

Legislators Hear Sinatra in High Fie

7/19/72
By Gerald Strine

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The House Select Committee on Crime appeared before Frank Sinatra yesterday.

The 11-man panel held up well under the retired singer's tongue-lashing. Actually, the SRO crowd came to the star's chamber expecting the question-and-answer session to work the other way around, but Sinatra took charge from the start.

"Why didn't you refute it?" Sinatra demanded, glaring at the committee members and their legal counsel. The "it" was testimony on May 24, in which the singer's name was mentioned in the same breath with several underworld figures.

"It's indecent. It's irresponsible to bandy my good name about," Sinatra declared. "Why didn't someone protect my position? Why didn't you call in the press and tell them it was a character assassination?"

"I'm not a second-class citizen. Let's get that straightened out."

The committee wanted to know how the entertainer had come to invest \$55,000 in Berkshire Downs, a nearly bankrupt race track near Hancock, Mass., in August, 1962. Several Mafia personalities reportedly put money into the sinking plant.

A few weeks after he invested the \$55,000, for 5 per cent of the voting stock, Sinatra and sidekick Dean Martin were named officers of the Hancock Raceway Association. Sinatra was listed as vice president. The singer said he first knew of his "promotion" in the corporation when he read about it in the sports pages. Martin, he said, never was involved.

Sinatra resigned from the track, asked for and had his money returned in July, 1963.

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Frank Sinatra after testifying yesterday. He did it his way.

Pls return

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Frank Sinatra, called for testimony on his connection with now-defunct Berkshire Downs race track, marched before the House Select Committee on Crime yesterday and took charge from the start.

The retired movie star and singer was at the witness stand only moments before accusing the committee of allowing a convicted felon, Joe (The Baron) Barboza, to link Sinatra with the Mafia.

In testimony before the same committee May 24, Barboza, a former underworld figure now in prison, sought to connect Sinatra with a New England crime syndicate headed by Raymond Patriarca.

"It's indecent, it's irresponsible to bandy my good name about," Sinatra told the committee. "Why didn't you refute it? I didn't have to refute what was said. There was no truth to it. Why didn't someone protect my position?"

"Why didn't you just call in the press and tell them it was a character assassination?"

Sinatra referred to a headline he held up: "Witness Links Sinatra With Mafia Figure."

"That's charming, isn't it? Really charming," Sinatra said. "I'm asking someone to be fair about it. How do you repair the damage done to me?"

"This bum (Barboza) went running off at the mouth, and I resent it, and I won't have it," Sinatra said. "I'm not a second-class citizen. Let's get that straight."

Before his tirade was over Sinatra had lectured the committee counsel as to the difference between "knowing" and "meeting" someone. He contended he did not know Patriarca and swore he never had any business dealings with Gaetano Lucchese, a New York crime figure who died in 1967.

If Lucchese had been a racketeer, "that's his problem, not mine," Sinatra suggested.

At another point during the proceedings he told the committee to "let's dispense with this line of questioning." And never, he said, was he aware that there were any crime figures, such as Patriarca, among the silent partners in Berkshire Downs, the little Hancock, Mass., race track in which he invested nearly 10 years ago.

Sinatra acknowledged he met Sam Rizzo while working at a nightclub in Atlantic City in the summer of 1962. Rizzo offered him 5 per cent of the voting stock in Berkshire Downs for \$55,000.

"I liked his idea," Sinatra said, and turned the business transaction over to Rudin.

"We thought it was a good investment, albeit a dangerous one because the track was in trouble," Rudin explained, "but you take some crap shots along with the more conservative ones," the attorney added. "Berkshire Downs was a very small episode in our business life." The track went bankrupt in 1965.

Rudin said he had checked on Rizzo and found him to be licensed by the state of Massachusetts.

Sinatra invested his \$55,000 in late August of 1962. A few weeks later Sinatra and fellow entertainer Dean Martin found

themselves listed as directors and officers of the track, with Sinatra the vice president.

"A phone tap by the Justice Department of Patriarca's office on Aug. 24, 1962, revealed that Mr. Patriarca was informed that the track was going to put you on the board of directors 'to add a little class to the track,'" Rep. Sam Steiger (R-Ariz.) told Sinatra.

Sinatra said he did not know about being named vice president until he read it in the sport pages.

An attentive listener to the testimony on Berkshire Downs was Gennaro Angiulo. The committee identified Angiulo as an underworld boss with hidden money in the race track at the time Sinatra was vice president.

"We sent them a litter of inquiry that November," Rudin said, "followed with a request for the return of the \$55,000 in March of 1963. The money was returned in July of 1963."

Sinatra admitted he might have offered Martin, his long-time buddy, "a piece of the action" in Berkshire Downs but that Martin never became involved.

Rudin said he and Sinatra were partners in Dansar Stable, which stands the stallion Mr. Right in California and which has Delaware Chief, once a top 3-year-old, as one of its best runners.

"I've been to the race track only four times in my whole adult life," the singer declared, "and never to Berkshire Downs. I once owned a small portion of Atlantic City race track and I still have some stock in Hollywood Park in Los Angeles."

The House men steadily ran out of fire power in their questioning. All 11 members attended, which was highly unusual, but by the time the microphone was turned over to the last four or five they seemed to have been cowed by Sinatra's aggressive behavior and they bordered on being apologetic to the famous entertainer.

It was disturbing the way several of the elected representatives appeared awed by the one-time admirer of President John F. Kennedy who now pledges allegiance to Vice President Spiro Agnew.

"Just who does this guy think he is?" one legislator wondered aloud.

"He must think he's Frank Sinatra," another replied.

Sinatra hurried from the conference room under escort, leaving Rudin to face the media.

"Was Mr. Sinatra honest in his presentation?" a reporter inquired.

"That's impertinent," Rudin replied.

"Has Mr. Sinatra's name been cleared?" a newsman asked.

"That's an idiotic question," the attorney answered. "You're playing my game, you know. It's like my asking you if you're a homosexual, just because someone told me yesterday that you were."

Whereupon another voice crept into the conversation.

"I happen to be a homosexual and I take offense to what you've just said," a gay blade interjected. "I don't think it's proper to link homosexuals with organized crime."

Rudin left in a hurry.