

HEAVY LENNY

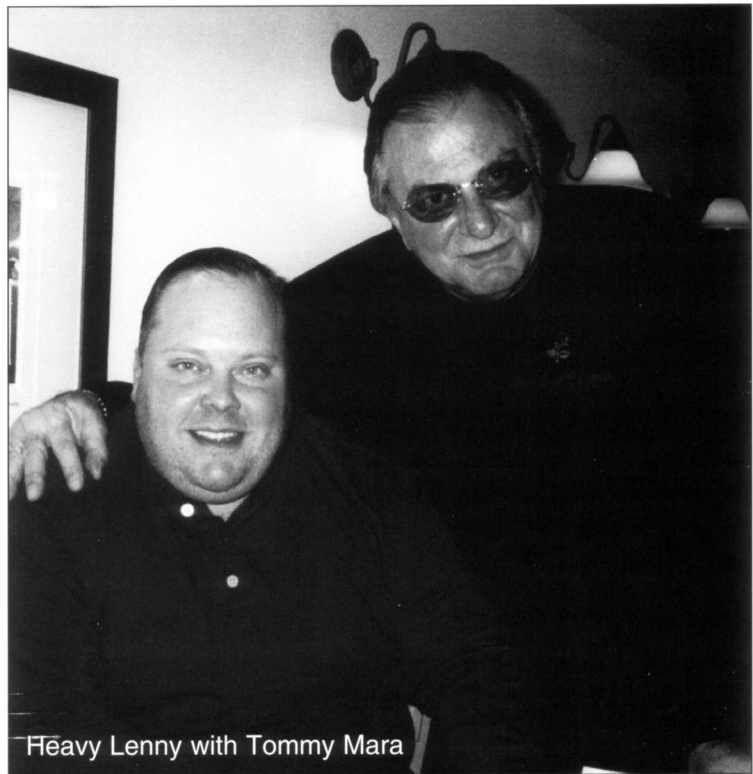
by Mr. Lucky

Back in the dark ages of the 1980s, those seeking out swing band sway had to prowl the back alleys in their '38 Buicks desperately seeking the sounds of pianos and horn parts. It was all skinny, purple-haired white boys pushing peach fuzz out their chins, nursing angst, and learning to play fuzz-tone (like, there's a button by your foot for that, man...). Down the Lower East Side every weekend, legions of metal men in black leather bunting and chrome studs would stream into Manhattan—and still do—devoted followers of the clanging dirge of bands with black and death in their names, with no sense of irony, whatsoever.

Through the grime that was "Olde Times Square" strode one man in the mist of the smoking sewers, bringing great music to the starving ears of the old-timers who had lived it and the small number of us under-thirties who worshiped the Swing Gods. His name was... "Heavy Lenny."

Lenny Triola was the music director at the legendary WNEW from 1982 to 1989, which was then home to Al "Jazzbo" Collins, William B. Williams, and Jonathon Schwartz, all playing the music we're in love with now to that station's devoted audience. Lenny took on Central Park's famed Tavern on the Green's Oak Room and turned it into a respite for jump 'n' jive, featuring Count Basie, Illinois Jacquet, Lionel Hampton, Ray Charles, Sweets Edison, Al Grey, Jimmy Scott, and many more legends and legendary sidemen.

Lenny worked with classic singer Jimmy Rosselli on Rosselli's




new book, which detailed his singing career and the muscling he took—and gave back—to the mob. He hung with the Hamp. He pal'd with Jilly Rizzo and put together a benefit for him after Jilly died driving his Jag. Friends spared Frank the details of Jilly's fiery demise. Still, Frank was never the same without his number one pal.

Mr. Triola saw Sinatra sixty-five times—every Radio City show in the '80s, Carnegie Hall, Nassau Coliseum, the Garden, Atlantic City—wherever. If Frank needed cigarettes or some Jack, Lenny was there. Lenny laughs when he recalls seeing Sting, James Taylor, and some other rock star outside Frank's dressing room, nervously awaiting the opportunity to genuflect. Frank told Lenny to tell the longhairs to cool their heels till Monday Night Football was over. Later, a nervous little girl in a sexy dress walked in. "So you're Madonna," Frank looks her over. He gives her a hug. After all, she's a broad. You gotta be nice.

Those blue eyes shot through everybody they gazed upon. "It's hard to believe a world without Frank," Lenny muses. "Jeez, what a party must be going on up in heaven with Dino, Frank, Jilly, Basie, and Sammy—wow!"

Lenny has not only been responsible for bringing Tommy Mara back to the fore (along with Mara's manager, the indomitable Lightnin' Harry). Mr. Triola has also booked and pushed many other singers of today, doling out what really is *today's* music every bit as much as rock is. We asked Lenny who to look for and he mentioned Tom Postillio, Doug Feron, Joe Francis, Catherine Dupuis, Michele Anastasio, and George Gee.

In case you don't know, gang, work like this has its rewards in the music, the great people, and the great times. "If I was in it for the money, I'd work Wall Street, not Swing Street," says Lenny. "It's been a good twenty years of the booze, the swing, the saloons—the president of some country should be so lucky! I'm lovin' every note." 

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