

Up Close & Personal

LOOK FOR UP CLOSE & PERSONAL EVERY WEEK IN ELECTRIC CITY. WE'LL SPOTLIGHT YOUR FRIENDS, NEIGHBORS AND CO-WORKERS AND HOW THEY'RE CONTRIBUTING TO LIFE IN NEPA.

Meet Mark Mack...

When the pressures of the courtroom come down upon attorney Mark Mack, he turns to his weekends for his release. Every Saturday night, he dons a Sinatra style suit and croons classic jazz standards in front of strangers at the Woodlands. For a guy who makes a regular habit of swimming with sharks, performing live is a walk in the park. No, really, when we say swimming with sharks, we mean he literally swims with sharks. The Wilkes-Barre native is an avid scuba diver, and even has a place in Cancun that allows him to frequent his favorite Caribbean reefs. For now though, Mack's excited about the release of his new CD "In the Glare of the Spotlight." Proceeds from the disc benefit The Gilda Radner Familial Ovarian Cancer Registry, and so far he's raised more than \$1,000. Now, meet the Mack Daddy of criminal defense lawyers, the swingin' Mark Mack ...

How did you get into singing?

I've always kidded my friends and people close to me that some day I would become a singer. About three years ago, something clicked and I decided to stop talking about it and do it. I had been doing a lot of karaoke and people were very encouraging — especially down at Martini. I finally went in one night and saw Marty Edwards, whose band plays at the Woodlands. A couple days later he had me in the studio and that was it.

I was doing it three nights a week for two years and ... to tell you the truth, I couldn't do it. It was killing me, between that and the law firm. So now I just do Saturday nights from 9:30 p.m. to 2 at the Woodlands' Courtyard Cafe. We also do weddings and private parties.

And Sinatra is a big influence?

One guy said I was a Sinatra impersonator and I didn't like that. I consider myself just a singer who sings jazz standards and a lot of them are the same ones Sinatra did. I certainly respect the guy as a singer more than anybody I've known. I'll be 50 years old in July but when I was 10 years old I remember listening to Sinatra on this guy's Cadillac on the radio and that guy's music stuck with me. I've listened to my share of everything else, but that type of music, I considered it more real and professional than other music. To me, to do a song well, takes a lot of effort.

How did you learn?

I take lessons every week. Right now, I take lessons from a fellow by the name of Maestro Giacomo Simonelli. He was with RCA in Rome. He was an A&R man, a talent scout. He's done a number of concerts around the world. Right now he's working on an opera. He produced this album. If not for him, the CD wouldn't have turned out like it did.

Does he make you call him The Maestro?

Yeah. Yes he does. He told me I may call him Giacomo in private but in public it's Maestro. He is a real Maestro.

Talk about the songs on this CD.

They're mostly standards that have been done by Sinatra. A lot of other singers have done them as well. When you listen to jazz music, there are so many singers and most of them have done these songs. It's just that certain singers make them their own. Like Nat King Cole made "Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire" his song.

Was it intimidating recording with the Maestro?

The Maestro and I have become very good friends. We eat together, drink together, travel together ... he's a very interesting person and we share a lot of the same views about environmental issues and politics. He's very inspirational. He wants me to go with him to Italy to put on a concert this summer.

Is that doable?

If I can get 10 days off, why not? I spent my last 23½ years as a lawyer. This is something I've always wanted to do. Who knows how long I'm going to last? When will I get another chance to do this?

Which career will kill you quicker?

(Laughs) You know what? That's a very good question. I think the two together are definitely burning the candle a little quicker than most lawyers or singers. Musicians ... singing at a club three nights a week ... I'm not the same as I was 20 years ago. It messes up your sleep pattern and that's tough for me. It's a tough business. Sinatra could get up in the afternoon and have a girl give him a massage then go down to the pool and take his time. I have to be up and go to court!

Which do you find more rewarding?

I've put a lot of work into law. I have a great legal practice. In every way, the law business is very rewarding. It's a much more serious business. It requires much harder work. You're dealing with people's liberty and lives. Here, you're entertaining people. This is the dessert in life. This is the cake and the icing with it in life. This CD was a labor of love. I have to credit my girlfriend Lorie McCarthy because it was her idea to have this benefit. I mean — I did the benefit for my sister Marlena. But Lorie had a lot to do with it. We wanted to entertain people and do something for

the community at the same time. We chose the Gilda Radner fund because my sister was very into the theater.

Was becoming a lawyer a childhood dream?

Well, my dad was District Attorney of Luzerne County. My grandfather was a lawyer. My uncle was a lawyer. It runs in the family. As far as this music is concerned, my father was the biggest influence in my lifetime. He was a very good lawyer and he sings himself. He's always loved to sing.

What else are you passionate about?

We like to travel. We go to New York as much as we can. We seek out new music. I especially like to listen to singers. I'm also an avid scuba diver. I've been lucky. I've been all over the Caribbean and Central America. You name it and I've been there. I've been very fortunate. You're like a space man. Did you ever do it?

I went snorkeling once in the Bahamas ...

Hey I was in St. Martin and I'm snorkeling. It was the first trip I ever went on my life anywhere. And I see these guys down below diving and I just thought, "wow." That was what I needed to do. Since then, I've probably been on at least 250 dives. You're like a space man. It's so relaxing. You can float at any level you want. It's really great. You have to try it sometime.

What was your most memorable undersea encounter?

In the Bahamas, we dove down about 85 feet, and I have an underwater camera. We all sat down and let everything settle, and the captain's mate came with a rope and there were two milk jugs tied together full of chum. Sharks can smell underwater a mile away. These sharks started coming toward us. There were six or seven Caribbean sharks, bull sharks

... some of them were six feet long. They would circle around us and nose at it, and then when they finally opened the boxes they went into a frenzy. The sand was like smoke because the sharks were going absolutely crazy.

Another time we were diving in Mexico where they trained nurse sharks and green moray eels. I have pictures of me wearing a Moray eel like it's a boa. And one time I was diving and a submarine went by. That was in Cabo San Lucas.

Anything else you'd like to say?

I would like to stress how much I love the law business. And if something ever came up where I had the chance to get some time off to do Atlantic City or something, I would do it. Not that I would ever want to give up what I'm doing now, but just to say that I gave it a shot.

—by gene padden



PHOTO BY BOB URBAN