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Jimmy Scalia, left, speaks to a crowd on Jan. 3 in the meeting room of the Upper Shores Branch of the Ocean County Library, Lavallette, about the life, career and struggles of legendary performer Bobby Darin.

The Life and Times of Bobby Darin Recalled at Upper Shores Branch

LAVALLETTE –For Jimmy Scalia, the official archivist for legendary entertainer Bobby Darin, sharing the performer’s life story is nothing short of a labor of love.

Scalia works in cooperation with the Bobby Darin estate and writes articles for In-Tune and Primo magazine. Scalia is a member of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and the Songwriter’s Hall of Fame. He visited the Upper Shores Branch of the Ocean County Library on Jan. 3 and shared many little known facts of the performer’s often tragic life with a packed audience.

“I came to appreciate Bobby Darin after listening to my father’s record collection,” Scalia said. Scalia became fixated with his father’s copy of Darin’s “Greatest Hits” album and his signature song, “Beyond the Sea.” Darin’s real name was Walden Robert Cassotto.

“He wasn’t just a singer but played the piano, guitar, drums and harmonica He also inspired so many young performers. Sinatra was the voice but no one could lay a track down like Bobby Darin,” Scalia said in an interview prior to his program. “I think what doesn’t break you makes you and he did a lot in his career with his performances, song writing, movies and so many accomplishments.”

Scalia opened the program with a short video that featured an introduction by Bobby Darin’s and Sandra Dee’s son Dodd. “I never got to meet Bobby but I almost feel like I have. Dodd is a great guy and shared so much knowledge, memorabilia and video footage about his father.”

Bobby Darin was driven believing his bout with rheumatic fever as a child, might cut short his life as it had permanently damaged his heart. “He knew the clock was ticking and he was always pushing himself in different directions. He never wanted to be pigeon holed and he wanted to live and perform on his own terms,” Scalia said.

Scalia discussed Darin’s life and shared video footage of the performer’s various TV appearances. They included Darin’s first hit song “Splish, Splash” in 1958 on American Bandstand. Darin co-wrote that song with DJ Murray the K, who bet that Darin could not write a song that began with the words, “Splish Splash, I was takin’ a bath”, as suggested by Murray’s mother, Jean Kaufman. It reached number 3 on the U.S. pop singles chart and number 2 on the Rhythm and Blues Best Sellers chart.

Darin started his career as a songwriter for singer Connie Francis in 1956 and they appeared on the Ed Sullivan show together. “He started to fall in love with her but her father did not approve of this,” Scalia said. Scalia added that Francis’s father gave the record producer handling them an ultimatum, “either he goes or she goes so they fired him. Bobby then went off to Nashville and signed a contract with Atlantic Records.”

During the 1960s Darin became politically active and worked on Robert F. Kennedy’s Democratic presidential campaign. He was present the night Kennedy was assassinated in 1968. “He sat vigil with Bobby Kennedy’s coffin. That was the kind of guy Bobby Darin was. He was brutally honest but if you were his friend he always had your back,” Scalia said.

Scalia also revealed that during that same year, Darin discovered he had been raised by his grandmother, not his mother, and that the girl he thought was his sister was actually his mother. These events deeply affected Darin and sent him into a long period of seclusion.

Although he made a successful comeback in television with his NBC variety show in 1973, his health was failing. “He did 13 episodes of the show before he died at the age of 37 following a heart operation in Los Angeles. His son Dodd’s 12th birthday was on Dec. 16 and Bobby died on Dec. 20, 1973.”

Scalia noted that for Darin, performing was his life and that it kept his heart beating. “Music took him into a world beyond the Bronx,” Scalia said. Darin’s life was chronicled in the 2004 film “Beyond the Sea” starring Kevin Spacey.



A display of Bobby Darin memorabilia is seen on display during a Jan. 3 program presented by Bobby Darin archivist Jimmy Scalia at the Upper Shores Branch of the Ocean County Library in Lavellette.