

# RHODE ISLAND PROFILES

BY J. Michael Levesque

## Strictly Sinatra: Rhode Island's Michael Dutra

The similarities are striking.

Both were born on December 12th.

Both left handed.



Both mothers were nurses.

Both fathers were boxers at one time.

Both were baptized at St. Francis Church. One in New Jersey and one in Rhode Island.

Both 5 feet, 8 inches tall.

**J. Michael Levesque** And both dedicated their lives to music.

The first time that you glance at Michael Dutra, you are shocked at how much he looks like Frank Sinatra.

Close your eyes when he starts to sing you will think that you are listening to a tape of "Ol' Blue Eyes" or that you are about to enjoy something very special.

My wife Celeste even remarked "he sounds more like Frank Sinatra than Frank Sinatra! He even has the same mannerisms."

He's just that good.

So good that Warner Brothers Entertainment dubbed him one the five best Frank Sinatra covers IN THE WORLD.

We Rhode Islanders are fortunate to see Mike perform in a number of local venues, sometimes as a solo act, sometimes as the "Rat Pack" with Dean Martin and Sammy Davis Jr. sound-alikes and sometimes in front of the jumping sounds of the 16 piece Strictly Sinatra Band.

A little background on Michael Dutra.

Born at the old Lying-In Hospital in Providence and raised in East Providence, Michael together with sisters Cynthia and Luann grew up in a family that loved music.

His mom Jeanette (Lanni) was a Licensed Practical Nurse (who sadly passed) and his dad George was a route manager for the Coca Cola company who in 1959 was acknowledged as the number one salesperson in the world for the company during a special sales promotion.

George loved Frank Sinatra and would rush to the music store, with Michael in tow, to buy the latest album or sheet music.

George and Michael would frequently belt-out the latest songs together.



Michael Dutra

Photos Courtesy MichaelDutra.com

After graduating from Bishop Feehan High School in Attleboro, Michael rushed head-first into the business world (the start of self-employment throughout his life) starting a janitorial service company that worked for numerous clients including McDonald's restaurant locations.

The company (which he actually started while a student at Bishop Feehan) was very successful.

So successful as a matter of fact, that when he turned 21 he bought the first of his six Honey Dew Donut franchises.

He would eventually sell the stores in 1997 to open a new chapter in his business life by establishing a company called Franchise Business Brokers. The company arranged and assisted in the buying, selling, and financing of franchise concept businesses throughout New England.

The company would prosper to a point where it reached over \$75 million in sales, though Mike's interest was moving steadily in another direction.

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Having worked the club circuit on a part-time basis for years, he decided to change his life and go "all-in" to the music world.

His world would be strictly Sinatra.

A world that would eventually take him and his wife Patricia (an executive in the automotive industry) from small venues to big concerts throughout the country.

His list of "gigs" reads like an encyclopedia (excuse me like Google) of coffee houses and concert venues, primarily up and down the East Coast.

He has performed at corporate events for Fortune 500 companies and the inaugurations of New Jersey Governor Chris Christie and Boston Mayor Marty Walsh.

Michael is also in great demand for fundraisers for hospitals and other charitable organization events.



Michael Dutra and the Strictly Sinatra Band

Whether it's a "small gig or corporate event", workaholic Michael Dutra performs over 275 nights each year.

"I have to keep the pipes going!" he explained.

Asked what his favorite venue was, Mike didn't

hesitate for a second.

"BB King's" on 42nd Street in New York City.

"It's a world-renowned club that only the best can play at."

Asked what his favorite Sinatra songs were, again no hesitation.

"My audiences love "My Way" and "Summer Wind" the most. Those are my favorites."

Not only does he play the club and concert scenes, but he is also the voice of Sinatra on a Twix candy bar commercial as well as the background vocals on a Mercedes-Benz commercial.

Closer to home you might remember the opening for the late Mayor Buddy Cianci's radio show – the song "More". That was all Michael.

He remarked that he had fond memories of the Providence legend.

So, if you get a chance, I highly recommend that you check out his website: [www.strictlysinatranow.com](http://www.strictlysinatranow.com) for upcoming shows.

What's nice for us Rhode Islanders is that we don't have to travel to BB King's in New York City or the Hard Rock Casino in Miami to catch his show.

You'll see him on the Hill and in venues throughout Rhode Island.

I last caught him at a Christmas Party my son Zack hosted for Home Point Financial in Providence.

You might also walk away thinking he sounds more like Sinatra than Sinatra.



The "Rat Pack" (shot in Little Italy) is of Michael Dutra playing Frank Sinatra (center), as well as Steve Palumbo playing Dean Martin (at right) and Lloyd Diamond playing Sammy Davis Jr. (at left)

*J. Michael Levesque is a former Mayor of West Warwick and contributor to this newspaper.*