

Biography for Connie Francis *America's Sweetheart of Song*

At merely age 4, Concetta Rosemarie Franconero made her debut at Olympic Park in Irvington, New Jersey, singing "Anchors Away," while accompanying herself on the accordion. Connie developed a love for music from the first time her father, George, played the concertina that his father brought from Italy in 1905. From that point on, music became Connie's world. Connie's father took her to every radio and television audition in existence so she could reap the benefits and experiences of live performances. Little did young Concetta fathom that she would become the world's most popular female singer and the number one, best-selling female recording artist of all time.

At age 11, Connie was a regular on "Marie Moser's Starlets" a local TV show and later appeared on the "Ted Mack Amateur Hour." The following year she made yet another national TV appearance on "The Arthur Godfrey Talent Scout Show," finally ending up with a four-year stint as a regular on "Startime," a TV show that featured talented child performers. The show was produced by the late George Scheck, who would become her lifetime manager. Connie never missed a week in her four years on the show, showing indeed her stability and stamina as a trouper.

In her early teens she was sought after to make demo recordings for music publishers who were impressed with her distinctive voice. However, at the sessions she was told deliberately to imitate other artists for whom they wanted to pitch their songs. Some years later, still in her teens, Connie signed with MGM Records for a "20-side" contract. She recorded 18 songs, all of which bombed. Like all recording artists of the era, Connie's dream was to have her music played on Dick Clark's "American Bandstand." As her recording contract was coming to an end with just one more session to go, her father urged her to record "Who's Sorry Now?" a slow ballad first published in 1923. Connie told her father, "Daddy, it's so square, the kids will laugh me right off the show." "Look, sister," George told his daughter. "If you don't record this song, the only way you'll ever get on 'American Bandstand' is if you sit on top of the television set."

January 1, 1958 was a day like no other. With the flick of a switch, Connie became a star. Dick Clark introduced "Who's Sorry Now?" on "American Bandstand" and told its 8 million viewers that Connie Francis is "A new girl singer that is heading straight for the number one spot." Clark played the song until it sold 1 million copies. Connie was voted the "The Best Female Vocalist" by "American Bandstand" that year, and every succeeding year for the next four years of the poll's existence by write-in viewers.

"Who's Sorry Now" was the first of Francis' long string of worldwide hits. By the mid-1960s, she had sold more than 35 million records worldwide, with 35 U.S. Top 40 hits, and three number ones in the United States ("Everybody's Somebody's Fool," "My Heart Has a Mind of Its Own," "Don't Break the Heart That Loves You") as well as several other No. 1

songs in the U.K. (“Who’s Sorry Now?” “Stupid Cupid,” “Carolina Moon,” “Mama” and “Robot Man”) and other foreign countries to her credit. Many of her foreign hits remained in the Top 10 for more than six months at a time, earning her titles such as “Japan’s Most Popular Singer,” “Italy’s Most Beloved Italian American Singer” and European’s Golden Lion Award as “Most Popular Artist - Male or Female on the European Continent.”

In July of 1963, Connie gave a Command Performance before Queen Elizabeth II at the Alhambra Theatre in Glasgow, Scotland.

1963’s “In the Summer of His Years,” written as a tribute to the assassinated John F. Kennedy, remains one of the earliest-known charity records, with proceeds donated to dependents of the policeman shot during the incident and the LP’s sales used to help build the newly-established Kennedy Child Center at the time.

Connie made American music international by recording her singles in as many as 13 languages, and recording many ethnic albums in the 1960s. When Connie’s father suggested she record an Italian album, she told him he was crazy. “This is America, Daddy, not Italy.” He said, “Look, stupid, there are 30 million Italian Americans living in this country, and no other female artist has done it before.” The record became Connie’s biggest-selling LP, charting No. 4 on the Billboard Charts with a single culled from the collection, “Mama,” reaching Top 10 in the U.S., No. 1 in Europe and South America and gold status. Connie’s father later added, “And you should also record a Jewish album. Jews love everything Italian.” Connie knew there was no point in starting a battle with him, so she did what any Italian singer would do, she went across the street to ask her neighbor, a rabbi, what songs to include and checked with a fellow performer, Jackie Mason.

When Connie mentioned to her father that she might as well record in German, Japanese, Spanish and other languages, he replied, “Now you’re using your brain.” This was another of her father’s ideas that paid off. Connie built an international following by singing to people in their native languages. She made numerous concert and television appearances in Germany, Japan, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil, Australia and South Africa, covering all five continents. To this day, Connie Francis is the best-selling recording artist in Germany.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Connie was voted the World’s No. 1 Female Vocalist by London’s prestigious New Musical Express and was voted No. 1 in almost every country in Europe, the United States, the Far East, South America, Australia and practically everywhere records were sold.

In 1961, Connie starred in one of the top 10 teenage films of all time, “Where the Boys Are.” The theme song went to No. 1 in 15 countries in several languages. “Where the Boys Are” was the first of four motion pictures that starred Connie during the 1960s.

In 1961, “Everybody’s Somebody’s Fool” became the most-played song not only in the

United States where it charted at No. 1 but on the European continent, earning Connie the title as the “Most Popular Artist in Europe.” She earned the Golden Lion Award by Radio Luxembourg and several Golden Ottos (Germany’s most Prestigious Award) for “DIE LIEBE IST EIN SELTSAMES SPIEL,” the German version of “Everybody’s Somebody’s Fool.” The song became so popular that the German record distributor for MGM records rented the ocean liner “The United States” and invited every artist, member of the press and disc jockeys for a grand celebration. At first, the German record company did not want to release the song at all, saying, “We can’t understand what the hell she’s talking about— especially the first verse.” Connie said, “Then lop off the first verse— it’s a long song anyway.”

Her Italian, Spanish and Jewish albums transformed Francis from a teenage idol to a mature performer at leading nightspots around the world. Connie was the biggest female draw the Copa (Copacabana nightclub in New York City) ever had. She was the top female vocalist in Las Vegas, often earning the award as most popular female entertainer in Las Vegas, and the youngest performer, at age 22, every to headline at the Sahara in that town.

Soon after her first hit record, Connie became the most sought after singer for television and cabaret. Her many prestigious appearances include more than 35 appearances on “The Ed Sullivan Show,” “Best Of Record” for the National Academy Of Recording Arts And Sciences which initiated the Grammy Award, as well as Steve Lawrence, Dean Martin, Jonathan Winters, Perry Como, and Andy Williams Shows. Her appearance on the Oscar telecast in 1961 made history with her performance in Greek of “Never On Sunday” which marked the first time a foreign song ever won an Oscar. She recalls the incident, stating, “Everyone, including my friend, Joe Pasternak, suggested that I sing, the sure winner, ‘The Second Time Around.’ However, I had just made appearances all over Europe where ‘Never On Sunday’ was a very popular instrumental.” She felt so strongly about the song and she was correct. The song won and resulted in a “Top 10” LP of movie songs she decided to record with “Never On Sunday” as the title.”

Connie’s TV appearances were by no means limited to just the States. She crossed several continents, doing not only personal appearances in the most prestigious venues in the world, “The Olympia Theatre, Paris,” “London’s Palladium,” Montecarlo’s “Sporting Club,” Rio de Janeiro’s “Teatro Novo Republica,” with TV appearances in Italy, France, Spain, Brazil, England, including her own TV specials in Germany and specials in Japan, each in the native language of the country.

So great was her international fame that at the Canadian 1967 Expo, the Prime Minister named Connie “Female Entertainer of the Century” (Bing Crosby was named Male Entertainer of the century).

However, despite all these acclamations, Connie donated much of her free time to charitable benefits and she was chairwoman of Overseas Combined Charities, including UNICEF and often has done special concerts for various religious and civic organizations. In

1982, Connie composed a Victims Bill of Rights that was ratified and posted throughout precincts nationally by the Directors of the International Associations of Chiefs of Police. Among her many USO tours, a particularly notable one was to Vietnam. She states, "visiting and entertaining the troops in Vietnam was my most rewarding experience." She was long a favorite of the military before she went there, easily earning her title as "America's Sweetheart of Song." Connie spent the Christmas of 1967 upon her return making hundreds of phone calls on behalf of the servicemen to their families, a task which has not gone unnoticed. Connie runs into servicemen who come to her concerts or who write her notes, often including pictures about the boost she gave them at the time.

On January 7, 1974, Connie's life made a 360-degree turnaround. She was raped at knifepoint in a Long Island Howard Johnson Motor Lodge, where she was staying during an engagement at the nearby Westbury Music Fair. She did not sing again for seven years, reluctant to face the public and experiencing severe bouts of depression. Connie later sued the Howard Johnson Motor Lodge chain and was awarded the largest monetary settlement ever in a case of sexual assault. Her landmark case studied in law journals till today also brought about improved hotel security. At the request of several organizations protecting crime victims, she made public-service announcements about rape and toured the country.

A few years after Westbury, Connie lost her voice and could not sing nor complete an entire song. On March 6, 1981 her beloved brother, Georgie, was murdered gangland style. After all these tragic events and an ended marriage, Connie's courage and determination encouraged her to make a spectacular comeback in 1981 at the Westbury Music Fair. Her appearance was welcomed by loving fans and covered by press and wire services throughout the world. She continues to delight audiences at sold-out concerts at the most prestigious venues in the United States and around the world, which have included Carnegie Hall, Avery Fisher Hall, Lincoln Center, the London Palladium and her 45th anniversary concerts at the Sahara in Las Vegas. Connie is currently in the process of writing another autobiography.

Today Connie continues successful tours throughout the United States, Europe and the Far East. Connie's present bookings include a proposed tour of Australia, Seoul, Tokyo, Manila, Malaysia, Singapore, and Macau. In the United States, she is booked at various venues in San Francisco, Philadelphia, Boston, Miami, New York City and New Jersey. She has recently released "The American Tour" and "European Concert" featuring live performances. She continues to perform to sell-out crowds and often takes part in special Connie Francis Days throughout the United States and abroad.

She has no plans to stop performing and enjoys every minute of it. She states, "There is nothing like the feeling of a live audience and if I can still bring happiness to people both here and abroad, I will continue to do so! I love it more than anything else in the world, the applause and making people happy! I just love the people!"