

Footlighters Club

President's Message - December 12, 2010

CONNIE FRANCIS TRIBUTE

From the moment Connie Francis entered the jam-packed Grand Ballroom at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino there was a tumultuous standing ovation that did not stop. The overflowing crowd knew it was in for a special day. The Footlighters Club was honoring Connie Francis, the #1 Female Recording Artist Of All Time and an authentic living legend, with the first "Connie Francis Lifetime Achievement Award."

In the fifty-four year history of the Footlighters Club, this was truly one of our greatest and most memorable events. What made it extra special was the fact that it was also Connie's birthday. The Footlighters can never thank Connie enough. Her appearance raised thousands of dollars for the Footlighters Foundation For Indigent Entertainers and Musicians, and the donations are still coming in. Connie's fans and friends flew in from all over the world for this event. She graciously signed countless autographs and posed for countless pictures. She is a true superstar.

After a great Hard Rock Hotel lunch and a gigantic birthday cake, the show began. I had the privilege of introducing Connie, who sang beautifully, looked fabulous and spoke from the heart. Then, as if that wasn't enough, she brought up her dear friend, one of the greatest singer-songwriters of all time, the legendary Neil Sedaka. Connie discovered Neil, and they both spoke of how he came to write many hits for her, including Stupid Cupid, which they did as a duet. He told how he and the late Howard Greenfield wrote "Where The Boys Are." When Connie sang that accompanied by Neil, the crowd went wild! They knew they were witnessing true show business history.

Then I introduced Connie's celebrated entertainer friends to pay tribute to her. First up was Peter Lemongello, who did a beautiful version of his million-seller, "Do I Love You?" which was written for him by Paul Anka. Then came the phenomenal singer-songwriter Ann Anello. What Ann did was truly magical. She wrote a wonderful song for our guest of honor called "Connie," which absolutely overwhelmed the audience and none more so than Connie Francis, who had to get up and thank Ann for that tribute. Then Ann did "I Am What I Am," which just knocked everybody out. A special surprise was Rock and Roll Hall of Famer, the fantastic Dion. Not only did he sing in his inimitable style, but he was hilarious talking about his lifetime friendship with Connie.

Up next was the always funny Eddie Capone, who had the crowd in stitches. David Orsen did a terrific rendition of the Andrea Bocelli song, "Time To Say Goodbye." It was great to see TV and nightclub legend, Kaye Stevens, who belted out "It's a Sin To Tell a Lie," and "Sister Love." The crowd just loved her. Then came that great singing impressionist, Tony Ferretti, who did his dead-on takes of Tom Jones, Tony Bennett and Ray Charles. He did a duet with Connie's record of "You Made Me Love You" in the voice of Al Jolson. It was wonderful. Then Sal Richards tore the roof off. He had them screaming with laughter - they wouldn't let him off the stage. Sal did a beautiful version of "The Best of Everything," which he dedicated to Connie. Connie's cousin, Connie Rose spoke beautifully on behalf of the Connie Francis family.

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Then came the time to present the Connie Francis Lifetime Achievement Award to our guest of honor. Lou March and Tommy Dale, founders of the Footlighters Foundation, presented the award to Connie, who spoke about how important the Footlighters Foundation is, and what a wonderful way to spend her birthday. Joined by a military honor guard, Connie sang an unforgettable version of "God Bless America."

I don't believe that anyone who was there will ever forget this tribute. Sal Richards, at the end of the event, said to me, "Errol, how are you going to top this one?" I said, "I have no idea." But that doesn't mean I'm going to stop trying to give the Footlighters the greatest events ever.

