broken hearted hipster, Sinatra the movie star is, however, also worth reviewing for several more, equally notable reasons. First and foremost he is the only male pop star to have really made it on the big screen, not just in musicals but in serious dramas and all shades of genre movies. Before Sinatra, crooners like Crosby stuck to slight comedies and trad musicals. After Sinatra, from Presley to Prince, pop stars have rarely broken into the *cinema* in anything other than dumb comedies or thinly disguised musical big concert films. Sinatra was a unique exception; he could act, and he sustained his presence in movies for the best part of thirty years. Secondly, Sinatra's movies are exciting precisely because they are from the final Hollywood era of glamour, CinemaScope and ravishing colour, the last period of studio supremacy as the postwar world began to change. Not only is Sinatra unique; he worked within a system which has all but disappeared. Thus what follows is a mix of fact, interpretation and analysis which hopefully brings Frank, his acting and the vanished environment in which he worked, back into frame.

Those Were Very Good Years; ***Sinatra's Films - A Chronology: 1943-1980***

Once upon a time, Frankie was an up and coming big band crooner, whose warbling with Tommy Dorsey's Orchestra, fuelled by energetic self-promotion, started to get him noticed at the beginning of the 1940s. Soon after, the success of Dorsey's outfit landed them background filler parts in a couple of musicals, and Sinatra experienced his first whiff of Hollywood. By 1943, Frank was the swooning sensation of wartime teenagers and, rapidly signed to RKO Pictures, appeared in his first low budget vehicle pictures, *Higher and Higher* and *Step Lively*. These bland efforts, pitching Frank as himself, required very little acting and merely served as an excuse for Swoonatra to further spread the gospel of his hot set of singing pipes.

Things changed when Louis B. Mayer brought Sinatra to MGM (at that time *the* big-budget studio, famed for its lavish musical spectaculars), and put him to work with talent like Gene Kelly. There he gained the experience of working in a demanding environment full of performing perfectionists, where only the best results were acceptable. Thus Frank made the superb trilogy: *Anchors Aweigh* (1945), *Take Me Out To The Ball Game* (1949) and *On The Town* (1949), all with Kelly. These films represented the height of MGM's output, featuring the Technicolor, the photography, the splendid sets and, of course, the remarkably imaginative song-and-dance sequences that were hallmarks of producer Arthur Freed's team at the studio.

Unfortunately, Sinatra's other work at MGM, such as *The Kissing Bandit* (1948), never matched these productions, and it was clear that, commercially, Frank was unable to carry a film without the ensemble support of other big musical stars. MGM's realisation that Sinatra was a possible liability coincided with a major nosedive in the singer's popularity and, worse still, a serious voice problem. The net result was that Sinatra lost both his movie contract with MGM and his recording contract with Columbia Records.

From 1949 to 1953 Frank Sinatra struggled to keep his star shining, and for a while it looked as though he was going to fail. Two movies, *Double Dynamite* and *Meet Danny Wilson*. (both of which stiffed at the box office in 1951), a round of embarrassing concert appearances and a disastrous TV show all seemed to confirm that Sinatra was washed up. Then, just when Frank's career looked likely to be reduced to escorting around his extremely successful movie queen wife, Ava Gardner, along came *From Here To Eternity*.

This was the title of a Columbia Pictures big-budget film adaptation of James Jones' best-selling novel about life on an army base in Honolulu in the days leading up to the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor. Sinatra read the script and, simultaneously recognising himself in the tragicomic Italian character of Private Maggio and correctly surmising this could be his route back to the top, he mounted an all-out campaign to appear in the picture. Eventually, after lots of

special pleading, various screen tests and an agreement to work for a minimal fee, Sinatra got into the heavy-weight cast, playing Maggio alongside Burt Lancaster, Montgomery Clift and Deborah Kerr. It should also be mentioned that there have been many rumours that, somehow, Frank got the part in *From Here To Eternity* through Mafia connections, (suggestions the film and the book; *The Godfather*, famously dramatize), although this increasingly seems like an unsubstantiated myth.

From Here To Eternity was released in 1953 to rapturous critical acclaim, lots of which focused on Sinatra's acting, and quickly became a monster box office smash. The film's success was then capped when it swept the board at that year's Academy Award ceremony, and, as this included an Oscar for Frank Sinatra as best supporting actor, he was catapulted back to stardom. Sinatra's triumph in *From Here To Eternity* was confirmed as the greatest comeback of the era when, after miraculously getting his voice back, better than ever before, he accepted a lucrative recording contract from Capitol Records, producing the LPs that forever preserved his artistry as a vocalist.

From 1953 onwards, Sinatra clung tightly to the second chance of fame offered him, and embarked on a prodigious schedule of constant work on stage, in the recording studio and, particularly, on film. Alternating serious melodramatic/non-genre roles in films like *Suddenly* (1954), *The Man With The Golden Arm* (1955), *The Joker Is Wild* (1957) and *Some Caine Running* (1958) with popular bigger budget musicals (picking up on the renewed interest in 'The Voice') such as *Young At Heart* (1955), *Guys And Dolls* (1955), *High Society* (1956) and *Pal Joey* (1957), Sinatra firmly established himself as one of the ten biggest and most versatile stars in 50s Hollywood. Moreover, although Sinatra gained tremendous power in this period, establishing his own production company, he was always careful to appear alongside other big names, particularly in musicals, and very rarely put a foot wrong in his choice of movies. (*The Pride and The Passion* 1957, became the exception that proved the rule; and even then he had Cary Grant and Sophia Loren to help shoulder the blame).

These films were the peak of Sinatra's stardom. Never again would he be so popular or so prolific. At the beginning of the 1960s Sinatra was in a very comfortable career position; older, less exciting, but very powerful, and with the economic freedom to do more or less what he wanted. In the first instance, this led to Sinatra forming his own personal appreciation society - or "Rat Pack" - made up of younger, like-minded performers like Dean Martin, Sammy Davis Jr and Shirley MacLaine, whom he proceeded to feature in a string of self-produced good-time pictures. Easy going, undemanding and stuffed full of in-jokes, movies like *Ocean's Eleven* (1960) and *Robin And The Seven Hoods* (1964, and Sinatra's last musical) were surprisingly successful, even if they gave, correctly, the impression of being more fun to make than to watch. Occasionally Sinatra would make something different, and when he did, the results could be startling, as in the case of John Frankenheimer's chilling spy thriller, *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962). Sinatra's enjoyment of the coldwar thriller/detective genre led to a couple more inferior re-treads of *The Manchurian Candidate* namely *The List Of Adrian Messenger* (1963) and *The Naked Runner* (1967) - but, for the most part, Frank was more interested in his other work (like running his Las Vegas casino) and the behind the scenes business.

1965 saw Sinatra's one and only attempt at direction, on the anti-war war film, *None But The Brave*. It wasn't an entirely happy experience (especially taking into account the fact that the star nearly died in a swimming accident while on location in Hawaii), and Sinatra himself commented;

"It was in some ways tougher than I thought. The Director has so many things to worry about. Next time I won't try to perform when I direct."

Strangely, Sinatra never did direct again; instead carrying on with his round of hit or miss acting chores; the best of which during the mid-60s was *Von Ryan's Express* (1965).

By 1967, nobody expected much from Frank Sinatra. He was the show business establishmentarian who performed regularly in live concerts and on television when he wasn't involved in political campaigning. Against this background, his recording career was still going but not flourishing, and his movies were released but not watched. So it was more than a slight shock when, with hits like 'Strangers In the Night', he topped the charts and then made a string of hit movies. The movies were perhaps the biggest surprise, as Sinatra dispelled all thoughts of jokey comedies and Rat Pack giggling, and made in quick succession three ace detective thrillers; *Tony Rome* (1967), *The Petective* (1968) and *Lady In Cement* (1968, a sequel to *Tony Rome*).

Apart from one lousy western, *Dirty Dingus Magee* (1970), Sinatra more or less retired from the movies at the end of the 60s. Initially, this coincided with a famous public retirement from the entertainment industry as a whole in 1971. Nevertheless, in 1974, when he began recording and performing again, movies seem to have been left entirely off the agenda. Some ascribed this to Sinatra's age, while the man himself said it was a lack of suitable offers. Whatever the reason, Sinatra has only appeared in dramatic roles three times since 1970. Two of these appearances were on TV, and the third was in a sombre film melodrama, *The First Deadly Sin* (1980).

Swooning Star to Acting Swinger: Frank the Performer..

If the volume and varied types of movies Frank Sinatra made during a thirty nine year period are in themselves impressive, it's the development and shifts in his screen personality within those pictures that make him a

peculiarly original star. In fact, more than one critic has commented that Sinatra is such a good actor because of his great strength, as a vocalist, in dramatising the lyrics of the songs he sings.

It was, however, not always the case that Sinatra was a natural actor. Right at the beginning, Frank had no screen presence to speak of, and his early films (*Step Lively*, etc) relied on his straight forward performance of songs. Sinatra's star, persona wasn't really fleshed out at all until he moved to MGM. There, starring in *Anchors Aweigh*, the first multi-million dollar musical, Sinatra was taught how to be a more complete performer by his dance director and co-star Gene Kelly (whose lessons included ensemble acting, dance routines, facial gestures, comedy dialogue and close-ups). However, even at this early stage of his career, Sinatra flexed his popular appeal to get his own way at MGM (insisting on hiring his own personal songwriters Sammy Cahn and Jimmy Van Heusen to contribute to *Anchors Aweigh*), and regularly expressed his dissatisfaction with the long, routine and boring aspects of filmmaking, particularly the grind of rehearsals.

Nevertheless, *Anchors Aweigh* first crystallized Sinatra's working class, New York boy-next-door persona. Cast as a naive, virginal sailor, being helped out in his courting the guy who took home the sophisticated screen siren. That was the athletic Kelly's job; instead, Frank ended up with attempts by self-confessed ladies man Kelly, Sinatra adopted a role that would, with little variation, be his character stereotype for the next five years. Taking on board Sinatra's diminutive (almost consumptive) physique, his Hoboken accent (which ruled him out of heroic leads), and his already-established sanitized singing personality, MGM moulded him as the young, shy, nice guy whose experience of life was defined and limited by his loyalty to a family background in the streets of working class New York (usually Brooklyn). This also meant that Sinatra was never

the spunky working girl (waitress, taxi driver, or nurse) who could mother him and, remarkably, always came from the same side of the tracks as he did. So, in everything from *Anchors Aweigh*, through *It Happened In Brooklyn* (1947), to *On The Town*, Frank Sinatra remained an almost class-bound, juvenile star (one with a wife and three children!); with the contradiction of simultaneously being Hoboken's most innocent adult and yet performing one or two songs per picture of incredible romantic maturity and style. Still, while the combination might now appear strange, it worked, especially as even the songs were shot in such a way as to appear innocent romantic fantasies; and Frank was firmly lodged in the heart of the world's movie-going public by a string of hit movies. More significantly, although Sinatra was to change dramatically on screen and off in the years to follow, the specific class and ethnic branding of his persona remained a virtual constant throughout his career.

After 1949, Sinatra's stardom was on the skids, ~~read by MGM~~ but Frank had finally passed his shy-boy sell-by date. Released by the studio, Sinatra managed two films during his career doldrums, both of which saw him attempting to break out of his previous typecasting. The first, a staid romantic comedy, *Double Dynamite*, was not so much explosive as poisonous; while the second, *Meet Danny Wilson* (1951), was an excellent musical drama which had Sinatra in a role that closely paralleled his own rise to fame. Unfortunately, nobody did want to meet Danny or Sinatra, and he had to wait another two years until *From Here To Eternity* changed his acting career forever.

The commercial rejuvenation of Sinatra's movie work by *From Here To Eternity* is closely tied to the fact that the former swooner learnt how to act a serious, adult, dramatic role. In retrospect, although getting the part as Private Maggio was difficult, working in the film without appearing totally outclassed by the rest of the highly talented and ultra serious cast of professional actors was Sinatra's real test on *'From Here To Eternity*. The part of Maggio, a likeably spunky but hot headed Sicilian, was the closest Sinatra had ever got to playing a character whose origins and personality resembled his own; but to embody the role successfully, involved the star in the greatest learning curve he had experienced since *Anchors Aweigh* in 1945. As all accounts of the film's production confirm, Sinatra threw himself into the role and, becoming friends with Montgomery Clift, spent hours hanging out rehearsing, re-rehearsing and studying every nuance, gesture and inflection of speech delivery the great Method actor passed onto him. Sinatra's debt to Clift was great, and he repeatedly acknowledged it:

"I wanted to thank Monty Clift personally. I learned more about acting from Clift - well it was equal to what I learned about musicals from Gene Kelly".

The result was a finely detailed piece of character acting from Sinatra, in which, in a relatively small amount of screen time, he perfectly encapsulated the tragicomic toughness of this little Italian-American loser without singing once. Representing, a watershed in Frank's life, *From Here To Eternity* moved him from lightweight youthful star of musicals to respected contemporary actor in modern movies.

Buoyed by renewed fame and fortune, and armed with a new technical mastery of screen acting, Sinatra entered the most productive and Challenging phase of his movie career. Moreover, his alternation of new musicals with serious dramas allowed him to vary his image, and thus remain fresh to audiences.

With the power to choose, Sinatra's musical roles were tougher and more adult than ever before. In *Young At Heart*, Sinatra played his sad-sack, torch-song singing self who does get the girl (Doris Day). Yes, Sinatra still has a more typical he-man to play against, in the form of Gig Young, and he is still the vulnerable Italian-American who needs feeding up; but the bitterness and cynicism of Barney Sloan, his restless, unsuccessful composer character, even in the happy end (Sinatra by this time being able to insist on not dying in a movie), suggest far more depths of angry emotion than

normally found in your average sappy-golucky musical. Moreover, even in his most conventional singing roles of the 50s, the rootless, unsettled edge of the Sloan character is retained.

In *Guys and Dolls* he is the perpetually elusive gambler Nathan Detroit, forever postponing marriage to his faithful doll Adelaide, and in *High Society* Sinatra is the rather confused reporter who again has to be "saved" by a good woman. The most naturalistic of these roles was undoubtedly in *Pal Joey*. Adapted (and softened) for the screen from a raunchy Broadway musical, this tale of a no-good saloon singer, torn between the money of society hostess Rita Hayworth and the small town sexiness of Kim Novak, features Sinatra only a heartbeat away from playing himself. Apart from the less wholesome nature of Sinatra's characters in musicals, he is made a far more sexual personality in his 50s films; so that even though he still looks very much the same as before, his adult melancholy and past experience make him attractive not just to the Adelades of *Guys and Dolls*, but to the Tracey Lords (Grace Kelly) of *High Society* as well. There is also a new knowingness in the way his song performances are shot (using more closeups from varying angles, and having a fan or would-be lover watching in admiration, as in the 'Lady Is A Tramp' scene from *Pal Joey*) that reinforces both the different, more potent star personality of Sinatra and the new character of what a French critic might have called the 'grain' of his 50s voice. The strength of Sinatra's singing sequences seem more remarkable when one knows how much he disliked miming to pre-recorded songs and would, more often than not, refuse to do more than one take of them:

"There's Ay one thing about making movies that really irritates me; this business of overdubbing songs to the vision afterwards. I never sing a song the same way twice so when I come to mime I find it very hard..."

If Sinatra's 50s musicals are intriguing, then his straight dramas are often extraordinary, pushing at the very limits of his stardom. In particular, Frank's brave and disturbing performance as a drug addicted card dealer in Otto Preminger's taboo-breaking *The Man With The Golden Arm*, convincingly demonstrated that *From Here To Eternity* was no fluke. Sinatra's acting, as the terribly frail, slightly pathetic Frankie Machine, trapped by a horrific marriage, a low rent lifestyle and criminal pressures (drawing on the Brooklyn ethnic background once more), gives him a chance to ring every available emotional register without resorting to mawkish sentimentality. Furthermore, Sinatra goes for broke and brilliantly pulls off a hysterical scene where Machine suffers 'cold turkey' in a desperate attempt to get off heroin. Even though, by today's standards: Preminger's film is quite tame, it should not be underestimated what a risk *The Man With The Golden Arm* was for the star, addressing such a potentially scandalous subject.

Preminger's film was followed by a number of similar experiments with controversial characters: *Johnny Concho* (1956) is about a cowboy coward, *The Joker Is Wild* (1957) is a sour bio pic in which Frank confidently played an alcoholic comedian; and the ultra-liberal *Kings Go Forth* (1958) uses the form of a war picture to show ordinary GI Joe Sinatra confronting and conquering his racism. Looking at these parts, it's clear that Sinatra, instead of being bound by his slight stature and unconventional vulnerability, utilised it to embody unusually complex characters whose flaws were expertly emphasised by his new "loser" star image. This exciting period was capped by the stunning, Vincente Minnelli directed, *Some Caine Running* (1958; and another adaptation from a James-From *Here To Eternity*-Jones novel), which had Frank as a disillusioned minor writer, disgusted with the phoniness of small town life and sexually obsessed by a woman he can't have, while pursued by a girl he doesn't want. Arguably the most complete and profound movie of Sinatra's 50s canon, *Some Caine Running* marked the end of an era and, with its proto-Rat Pack casting (Shirley MacLaine and Dean Martin), ushered in a new one.

Whatever the impetus (political liberalism, production power, the class of director, censorship relaxation), Frank Sinatra from 1953 to 1958 carried off a gallery of complex, imaginative and still resonant screen personalities that avoided the ridiculous and stereotypical. In fact Sinatra was always at his best the more uncomfortable or taboo the subject matter of the film was; a characteristic which he carried through, albeit more infrequently, into the next decade. In this way Sinatra's star image bridged the gulf between the traditional, rounded cinema acting of stars like Humphrey Bogart and the psychologically unstable, Method "realism" of 50s icons like Montgomery Clift and Marlon Brando. Quite how Sinatra achieved the level of energy and motivation required for his acting is still something of a mystery. Legendary for his refusal to rehearse, his insistence on add, late night filming schedules (coinciding with his own late night lifestyle), one take shooting and his preference for spontaneous, improvised, on-set delivery (again paralleling his singing), Sinatra

could be impossible to work with and yet somehow produce magical results.

Sinatra by the early 60s was a very rich, successful man who regularly made his 'Rat Pack' comedy/musical films, but few of them demanded or received much in the way of real acting effort. Indeed, along with Sinatra's complete control, and a fuller, older figure, came repeatedly bland parts - Frank more often than not portraying conventional, ordinary guys who lack all the urgent, vulnerable ambivalence of his earlier roles. In Sinatra's defence, it might be argued that Hollywood itself was in a process of uncomfortable transition. With the breakup of the studio system, the rise of television and radical filmmaking developments in Europe (the French New Wave and British Free Cinema etc), the American movie industry was, for a time, floundering hopelessly. Lacking new ideas, the major film producers relied on big-budget star-studded blockbusters to appeal to an

increasingly fragmented "family audience". Thus, Sinatra's early 60s career could be interpreted as identical to that of many other mainstream figures of the era (including Brando), Without great films to make, he made mediocre ones, took the money and ran.

There is, of course, one notable exception to the desultory procession of Frank and Friends' films - namely *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962), a highly regarded political thriller that neatly summarised cold war paranoia at its very height. *The Manchurian Candidate*, based on a novel by Richard Condon, once the star's press agent at MGM, got Sinatra's interest through a high quality script adaptation by George Axelrod and the energy of its young director John Frankenheimer, one of a new breed of creative filmmakers emerging from the training ground of TV drama. Indeed, Sinatra invested both economically and personally in *The Manchurian Candidate*, even calling in a personal favour to the then President, John F. Kennedy, to allow the production to go ahead against the advice of presidential aides who were (rightly?!) worried about its subject matter of political assassination.

Sinatra, working closely with the director, gave one of his most impressive acting displays in a complex, dialogue-laden part as a brainwashed soldier turned secret agent, trying to stop a similarly programmed comrade in arms from killing the President. Frank's sensitive depiction of Ben Marco - a confused, paranoid man beset by nightmarish visions of the past, who is struggling to confront and dispell the mystery surrounding him -brilliantly shakes off the bluff indifference of Rat Pack rep roles. Tapping into the wellsprings of his most evocative, psychologically unstable characterisations, Sinatra plays Ben Marco as well as any part he acted in the 50s, replete with a previously unseen degree of seasoned maturity, illustrated in the sophistication of his romance with Janet Leigh. The difference between this and earlier Sinatra roles, was that Ben Marco was not, unlike Frankie Machine, a weak man succumbing to straightforward temptation, he is a man who has been forced into a nightmare by circumstances outside his control and has to fight to regain his sanity against a duplicitous world. In the 50s, Sinatra played difficult characters who lived in varying circumstances, but there was still no doubt that it was their moral responsibility to pull themselves together. By the 60s, Sinatra in Frankenheimer's thriller has a role which shifts the moral ground, and he now plays a man who would be perfectly normal if it wasn't for other people's lies.

The Manchurian Candidate was a major critical and popular hit and, although Sinatra later banned its re-release for some twenty years because of its uncomfortable associations with the JFK assassination, at the time of initial circulation, he was very positive about the film: "I'm more excited about this part than tiny other he played. I'm saying things in this script that I've never had to speak on screen before. Never had to speak at all, for that matter. Long wild speeches. Very, very different." Indeed, his pleasure at being part of *The Manchurian Candidate* led Sinatra to an unaccustomed, and one time only, statement on his acting philosophy:

"I always try to remember three things as a movie actor. First you must know why you are in the movie, understand all the reactions of the man you are playing, figure out why he's doing what he is doing. Secondly you must know the script. Some actors are crammers - they cram the night before and just learn their lines for the following day. I don't do it that way. I keep a script in my office, my car, my bedroom, by the telephone; even in the john. And I read the whole script maybe fifty or sixty times before shooting even starts. Then, when it comes to shooting a particular scene, you just have to glance at the script to remember the lines and more important, you know how that scene fits into the picture as a whole. Thirdly you must learn and listen to the lines of others; it's no good just learning your own. With Spencer Tracy for instance, you don't get time between his lines and yours to think out your next..."

Whilst this might not be the ultimate expression on motivation for screen thesping, it does provide a rare insight into how Sinatra did prepare himself for the movies when committed and dedicated to a specific project.

Unfortunately, with the possible exception of *Von Ryan's Express* (1965), a war movie that Sinatra scored in as a tough POW leading a breakout, the rest of Frank's early and mid 60s career was a rollcall of routine actioners and clumsy comedies which didn't require acting anywhere near the sensitivity of *The Manchurian Candidate*.

As described above, it was at the tail end of the decade that Sinatra enjoyed a major revival of fortune both on disc and screen. Now in his fifties, Frank Sinatra made one last major change of star persona and exploited his now heavier, more world-weary and battered appearance to the full in a trio of perfectly tailored detective thrillers all directed by Gordon Young At Heart Douglas. If *Tony Rome* (1967) established the viability of Sinatra playing a cynical, wisecracking private eye in a glossy sixties milieu (also coinciding with a revival in Hollywood in general and thriller movies in particular), then *The Detective* (1968) was the opportunity to show that the star still had the capacity to confound all expectations and surprise everyone by the quality and depth of his characterisation. *The Detective* is a tough, contemporary thriller about a liberal but hardboiled cop trying to track a psychotic killer (of gays) while himself beset with marital problems and surrounded by police corruption.

Confronting many still-then-taboo social issues (like homosexuality and cops on the take), *The Detective* was a fashionably radical movie that further grabbed everyone's attention because such an establishment star as Sinatra was prepared to appear in it. However, he did more than star in *The Detective*. Sinatra embodied the heart and soul of the film as an utterly believable police loner who has a traditional morality about marriage and relationships, but whose honesty and old fashioned liberalism runs so strongly through him that he detests the slap-happy racism and homophobic brutality of his colleagues. With a carefully constructed performance,

consisting of pared down dialogue and laconic understatement which registers emotion through subtle facial gestures and careful looks, Sinatra gave his most compelling and controlled example of mature acting.

The sheer resonance of Sinatra's acting in *The Detective* may have something to do with the nature of the movie -the star once again producing his best for a film confronting risky material - or it may be that this part most completely encapsulated an image of how Sinatra himself would like to be seen, an idealised self-image of a white knight, confident in a frequently frightening and bizarre world. This- is one step further on from Ben Marco in *The Manchurian Candidate*. Now Sinatra plays a man who is old enough to know what he does or doesn't believe in, and accepts the world for the messy, confusing place it is, secure in the fact that his moral honesty will carry him through. Whatever the motivation, this role carried over to raise the quality threshold of the Tony Rome sequel, *Lady In Cement* (1968), and led Frank Sinatra into adopting it as his one and only replayable persona in further detective roles in TV movies like *A Contract On Cherry Street* (1977) and his last big-screen role to date, *The First Deadly Sin* (1980),

Yet, to a greater or lesser extent, that trilogy of cop thrillers marked the end of Frank Sinatra's long film career and the final development of his film stardom and acting abilities. Leaving aside the lame, comedy-western *Dirty Dingus Magee* (1970), Frank opted out at the very top and was content to only very occasionally re-enter the acting fray to replay past glories of his 'tee persona. So what one is left with, is a flawed but exceptionally intriguing, canon of films which saw Frank move from Hoboken nice guy, to ambivalent swinger, to cynical but sympathetic tough guy, in one of the longest and most creative careers in American cinema.

References:

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