

LIGHTS.  ACTION.

Q & A Barry Manilow

Interviewed by Kristine McKenzie

With worldwide sales of more than 75 million records, there's no denying that Barry Manilow truly does write the songs the whole world sings.

His musical journey began at the age of seven when he took accordion lessons and learned to play the piano. By the time he was a teenager, Manilow knew music would be his career path and he attended New York College of Music and the Julliard School of Music.

Manilow became musical director for a CBS show named

"Callback," which led to a very successful career writing advertising jingles. If you can hum the advertising tunes for companies like State Farm Insurance, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Pepsi and the McDonald's "You Deserve a Break Today" campaign, you have Manilow to thank for it.

His big break came in 1971, when he met Bette Midler and became her music director, arranger and pianist. The following year, he signed a record deal of his own and in 1975,

Manilow scored his first No. 1 hit song, "Mandy."

Manilow had 25 consecutive Top 40 hits on the Billboard Hot 100 between 1975 and 1983 including the familiar songs "It's A Miracle," "I Write the Songs," "This One's For You," "Weekend In New England," "Looks Like We Made It," "Can't Smile Without You," and the Grammy Award-winning "Copacabana (At the Copa)."

In 2005 Manilow recorded a collection of tunes from the 1950s with producer Clive Davis. The resulting "Greatest Songs of the Fifties" became a surprise hit and brought Manilow back to the top of the charts. Also in 2005, Manilow premiered his show at the Las Vegas Hilton. Now in its third year, the show continues to wow critics and fans in Vegas.

Q: You have an all-new production at the Las Vegas Hilton. What made you want to change the show?

A: "Music and Passion' was tremendously successful, but my co-creators and I kept seeing things that we wanted to make better and there was never enough time to do them. Since we had the summer off, we all decided to dive in and make the show more exciting, more beautiful and with more hits than ever."

In your new show, you sing a lot of your greatest hits. How did you select which ones to sing? And will that line-up of songs change each night?

A: "We've rehearsed all 40 of them. We can do any one of them in different places every show."

You're headlining in a very famous room – the same one that Elvis called home. What is that like? Were you an Elvis fan?

A: "Now and again I get a shock of realization that I'm standing on the same stage that he stood on; that I'm dressing in the same dressing room he used. Sometimes I get an irresistible urge to wiggle my hips, but you'll be glad to know that so far I have resisted that urge."

Your show is very physical – there's a lot of dancing and moving around the stage. How do you stay so energetic?

A: "It's easy. The power that comes from the music and the excitement I feel from the audience."

You have a lot of very dedicated fans. What's your most memorable fan encounter?

A: "A mother once told me that her child had learned to speak by listening to my records."

You've written literally hundreds of songs over the years. Do you have a favorite?

A: "My favorite song changes every week or so. This week it's 'Could It Be Magic?,' the song I wrote based on the Chopin Prelude in C minor."

Did you play Vegas a lot when you were starting out? How has it changed since then?

A: "We would play a hotel now and again on early tours. Even though I was told that the audiences would be drunk, eating, talking, heckling...I never got that kind of audience. I always had a great time in Vegas. Still do."

There are loads of production shows in Vegas now, but I've got my own little piece of the town – a guy in front of a band and in front of a beautiful set singing his heart out. That's just fine with me. I'm a grateful guy that I've still got an audience that is interested in hearing my music."

You have a charitable foundation, the Manilow Fund, which among other things, gives money for music scholarships. What inspired you to create that and what do you hope to accomplish with it?

A: "I've been blessed with a lot. I wanted to give back. The goal of my fund is to give assistance to organizations and people that are under the radar. My fund aims at small town charities that are recommended by my fans."

There's nothing more heartwarming than surprising a small town charity with a thousand dollar check out of the blue that pays their rent for the next three months."

You have been nominated for Grammys, Emmys, Tonys – is there one award that means the most to you?

A: "I was inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame a few years ago. It meant a great deal."

You once worked in the mailroom at CBS. Did you ever have any other odd jobs?

A: "I was a helper on a beer truck in Brooklyn when I was a teenager. I was AWFUL! The drivers would moan when they realized that I was their helper for the day. After that summer, I knew I was cut out for better things!"



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