

# VALENTINE'S DAY IS FOR CROONERS

by: Ed Lettner of The Music Studio



The Nelson Canadian Dictionary defines the term crooner as one who “sings popular songs in a soft, sentimental manner,” which explains why this singing style has come to define Valentine’s Day in much the same way as wine and roses.

The roots of the crooning vocal style may be traced back to the 1920s when singers such as Gene Austin created the style while singing jazz standards backed by an orchestra or big band.

The invention of the microphone at that time allowed vocalists to sing in a softer, more personal style than had been possible in the days before microphones. Back then, popular singers had to sing loudly to be heard over the band.

Interestingly, crooning shares characteristics such as smooth phrasing and a light vocal tone with the Bel Canto or “beautiful singing” style of Italian opera. Crooning also features jazz vocal techniques and phrasing.

Crooning was initially looked down upon by many singers as a “pretentious” vocal style. In fact, Frank Sinatra stated that he was not a crooner even though he had been labeled as one. Other notable crooners included Bing Crosby, Nat King Cole and Bobby Darin.

Beginning in 1928, Rudy Vallée became the first hugely popular crooner, especially among women. This achievement was helped by his recordings and the fact that radio broadcasts were now heard nationwide.

By the 1930s, crooning was being denounced as a “corrupting” and “degenerate” vocal style by the New York Singing Teachers Association and at least one religious leader. The New York Times predicted that crooning was a fad that would soon pass.

Crooners, and their fans, proved them wrong however, with crooning continuing to be at the forefront of popular music until 1954 when rock became the dominant style. Consequently, crooners of the day such as Perry Como had their music renamed easy listening or adult contemporary. Today, singers such as Tony Bennett, Harry Connick Jr. and Michael Bublé carry on the tradition.

So, when you are planning the perfect Valentine’s Day, remember that the crooners will be there to help you set the mood.

*Ed Lettner owns The Music Studio in Etobicoke which has offered music instruction since 1990. He is an honours graduate of the Humber College Institute of Technology music program. Ed admits that he relies on crooners on Valentine’s Day. For information about the programs at The Music Studio, please call 416-234-9268, email [ed@themusicstudio.ca](mailto:ed@themusicstudio.ca) or visit [www.themusicstudio.ca](http://www.themusicstudio.ca)*