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## Perfectly Franc!

### D'Ambrosio performs with gusto and grace

*By Robert Sokol*

Some performers are meant to be on stage. They may be incandescent on the screen or inspirational in a studio, but it is on stage, in relationship with a live audience, where they shine.

**Franc D'Ambrosio** is one of those performers and the proof is at The Razz Room through February 1.

On tour an average of ten months out of each year, D'Ambrosio has been criss-crossing the country for the last several years with either his Hollywood or Broadway show - each a tuneful celebration of an industry in which he's had more than a little experience...

From the opening notes of "Almost Like Being In Love" from *Brigadoon*, D'Ambrosio's rich tenor caresses each song in an embrace - sometimes tender, sometimes humorous, but always passionate - that he does not relinquish until his final bow. Not known as a dancer, he is nonetheless a very physical performer whose body language changes easily to suit the song he is singing. When he reaches for the lyrical stars, his heels leave the ground. His "Singin' in the Rain" evokes Gene Kelly's lighthearted grace and a humorous medley from *Doctor Doolittle* and *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* - in Italian, no less - let him show off not only his skill with the language and operatic vocal chops, but also allows him to poke good-natured fun at the very staid stage presence of classical singers.

You can take the boy out of the Bronx, but fortunately there's more than a little Bronx left in D'Ambrosio. He tells great stories on his family, his childhood, and his dream of becoming a singer when the well-worn cultural path in his neighborhood was to the rectory. With a nod to his mother's idols Ezio Pinza and Mario Lanza, D'Ambrosio offers up "Be My Love" and "Some Enchanted Evening" from *South Pacific*, followed by a winking "Be Italian" from *Nine*, before launching into a legit rendition, in both English and Italian, of "Speak Softly Love" - the theme from Francis Ford Coppola's mafia trilogy where D'Ambrosio sang in *The Godfather III*.

A jazzy Bobby Darin take on "Mack The Knife" was followed by a medley of a Platters-infused "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes," "Hey There" from *The Pajama Game*, and a fervent "What Kind of Fool Am I?" from *Stop The World...I Want To Get Off*. Though he's obviously at home in many musical genres, it is the Broadway ballad where Ambrosio really shines and his rendition of "Bring Him Home" from *Les Miserable* was a stirring example of vocal power and gentility.

Review for **FRANC D'AMBROSIO**



Photo: Rick Guidotti

Handsome and engaging, D'Ambrosio's patter leading in and out of each song and sequence demonstrate an utterly natural and relaxed performer who knows his material and is delighted to share it. He guides the audience through the different sections of the show with ease and aplomb.. Following a medley tribute to Fred Astaire that touches on too many songs to list here and is a showstopper, D'Ambrosio delivers an intimate "Moon River" from *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and then a zesty "Life Is" from *Zorba*.



Photo: Phil Bello/  
Ganymedia.net

... It is inevitable that an audience favorite and nightly top vote-getter will be D'Ambrosio's most well-known role, *The Phantom of the Opera*, which he performed here for a record-breaking five years. He's played the role more than any other actor to date and, in an expertly arranged sequence, he demonstrates why he is probably the best. Without benefit of prosthetic makeup, swirling fog or a crashing chandelier, D'Ambrosio delivers a masterful and very theatrical presentation of song snippets from the show leading into an extraordinary and astonishingly affecting rendering of "The Music of the Night." If it never worked for you before, suddenly the long-lived and oft-derided show makes sense. The yearning, the passion, the pain are all there on D'Ambrosio's unadorned face and the monster becomes man...one with whom you empathize. It is a master class performance.

Most of the songs he performs are available on his two excellent CDs - "Franc D'Ambrosio's Broadway" and "Franc D'Ambrosio's Hollywood". Enjoyable as these recordings are - and they are very enjoyable - they are no substitute for the live experience. So get yourself to The Razz Room for the exceptional treat of an incredibly classy and gifted performer in an intimate, up close setting.