

Meet Pianist Bruce Westcott: The Man who Knew Sinatra

Today, we are publishing the 12th in a series of stories focusing on Commercial Center as written by noted long-time Las Vegas journalist, Diane Taylor.

In this article, Diane learns more about a musical fixture at The Composers Room, Bruce Westcott.

- *Who is Bruce and what is his link to the legendary Frank Sinatra?*
- *Where did the two meet, and what impact did Frank have on Bruce's life?*
- *In what unique way does this 87-year old musician get to his daily gig at The Composers Room?*

Wander over to Commercial Center's Composers Room for lunch and you'll hear live music. A man "of a certain age" is playing the piano. You listen a while and realize his playing has a certain style that is quite pleasing.

Who is the guy at the piano? He is Bruce Westcott, a native of Baltimore, Maryland who learned piano after his childhood experiment with drums became hard on his parents' ears.

As a teenager, Bruce became part of a popular musical trio, and he also became (at 17) a young father and bridegroom. (The marriage ultimately ended.) He continued his musicianship as a pianist and singer, playing a local circuit. A fan of musician and singer Buddy Greco, Bruce dreamed of being an artist like Buddy and someday making the big time.

Bruce was also a Frank Sinatra fan and years later knew that Frank and his friends hung out at Jilly's Saloon in New York City. After a successful audition at Jilly's, Bruce (now in his mid-20s) and his trio were booked to appear there. Bruce did meet Frank Sinatra, in fact, and Sinatra became a fan of Bruce's work.

Bruce has lots of stories of his time with Frank Sinatra both in New York and Palm Springs. “Did you know Frank Sinatra also could play piano?” he asks. Bruce names lots of celebrities he met that liked the places Sinatra liked: Judy Garland, Buddy Rich, Jack Jones, Burt Bacharach, Liberace, Mary Pickford and many others. With the Sinatra blessing, Bruce and his trio played many other nightclubs across the country.

Bruce also tells stories of his introduction to Las Vegas and the good times here, as well. His trio even opened Cleopatra’s Barge at Caesars Palace and played there for 12 years.

When of middle age, Bruce wanted more –he became an Entertainment Director at a Las Vegas casino and loved the executive life...for a while, anyway. He ultimately exited that job when the casino rather suddenly changed hands. But he loved the executive role and dreamed of even bigger things such as casino ownership.

And there he found the road was tougher. Let’s just say that Bruce’s ownership plans over a number of years were not realized. He spent the remainder of his career as he describes it “bumping around”. He played tiny restaurants. If necessary, he would even wear a costume while doing so. And the years went by.

Last May, Bruce visited The Composers Room. He had been retired mostly, but he stopped by the piano in the Composers Room large lounge. When asked if he knew about pianos he said “yes”. This particular piano had an antique casement but a Yamaha keyboard. When asked if he played piano he said yes and offered to play a small tune not having touched a piano in a year. “I’d love to practice on this piano,” he said.

Owner Damian Costa agreed and the idea of lunchtime practices began. Not many lunchtimes later, Damian asked Bruce if he would become an employee and play daily at lunchtime. Bruce agreed and, since May, he has been the “Resident Pianist at The Composers Room”. His repertoire is growing daily and he’s one happy man.

How does Bruce get to work? He rides a bicycle! Yep, at 87, he rides and enjoys the exercise.

Come for lunch at The Composers Room and enjoy the same music Frank Sinatra enjoyed more than half a century ago, created by the one and only Bruce Westcott.