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Tonight Will Not Swing: Frank Sinatra through the Liner Notes of Stan Cornyn

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ABSTRACT

Frank Sinatra was a towering figure in popular music of the twenty-first century. He designed the basic approach to album making called the “Concept Album.” Part of that album-making process was devised outside of the studio, in the form of liner notes. Few critics have approached the albums of Frank Sinatra through the lens of Stan Cornyn’s award-winning liner notes during Sinatra’s tenure with Reprise Records, particularly the words of *Softly, As I Leave You* (1964) through *My Way* (1968). Cornyn’s notes’ use of poetic mechanisms and their conversational structure allow him to assess Sinatra’s work to the most minute detail. Through object association or dialogue between characters, Cornyn colorizes Sinatra’s songs as if the liner notes were a part of the music itself. In my essay, I look into several Cornyn notes to unify themes and discuss Cornyn’s analysis of Sinatra’s character in his music, ultimately bridging Sinatra’s concepts into other aspects of the album form, particularly liner notes.

KEYWORDS

Frank Sinatra, Stan Cornyn, liner notes, music, traditional pop, album, September

Liner notes, a product of an earlier generation of the music industry, began as simple epithets attached to the backside of a long-playing (LP) vinyl record to lure a potential listener by a variety of tactics. These notes could be articles from newspapers or rave reviews of the record. The liner note grew up alongside popular music criticism with the likes of *Rolling Stone* founders Ralph J. Gleason and Jann Wenner, “jazz critics, who started to push popular music writing into thoughtful, politically oriented directions in the 1950s” (Powers 13). Liner notes became a standard for the LP market and became more experimental by the mid-1960s, with artists like Bob Dylan writing their own notes. With a well-written liner, a writer can take on many forms within the world of the artist. They could become a performer themselves. They could ultimately become an eyewitness to the art.

Eyewitness. This mild description became the title of Stan Cornyn’s final liner note essay for Frank Sinatra on the colossal *Complete Reprise Studio Recordings* box in 1995. He was the eyewitness to the Chairman’s act as a studio charlatan—eyewitness to the inner workings “[b]ehind that thick door, the one with the red light that will later light up and say ‘Recording. Do Not Enter’” (Cornyn, “Eye Witness” 56). In each of his essays appearing on Sinatra’s mid-’60s records, Cornyn measures his own details and detains them within two separate themes that ultimately lead to an understanding Cornyn presents of the character of Frank Sinatra. The first theme, Cornyn argues, is that the studio acts as a player in Sinatra’s unfolding drama. The second is the conflict between the man and his muse—the cultural dynamics of Sinatra’s dissonance with the counterculture America. A good liner consists of these traits as a complement to the album form.

The studio is a character in Cornyn’s writing as much as Sinatra himself. He gives life to what is living and what is not, appropriating action to all in the room. He is a cataloguer above all else, meticulous in his metaphors as in the case of *Moonlight Sinatra*, where “[t]he romantic *mis en scene*, Mendelssohnian in its aluminum newness, closes in around [the Ring-a-Ding Kid]” (Cornyn, *Moonlight*). Writing about an album on clichés, Cornyn masks this trait to make it seem much less meager, thus the comparison to Mendelssohn. It is all a renewing in this passage. Cornyn is taking on weary waters to wade Sinatra’s words of the moon, but he nonetheless evokes brilliance to the banality:

To sing of the moon, and not of missiles, of romance and not of fudge, of love and not lollipops, is old-fashioned. Something out of Grandma’s day. Out of date, like the stars. Non-chic, like Valentines. Corny, like your own heart’s beat. But if a man chooses to sing

of the Moon, he cannot be pinchpenny with words of praise. His songs will fall on greedy ears.

(*Moonlight*)

Every detail is important. Fudge and lollies add a naivety to love, concerning it to candy, disapproving of it just the same as Valentines. Love is not to be handed out. If it was, only those with “greedy ears” would hear these songs of love. It is earned. It is lived. It is another corny part of life, “like your own heart’s beat” (Cornyn, *Moonlight*). Cornyn’s notes would follow suit to this kind of imagery from the very beginning.

Although Cornyn began writing for Sinatra in 1964 during the singer’s second collaboration with Count Basie, *It Might as Well Be Swing*’s liner notes were an extensive interview with arranger Quincy Jones. These were hardly an example of the enigmatic essays that began with *Softly, As I Leave You*, Sinatra’s pick-up album of singles and movie songs. The liner of this latter record recounts a scene of Sinatra’s studio, with musicians waiting for their master to make his appearance. Suddenly, as Cornyn’s pen comes down, the man moves into the room. “His wide-branded hat is tipped back,” Cornyn says, “He doesn’t come in with fanfare. He’s there though” (*Softly*). There is no easy atmosphere, no leisure as the leader lumbers in. The tension—Cornyn’s conflict—tumbles onto the scene with him. A weight wavers on the woodwinds and brass. Even a string band plays hot in the presence of Frank Sinatra.

There is a three-step process in Cornyn’s liner notes, each step a siren wringing the reader closer to the studio, closer to Sinatra. The first pushes the listener into the craft, establishing the entertainer’s entrance, the second arouses the action, and the third leaves the listener in silence filled only by the music. *Softly, As I Leave You*, the first real Cornyn liner, was the first to use this process in full.

“He steps up into the singer’s booth,” Cornyn writes, watching as if he is Sinatra’s shadow, “a window behind him, a scrubbed-up ashtray to his right hand. He gets behind the music stand; it has his name engraved on it” (*Softly*). This is Sinatra’s studio now; the etching of his name professes the nature of Sinatra’s character. This moment is Cornyn’s first foray into the character; it is his first as the shadow. “He takes a second to shuffle through the music, his piano player standing close by, in case. He shoots his cuffs, three-quarters of an inch. He came here to sing. He speaks straight into his mike” (Cornyn, *Softly*). The attention to detail is Cornyn’s trademark. The mannerisms mask him in anxious action. He

doesn't sing—he speaks. He *breathes* the words, the music, and the moment itself through his voice. “Everybody straight?” he has the audacity to ask, a tactful move to fracture any doubts deluding the room (Cornyn, *Softly*). He's asking *them* if they are ready. Not the man himself, fiddling with his cufflinks.

Confidence is a Sinatra trademark (Zehme). When Cornyn writes the “Everybody straight?” question, he captures this confidence in a single line. With the actor on the stage, Cornyn begins reciting the script: “His hands stuff into his pockets. His knees bend half an inch. . . He studies the microphone—friend or enemy? . . . He balances on the balls of his feet, his eyes feeling their way through the already memorized poetry before him” (*Softly*). His body is ready. The action of inaction absorbs Sinatra's thought in this scene, almost playfully. The conflict is there. The sheet music is there. Even so, Sinatra would rather juggle his pockets or caress the steel microphone than sing; it is a tease. “He sings. The words come out wise, and sure. The girl in the crowd, the one against the wall, forgets to wonder if he's noticed her. He's singing now. Everyone feels the groove of the rhythm. Thirty right feet silently tapping” (Cornyn, *Softly*).

The passage above illustrates the final stage: releasing the listener into the music. The words are wise, aged by the writer's relentless leaden pace, another theme Cornyn would visit during Sinatra's folk-rock period as the decade (and Sinatra's career) reached Indian summer. It is the moment when Sinatra sings that Cornyn neglects those trinkets and hands, even the woman, a symbol for philandering, failing to plunder Sinatra's survey. Thirty tapping feet are just a bonus. The infectious friction between the jazzman and his fans is apparent as it was when the man entered and said “Evenin', Sunshine” (Cornyn, *Softly*).

Cornyn's assessment of the studio relies on two constructs. First, to apprehend Sinatra at the moment of entrance, as introduced with *Softly, As I Leave You*. The second, however, is the functionality of how the other objects respond to Sinatra or vice-versa. It begins with the studio without intrusion, as a bystander intent on listening, relenting the ruse of Sinatra's craft. Take the case of Cornyn's liner to *Francis A. and Edward K.*, where he describes the scene of Sinatra's only studio sessions with Duke Ellington. Cornyn stands by the reader, as in a theater, watching drama unfold, listening for the echoes of Sinatra's soft temperate dissolve into the music of the Duke. Before the scene unfolds, it must first be made. Cornyn designs set pieces almost from

imagination, the objects becoming increasingly outrageous for even a Sinatra session—though, for an Ellington session, perhaps they are right—an ensemble of American artifacts.

“For the next five minutes,” Cornyn observes:

with the thoughtful ceremony of a Sumo wrestler, Ellington arranges his cafeteria of sine qua non’s. Across the music stand of his Steinway he lays out his cafeteria: One six pack of Cokes. One pkg. Pall Malls. A Kleenex box. A cafeteria spoon. A one lb. box of C&H cube sugar. One Hilton Hotel’s bottle opener (no church key at such a session). Six inches from the left piano leg, a plaid two-gallon ice cooler. Ash tray, aluminum. Qantas Airlines flight bag, with towel in. (*Francis*)

When Cornyn takes a minute to curate his cafeteria, he takes in every detail, the sound of a Coke bottle in the timbre of Ellington’s American jazz. Sinatra’s vocals are rusty like afterhours cigarette smoke, but there is a hint of that sugar cube—as on the playful sway of “Follow Me” or “All I Need Is the Girl.” “I Like the Sunrise” pulls in by pulling away the now-sweat-ridden towel that closes Cornyn’s curation.

Francis A. and Edward K. is a weary record, so Cornyn naturally gives weary notes, dilating the Duke’s “wisely sad” eyes, describing how the “old days” were now “[t]alked over, and a bit sung and played over,” melding a melancholy to the muse of both jazz masters (*Francis*). This conversation captures the tensions of the room through interaction rather than inaction, as the description were on *Softly*. There was a four-year gap between these two records, and there is time overarching their sensibilities. Beatlemania had erupted and rock ‘n’ roll had become an imposing threat to Sinatra’s artistry, as the 1968 Grammy’s had granted the Beatles “Album of the Year” over Sinatra’s collaboration with Antonio Carlos Jobim. His music was fading.

Cornyn, a Reprise Records executive at the time, began to notice. His liners let off caressing commentary by imagining Sinatra in his setting: the studio. It always returned to the studio; a shelter from the storm. “They hear back their music. Sinatra’s eyes, when his song is happening, they also happen” (Cornyn, *Francis*). Playback is the mirror any artist visits to assess their art, twisted in a house of horrors for some, but here it becomes a reflection of feeling. Sinatra knows his music is no longer in demand—Reprise’s sales figures can tell him that much. But what makes him cry here is hearing the echo of a ghost. Cornyn placed this exchange at the end of his notes to *Francis A.* because he knew the sun was low on Sinatra. Coincidentally,

Francis A. & Edward K. would be the final brass band Sinatra album until 1984's *L.A. Is My Lady*.

But even by the time the Sinatra-Ellington album was underway, the Chairman cleared the airwaves of his occasional swing records. It would be Stan Cornyn, on his Underwood typewriter, who made this observation on April 23, 1965: "Tonight will not swing," he declared, "Tonight is for serious" (*September*). This line opened Cornyn's liner to *September of My Years*, his magnum opus among Sinatra's catalogue.

What made these particular notes so successful is the way Cornyn used the dialogue between Sinatra and arranger Gordon Jenkins. He developed an autumnal drama by playing off the thematic compression of air during these sessions. Cornyn used that compression to give us the scene, with every fiddle player accounted for. Sinatra doesn't show up until the fifth paragraph, and at the moment he does, the scene erupts: "Thirty orchestra wives wish they had the late scores memorized. Four men look around for a transistor radio. [Sinatra asks] 'Hello, Sidney, how are ya. What's happening in the music business?'" (Cornyn, *September*). Action. Jenkins then begins his arrangements, slow and calculating, never sparingly.

September's notes were all studio in scene, but the tension that surrounded Gordon Jenkins gave it conflict. The "posture-free" Jenkins was almost of another world in these notes, absent from the performance but almost omnipresent, "[rehearsing] voice empty arrangements" (Cornyn, *September*). He was the maker, the creator of the world to which Sinatra has been sent. Jenkins, both conductor and arranger on *September*, holds complete control; Cornyn observes he is not "leading the orchestra: [he is] being the orchestra" (*September*). Sinatra, crowned Prince in these notes, is the Christ figure, the connection between earth and heaven, between the listener and the studio. The Holy Ghost becomes the ghost of love, the theme of *September*, aged with wisdom that comes with experience on the fault lines of love. Cornyn produces this trinity to complement this record on death and dying. They are the characters of the drama Sinatra sings. Cornyn talks of the fall of his Christ figure in a sense of hesitation. "He sings with perspective," Cornyn says, "This vital man, this archetype of the good life, this idolized star..." (*September*). Both Sinatra and Cornyn pause, for they know he is not to stay on this earth. "He looks back. He remembers," Cornyn turns the paragraph, adjusting the vision into dreams, the only relief the tension receives (Cornyn, *September*). The duty is there for the Prince to command, and thus he

shutters aside into the September darkness. In his notes, Cornyn's characters fail to resolve the conflict. He simply lets it dissolve in the music to segue the liner into the opening song.

The opening song, a Sammy Cahn-Jimmy Van Heusen tune, is absent from the writers' other works that bounced in their buoyancy. "The September of My Years" was not recorded when Cornyn wrote the liner to the record at that time dubbed *September Songs* (Kaplan 623). But comparing its opening bars to the opening lines of Cornyn's notes, one cannot think the writer had this track in mind. A pulse of violins, almost in a fade-in, assaults the listener from the beginning, after which Sinatra turns abruptly to the microphone and, in his huskiest phrasing, asserts, "One day you turn around, it's summer" but the next day "it's fall" (Cornyn, *September*). It is a hook, much in the same way Cornyn opens with his declaration, "Tonight will not swing" (*September*). It becomes a bold statement, a warning to potential listeners, while at the same time serving as appreciation for the tonal qualities in Sinatra's music. The statement addresses an outward conflict, one unrelated to the rest of the notes, but one that would recur in subsequent records: a conflict around the audience and their response to Sinatra's art.

The mere notion that a night with Sinatra that would not swing alienates those who scurried far for Rat Pack debauchery in 1960, or who grew up on early concepts like *Swing Easy!* or the perennial *Songs for Swingin' Lovers!* The statement Cornyn makes turns away those fans. *September* is the polar opposite to Sinatra's first Album of the Year-winner *Come Dance with Me!*, substituting that Billy May record's heavy brass for sweeping strings and less-muted timbres. *September* was no swing record. No dancing. Rather, it was to be an "easy chair" album.

"Tonight is for serious," Cornyn deduces (*September*). Through this statement, Cornyn juxtaposes the notion of "not swinging" with that of a sort of high art only found on uptight records. In Sinatra's case, the four saloon albums of the '50s prove consistently to be his most serious and most *artsy* records. *Wee Small Hours* standardized the "concept album," after all. The seriousness in his voice as he sings the songs on *September* is also noticeable in this line. Sinatra's diction takes on new heights not seen elsewhere on record. The looseness gone, his voice is rigid and steep, as frugal as Jenkins is generous. He accepts his reality by relenting to Cornyn's words. Life is not fun and, therefore, tonight there will be no swinging, he seems to say.

These words would open the door to the folk-rock period of Sinatra's career, an allusion to what was to come. Upon hearing these sessions, Cornyn wrote in conjecture to what he

believed would result from these sessions. Many later records were not as successful as *September*, but there are a number of quality pieces that make Cornyn's observations right in some respects. Sinatra would pursue "not swinging" as an artistic move, dropping other elements of his style by the 1970s, even dropping his career into a retirement "for reflection, reading, [and] self-examination" (Tina 125).

September, and its centerpiece, top-forty epic "It Was a Very Good Year," would begin Sinatra's mid-'60s renaissance that I call the "Popular Sinatra," citing the subtitle to his incessant hit *Strangers in the Night*, the funkiest collection he ever did, jiving like a live record would. Stan Cornyn makes use of the loose rhythm in his liner by lecturing on the legend, "the master of pop singing form" (*Strangers*). He takes us onto the stage, much like his early forays into the studio, lending an ear or an eye to sense Sinatra's seduction of a show: [I]f he tosses off a tired joke about his tired tonsils...If he smiles about hoping one of his kids comes along soon so he can retire...If he clears his throat with a line about having just swallowed a shot glass, the people all laugh. If they didn't, he'd know he was in trouble. (*Strangers*)

Running down a Sinatra monologue from 1966 is like watching a sitcom sped up so that it only lasts six to eight minutes. It would be a miniature rave off those Rat Pack shows during the filming of *Ocean's Eleven*. The same jokes, aged like the cigarette butts he smoked, were recited as he would his songs. It's a part of the canon, with the booze and the women. The legend. Used effectively, the monologue is a part of the pop form—look at Bruce Springsteen's legendary raps on stage. This is why Cornyn takes his time to make fun of these jokes, leaning in on even the lightest moment of a Sinatra show. He wants to breathe in the best, taking it all in at once. When the audience falls from his breath, that is when it is over. That connection is what Cornyn cares so much for here. "If he runs out of gas on a phrase, [h]e sings like he's got an extra tank of Texaco in his tummy" (Cornyn, *Strangers*). A show with Sinatra is a Sunday drive with a stranger to the end of days.

A stranger in the night, perhaps? Cornyn believes Sinatra to be such a stranger, a character right out of film noir, a Sam Spade of show tunes. Hats aside, Sinatra by '66 was a man who had "been belly to belly with Reality" (Cornyn, *Strangers*). Ten years prior he was "paying back taxes he'd owed [since 1951],. . . supporting one ex-wife. . . and three children" (Kaplan 177). Even with celebrity, his life was a tornado, twisting around other people as it wreaked havoc, about to fade. Sinatra was a man who could use those

tired jokes, even when singing to empty tables, and make someone laugh, as he would later translate when he recorded Johnny Mercer's final song in 1977:

Without you around to applaud me,
Every night's just like closing night,
And I'm singing, singing the same old numbers, And I'm telling the
same sad jokes,
And there's nothing out front but memories. ("Empty")

This connection between singer and audience was the most prominent theme on Sinatra's '70s records, most masterfully woven in the grooves of *Watertown*, where, as Gilbert Gigliotti notes in his book *A Storied Singer*, Sinatra "never fully gives up on the possibility of his love's returning, never fully stops wanting his audience back" (53). The Popular Sinatra period ends where *Watertown* begins, where it is this coincidental connection that shines brightest. It is a brave new world and Sinatra takes on the guise of a guide. But is this brave new world to be believed? Did everything turn out alright for those two strangers? If Sinatra truly tells us, it's in his scat, singing in the fade, that we find the answer. The *doobie-doo*'s are what makes us smile at that recording, alluding to a happy ending for the couple.

Just ask the eyewitness. "Sinatra, when he sings at you, doesn't look at you. He looks about six inches behind your eyes" (Cornyn, *Strangers*). He peers deep, releasing a tension without words, only in line of sight, hence the scats that close "Strangers." "His eyes a little far away. A little closer to where the truth lives" (Cornyn, *Strangers*). He is a guide. His blue-eyed stare is not intimidation, it is sincerity: "[i]f you want to pick a word for it, pick one in seven letters: Honesty" (Cornyn, *Strangers*). That is Sinatra's trademark: honesty, a lonely word, free from deceit in the face of compromise, confidence, and life.

Life. Since *September*, it feels as if Sinatra was living in the future, fixating himself on the prospects of age. *Strangers* was just a meddling of that age—an old man with a young man's band. His next venture would be an R&B tune to further develop that fixation. In the albums that follow *Strangers*, there is no evidence of Sinatra trying to recapture his audience directly until *Watertown*, but in the middle Sinatra seems not to grasp what he is losing, and this is where "That's Life" comes in. "Strangers in the Night" was such a sappy song, Sinatra felt he needed something with edge to follow. "That's Life" made the perfect follow-up with that same rhythm, now applied to blues.

“He went in to record ONE SONG,” Cornyn asserts in the subsequent album’s liner, “They had enough time left over at that recording session to play three slow games of Scrabble. Nobody in his right puttees goes in to record ONE SONG” (*That’s Life*). The *That’s Life* album began with this approach on October 18, 1966 (Ackelson 192). It was the only track on that record worthwhile by any means; the rest of the album came like throwaways. Will Friedwald observes that *That’s Life* lifted songs that “are the sort Sinatra would do had he deigned to portray a singing villain in *Batman*. It’s a strange combination” (425). Perhaps Cornyn took note of this same observation, and how these tracks were not quite attacking in the studio. “He went in to record ONE SONG,” he professes in capital letters, “Mr. Sinatra went on to produce ONE SONG. A totally persuasive, percussive, permissive, unpassive [sic] thing. ONE SONG that had been recorded before, but unimportantly. . . Mr. Sinatra sang his ONE SONG *with* importance” (Cornyn, *That’s Life*). No mentions of the other nine tracks make their way in the notes. The only allusion he makes is a joke on contingency tracks “in case of Accident, Slop, or Lassitude” (Cornyn, *That’s Life*). The other songs simply fall short; they are as unmemorable as that aforementioned aside to an earlier reading of “That’s Life.” But what makes this track stand out among the rest? Why is it this “ONE SONG” the one Cornyn cares so much for?

It comes back to honesty. The honesty that Sinatra has with a lyric wreaks havoc all over this song, this “ONE SONG.” His life had been no hayride; it was a tornado, and as a result, the song was too. In his book discussing Sinatra’s studio escapades, Chuck Granata recalls the story from October 10, 1966 when “That’s Life” was brought in:

[Producer Jimmy] Bowen then stepped mighty close to the edge. “Frank said to me, ‘That’s your hit, isn’t it?’ and I said, ‘Well, no. . .if you want a hit, you’re going to have to do it one more time. . .that just doesn’t add up.’ And everybody got real quiet, and he gave me the coldest look an artist ever gave me. But he went right out, and instead of singing it hip, he was pissed. . .so he bit it. That’s when he sang ‘That’s Life!’” (182)

He was mad. Was that all it was? Sinatra would occasionally go toe-to-toe with his producers and arrangers when he felt the need. It was not anything special for him to be mad in the studio and for that anger to affect a song or two, but no other track was this noticeable. You would swear Sinatra was overacting. Cornyn attributes this act as war, “with brand new arms [coming] again with ‘That’s Life!’” (*That’s Life*). The eyewitness must have seen this altercation between actor and director. “Life is a theatre of war,” he almost seems to say.

The theatre of war in the 1960s was Vietnam, which was arguably the most important event (save perhaps the Civil Rights Movement) affecting the new age of songwriters. The theme of making peace and not bombs was one that cycled the rock era of popular music in an inescapable way. It was simply a part of American life in this period. Always in the news, never absent from American consciousness, the war was subject to social dissonance, sparking rebellion everywhere from students to the patriarchal generation of old. Traditional popular music runs parallel to Vietnam in this respect. Pop and jazz were becoming more and more “old hat” as the ‘60s slogged on, with Sinatra, their champion, caught in the crossfire. There were casualties on both sides, battles won as well as lost, but the final blow came with that Grammy to The Beatles and *Sgt. Pepper*. At the time, Sinatra had won the same award twice consecutively and was nominated for a third time, but the blow, coming from what many see as the greatest rock album ever made, was a symbolic victory for the rock community. Maybe even the war ended there.

With the rule shifted to rockists, folkies, and beatniks, Sinatra’s next project provided a commentary on his war, also including a straggling stab with a rewritten “Mrs. Robinson.” The *My Way* album found Sinatra conceding for the most part, even playing a Beatles song to reflect pre-Beatles music. These ironic touches are what make the concept of this record stand out as a late bloomer in Sinatra’s catalogue. The other standout from the record was of course Stan Cornyn’s five-line liner notes.

Cornyn’s *My Way* liner, the least prosaic of his notes for Frank Sinatra, sees the singer as a larger than life figure, accompanied by a photograph that focuses on Sinatra’s feet and legs, looking up at him while he is in a sitting position. The photo portrays a giant. Sinatra “[walks] as if he knows the planets are watching him,” Cornyn tells us in the first line (*My Way*). The spotlight, however dimmed by defeat, is still there, shining down. The defeat is referenced in the second line: “If a man grows in harmony with all his yesterdays, as these days now rush past him more suddenly—that man is Frank Sinatra” (*My Way*). *My Way* was a continuation of the 1968 album *Cycles*, another collection of folkrock and country-tinged ballads built on the theme of passing on through crisis, either in struggle or in death. This second line of Cornyn’s, its reference to the Beatles song present on *My Way* notwithstanding, can be seen as an allusion to the title song from *Cycles*:

There isn’t much that I have learned

Through all my foolish years
 Except that life keeps running in cycles:
 First there's laughter, then those tears. (Sinatra, "Cycles")

While Gayle Caldwell's lyric sounds cliché in the hands of Sinatra, one cannot think but look on to the tumultuous cycles taken through his life. The phrasing comes off as colloquial, but comforting in its sincerity. Cornyn further exemplifies Sinatra as "a man whose face looks less intimidated than others, because for all his years, he has known how to look deep into all of life's other faces," a powerful sentiment combining into Sinatra's interpretive ability, his acting prowess (*My Way*). It cycles back to Caldwell's song, depicting a crisis of character, which ends in such a way that cannot resolve Sinatra's existential purpose: "I'll keep on trying to sing/But please, just don't ask me how" (Sinatra, "Cycles"). The focal point to Cornyn's notes becomes this line of fractured character, complementing the theme throughout the *My Way* album as well.

The next line changes course from *Cycles* into *My Way* and what the latter's title means: "And if you hear a man who will do it his way—damn to high damn what other ways others expect from him—only 'my way'—then, that man is Frank Sinatra" (Cornyn, *My Way*). The face value of *My Way* is the sentiment that only Sinatra could do it "his way." He was the Chairman of the Board after all, but there is a deeper conflict in that Sinatra was this larger-than-life figure as Cornyn spent five years depicting. The key word is *hear*. It calls back to another moniker given to Sinatra at what seems like the moment he hit the airwaves: the voice. It was always through his voice and song by which he touched his audience. When Sinatra says he did it his way, he meant the words, music, and power exerted in song. In the songs of *My Way* one will find lush libations in "Didn't We?" and "Yesterday," but also roused versions of "For Once in My Life" and "Mrs. Robinson," the latter actually sparking controversy with songwriter Paul Simon (Granata 190). Sporadic though their arrangements may be, these songs are meant to be so. It was Sinatra's intentions to create such a haphazard platter, akin to what rock 'n' rollers were making post-*Pepper*. By the time a listener gets to the line "How's your bird, Mrs. Robinson?" the listener should know this record was meant to be parody, a jocular commentary raised from Sinatra's distaste for the material presented (Sinatra, "Mrs. Robinson").

Cornyn reaches his conclusion on this note of self-reflection, adapting to the new world his subject has entered. He believes Sinatra is a man "who can remember and walk and grow and look in all these ways" (Cornyn, *My Way*). He gives us a final look at the evolution Sinatra has

made, a glimpse of the artistry unfolded, but it is just a tease as he dismounts on solid ground as the needle drops.

“That man,” Cornyn ends, “is worth listening” (*My Way*).

Listening. This is the action that connects willing ears to the music, the registration of response to the call to action. Cornyn’s notes to the bridge album would focus on this call and response. I say “bridge album” because *The World We Knew* is the record that turns Sinatra’s career at its popular crossroads, answering the call of *Strangers* while fulfilling the promise of *September* within twenty-five minutes. The album, notable for containing the biggest pop single of Sinatra’s career, also featured its liner notes on the *front* cover, a move by Sinatra that suggests experimentalism, a turn from the formulaic Ernie Freeman—in fact, the record had more arrangers than any other in his catalogue. It is an album that reeks of experiment.

This is also where Cornyn’s liner notes reach their artistic climax. From the dialogue of *September* comes a condensed poem zigzagging across the profile of its subject, airing out the front cover with naturalistic urbanization of words: “The sun had plunged into the Pacific, / somewhere southwest of Bel-Air. / In Studio One, Sinatra, like the Pacific, makes / his own waves” (Cornyn, *World*). Cornyn’s liner opens with this call to action to take a swim with Sinatra, for when we listen to the radio we swim in the airwaves, the product of this Californian studio. California, Hollywood, celebrity: all are waves in the composition of an oceanic man in Sinatra. Cornyn culls his earlier process of studio writing to recreate it as an ocean, a vast open space of creative thought. The spotlight shining on the singer becomes a lighthouse that guides him ashore, where the audience awaits the sound of his voice once more. “He stands at the microphone,” Cornyn suggests, to “[do] his best thing. . . / sharing” (*World*). Sinatra’s gift is one to be shared, he says. It is to be approached as any audience should approach it: with an embrace. Cornyn further romanticizes the music as the front page closes, the poem curling around a smoking Sinatra:

Sinatra at a microphone, nurturing a
bouquet of emotions, then plucking them
in full flower, without first checking
for possible thorns. (*World*)

The cigarettes his roses, Sinatra absorbs the atmosphere, puffing in each careful gasp at air the way he would smell the flowers. The “bouquet of emotions,” the phrases taken in ginger breaths, goes back to this recurring quality of honesty within Sinatra’s music (Cornyn, *World*). The

honesty is the binding trait to Sinatra and the every-man, or, the legend and his muse. Cornyn builds on this connection with the liner's finale, found on the flipside of the record. "And, after a time," it reads, "he moves to one side. He sits down on raw wood. Listens back to his voice. And reacts like any man" (Cornyn, *World*). It fits that Cornyn would end by withdrawing into listening. The response to the call to action occurs in this final moment, ultimately connecting Sinatra to the music in his every-man smile, a simple setting of raw wood underfoot for a man who walks with planets and sings of the moon.

And so I close my lecture on the liners of Stan Cornyn with *The World We Knew* for two reasons. First, these liners provide the clearest example of his work at a crucial setting. Second, because they appear on the front cover. This latter point is most important to why it is the apex of Cornyn's body of work. The liner is complementary to the album form just as the album cover itself is. Connecting both how *World We Knew* does is what sparks its own experimental design's success. In short, *World We Knew*, however mixed a bag in content, is a standard of the album form. It took Sinatra twelve years from his first twelve-incher, *In the Wee Small Hours*, to *The World We Knew*, where he perfected his formula, his theory on concept albums to fit the post-*Beatles* rock era. Cornyn's notes are the complementary device that gave Sinatra these tools since the liner writer took on his loaded style with *Softly, As I Leave You*, and with that record, the art of writing liner notes softly entered.

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