

Sinatra Birthday Bash returns to the Count Basie Theatre



Michelle DellaFave and James Anthony are among the swingin' singers joining Joe Muccioli and the Red Bank Jazz Orchestra, during the annual Sinatra Birthday Bash at the Count Basie Theatre. Friday, December 6, 2013.

Call it the second most famous birthday celebrated in December — that of Jersey’s own Francis Albert Sinatra, the iconic Chairman of the Board who would have turned 98 years “Young at Heart” on Dec.6, 2013.

It’s only fitting, then, that Red Bank’s Count Basie Theatre — the landmark auditorium that’s long been headquarters to Nutcrackers, Scrooges, Messiahs and other local December traditions — would welcome Ol’ Blue Eyes into the holiday mix, with the seventh annual edition of a homegrown concert event known as the Sinatra Birthday Bash.

Scheduled for 8 tonight, Dec. 6, the event brings together 11 different “saloon singers, crooners and chanteuses” to perform Sinatra signatures in front of the 18 piece Red Bank Jazz Orchestra — all under the baton of conductor-arranger Joe Muccioli, artistic director of the Red Bank-based Jazz Arts Project, and an internationally noted expert who’s worked with the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra and BBC Big Band.

As the man named “Mooche” tells it, “this is our biggest, most ambitious show ever” — a production that also boasts the voices of the Red Bank Regional High School chorus — and “also the scariest,” as the Jazz Arts team has assumed full producing duties for the first time in 2013. Also new this year is the introduction of an element of “holiday cheer,” with the vocalists drawing from some of the many seasonal classics recorded by Frank Sinatra during his prolific 60-year career.

What hasn’t changed is the basic concept in which a group of “pros and amateurs from all walks of life” find themselves “suddenly onstage in front of a massive orchestra, with a thousand people in the audience ...many of them are scared at first, but they all have that drive, and they really step it up.”

Featured among the all-new cast of guest singers this year is a woman who might excite some memories with audiences of a certain Boomer-era age — Michelle Della Fave, an original member of The Goldiggers (and The Ding-A-Ling Sisters) from Dean Martin’s vintage TV variety hours. She’s joined by Virginia-based professional Chairman channeler **James Anthony**, winner of the 2012 Sinatra Idol.