

LOOK OUT!

Ol' Mack is Back

NEPA's answer to Sinatra primed to launch second CD

BY GENE PADDEN

Call Mark Mack "the crooner chameleon."

By day, you can find him in his Kingston law office, complemented by the library of leather-bound books and treasures collected from his worldly travels. His desk carries more commemorative penholders than an Ivy League schoolhouse, and the waiting area displays dozens of framed newspaper articles documenting his successes defending the accused.

There's no clowning around in the office, much like in the courtroom. So when Mack addresses you with his no bullshit, 1950's Rat Packer tone, you heed each word like your life depends on it. Then, when you least expect it, you laugh.

"We're going to head out now," he says. "I

have a real nice ring picked out for the lady over there, and we're gonna go pick it up and have a nice lunch at the Super King Buffet."

Coming from a man whose suits would have made Frank him-

self stop and stare, that's funny.

The Chinese buffet isn't the most frequented meeting ground among the area's most successful attorneys (let's face it, no matter how good the dim sum, you can't golf there), but Mark Mack is no billboard attorney.

By night, he becomes an animal of another color. A well-mannered shark, if you will.

He and his eight-piece orchestra are doing something no other band or entertainer in the area is doing - they're keeping it real in ways most of today's musicians cannot comprehend.

They're championing the Great American Songbook.

Sinatra. Martin. Bennett. Rawls. Darrin. Porter. Torme. And they're doing it spot-on.

The timeless music that evolved from the Golden '20s through the '60s is fading from our cultural radar. Tony Bennett, now at age 79, may be America's last ambassador to that body of work. Mark Mack wants to change that.

"I've always felt that this is the most legitimate type of music - if that's the right way of

saying it," he says. "It takes a lot to do it right. I like a lot of black music because they are entertainers. How they dress. How they move. They put on a show. I respect that. But I've always come back to this. It's a jazz-influenced pop sound. It's something a little different for our area."

Mack will release his second CD "Mack the Knife" this Saturday at NightCap's in Edwardsville. He'll perform with The Mark Mack Orchestra, an eight-piece collection that's a who's who among jazz musicians.

His personnel includes pianist/arranger Ron Stabinsky; Joe Cole on bass; Mark Sullivan (of Regis Philbin, Joe Piscopo, John Davidson) on drums; Nelson Hill (Sinatra, Sinatra Jr.) on sax;

Danny Cahn (Streisand, Minnelli) on trumpet, Kevin "Racehorse" Haines (The Supremes) on trombone; and Jay Ratman on sax.

Mack used most of that crew on his new CD, and the result is a spotless, 19-track greatest

hits collection that despite its complicated instrumentation, sounds better than most big studio releases.

It's music you can turn up full blast on a sunny day and clean your house to. It's the quality of music you hear during bad romantic comedies at Christmas time, when the lovers are shopping at Tiffany's and Macy's ... laughing and giggling until they fall all over each other during a midnight skate in Central Park.

More popular tracks include "Almost Like Being in Love," "Ain't That a Kick in the Head," "Mack the Knife," "That's Life," and "There Will Never be Another You."

Mack even sings in Italian, and one of the album's true highlights is the piano/bass/vocal arrangement of "Estate" by the late Bruno Martino. Mack's friend, producer, and mentor Maestro Giacomo Simonelli wrote a unique rendition for the disc.

"It's all the maestro on that," Mack says. "It's nothing like Bruno's song. And I will say, my Italian has been improving (laughs)."

Mack has been a regular performer in the

area for the past four years. You could usually find him with a trio at upscale restaurants and martini bars like the former Billy G's in Wilkes-Barre, The Woodlands in Plains, or Sidney's at the Ramada in Clarks Summit.

There's a certain caliber of presentation necessary to tribute some of music's greatest performers, and Mack now feels he's exceeding it with a full orchestra.

"These guys all love the music and they love the product," he says. "It's not just another date to make a buck. For me, it's an honor to have these guys. I'm very fortunate to have them."

Mack has plans to confirm dates in Atlantic City, and it's only a matter of time before we'll be able to formally announce them. As we spoke, he confirmed one of the biggest gigs any of our area bands have ever taken. He'll perform at the "World Concert for Peace" in Rome, Italy in March. The concert will feature the likes of Paul McCartney and Bono as well as world leaders and dignitaries from across the globe. The concert will be televised in more than 40 countries and will be produced by Hal Uplinger and Mike Appleton of Live Aid

fame.

This Saturday, he'll donate all proceeds from his CD sales to the Make-A-Wish Foundation of Greater Pennsylvania.

"Our goal is to give a \$10,000 check to them," said Lorie McCarthy, his manager. "It all depends on the turnout and the CD sales and while Mark is performing, he's going to raffle prizes, one of which is a Cancun vacation. It's not your typical T-shirts."

Mack is booked through 2006 at NightCap's, and it's a venue tailor made for his big band sound. "The club is a great, great venue," he says. "It's done professionally for live entertainment. They have an excellent sound system, a large dance floor, and a nice stage."

Mack is also setting up his own charitable foundation, as his way of giving back to the area. From his first notes with the Marty Edwards Band at The Woodlands four years ago to his upcoming performance in Rome, he's come a long, long way.

And to quote one of the Steve Allen tracks on Mack's new CD, "This could be the start of something big."

IF YOU GO...

WHAT: Mark Mack CD Release Benefit

WHEN: Saturday, Oct. 15, 8 p.m.

WHERE: NightCap's, Edwardsville

ADMISSION: Free. All CD sales benefit Make-A-Wish Foundation of Greater Pennsylvania



Mark Mack will release his second CD this Saturday in Edwardsville.