

New JFK-Sinatra Data

Washington

Contrary to previously published reports, Frank Sinatra's friendship with John F. Kennedy apparently continued after warnings to the President that the singer associated with hoodlums, including one involved in a CIA assassination plot.

Continuation of the friendship is documented by correspondence on file in the John F. Kennedy Library in Waltham, Mass., and substantiated by former Kennedy aides Kenneth O'Donnell and Dave Powers.

The fact that the singer and the President remained friends was learned by the Los Angeles Times as it sought answers to questions left by the Senate Intelligence Committee's failure to question Sinatra in its investigation of a CIA-directed plot by the Mafia to assassinate Fidel Castro.

A key question is why Sinatra introduced a young woman to Kennedy and shortly thereafter introduced her to Sam Giancana, well known at the time as a mobster and labeled by the FBI as "a notorious hoodlum from Chicago."

The committee has theorized that at a March 22, 1962, meeting with Kennedy, then-FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover warned the President that the woman was an associate of Giancana, who was involved in the Castro assassination plot. FBI agents had prepared a memo for Hoover just prior to the meeting with Kennedy disclosing that the woman had made at least two telephone calls to the White House.

As information about Kennedy's relationship with Judith Campbell Exner, now 41, has surfaced in recent weeks, the Senate committee has come under increasing pressure to call Sinatra as a witness. A spokesman for Chairman Frank Church (Dem-Idaho) said the committee will meet tomorrow and discuss

whether to question the singer and perhaps other witnesses.

Sinatra has refused to comment about the matter.

In a report last November 20 on CIA-directed assassination conspiracies, the committee said Giancana and another mobster, John Rosselli, had been involved in a plot to assassinate Castro. Rosselli also turned out to be a friend of Mrs. Exner.

The committee went out of its way to conceal the identity of Mrs. Exner and barely touched on the Sinatra connection with Kennedy. If its aim was to protect the privacy of a dead president from allegations of sexual escapades, it only focused attention on the cursory nature of its investigation into the Kennedy-Sinatra-mob factor.

Mrs. Exner, in a closed-door appearance before committee attorneys and staff investigators, denied any knowledge of the assassination plot. None of the senators on the committee was present for the questioning and none of them has ever questioned her.

The committee had also planned to question Giancana, but he was shot to death in gangland style last June.

Committee officials have said they see no link between his murder, which is still unsolved, and the fact the committee wanted to question him.

Mrs. Exner, who announced plans to sell her memoirs after her identity leaked from the committee, said she will "tell everything" in a book which her literary agent outlined to reporters in New York Wednesday.

The outline says, "There may have been a reason beyond what has yet come to light for Sinatra's introduction of Judith to Kennedy and then to Giancana and it is interesting to speculate on whether he was attempting to set up a connection."

Numerous published reports in the past have pictured Kennedy as disassociating himself from Sinatra in early 1962 after being warned about the singer's hobnobbing with hoodlums.

Many such reports have cited as evidence of a breakup of the friendship the fact that during a visit on March 23, 1962, to California, Kennedy chose to bypass a previously scheduled stay at Sinatra's Coldwater Canyon home in Los Angeles and visited instead at Bing Crosby's home in Palm Springs.

In fact, some reports have suggested that Kennedy avoided staying at Sinatra's home because his brother Robert, the attorney general, has warned him to stay away from Sinatra because of the singer's association with hoodlums.

But both Kenneth O'Donnell and David Powers deny that that was the reason Kennedy bypassed Sinatra's house and both say that the friendship continued and that there was never any criticism of Sinatra in the Kennedy White House.

"Let's face it, the mob made Sinatra," said O'Donnell, who now runs a consulting firm in Boston. "But he had outgrown tem. And he got a bum rap on this thing about President Kennedy ending their friendship."

O'Donnell said he switched the site of Kennedy's visit from Sinatra's to Crosby's house "on the advice of the Secret Service and for security reasons and for my own political reasons."

Powers, now curator at the Kennedy Library, said, "The President would be displeased with this disassociation talk. He admired people for their courage and loyalty — and I'm not talking about the courage of a marine in a foxhole, but of a person standing up and being counted."

Los Angeles Times