

Joining Tom Selleck

As Tough as Ever, Frank Sinatra Bounces Up off the Canvas

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Fighting off physical problems, the hurt of a critical biography and the boredom of retirement, the legendary singer/actor comes on strong in this week's Magnum, P.I. (Tele)

By Susan Littwin

Frank Sinatra will be the guest star on CBS's *Magnum, P.I.* on Wednesday, Feb. 25, at 9 P.M. (ET). See listings for time and channel in your area.

We are on a sleazy street in Honolulu's red-light district, but tonight it is as cheerful and electric as a carnival. A crowd of clean-cut tourists and curious locals mingle with extras done up to look like prostitutes and real prostitutes who will not do any business tonight, because everyone is more interested in the *Magnum, P.I.* crew members' carrying cables and equipment from the production vans into a seedy bar.

Inside the bar, a couple of regulars are shooting pool, a money game. An aging long-hair in dirty denims, a bandanna around his head, lines up a shot. An older guy with thinning hair, paler than the locals, pads out of the shadows. He's wearing white slacks and black shoes and a truly terrible flowered shirt, the kind of shirt Easterners think looks Hawaiian. On the sidelines, people poke each other, exchange glances. The man is

Left: *Magnum, P.I.* star Tom Selleck with guest star Frank Sinatra. Opposite page: Sinatra relaxing between takes and (bottom) in his role as retired police officer Michael Doheny, seeking clues on Honolulu's seamier side.



Frank Sinatra, dressed to look like a retired New York cop pursuing an unclosed case across the Pacific. "You know a guy named Geiger?" he growls. The pool player shrugs him off, and the older guy grabs him by the throat as the director calls, "Cut."

It's the legend, all right. The awe is thicker here than the special-effects smoke. The crew is nervous, charged. Tom Selleck (Thomas Magnum), looking every one of his 6 feet 4 inches like a star, is watching off-camera instead of resting in his trailer. Larry Manetti, who plays Magnum's sidekick Rick, freshly showered and fragrant with after-shave, greets visitors as if he were hosting a bar mitzvah. This episode is clearly more an Event than an ordinary show. "It's something you'll never forget," Manetti waxes.



"It's forever, like a tattoo."

Outside, the crowd gets thicker as the crew sets up the next shot in a coffee shop across the street. A deeply tanned young man with a cloud of long, curly hair sits at one of the Formica tables. Sinatra approaches him; the guy shakes his head, and Sinatra shoves him through a plate-glass window. The window, of course, is special-

effects "sugar glass," and as it shatters, Sinatra adds a bit of unscripted business. He dumps a glass of water on the startled extra's head. The director is taken by surprise, and the publicists on the sidelines buzz about another bit of business Sinatra ad-libbed in Honolulu: as Maggio in "From Here to Eternity," he shot craps with a pair of olives.

When Sinatra did "Eternity" 34 years →

Photos by Gene Trindl



ago, his career was on the skids. He fought for the part, and he won an Oscar and a new career as an actor. Now, he has had a different kind of tough year. "His Way," Kitty Kelley's unauthorized and unflattering biography, is out. And a 71-year-old body has been landing the still-young-at-heart singer in hospitals. Two months earlier, surgeons removed a section of his large intestine; at the end of that week, he will return to Palm Springs, Cal., for a final operation to close the incision. Still, he works till 3 A.M. and does fight scenes himself, taking round-house lunges at anxious stuntmen. "If my physician knew what I was doing this week, he'd have a heart attack," says Sinatra. "You know, I still have a huge incision." At least one night's work has left him sore, and you wonder why he does it. The answer may be that he is fighting back—against his critics, against the doctors, and even more, against age.

The seeds for Sinatra's guest appearance on *Magnum* were planted last summer when he gave a concert in Hawaii. Selleck and Manetti attended and were invited to a dinner party afterward. "He talked a lot about our show—about particular episodes," Selleck recounts, "so I knew he wasn't just being polite when he said he was a big fan. Then, off the cuff, he just asked, 'What would you guys think about me doing one?'"

Supervising producer Chris Abbott-Fish was assigned to write the script, and she worked closely with Sinatra. "He understood the kind of character he wanted to play," she says. Doheny, "a tough, gritty cop with a heart of gold," was similar to a character Sinatra had played in the 1980 movie "The First Deadly Sin." When production started, he thanked her with a Cartier watch inscribed, "Love, F.A.S." Sinatra added the issue of child abuse to the script, a tribute to his wife, who has raised funds to treat sexually abused children and rehabilitate their families at the Barbara Sinatra Children's Center in Rancho Mirage, Cal.

Of course, Sinatra/Doheny's way of

combating child abuse is very different from the progressive treatment program his wife has helped fund. So the next day finds him on another location, in still another seedy bar, taking swings at the patrons and smashing heads onto the bar. In this scene, waiters rush to the aid of Doheny's victim, and he takes them out too. It is a tough scene to choreograph, and they do a couple of takes. Sinatra is agile and obviously a boxing aficionado. Yet the two takes leave him sweating and panting, and everyone is relieved that it is done.

"The biggest thrill of all is that [Sinatra] has accepted me as a peer," Selleck says.

But the cameraman shakes his head. There was a flash of light in the middle of the shot, and they will have to do it again. The flash, they soon realize, came from a Polaroid Manetti was using to record the moment. They turn to him accusingly. "It wasn't me," he says, as the picture rolls out of his camera. A little later, someone asks, "Where's Larry?" "He's reloading," a crew member quips. If Sinatra said anything to Manetti, it did not affect a lifetime of hero worship. When Manetti was getting started as an actor, he got rid of his Chicago street diction by mouthing the words of Sinatra's records. And when he was asked to play Sinatra in a TV show, he waited two hours at a Palm Springs restaurant to ask for the singer's blessing.

But the reverence for Sinatra on this set is more than hero worship. It is show business closing its ranks against the legend-busters and muckrakers. "There are a lot of people lying in wait for this," says director Alan J. Levi. "The doubters who've read the books and the stories. We'd like them all to say, 'You know something? Frank Sinatra is damned good.' That would be reward enough for us."

Selleck's relationship to Sinatra is more complex. It is Star meets Superstar. "The first thing you think is, 'Oh, my God, I'm working with Frank Sinatra,'" says Sel-

leck, remembering back to the first day of shooting. But even on the last day, he muffs his lines in a scene with Sinatra and then, disgusted with himself, mutters, "I'm not giving Frank a chance."

He is too good a businessman to ignore the fact that Sinatra will boost the show's ratings. That *Magnum* has bounced back in the Niensens relieves the pressure. "When you're a fan of somebody and you've been in the spotlight yourself, you don't want to be one of those people who say, 'Meet my mom,' or 'Take a picture with me.' The biggest thrill of all is that he has accepted me as a peer," Selleck says. "So I go slowly because I don't want him to think I'm after something."

But in another sense, he is after something from Sinatra. Answers. Sinatra has been famous for five decades. And what Selleck wants to know is: How do you handle fame? And how do you keep it? It is not that he sees Sinatra as a role model. But the singer's visit to the show is a living laboratory on the subject. "I work hard at not having an entourage," Selleck explains, though Sinatra's celebrated entourage is small and discreet this week. "I don't have a bodyguard who sits two tables away in a restaurant. If people come up to me, I deal with it. You can get so isolated in this business."

Ironically, Selleck's ruminations have been inspired by a man who, at least at the moment, does not wear fame comfortably. In some way, Sinatra does not understand who he is. He is about to enter his trailer, where he will be interviewed by TV GUIDE. His publicist and assistant halt at the bottom of the steps while a security man checks out the trailer. Sinatra is confused about the delay. Later, sipping a whiskey, he tells why he likes the speed of television work. "Pace," explains the singer renowned for his perfect phrasing, "is important in any kind of performance." He says this as if the thought just occurred to him. When he is told that the young extra whose head he put through a window was so excited about being in a scene with Frank Sinatra that he could not sleep, he bursts out, "I couldn't sleep

either! I sleep three hours and then I get up and look for the script. My wife hears me and says, 'What are you doing? You've been reading that script for three and a half weeks!' I want to see what more I can do with it," he tells her.

But Sinatra is getting up off the canvas. Bouncing back. "I go back in the hospital tomorrow night," he says defiantly. "They'll do this secondary surgery, and my problems with indigestion will be over."

He is less sanguine about things that have been written about him. "It makes me ill. It hurts. My family hurts. My friends hurt."

But the press isn't his enemy as much as time is. He talks about Doheny: "I believe he's really unhappy because he's retired. He hasn't got the job any more. He was put out to pasture. I understand that phase." Sinatra has tried retirement, and couldn't stand it. What he'd really like to do is team up with Selleck, whom he sees as a new sidekick. "We could do a wonderful romantic comedy. We could be here or in New York or Monte Carlo, and the two of us would go out looking for girls together."

Clearly, he is having a good time. But the next day is his last on the set. There are a lot of gift presentations: a captain's hat for the "Chairman of the Board," a *Magnum* watch, a koa-wood bowl. "I haven't had so much fun since 'Eternity,'" he says, with a tear in his eye. His wife, Barbara, wearing a simple white shirt and pants and a knuckle-to-knuckle diamond, visits the set. She says she isn't worried about her husband's acrobatic week. "He's very strong, and he knows his limits," she says for the record. When the interviewer's notebook closes, her eyes cloud over. "To tell you the truth, I'll be very relieved when this last surgery is over." Then her husband and Selleck are interviewed by Mariette Hartley via satellite for CBS's *The Morning Program*. They cannot see the new co-host on their monitor, but they tell her that her neck hasn't been made up. "You look beautiful anyway," they taunt. For now, the worries fade. It's just Ol' Blue Eyes and his new sidekick, kidding around with the girls. (END)