



"Romancing The 60s" - The Fans' Verdict

Universal Motown B0009908-2

You can either listen to this new Frankie Valli album in the context of his whole back catalog and see limitations or take it in the context of today's marketplace and it's concept and celebrate it.

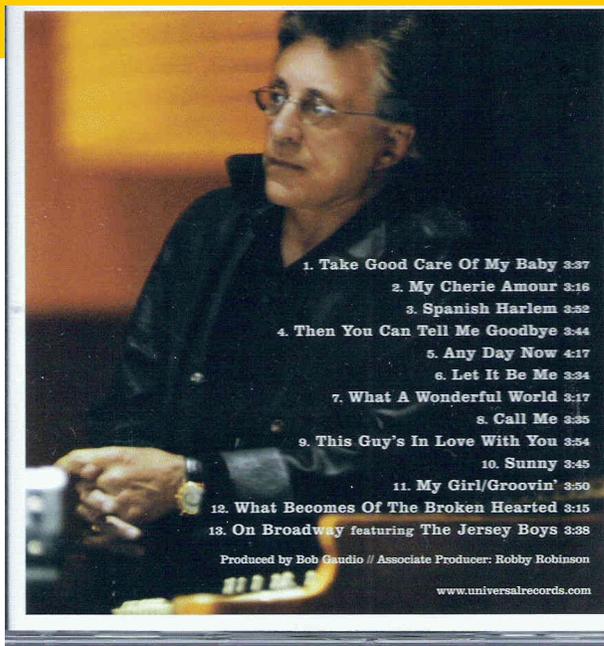
The critical reactions have spanned both extremes. Bob Gaudio maintains these are Frankie Valli's 'best ever vocals', whilst fans have called the material 'elevator music' and Frankie Valli's voice 'weak'.

So what is a fair assessment of the first album in 15 years from our much admired vocalist re-visiting songs from his hey-day years of the 60s.

A respected reviewer Alexander S Meyer wasn't impressed saying..... "I purchased "Romancing the 60's" on release day expecting an album with a little more "umph". Instead, I spent my hard earned money on an uninspired Frankie Valli plodding through his songs as if someone twisted his arm to do it. At times so, so spineless the disc becomes little more than high end Muzak. Frankie, or at least his producer should have had the sense to use livelier tempos, better delivery and maybe some more bottom end, percussion and strings..... Nothing will change my opinion that this was a well-intentioned and misguided effort. I love Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons and I love Frankie's earlier solo work. His voice is still remarkable and smile inducing, but his performance on this disc is lifeless, labored, and depressing. I'm not a professional musician, but this could have been so much better. Only the hard core "never do wrong" fans will truly appreciate this release."

Fan Greg Guillot was even more scathing.... "I've got extremely mixed feelings about the record, which I guess is an improvement over the totally negative feelings I had after listening to the snippets.... And, most critically, this material just ***sucks*!!!!!!**"

But is this really fair comment.? Charles Alexander is a respected journalist as well as long term fan of the Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons portfolio and he adds some balance to the commentary.. "First of all, we would have all been happier to have a new album of original music. But that wasn't an option because Gaudio hasn't written any music lately. He's been far too busy overseeing the Jersey Boys phenomenon, which was literally years in the making.... What Universal wanted was an album of covers, and I'm glad Bob and Frankie didn't turn down the opportunity. However, beyond the mandate that it should be an album of 60s covers, Bob and Frankie had total freedom and control. When I talked to Frankie, virtually the first thing he said was, "We didn't have to chase a market." For the first time in their careers, they had a chance to make an album in exactly the way they wanted to make it. They didn't have to worry about a radio format or hitting the Top 40. They hope the fans will like it, but if they don't, so be it. This album was for them. It was what they, and particularly Frankie, wanted to do. This album has the kind of arrangements he enjoys listening to. I'm sure he's proud of his big 4 Seasons hits, but he and Gaudio have never wanted to be stuck only in that bag. That, I think, was the motivation behind "Can't Take My Eyes Of You" and Valli's



whole solo career. He wants to be remembered as a great singer, in the Sinatra and Tony Bennett mold, not just the freak of nature with the falsetto.”

And Charles Calello who arranged several numbers on this album puts his and Frankie’s perspective on the set.....” Now at seventy three - - forty five years after the birth of the 4 Seasons - - - we "who really know him" are grateful he can still sing and get his heart into a song.

Frankie was always a 'great" singer and even though he had a great sound, what made him Frankie Valli was not his voice, it was his heart; it's evident even on "Sherry." What I really felt badly about when I read the comments sent in from his fans is, they really don't seem to get what he's all about. What a singer is supposed to do when he sings a song is sing it from his heart and make the song his own; tell the story the way he feels it.”

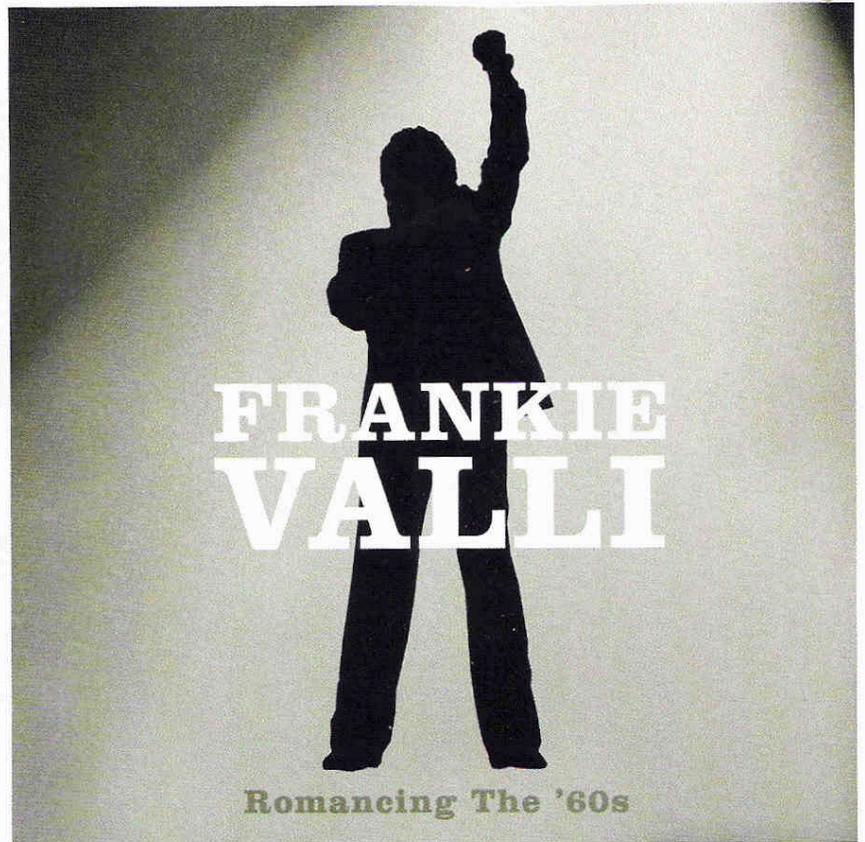
In music, the public NEVER wants their music to fade or go out of style. That's why each generation has parents that find the younger generation's music distasteful. This can be argued to be because, for the general public, musical taste doesn't change..... it keeps them glued to a time in their lives when life was just a dream and the world was before them. Musical taste is somehow cemented in the brain of humans and keeps them limited to the style of music they grew up with.”

But for the fans, it has been difficult to get 'what he's all about'and that's down to him not us. The problem for Frankie Valli is that although we have been supporting him and the group through thick and thin for 30 years, we have had little or no 'relationship' or support from Frankie and Bob in that period. So it hasn't been possible to 'know him' and where his heart lies regarding his music. We get it all second hand from interviews. It could have been so different. And of course, no-one asked the true fans who know his music so well what he should do in a new album...as Charles A said.“This album was for them (Frankie and Bob). It was what they, and particularly Frankie, wanted to do. “

But Charles Calello’s comments are also wrong regarding the long-term fans. As I told him.....”Most are not so narrow minded as you suggest. As we have grown older our musical taste has changed. It has expanded as our ear and mind experienced new interpretations and sounds..we relate to the heart and soul in all Four Seasons music and in other music too”.

The way we should have been presented with this work has also been badly managed. The initial sound samples available via the www have been so poor that they actually weakened Frankie’s voice and distorted it. But it is perhaps the mix of songs that didn't quite lift this album to what it could have been. Charles Alexander found the album was unexpected.....” The album for me, is a surprise. Frankie has largely abandoned his traditional go-for-the-rafters, ultra-powerful style, as in To Give (The Reason I Live) in favor of softer and more subtle stylings. He wants to move you, not blow you away, as he always did before. This is more like a Tony Bennett record than a Frankie Valli record. I've had the advantage of listening to this album for about two months. It has steadily grown on me. I think Frankie's vocals are very well done, and the production is marvelous. An album of covers, however originally arranged, can never compare with the Frankie and the Seasons' classic original albums. One problem I have personally is that Frankie's taste in music is not the same as mine. These are the songs he picked because he really liked them, and I don't like most of the songs.”

And Frankie has done them the way he wants and as Stefan in Germany noticed, Frankie uses his Jimmy Scott style and phrasing on some of these songs as he re-visits his jazz roots. You'll also hear this 'Jimmy Scott' effect if you compare “The Laugh's On Me” (Track 12 The Fantastic FIRST YEARS CD) with some of these songs.





The arrangements, although all are excellent, don't fit so easily without something that was always part of the Four Seasons approach to 'cover' versions. George O'Brien listened to the album several times and then realized what it was and we can all relate to this.....
" it's finally come into focus for me. I said before that there were just no "WOW" moments on this album, and now I know why. It's because the arrangements are TOO true to the originals.
Think about it. On the early Seasons' albums, most of the songs were covers, but the arrangements were drastically different. "Since I Don't Have You"...."Earth Angel"...."Stay" and on and on. Even "I've Got You Under My Skin" is miles away from Sinatra's version. Frankie's solo albums featured altered arrangements on standards, as well. They arranged these songs as if they had never been recorded before, and **they did it their way, with their sound.** The new album has none of that, with the exception of the **"look at the neon lights"** hook at the end of "On Broadway." That's why it has become my favorite cut."

When you are putting an album together for your audience you need to think about the mix as well as the songs. "On Broadway" should have started the album and it would have picked up the listener. Then the pace could have been slowed or picked up to keep the listening good. But there are not enough mid-tempo songs in this set and it is an opportunity lost. By staying true to the roots of their music...Bob and Frankie and Charles could have **'Celebrated'** the 60s instead of **'Romancing'** it.

For all these comments however the album remains a good piece of work, particularly the arrangements. As Mike DOO-WOP Daddy Miller says...."Frankie and The Seasons have been re-inventing themselves almost since the beginning of time. This new CD is again different, and yes, Frankie sounds a little different, but I am glad that it is being noticed. I think it will be good for his and the groups legacy. I have to admit, I liked some of the songs, even at the very first listen. There is a general soulfulness to it all.

I think artists should sing and record whatever they like. If the public

Billboard

Billboard 19th Oct 2007

FRANKIE IS THE WORD: This summer, a friend of mine bought tickets to see Frankie Valli at the Kodak Theater in Hollywood and at the last minute had a change of plans. He gave me his tickets and for the first time in my life, I saw Valli perform live.

It appeared to be a full house – I couldn't see an empty seat in any direction – and as I looked around, I noticed the audience wasn't made up of just baby boomers. There were kids, teenagers, and every age range from people in their 20s on up. And when Frankie sang, the audience gave him an incredibly enthusiastic reception, building to an electrically-charged finale.

It was obviously a "Jersey Boys" effect. Valli's audience isn't just the folks who grew up with the Four Seasons in the '60s, it has expanded to include fans who have come to the party because they've seen the musical life story of Frankie and his pals from Newark.

That "Jersey Boys" effect also touches The Billboard 200 this week, where Valli's new "Romancing the '60s" (Universal Motown) debuts at No. 177. It is Valli's first appearance on this tally in 29 years and his eighth solo album to chart. Valli was last on the album survey with "Frankie Valli...Is the Word" in 1978. His first solo album to chart was "Frankie Valli-Solo" in 1967. That album contained his hit single, "Can't Take My Eyes Off You." Just counting his solo work, Valli's album chart span expands to 40 years, three months and one week.

Of course, Valli's chart life didn't begin with his solo work. The first chart album by the Four Seasons, "Sherry and 11 Others," debuted exactly 45 years ago, on the chart dated Oct. 27, 1962. This week's album chart is dated Oct. 27, 2007.

But you can trace Valli's Billboard chart career even further back. He made his first appearance on a Billboard chart the week of May 26, 1956, with the single "You're the Apple of My Eye" by the Four Lovers. As any "Jersey Boys" fan knows, the Four Lovers became the Four Seasons. And for any "Jersey Boys" fans reading this item, the Broadway cast album on Rhino is No. 1 on Top Cast Albums for the ninth non-consecutive week.

doesn't like it, then they won't buy it or listen to it. Over the past 40 years, much of the output of the group and Frankie solo was criticized right off the bat. I liked it all, some a little more, some a little less, but again, they have tried everything over the years, from easy listening, northern soul, pop, rock, folk, even a little "country" flavored from time to time (eg "A Face Without A Name"). Someday, I hope to hear the unreleased material, even the jazz album because it will all have value and, I believe, quality".

This album is what Frankie and Bob wanted to do and that's OK. Maybe Charles Calello is right and we are trapped in the past. But our musical taste does change over time. As for setting the standard in covers of 60s classics, well Amy Winehouse has done this with, "Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow", "Cupid", and "To Know Him Is To Love Him" (see these on YouTube). And for a real treat check out her version of "Moody's Mood For Love". For me a re-interpretation of such classics has to deliver a version that sits alongside the original in my collection and be as unique and inspirational. Amy does this, and on this album by Frankie....well you be the judge.

But maybe the album will succeed with the public captured by the 'aura' of Jersey Boys rather than with the long-term fans. And every fans view re particular tracks will vary. Some will love songs by Frankie that I don't and vice versa. It depends how you tune in to the 'heart' he has put into them. For me this album doesn't find its "groove" until the last 3 tracks. Like Charles Alexander I don't have a "feel" for too many of the songs on this album. But maybe it will grow on me?

So as this album sits very comfortably at #167 in the Billboard Top 200 albums after entering at #177 last week, the negative views don't matter and as I said to Charles Calello. "I don't think Frankie (or the team involved) should feel badly about these diverse opinions. The album is set in a particular style that will appeal to some and not others and after being a collector for over 40 years you learn to respect all that an artist has done and the commitment they have shown."

What matters is that Charlie, Frankie, Bob and the rest of the team believes in the project and have put their heart and soul into it. "Believe me..." he said...". This will be Frankie Valli's biggest CD ever and those who love and believe in his talent are rooting for him."

And as his shows continue to pull audiences in wherever he appears then the one thing that will count is that people go back to see him again and again. As Frankie said in a recent interview....."that loyalty is priceless".

Verdict: 7 out of 10.....Ken Charmer. 1st November 2007

Thanks to all those who contributed their opinion . Other reviews will be elsewhere in Newsletter 51

Above : Frankie Valli in the studio to record "Can't Take My Eyes Of You" 1967 Courtesy of George Schowerer — Studio Engineer

