

FRANK SINATRA

Born in Hoboken, NJ, in 1915, Francis Albert Sinatra exercised an almost unparalleled sway on 20th-century popular music. Before there was Elvis or Madonna, he mastered the art of morphing his persona and his music, and in the process remained an iconic force for five decades. From 1942 (when he went solo after stints with Harry James and Tommy Dorsey) until his death in 1998, Sinatra adapted his approach to changing tastes yet always interpreted every song he tackled with phrasing that personalized and enhanced the meaning of the lyrics. His early, vulnerable crooning style elevated him to superstardom, arguably turning him into the first teen idol, with screaming bobby-soxers hanging on his every romantic turn of phrase, mixing tenderness and feminine vulnerability. He made the most of the post-WWII years by radiating a rugged insouciance—filling out his once-slender frame, using booze as a stage prop, and heightening his sexuality—that resonated with a newly affluent audience. By 1953 he completed the first of several reinventions, trading in youthful silkiness for introspection, an ambivalent delivery that afforded different interpretations to different listeners, and a darker timbre on a series of albums made with arranger Nelson Riddle. Toggling between celebrating urbane hedonism, rhapsodizing romantic desire, and meditating on loneliness, he exploited the new LP format—and pioneered the concept album with *In the Wee Small Hours* in 1955. In 1960 he launched his own label, Reprise, and began projecting a high-roller image aligned with Las Vegas high life. Even as he cut back on recording in the 1970s, he still scored hits such as the nostalgic “Theme from New York, New York” in 1980, and his influence remains profound, whether in the music of a disciple like Michael Bublé or in the business acumen of JAY Z.